

## History of LVRF

In 1925, legendary figure Helen Keller challenged the Lions to become Knights of the Blind in the crusade to eliminate preventable blindness. Needless to say, the Lions accepted the challenge. In the 1950's a young researcher at Wilmer Eye Institute named Arnall Patz began a long career of effecting groundbreaking advances in the causes and prevention of blindness. In 1952 Helen Keller personally presented Dr. Patz with the prestigious Lasker Award; she also suggested to Dr. Patz that he consider collaborating with the Lions in their efforts to help the blind. Accordingly, Dr. Patz concluded that a joint service project between the world's largest service organization and the world's leading eye institute would result in great discoveries, which would help visually-impaired people worldwide.

During the period 1978 to 1985 Dr. Patz made several overtures to Lions Club International, including a trip to Lions Headquarters in 1979, to encourage the Lions to collaborate with the Wilmer Eye Institute. With time, support for the partnership grew among the Lions of Multiple District 22 (MD22) representing Delaware, the District of Columbia, and Maryland. Later, as Director of the Wilmer Eye Institute and as the world's leading eye surgeon, Dr. Patz urged the Lions of MD22 to establish the Lions Vision Research Foundation (LVRF). Consequently, in May of 1988 at the 66<sup>th</sup> Lions Convention, MD22 voted to formally establish the LVRF.

In March of 1991, Dr. Robert Massof, Director of the Lions Vision Center, recommended that the Center's research be focused on the problem of low vision for which there is no cure. "Low Vision" is vision loss that cannot be corrected by eyeglasses, medicines, or surgery. Major causes of low vision are macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, and inherited eye diseases. Five million people in the US suffer from low vision and twenty-five million people are impacted worldwide. Dr. Massof proposed further that the Lions create a \$4 million endowment fund to guarantee the Lions Low Vision Center would operate in perpetuity. In November 1991, with then Lions International President Don Banker in attendance, the Lions of MD22 and the Wilmer Eye Institute entered into a formal memo of understanding officially creating the Lions Low Vision Center and committing the Lions to the raising of the endowment fund. Beginning in 1994 the Lions Vision Research Foundation contributed \$200,000 annually to sustain the research and operations at the Lions Low Vision Center, while growing the \$4 million Endowment Fund. On May 12, 2007 the MD22 Lions and their Wilmer partners celebrated the achievement of the \$4 million goal.

In 2009, LVRF established a fellowship program in the Lions Low Vision Center to fund a post-doctoral position specializing in low vision. In 2017, LVRF committed to raising between 2.5 and 2.8 million dollars to establish the endowment of the post-doctoral fellowship, while continuing to annually fund it. The fellowship brings doctors to Hopkins for one year of study in the field of low vision. According to Dr. Robert Massof, Director of the Lions Vision Center, "This is an invaluable program, one of only two in the USA that provides this level of low vision training for interns. Graduate interns then stay at Wilmer or take their knowledge throughout the world."

In 2010, the LVRF Board of Trustees and the MD22 Council of Governors resolved to support the memory of Dr. Patz by assisting Wilmer Eye Institute's fundraising campaign for an endowed professorship for the Low Vision Center. In 2014, the Arnell Patz endowment professorship was established by the combined efforts of MD22, Wilmer Residents Association Members, and the Patz family and friends. Through this professorship, the Lions Low Vision Center is enhanced by increased educational opportunities for specialists and patients alike, better equipment, additional staff, and increased research in the field of low vision.

In 2013, LVRF launched its Low Vision Rehabilitation Network (LOVRNET) program with grants from LCIF Sightfirst and Reader's Digest Partners for Sight Foundation. LOVRNET is a community-based program designed to promote the expansion of low vision services. The goals of LOVRNET are to train Lion volunteers to conduct computer-assisted telephone interview of patients and consequently provide support to local eye care professionals; to create a signal portal in which ophthalmologists can refer patients or patients can refer themselves; to coordinate care by matching patients to appropriate professional services in their area; and to constantly improve the quality and effectiveness of services.

We Lions are proud to partner with Wilmer, which is usually ranked by USNEWS & WORLD REPORT as the number one ophthalmological institute in America. Author Tom Clancy, the Honorary Lions Vision 2000 Chairman called Wilmer "One of America's crown jewels." The research team at the Lions Low Vision Center continues to develop cutting edge low vision enhancement technology, paving the way for retinal transplants and prosthetic vision through electronic chip implants, and new ways to assist drivers. The clinical specialists provide people with the low vision devices and practices to help them improve their quality of life while making the most of their remaining vision. We applaud the Wilmer Team for their skill, dedication, and hard work. We know that if medical and scientific breakthroughs are to happen, they will happen because of the collaboration between the Lions and the Wilmer Team at the Lions Low Vision Center

We Lions will never accept the status quo so long as there are visually impaired people. The Lions of MD22 LVRF will continue to identify new service opportunities and pursue innovative means of obtaining the funding to support the need.