



# “Eye of the Lion”

Quarterly Report – April 2015

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## What is Lions/USA Eye Research?

The year 2015 commemorates the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lions/USA Eye Research Institute. For those of you who are new to Lions, the Eye Research Institute is an official District 34C project. Our mission is 2-fold: 1) conduct high quality vision research and 2) train the next generation of vision scientists.

In response to Lions Clubs International aggressive global blindness prevention program called “Sight First” in 1990, Lions from the Mobile area met weekly to determine how they could participate in this wonderful project. The Lions/USA Eye Research Institute was the fruit of these meetings. The Institute is managed by a motivated council of Lions members from throughout District 34C. The council operates on a volunteer basis, and is responsible with raising funds to support vision research and research fellowships for future vision researchers. Through 25 years of effort, as well as support from area and state clubs, the council has raised well over half a million dollars to support vision research.

Distinguishing itself from Alabama Sight, the Lions/USA Eye Research Institute takes a more fundamental approach towards preventing vision disease and advancing cures through basic science research. To this end, District 34C Lions clubs have sponsored vision scientist-led equipment grants to Lions Club International Foundation (LCIF). Through the LCIF matching grant program whereby LCIF funds are matched by monies from the Lions/USA Eye Research, critical equipment such as a fluorescent microscope with time-lapse imaging was acquired. Since vision research is an ever-evolving field, there is a continual need for both direct funds and new equipment grants to fuel cutting edge efforts.

In sum, since 1990, the Lions/USA Eye Research Institute has:

1. Awarded approximately \$261,000 in direct funds to our scientists
2. Received matching funds from LCIF in excess of \$174,000 for research equipment
3. Supported vision research projects resulting in approximately 50 publications in peer-reviewed scientific journals.
4. Supported numerous graduate and undergraduate trainees with vision research projects. Notably, one of these individuals, Dr. Terrence Tumpey, now serves as Team Leader in the Influenza Division of the Centers for Disease Control. While no longer involved in eye research, Dr. Tumpey's career is proof that Lions/USA Eye Research has contributed to improving human health.

The 25 year anniversary of the Lions/USA Eye Research Institute therefore marks a history of exceptional accomplishments. Best of all, with current invested funds, the Lions/USA Eye Research Institute is positioned to have even greater impact in the future.

The truly unique partnership between community leaders in District 34C Lions Clubs and vision scientists at the University of South Alabama is advancing our understanding of eye disease. Please consider taking an active role towards eradicating eye disease by contributing to this District project.

We ask that all area clubs support Lions/USA Eye Research.

## **Happenings Around the Lab**

**Dr. Robert Lausch**  
**Dr. Rob Barrington**  
**Graduate student Steffani Fitzpatrick**

Under the guidance of Drs. Barrington and Lausch, graduate student Steffani Fitzpatrick is working on possible vaccine targets for Herpes Simplex Virus Type 1 (HSV-1) mediated blindness, the leading cause of infectious blindness in the USA.

The research team has discovered a rare population of cells present in corneas early after infection with HSV-1. They believe that these cells provide protection against the virus, but there are too few to effectively compete with

the amount of virus. Using a genetic strain of mice whereby these cells are fluorescent, Mrs. Fitzpatrick is conducting experiments designed to 1) determine whether the cells are protective, and 2) test whether increasing the numbers of these cells enhances protection from corneal damage. If the answer to both of these questions is “yes”, vaccines could be designed to boost the number of these cells in the cornea, thereby providing at-risk individuals preventative protection in the case of HSV-1 infection.

## **Board of Directors**

The Board of Directors of Lions/USA Eye Research is comprised of a representative from each Lions Clubs in Mobile and Baldwin Counties, District Governor 34C, Vice District Governor 34C, Sight Chairman District 34C, all members of the executive committee, Director of Ophthalmic Research, USA; one individual from USA Public Relations Department. There are no members; however all persons interested in the study, treatment and prevention of blindness will be welcomed to any program sponsored by the Corporation in pursuit of its stated purposes.

Officers are:

President – *Lion Steve Russell*  
*Mobile Lions Club*

Secretary – *PCC Linda Ziglar*  
*Gulf Shores Club*

Treasurer – *Ferrell Anders*  
*Mobile Lions Club*

Meetings are held quarterly at different locations around Mobile and Baldwin Counties.

# Finances:

*The institute reached a milestone last year, our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, in that our endowed fund reached the \$500,000.00 mark. It has dipped below that with fluctuations in the stock market and as mentioned elsewhere in the newsletter we have committed \$40,000.00 toward the purchase of an important piece of equipment for the research scientists. We need everyone's extra help now to bring our principal back to the half million-dollar sum. If your club has not included the institute in your annual budget, please consider doing so. I recently received a memorial contribution from a club for two deceased members. What a wonderful way to pay tribute to a deceased Lion!*

***Any Lion/ Club Wishing to make a contribution to Lions/USA Eye Research can mail their check to:  
Lions/USA Eye Research Institute Inc.  
3800 Airport Boulevard  
Suite #203  
Mobile, Alabama 36608***

*We have a Banner Patch for clubs donating and a lapel pin for individuals donating.*