



THE LIONS' EYE

Newsletter of the Lions Eye Bank for Long Island
Located at: **LIJ Valley Stream Hospital - Northwell Health**

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Visit Our Website
www.lebli.org



A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



As 2025 comes to a close, I am filled with gratitude for the incredible dedication and compassion that define the Lions Eye Bank for Long Island. This year, our team proudly provided 225 corneal tissues to surgeons across the region, helping to restore sight and transform lives for patients in need. Each transplant represents a story of hope, made possible through the generosity of 113 donors and their families, and the commitment of our staff and partners who work tirelessly to honor every gift of sight.

We were also proud to launch our Seeing Through Thanks program this year, designed to help spark meaningful correspondence between transplant recipients and donor families. This initiative has already begun fostering heartfelt connections and reminding all of us of the lasting impact that one donation can have.

A special thank you goes out to our Lions Club partners for their continued support, including the recent donation of an operating microscope that has allowed us to establish our new DMEK program for surgeons. This contribution marks an exciting step forward in our ability to provide advanced transplant options and strengthen our service to the community.

As we look ahead to 2026, I am inspired by all we have accomplished together and even more so by what lies ahead. Thank you for your continued trust, support, and shared dedication to restoring vision and changing lives.

Kristen Conte,
Director, Lions Eye Bank for Long Island



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EYE FOUNDATION, INC.

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IN MEMORIAM

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Lion Joanne Alexander

Always Remembered





CHAIRPERSON'S CORNER

As Chairperson of the Lions Eye Bank for Long Island, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the inaugural edition of our Eye Bank Newsletter. This publication marks an important step forward in strengthening communication with our Lions, our partners, and the community we proudly serve.

The Eye Bank continues to advance its mission of restoring sight through donation, education, and compassionate service. Every cornea recovered represents the generosity of a donor and the hope of a recipient awaiting a second chance at vision. Our work is possible because of the dedication of our Lions volunteers, board members, medical professionals, and staff who ensure that the gift of sight is handled with dignity and care.

This newsletter will bring you updates on our programs, highlight donor and recipient stories, and provide insight into the progress we are making together. It is also an opportunity to celebrate the collaborative efforts of the Lions across our districts, whose commitment strengthens the foundation of the Eye Bank.

Thank you for your continued support and belief in our mission. Together, we honor donors, uplift families, and help restore the precious gift of sight across Long Island.

Deborah Harrison,
Chairperson, Long Island Lions Eye Foundation



ON THE COVER

Eye Donation Month

Eye Donation Month, observed every November, is a time dedicated to raising awareness about the life-changing impact of eye and cornea donation. It serves as both an educational initiative and a heartfelt tribute to the donors who have given others the precious gift of sight. Throughout the month, the eye bank along with other transplant organizations, healthcare professionals, and community advocates work to inform the public about the ongoing need for corneal tissue, which can restore vision for individuals affected by injury, disease, or degenerative conditions.



Pictured: James Sharp, corneal recipient and employee at Mount Sinai South Nassau Hospital

Equally important is honoring the generosity of eye donors and their families. Their selfless decisions bring hope, independence, and a brighter future to thousands each year. By sharing stories of restored vision and celebrating donor legacies, Eye Donation Month encourages more people to register as donors. This month reminds us that the simple act of choosing to donate can transform lives—turning loss into a legacy of light and possibility.

The vibrant photos on the cover of this issue capture our Long Island Lions Eye Foundation Holiday Dinner, held on December 15th. The evening was filled with warmth, laughter, and the spirit of the season as members and guests came together to celebrate another year of service and fellowship.

These images reflect the camaraderie, generosity, and shared commitment that define our Foundation. From joyful smiles to meaningful connections, each moment embodies the compassion and dedication that drive our mission to restore sight and support the visually impaired. Click [here](#) to see more images from this event.

Did You Know



The North Babylon Lions Club has been doing vision screenings for children in the community for seven years. This selfless community program is essential as 80% of learning is considered to be visual, and school nurses have often reported back that after a child's vision disorder is addressed, their grades and peer relationships often improve immensely.

By the Numbers:

7

KidSight USA certified eye screeners

10

Admin/Logistics volunteers

11,000

children screened

For more information on how to get involved, contact the Vision Committee Co-Chairs, [Eileen Austin](#) and [Nancy Lyon](#).

Knights of the Blind Award

Established in 1999, the Knights of the Blind Award recognizes outstanding Lions, non-Lions, organizations, or businesses who have demonstrated exemplary service to a club, district, or community. These honorees embody the highest ideals of good character, purpose, and service. Scan the QR code to the left or click [here](#) to apply.



LC Athens Secretary Visits

In August, the Lions Eye Bank for Long Island was honored to host Lion Alexandros Georgiadis, Secretary of the Lions Club of Athens and representative of the Athens Eye Bank. During his visit, Lion Alex toured our laboratory, met with our staff, and learned about our operational and clinical processes that make sight restoration possible for patients across the region.

Our team was proud to share knowledge and best practices to help support the continued growth of the Athens Eye Bank. The visit reflected the true spirit of Lions collaboration—connecting across borders to strengthen the global mission of restoring vision.

We thank Lion Alex for spending time with us and wish him continued success as he furthers the important work of the Athens Eye Bank.



Pictured from left: Greta I. Salsbury, Catherine Corrado-Lodi, Kristen Conte, Alexandros Georgiadis, Marie Scandura, Brian Freier, Elliot Krakauer and Maria Leitao.

LILEF Donor Family Scholarship

Every year the Long Island Lions Eye Foundation awards scholarships to students whose family members have generously donated ocular tissue to the Lions Eye Bank, and who are pursuing a post-secondary education at a college or university.

The applicants submitted two letters of recommendation and an essay on "How Eye Tissue Donation Has Affected You or Your Family and What it Means to You". After careful review of the applications two students were selected. This year the awards were presented to Victoria Chiarovano and Mason Rosenbaum.

The Long Island Lions Eye Foundation congratulates Victoria and Mason on their academic achievements and wish them success in their future endeavors.



Pictured from left: Greta I. Salsbury, Victoria Chiarovano, Brian Freier & Mason Rosenbaum

Transporter's Spotlight

K1

Douglas X. Alexander

I can remember getting a call to pick up a cornea and deliver it to the hospital. Knowing that Lions may have played a part in someone receiving sight - it gave me a feeling that is hard to put into words. A feeling of purpose, a feeling of joy, a feeling of making a difference and a feeling of **service**.

Service to others is the rent we pay for the space we occupy here on earth.

Lions, let's keep serving.



Lion Douglas Alexander

K2

John Scalesi, Jr.

I've been part of the Lions Club since 1995. That connection eventually led me to the world of eye donations. In 2004, I became a cornea transporter. Since then, I've completed more than 1,150 "eye-runs".

When I first began, I felt both nervous and honored, aware of the responsibility in my hands.

Being an eye bank transporter for the Lions Eye Bank for Long Island means carrying something far more important than a package. Traveling from Valley Stream to hospitals and medical offices across Long Island and the Tri State area, you're delivering the gift of sight.

Each transport holds a sense of purpose, knowing that the corneas may help someone see their family and their world again. It gives me joy working with the staff.

I've also served twice on the Eye Bank's board, and was honored to receive The Knights of the Blind Award for my services.



Lion John Scalesi, Jr.

S

Grace Bassett

I attended a Lioness Conference in the late 1980's. PDG Howie Wilson manned an outreach table telling us all about the Lions Eye Bank.

One of the interesting things that caught my attention was transporters picking up corneas at various locations and bringing them to the operating room of various hospitals. I was told that they were using taxi companies to transport the corneas. By volunteering to transport the corneas, it saved a lot of money for the Eye Bank.

When I got home, I shared what I learned with my husband Lee, who was also a Lion. We thought that this was a great way to personally do our part in Lionism. On our very first trip I got to hold the box that contained the corneas. What a wonderful feeling to think that these corneas will give someone the gift of sight. We discussed organ donation during these trips. It was a wonderful experience, and we were so grateful that we had this chance to be involved.



Lion Grace Bassett

NUMC Enhances Vision with New Konan Camera

A new Konan Corneal Endothelial Camera has been generously donated by the Long Island Lions Eye Foundation's Board of Directors to Nassau University Medical Center's Department of Ophthalmology, promising enhanced vision for Long Islanders. This vital equipment significantly upgrades diagnostic capabilities, particularly for patients needing corneal transplants.

"A picture is worth a thousand words," and this camera takes highly detailed photographs of the cornea's endothelium, the inner layer. As Dr. Henry Perry, Medical Director at the Lions Eye Bank for Long Island and Chief of Cornea & External Disease at NUMC, explains, Konan specializes in these cameras, which "help diagnose and predict problems before they occur clinically." This level of detail is crucial for identifying corneal diseases "not visible to traditional biomicroscopy."

Dr. Perry was instrumental in securing the donation, recalling his long-standing interest in Konan technology and his "persistence" in advocating for NUMC. He notes, "Over the years I have performed several small research projects using Konan technology... I always ask if they can donate a scope for the NUMC program." After Konan offered a new scope at a reduced cost, our Board of Directors approved the necessary funding.

The arrival of the new Konan Endothelial Specular Camera brings immense benefits to NUMC. It will enable doctors like Dr. Perry and Dr. Marcelle Morcos, Chairman of the Dept. of Ophthalmology, to provide even better care. "The benefit to the residents, staff and patients is palpable," Dr. Morcos emphasizes, ensuring advanced diagnostics and improved outcomes for the community.



Pictured from left: Juan Pawirosetiko, Kristen Conte, Elliot Krakauer, John Scalesi, Jr., Brian Freier, Henry Perry, MD, Eileen C. Austin, Marie Scandura and John Alexander, MD

Tree of Life

The Long Island Lions Eye Foundation's Tree of Life is a meaningful way to honor or remember someone special. Featuring engraved brass leaves, acorns, stones, and mini trees, the display sits in a highly visible area on the first floor of LIJ Valley Stream, across from the coffee shop.

Every dedication supports the Eye Bank for Long Island's mission to provide high-quality eye tissue for transplant, advance research, and promote awareness about the importance of donation.

Consider adding your tribute and helping us continue the gift of sight. Scan the QR code or click [here](#) to learn more.



Save the Date!

SAVE THE DATE
LIONS EYE BANK FOR
LONG ISLAND

**40th Anniversary
Gala Celebration**
November

Sunday **15** 2026

The Inn at New Hyde Park

214 Jericho Turnpike, New Hyde Park, NY 11040



CLEAR FUTURE, DOUBLE THANKS

A Q&A with Lion Sharon Furrer, Lions Club of North Babylon and double corneal transplant recipient

What were the initial symptoms or conditions that led to your vision deteriorating?

After a routine eye exam, I was told I may have cataracts and I should go get that checked. At my Ophthalmologist visit I was indeed told I had cataracts but I was also told that I have Fuch's Dystrophy. I learned that this is a genetic progressive disease which would lead me to lose my vision. I was referred to a cornea specialist who reviewed Fuch's with me and the treatment was corneal transplants. I had so many questions such as, "What does that mean?" and "Where do you get corneas from?" to name a few.

Can you walk us through your experience with both surgeries?

The process had to be completed in steps. One eye at a time and cataract surgery first. I had DMEK surgery. The flight [containing my cornea] was delayed and we had to wait for the cornea to arrive. I remember thinking "all of this for me?".

What was recovery like?

After the surgery, the recovery process was a bit challenging. I had to lay flat (preferably with my head dangling a bit off the bed) and I could only get up for a 10 minute break every two hours. This is in part due to an air bubble that is placed [under the cornea] during surgery to keep the graft in place. I also had to wear a special alert bracelet until the bubble dissipated.

The first eye check after the surgery was scary as I could not see anything from my right eye at all. I was told this is part of the healing process.

When you first noticed improvements in your vision after each transplant, what was that moment like?

I remember after I started getting my vision back in my right eye, how I would cover each eye to see the difference in my vision, the crispness of colors. I didn't realize until after both eyes were healed just how much my night vision was impacted. I remember saying "Wow! This is what it's supposed to look like!"

What are some of the everyday things you can now see or do that you couldn't before?

My stubbornness, my glasses and a craft light allowed me to continue my hobbies before my diagnosis. I genuinely thought any vision changes were a part of aging.

Now that my transplants are healed, I have reassurance that I can continue doing the things I love for many years.

What feelings do you have toward your donors and their families?

Thanks to the wonderful gift from a donor and the support of their loved ones, I have the gift of sight! I get to see the faces of my children, grandchildren and see all of the amazing things life offers. I had the opportunity to send a note to the donor families thanking them for their loved one's gift. I also had to let them know that I take great care of my gifts!

What message would you share with individuals who are considering becoming organ, eye and tissue donors?

Anyone considering donating tissues or organs should know their gift is the ultimate act of giving!

Register to be a Donor

If you were inspired by Sharon's journey, please consider registering to be a donor to help save and enhance the lives of others, just as hers was. Scan the QR code to the right or click [here](#) to register.



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