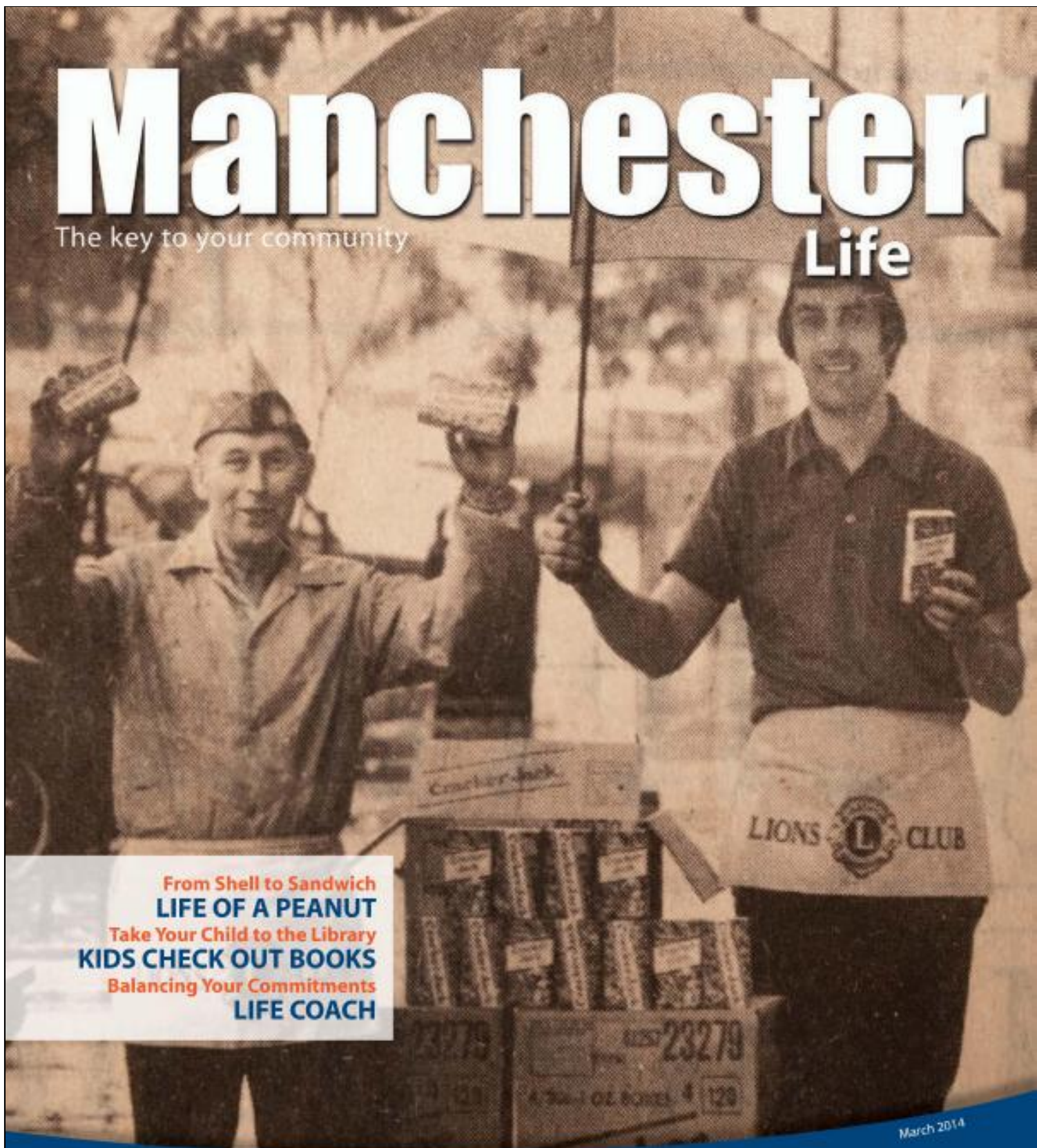


Manchester

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March 2014

65 Years of Service

Lions Club Celebrates Milestone

The community service organization traces its roots back to 1949.

by Tim Becker
Community contributor

1949 was a wild year by historical standards. President Harry S. Truman was inaugurated for his first term. Heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis retired. The Soviet Union tested their first atomic bomb. The first Volkswagen Beetle was introduced in the United States and Communist forces took over Beijing and proclaimed "The People's Republic of China." Arthur Miller's "The Death of a Salesman" opened on Broadway for the first of 742 performances.

In Manchester, a group of men, including many who had recently come back from World War II, formed the Manchester Lions Club to better their community. That work continues to this day as current members of the Manchester club celebrate 65 years of community service with an Open House on Tuesday, March 18, at 6:30 p.m. at the Adams Mill Restaurant, 165 Adams St.

One of the Lion's projects in the 1950s was a horse show at Charter Oak Field, when Manchester was more rural, and well before I-384 was built in the 1970s.

The proceeds from that project paid for a full scholarship for a Manchester nursing student. The only requirement was that the new nurse came back to Manchester to work for a year.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Manchester Lions often strolled along Main Street selling Cracker Jacks on Thursday nights when the stores were open late, held live auctions and hosted art shows in the Manchester High School. Admission was waived for a donation of old eyeglasses.

Through the late 1970s, and 1980s Manchester Lions held pancake breakfasts, sponsored carnivals, held tag sales, craft shows, art auctions and sold raffle tickets.

More recently Lions sponsored comedy shows to support the Christmas in April program.

For the community

As with all Lions projects, every dollar of profit was re-



Lion Bill Rodney performs weigh in at a recent Children's Fishing Derby. The Manchester Lions Club co-sponsors the event with the Town of Manchester. The derby began in 1977.
Photo courtesy of Manchester Lions Club

turned to the public through Lions programs.

"Our motto is, 'We Serve,' and we take it to heart in Manchester," said Lions President Ed Gorman.

He has been a Lion for more than 30 years, and now his wife Mary and daughter Marisa are also Lions, making it a three-generation Lions family.

"My dad was a Lion in Wisconsin where I grew, up and it has become a family tradition," Gorman said.

Throughout the years, and continuing today, the Manchester Lions Club collects eyeglasses for reuse in developing countries, and helps needy Manchester residents by covering the cost of eye exams and new glasses. Many referrals for eye exams come from school nurses.

Extending service

Our service to help others has extended to raising funds to train Fideleo Guide Dogs. Eighteen years ago Manchester Lions John and Pat Garoppolo started a small bowling tournament along with the Vernon Lions and it has become the Manchester

and Vernon Lions largest project, raising more than \$170,000 for Fideleo.

Lions in Manchester are involved with many other projects. In 1977, they started a Children's Fishing Derby that's now co-sponsored with the Town of Manchester. The Town Recreation Department handles stocking the pond with lots of hungry trout and provides publicity. Lions members handle the refreshments, weighing of the fish and awarding the prize.

"It's a great time for parents and children to turn off their electronics and spend some time together," Gorman said. "We are now seeing a second generation of Manchester children whose parents came to the Fishing Derby when they were young."

Another fun project happens on the campus of Manchester Community College during the Dutch Fogarty Independence Day Celebration. Manchester Lions man the cheeseburger concession as well as serve nachos and soft drinks. After cooking about 800 cheeseburgers, the Lions get to relax, listen to music, and watch the aerial fireworks display that's one of the best in the area.

You'll find Manchester Lions members at Christmastime wrapping presents at Barnes & Noble in the Buckland Hills Mall. The donations received from busy shoppers pay for presents and Christmas dinner for a family in Manchester.

Lions member Jolene Nemeth started a new project for the Lions last year preparing gift baskets for guide dog owners.

Nemeth, who is sight impaired, works for The Connecticut Services For The Blind. She also has a guide dog named Inca. To fund her project, Jolene sold bracelet charms, with a dog paw insignia, to friends and co-workers.

Local businesses also supported the project with donations of dog supplies. The gift baskets included treats for the guide dogs, that their owners may not be able to afford, including doggie toothbrushes.

"Having a guide dog has completely changed my life and has kept me independent. The things that Inca does always makes me laugh. I couldn't imagine being without her," Nemeth said.

Joining the club

Why Manchester Lions do what they do is not hard to explain. The international mission statement says it all: "To empower volunteers to serve their communities, meet humanitarian needs, encourage peace and promote international understanding through Lions Clubs."

"It comes down to helping other people through the goodness of your heart, without any expectation of being paid back," President Gorman said. "Can you imagine if there was no one to pay for an eye exam and eyeglasses for a child who couldn't see well enough to do school work? How would that child become successful in life? Help like this is one of the benefits Lions provide that can't be measure in dollars."

At the annual International Convention, you meet amazing people from all over the world who, like you, work to help others.

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— Ed Gorman

During the year, members of the club get a chance to attend regional and statewide meetings to work with fellow Lions from towns across Connecticut.

As a Lion, you know that wherever you travel, you can attend the local club meeting and you be will welcomed.

Feeling good about helping others isn't the only benefit of becoming a member of the Manchester Lions Club. You develop leadership and people skills while working on meaningful projects.

"Working on projects together is fun, and you make friends for life who will always be there if you ever need help. Working to help others becomes an important part of your life," Gorman said, "Come and join us!"

Lions Club International

Lions Clubs International is the world's largest service orga-

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Clockwise, Manchester Lions Club members at horse show in 1951. Pat and John Garner at a Lions' Club bowling event in 2010. Members of the Lions Club in 1980 build a handicap ramp. Members of the club participate in an art show in 1967. President Ed Gorman, his daughter Marisa and wife, Mary, all members of the Manchester Lions Club. The club staffs a concessions stand the Dutch Fogarty Independence Day celebration, on the campus of the Manchester Community College. It is named in memory of Town Director Dutch Fogarty, who started the event in his backyard, and it now draws thousands of people. Center, a 1981 photo of the installation of officers. Photos courtesy of Manchester Lions Club



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nization with 1.35 million members in more than 208 countries. Lions Club was founded in the United States on June 7, 1917, by Melvin Jones, a Chicago businessman.

In 1919, the Lions Club became an international organization.

In 1925 Helen Keller spoke before the international convention and challenged Lions: "Will you not constitute yourselves Knights of the Blind in this crusade against darkness?"

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Lions Clubs took up that challenge and are best known for fighting blindness. The Lions Club assists those in their community without insurance, or with special financial circumstances, with help for eye care needs. Lions also collect used eye glasses that are cleaned and repaired for reuse in countries around the world.

Membership

Lions membership is open to all men and women within the community. We would like to invite readers to attend our March 18 Open House meeting or contact Tim Becker, membership chairman if you have any questions: 860-306-7046 or by email: tim@2cimages.com.

For more information about the local Manchester Lions Club, visit its website at manchesterlionsclub.org. For more information about the organization Lions Clubs International, visit its website at lionsclubs.org.

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