

# NORTH CAROLINA Lions Foundation Newsletter

## A Mission to Care, Support and Help Our North Carolina Citizens

The North Carolina Lions Foundation is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization established in 1934. As the official charitable organization for the Lions of North Carolina and working closely with community based North Carolina Lions Clubs, we collectively enrich the lives of those blind and visually impaired, offer needed services for those less fortunate in each community and a hallmark of continuous support of research for health related issues concerning vision and overall wellness of all our citizens.



## President's Message



Fellow Lions,

Before I get into the exciting new year at your NCLF, congratulations to Gary Steele our newest International Director for Lions Clubs International. Gary and Liz are probably over in India doing good work by the time you read this - go have fun you wonderful couple!

Yesterday I was sitting in a rocking chair overlooking Lake Norman from Camp Dogwood's back porch. Carlie Metts, our new Executive Director for NCLF, asked me, "How goes the first one-hundred days?" Well, it has only been 69 days so far; however, it has been a wide open start to our Lions Year.

Yesterday was our first Open House at Camp Dogwood in over a decade. It was a rousing success with Lions numbering in the triple digits while energetic staff gave tours and served hotdogs. I personally got to meet many new Lions that never visited your camp. Everyone had great things to say, and the camp staff had polished the buildings and gardens to a beautiful shine.

Our goal was to create a spirit of ownership and pride in the camp with the new members, while reviving enthusiasm in the more seasoned members. We more than accomplished that goal, we even had non-lions show up just to see what they could contribute.

The year started in July with a phone call on the second day of the term. Around nine o'clock that night, my phone rang with the announcement that, "your towing truck blew up." Somebody must have been wrong because my truck was outside in my drive. However, once I understood that I was going to have to help replace the NCLF towing truck for the MSU, I quickly learned that the buck stops with the President - and now that guy is me. After some hard searching and a few very tense negotiation meetings, the camp now has a fairly new GMC truck pulling the MSU and Brian Hoover is very happy with the heated and cooled seats. We are still looking to gain a new truck, there are a few "free programs" of the big three manufacturers for which we are trying to qualify. If you can help, please do.

I am pleased to announce the Foundation is off to a great start with the Brighter Visions Annual Fund Drive.

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All the BV Kickoffs were very good and you should be proud of your clubs. We have a long way to go, but we will get there with all clubs pulling together. Several clubs failed to participate last year and I ask for your help in urging those clubs to join us in support of NCLF this year. Your endowment is growing like gangbusters under the new management. Remember that if you have any business with Thrivent, ask your representative to contribute to NCLF with your non-profit funds available to all clients. With just those non-profit funds NCLF could attain more money than our whole BV Fund Drive - and that money is going to go somewhere, why not us?

NCLF has changed the management structure some this year. Carlie Metts has joined us as the new Executive Director and Tammy Thomas has been promoted to Director of Operations. We look forward to their leadership in taking the camp to the next level of service. I am impressed with their effort and accomplishments thus far.

So, to sum up the year at this point: a great open house, a better truck to pull the MSU, and 69 days of opportunities to support NCLF and your community's projects! Amy and I look forward to seeing each of you soon. Keep selling those raffle tickets and remember the VIP Fishing Tournament is just around the corner.

Yours in Lionism,  
PDG Allen Swaim  
President of NC Lions Foundation, '25-'26

## NCLF Hosts First-Ever Open House at Camp Dogwood

On September 7th, the North Carolina Lions Foundation proudly hosted its first Open House at Camp Dogwood, marking a new tradition of community engagement and celebration. The event was a resounding success, drawing in Lions from across the state some visiting Camp Dogwood for the very first time as well as members of the local community.

Guests were welcomed with guided tours of the campgrounds, opportunities to learn more about NCLF's mission, and a chance to see firsthand the impact of programs like Brighter Visions and the Camp Dogwood Raffle. The atmosphere was filled with excitement, curiosity, and heartfelt conversations about the future of the Foundation.



Staff prepares grounds for the Open House

"This Open House was a wonderful way to connect with our supporters and showcase the heart of what we do," said Carlie Metts, Executive Director. "It was inspiring to see new faces experiencing Camp Dogwood and to hear their enthusiasm for our work."

The event also served as a platform to share updates and gather ideas for future initiatives. With such positive feedback, the Open House will now become an annual tradition, and planning is already underway to make next year's event even bigger and better.

Thank you to everyone who attended and helped make this day so special. We look forward to welcoming even more guests next year as we continue to grow and serve together.

## Message from the Executive Director...



Dear Friends,

As I wrap up my first few weeks as Executive Director, I want to share how honored and excited I am to be part of this incredible organization. The warm welcome I've received from staff, volunteers, and community members has been truly heartening, and I'm already inspired by the passion and dedication that fuel our mission.

This season has brought several highlights, including our Brighter Visions campaign, which continues to make a meaningful impact across our communities. Your support helps us bring light and hope to those who need it most, and I'm thrilled to be part of this effort moving forward.

We've also launched the Camp Dogwood Raffle, a vital fundraiser that supports the ongoing maintenance of this cherished space. Camp Dogwood holds a special place in the hearts of many, and your participation ensures it remains a place of joy, connection, and renewal for years to come.

Another exciting milestone was our first-ever Open House, which was a great success. We welcomed several Lions visiting Camp Dogwood for the first time, along with members of the local community. It was a wonderful opportunity to showcase the heart of our mission and the beauty of the camp. We're already brainstorming ideas to make next year's event even bigger and better.

Looking ahead, I'm pleased to share that our District Governors will be contributing articles to help spotlight the incredible work happening across their regions. These updates will offer valuable insight into the local impact of our collective efforts. In addition, ID Gary Steele will be keeping us informed about his travels and sharing updates from Lions Clubs International, helping us stay connected to the broader Lions community.

As I settle into this role, I'm genuinely looking forward to working with each of you. Together, we'll build on the strong foundation that's been laid and explore new ways to grow, serve, and make a lasting impact.

Warm regards,

Carlton "Carlie" Metts II  
Executive Director, NCLF

## Message from the Retired Executive Director...

Former Executive Director, Carlton Metts



We are three months into the New Budget Year and we have completed all of the five Brighter Visions Kickoffs, District 31-L, 31-I, 31-O, 31-N, and 31-S. The five districts raised nearly \$130,000 which is a very good beginning. Good luck in the coming year with all of your Fundraising and Lions Projects. We need a better year, since the downfall last year due to Hurricane Helene and other unexpected major repairs/ replacements needed at Camp Dogwood. Keep up the good work, you will be in good hands.

I am back to my old life in New Bern after retiring at the end of August. I have enjoyed the past three years and nine months as your Executive Director of the Foundation. I am wishing you all the best in the world and ask you to continue your good work serving others. Maybe I can help in a different way than the past. We have great programs established and flourishing. Good

luck to the KidSight Committee, drivers and volunteers. You are doing an outstanding job serving the children of this wonderful state.

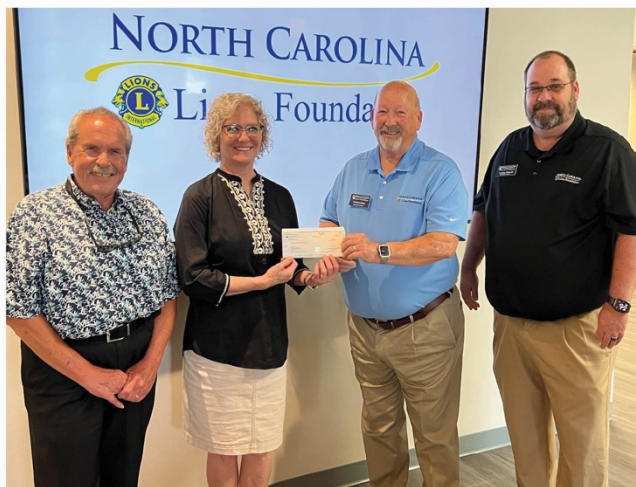
I truly think that the new format for the Camp Dogwood Raffle has a great potential in raising the funds needed for maintenance at Camp Dogwood. You have asked to return to booklets to sell instead of sheets of tickets along with ZEPHY. We are returning to booklets as requested. Each lion member in the state is being asked to sell at least one booklet of tickets. Each booklet has twenty tickets. Single ticket sales can raise \$100 per book at \$5 per ticket, three tickets for \$10 nearly \$70 per book, 20 tickets will raise \$50 per book and a new addition is 50 tickets for \$100 (that's \$2 per ticket). You may still use ZEPHY to help print the large amount of tickets for you or if you prefer to purchase your tickets on ZEPHY, feel free to do so. Be sure to select, "Other" at the end of the sale to prevent additional charges. DO NOT mail tickets purchased on ZEPHY to the NC Lions Foundation office. The NCLF office will print your tickets for you. Need more tickets, please contact the NCLF office, they will be glad to mail them to you.

The new management team, Carlie Metts and Tammy MacLean are excited about doing great things for you. I am pleased to leave you in good hands. Special thank you to all of the NC Lions Foundation staff for an outstanding job well done and supporting me in my tenure as Executive Director. You are an awesome group to work with!!

To the Lions of North Carolina, thank you for all you have done for me as your Executive Director and I hope you find it in a better position.

Thank you so much and good luck to all of you,  
Carlton

## Miracles In Sight receives \$50,000 grant from NC Lions Foundation to assist with research



CLEMMONS, N.C. (Sept. 24, 2025) – Miracles In Sight (MIS) recently received a \$50,000 grant from the North Carolina Lions Foundation to fund the purchase of two ophthalmic instruments to assist the nonprofit with research. The grant is made possible by additional support from the A.J. Fletcher Foundation and matched by Lions Clubs International Foundation.

As one of the largest nonprofit eye banks in the world, MIS specializes in the preparation, preservation, and distribution of donated ocular tissue. In close collaboration with ophthalmologists and researchers, MIS ensures timely and secure transport of this tissue, helping patients regain sight through life-changing corneal transplants and groundbreaking research.

Pictured above (left to right): PDG Paul Bledsoe, Miracles In Sight CEO Ingrid Schunder, Retired Executive Director of the NC lions Foundation Carlton Metts, and Executive Director of the NC Lions Foundation Carlton Metts, Jr. The funding will be used to purchase a SL-D4 digital slit lamp for tissue evaluation and research and a MORIA microkeratome system. The equipment will be used for enhanced imaging capabilities for tissue analysis, digital imaging and data integration, and training and skills development aligning with the organization's continued research goals.

"This new and innovative equipment is critical in the ever-changing research needs for preserving this pivotal tissue for successful corneal transplantation," said Ingrid Schunder, president and CEO of MIS. "This new state of the art equipment will allow MIS to continue its missions of offering a wide range of services, including research and collaboration with innovation partners to advance corneal transplant procedures." An SL-D4 slit lamp is a digital-ready ophthalmic diagnostic device that serves as a conventional biomicroscope and a digital imaging platform. The slit lamp can be used as a standard examination instrument or connected to a digital camera to create a comprehensive digital imaging system. MIS will use the slit lamp for various research projects involving tissue analysis.

At MIS, the MORIA Evolution 3E technology will play an important role in clinical application and research initiatives. The device allows for the study and improvement of corneal tissue preparation techniques, which can lead to improved outcomes in transplantation and broader advancements in ophthalmic care.

The North Carolina Lions Foundation collaborated with private and public donors, including the A.J. Fletcher Foundation, to raise \$25,000, which was matched by a \$25,000 grant from the Lions Clubs International Foundation.

"Eye research has taken a dramatic turn over the years, and NC Lions club members and Lions Clubs International Foundation are excited about the possibilities that can be discovered through the use of cutting-edge equipment used at Miracles In Sight," said Carlton Metts, executive director for the NC Lions Foundation. "Two of our North Carolina Lions members come to mind after successful cornea transplants: one less than a year ago and the other back in the 90s. Lions have been involved with many research programs but this one with MIS feels like helping a family member."

## Brighter Visions 2025-26

NC Lions are starting this year STRONG for Brighter Visions. North Carolina Lions have already reached 33% of the total goal for the year. The Brighter Vision Chairs are working diligently to meet and exceed the goals. The breakdown as of September 19, 2025, is as follows:

District 31L	19%
District 31I	36%
District 31O	26%
District 31N	25%
District 31S	46%

In addition to the percentages above, \$2,330 has been raised and received for Honorariums and Memorials. This is such a wonderful way to make some feel extra special when receiving one of these. Please find as follows from the latest report that contains additional details:

District	Members	Club Contributions			Individual			Gov. Goal Per Club	Difference	% of Gov. Goal	\$ Per Member	Total BV Last Year
		Brighter Visions	Mem/Hon	BV Raffle	Contribution	Mem/Hon	Total BV					
L	635	\$ 12,581	\$ 575	\$ -	\$ 90	\$ -	\$ 13,246	\$ 68,000	(54,754)	19%	\$ 20.86	\$ 34,686
I	840	\$ 47,448	\$ 4,050	\$ -	\$ 2,111	\$ 760	\$ 54,369	\$ 150,000	(95,631)	36%	\$ 64.73	\$ 124,974
O	1,002	\$ 29,503	\$ 100	\$ -	\$ 2,639	\$ 125	\$ 32,367	\$ 125,000	(92,633)	26%	\$ 32.30	\$ 106,415
N	957	\$ 21,964	\$ 200	\$ -	\$ 720	\$ 595	\$ 23,479	\$ 95,000	(71,521)	25%	\$ 24.53	\$ 90,495
S	792	\$ 42,116	\$ 25	\$ -	\$ 950	\$ 250	\$ 43,341	\$ 95,000	(51,659)	46%	\$ 54.72	\$ 81,520
State		\$ -	\$ 25	\$ 170	\$ 8,234	\$ 600	\$ 9,029	\$ -	9,029	0%		\$ 16,791
	4,226	\$ 153,612	\$ 4,975	\$ 170	\$ 14,744	\$ 2,330	\$ 175,831	\$ 533,000	(357,169)	33%	\$ 41.61	\$ 454,881

For those of you who are newer to Lions, the following programs and services are offered annually through the North Carolina Lions Foundation:

- Camp Dogwood for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Lake Norman, NC.
- Blind and Deaf Retreat.
- Support and Mobility Canes.
- Educational Grants for sighted children of visually impaired parents.
- Low Vision Aids in partnership with the NC Assistive Technology Program.
- Clinical Eye Research, NCLF takes pride in supporting clinical eye research at major NC universities.
- KidSight and Mobile Screening Units. Eye screenings for children and adults statewide.
- Sight and Hearing Conservation
- Matching Grants for eye surgeries.
- Recycling a year-round program involving Lions throughout North Carolina.

Let's not accept just reaching our goals, but **let's exceed them**. I know in my heart that each of you is very dedicated to our Brighter Visions Mission. Every donation makes a difference, no matter what the dollar amount. Your efforts are appreciated more than you know. Let's challenge each other and do whatever it takes.

Yours in Lionism,

PDG Susan Fernandez, 2025-26 State Chairperson for Brighter Visions

## Memorials and Honorariums

July - September 5, 2025

### Given By:

Main St. United Methodist Church  
 Shallotte Lions Club  
 Hendersonville Lions Club  
 Hendersonville Lions Club  
 Hendersonville Lions Club  
 C. Neal & Shirley Alexander  
 Black Mountain Lions Club  
 Scott & Michelle Stephenson  
 Betty C Wooten  
 Carlton & Anne Metts  
 Edward H. Jordan  
 Chris & Judy Headley  
 Chris & Judy Headley  
 Ronald Beltran  
 Gene & Jacqueline Goetz  
 NC Past District Governors  
 Eddie Chase  
 Earl House  
 Kernersville Lions Club  
 Hendersonville Lions Club  
 Clarence & Elizabeth Conrad  
 Clarence & Elizabeth Conrad  
 Clarence & Elizabeth Conrad  
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 Clarence & Elizabeth Conrad  
 Clarence & Elizabeth Conrad  
 Clarence & Elizabeth Conrad  
 Lake Lure Lions Club  
 H. Douglas & Jane Hardee  
 Lee Beall  
 Caroline Sinclair Family Foundation

### In Memorial:

Stewart Wooten  
 Ruth Dianne Baxley  
 Norman Bruce Mashburn  
 Norman Bruce Mashburn  
 Norman Bruce Mashburn  
 Charles "Keith" Peedin  
 Karen Anne Leonetti  
 William "Bill" Passick  
 Charles "Keith" Peedin  
 Charles "Keith" Peedin  
 Charles "Keith" Peedin  
 Garry Frederick  
 Charles "Keith" Peedin  
 Charles "Keith" Peedin  
 Charles "Keith" Peedin  
 Charles "Keith" Peedin  
 Charles "Keith" Peedin  
 Dr. Robert Burgin Dalton  
 Ronald "Ron" McCallister  
 Jan Holleman  
 Alan Lake  
 David Miller  
 Wayne Kennerly  
 Ron Staley  
 Joe Silver  
 Karl Ernst  
 Stewart Wooten  
 Charles "Keith" Peedin  
 Margaret Joyce  
 Mike Reid  
 Allen Thompson  
 Andy Lilliston  
 George Culp  
 Rachel Walker  
 Randy Vickers  
 Mathew "Matt" Dolan  
 Cecil Edgar Wooten  
 Cecil Edgar Wooten  
 Cecil Edgar Wooten

### Given By:

Jerry & Geneva Austin  
 Wayne Faber  
 Wayne Faber  
 Neal & Shirley Alexander  
 Chris & Judy Headley  
 Chris & Judy Headley  
 Clarence & Elizabeth Conrad  
 Juanita Brown  
 Aberdeen Lions Club

### In Honor Of:

Carlton & Anne Metts  
 Tammy MacLean  
 Carlton & Anne Metts  
 Carlton & Anne Metts  
 Juanita Brown  
 Carlton & Anne Metts  
 Jimmy & Michelle Myers  
 Susie Dailey  
 Scotland County Lions LC

**Donations can be  
 credited to  
 your club's  
 Brighter Visions  
 Fund Drive**

## The Governor's Corner...

### Kindness Matters... Mental Health & Well Being



Mental health touches every family and every community. The leadership team of District 31-O is proud to launch our first District 31-O Mental Health & Well-Being Week, October 4–11, 2025. This initiative reflects our commitment to raising awareness, educating, reducing stigma, and ensuring that no one feels alone in their journey toward mental health well-being. By working together, we can provide hope, encouragement, and resources that strengthen resiliency in both individuals and communities.

As part of District 31-O's Mental Health Initiative, we will host the Kellin Foundation's Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) course on October 6, 2025, from 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. This will be conducted in person at the Sanford Lions Clubhouse.

Just as traditional first aid equips us to respond to physical health emergencies, Mental Health First Aid provides the tools to recognize, understand, and respond to

signs of mental health and substance use challenges. This evidence-based training helps participants learn how to support someone in crisis until professional help is available.

The Kellin Foundation, a nationally recognized nonprofit based in Greensboro, North Carolina, is committed to building resilient children, families, and communities. Through their MHFA training, participants gain practical strategies for:

- Identifying common signs and symptoms of mental health challenges
- Approaching and supporting someone who may be in crisis
- Knowing when and how to connect individuals to professional care and resources
- Reducing stigma by fostering compassionate, informed conversations

As District Governor, I want to emphasize the importance of this training as part of our service mission: "Mental health is a vital part of overall well-being. By learning these skills, Lions and community members can provide support in critical moments—just as we would if someone were experiencing a physical health emergency."

To further support this initiative, District 31-O will host a district-wide Question & Answer session via Zoom on Monday, October 6 at 6:00 p.m. Dr. Kelly Graves, founder of the Kellin Foundation, and Ashely Cox, Clinical Director of Youth Focus, a Greensboro nonprofit, that also works to strengthen community well-being through housing, counseling, and crisis services for youth and families, will be our guest presenters. This interactive session will give Lions across the district the opportunity to ask questions and share ideas on how to apply these skills in our clubs and communities.

The Mental Health First Aid course is offered free to 30 participants who are interested in counseling and mental health. The Zoom discussion is open to all Lions, Leos, and community members. By participating, we are not only strengthening our own understanding but also helping to create a culture of care, compassion, and resilience across District 31-O.

I strongly encourage every club across the state to maximize its participation in scheduling events across their district. Together, we can demonstrate the power of Lions service—showing that we are not only champions of sight, hearing, and hunger relief, but also of mental health and well-being. Together, we can make a difference—one conversation, one connection, and one act of support at a time.

Juanita S Brown  
District Governor of District 31-O

## The Governor's Corner...

# Bringing Sight & Health to Spruce Pines After Helene



### Lions Clubs and Partners Unite for Vision After Helene Service Project Where Community Comes Together for Vision and Health

On a bright and hopeful day in Spruce Pines, service and collaboration took center stage as the Vision After Helene Service Project unfolded with remarkable energy and compassion. This impactful event was made possible by the collective efforts of The Lions across District L, joined

by dedicated members from District I, working side by side with several partnering organizations. The main goal: to provide essential vision screenings and host a comprehensive Health Fair for the local community.

### A Unified Force of Volunteers

The event brought together an impressive group of 40 volunteers representing 14 different Lions Clubs from two districts. This strong showing of commitment and teamwork was a testament to the Lions' enduring motto: "We Serve." Volunteers were crucial in ensuring every aspect of the event ran smoothly and that every attendee received the care and attention they deserved.

### Leadership and Partnership

The Vision After Helene Service Project was spearheaded by Lion Wayne Houser of the Long View Lions Club, whose vision and organizational skills laid the foundation for the event's success. The coordination of the volunteers was masterfully handled by Lion Connie Monday of the Claremont Lions, whose leadership ensured that every task was addressed, and every participant felt welcomed and supported. The Lions were not alone in this endeavor. Several local organizations joined forces with them, providing expertise, resources, and enthusiasm. Together, this coalition of service-minded groups amplified the impact of the Health Fair, offering expanded services and information to all who attended.

### Delivering Essential Services

Throughout the day, community members received free vision screenings, vital health assessments, and educational resources. The event was designed to remove barriers and make health care more accessible to everyone in the Spruce Pines area, with a particular focus on vision—a cornerstone of the Lions' mission. Many attendees expressed gratitude for the opportunity to have their vision checked and their health questions answered by caring professionals and volunteers.

### A Model for Community Service

The Vision After Helene Service Project stands as a shining example of what can be achieved when service clubs and community organizations unite with a shared purpose. The Lions Clubs of District L and District I, along with their partners, demonstrated the power of collaboration and goodwill, making a tangible difference in the lives of Spruce Pines residents.

Congratulations and heartfelt thanks to Lion Wayne Houser, Lion Connie Monday, all 40 volunteers, and the organizations that joined hands with the Lions. Your dedication and spirit of service continue to be a Beacon of Hope for others. All In all, The Lions and Partnering Organizations provided hope and glasses to the people of Spruce Pines!

## Kicking Off the New Year With a Bang!



What an incredible start to this Lions year! We launched the season with energy and enthusiasm, and it's already shaping up to be one of our best yet.

Our summer camp was a tremendous success, filled with unforgettable experiences, growth, and joy for all who attended. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, and we're already looking forward to next year!

We're thrilled to share that our off-season retreats are completely booked! This speaks volumes about the impact Camp Dogwood continues to have year-round, and we're grateful for the continued support from our Lions community.

I'm personally excited to step into my new role as Director of Operations. It's an honor to serve in this capacity and help guide Camp Dogwood into its next chapter. I recently had the pleasure of speaking with the Thomasville Lions Club and have several more engagements lined up.

If your club would like to hear more about Camp Dogwood and the incredible work we're doing, I'd be delighted to come speak. Let's keep the momentum going and make this Lions year unforgettable!

Yours in service,  
Tammy MacLean  
Director of Operations, Camp Dogwood

## Reflections from the USA/Canada Lions Leadership Forum – Atlantic City

By International Director Gary Steele



I traveled to Atlantic City on September 17 to attend the USA/Canada Lions Leadership Forum. Upon arrival, I jumped right into an evening meeting that ran from 9 to 11 p.m.—a strong start to what turned out to be a packed and energizing few days.

The next day was filled with back-to-back meetings and seminars. One of the sessions featured International Director candidates, each given three minutes to introduce themselves. It was a great opportunity for Lions to hear directly from those seeking leadership roles and to connect with them personally.

I also had the privilege of presenting a seminar titled "What is Lions University?" The room was full, and the engagement was fantastic. Attendees asked thoughtful questions, and it was clear that there's strong interest in the leadership development opportunities Lions University offers.

Two standout moments from the Forum were the Friday Luncheon and Saturday Dinner. We heard from Warren Morris, a former Major League Baseball player, and BJ Blahnik, who shared his journey with Leader Dog Jackson. Both speakers were incredibly inspiring and left a lasting impression.

The Forum concluded with the Lions University graduation ceremony on Saturday. Over 300 Lions and Leos received their certificates representing more than 20% of all attendees. It was a powerful reminder of the commitment our members have to learning and growth. What an incredible accomplishment to witness.

## Eliza Park & the NC Lions Veterans Initiative

### Written to Inform, Inspire, and Strengthen Lionism in Action



Lion Mike Hall



#### From Biscuits to a Movement

What began almost two years ago with a bag of biscuits under an overpass has grown into the Eliza Park Homeless Initiative—a model of service, dignity, and transformation. Over 2,100 volunteer hours and \$17,000 of personal savings have already been invested to create a chartered encampment that resembles its own functioning community government.

This work entered a new chapter in August 2025, when Lion Paul Geigel joined the NC Lions Veterans Initiative. Together with Lion Michael Hall and others, Eliza Park and ROOTS have become part of a growing statewide effort to serve homeless veterans and restore dignity to those who once served our nation.

#### Veterans at the Center

In Raleigh's encampments, veterans live side by side with civilians—a reminder that homelessness touches every corner of our community. Many veterans face unique barriers to recovery, but they also bring leadership, resilience, and skills that can transform their camps into structured, peer-led communities.

The NC Lions for Veterans program works to:

- Advocate for housing and recovery pathways
- Assist with peer-led recruitment and leadership development
- Support encampments with practical resources—generators, stable infrastructure, and community investor partnerships
- Ensure veterans and their families are honored, supported, and equipped for reintegration

#### Lions for Veterans Initiative

Lion MSG (Ret.) Michael J. Hall

The Lions for Veterans Initiative is led in North Carolina by Lion MSG (Ret.) Michael J. Hall, who brings both his military service and his Lions service together in a mission to support veterans across our state.

Goals for Lions for Veterans:

- Advise, assist, and recruit veterans into the Lions network.
- Build data and pathways for veteran support across North Carolina.
- Strengthen partnerships with civic, faith, and peer-led community groups.

A veteran is defined as someone who has served at least 24 months in the U.S. military and received an honorable discharge. In 2023, North Carolina had an estimated 700,000 veterans, roughly 8% of the state's population. Of these, 218,200 had a service-related disability rating, alongside 10 military installations and nearly 90,000 active-duty personnel.

Yet the need remains pressing: in 2024, 688 homeless veterans were identified in North Carolina, of which 23% were unsheltered. Many face challenges related to PTSD, substance abuse, and barriers in accessing federal benefits.

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Lion Hall's leadership is guided by both data and compassion. His partnership with Lion Paul Geigel in September 2025 connected the Lions for Veterans Initiative directly with the Eliza Park Homeless Initiative, a peer-led encampment model in the Garner area. This has resulted in the establishment of a chartered, structured encampment, where veterans and civilians alike are supported with dignity, leadership, and recovery pathways.

By connecting veterans living in tents with resources such as CASH stipends, PTSD counseling, substance abuse recovery, and VA partnerships, the Lions for Veterans Initiative ensures that no veteran is left behind.

Lion Michael J. Hall is new to this partnership, but his commitment is strong. Together with Lion Paul Geigel and the Eliza Park team, the Lions for Veterans Initiative is shaping a new model of service, outreach, and veteran reintegration in North Carolina.

## Core Objectives of Lionism in Action

- **Hunger:** Weekly hot meals, groceries, and supplies are served to hundreds in need.
- **Environment:** Through the ROOTS work program, over 10,000 pounds of trash have been removed from parks and encampments, making Raleigh cleaner and greener.
- **Disaster Relief:** Structured encampments create safety and dignity in times of crisis.
- **Volunteers:** Lions and community members work side by side, embodying 'We Serve.'
- **Homeless Outreach:** Peer-led, city-recognized models are pioneering new pathways to housing, recovery, and long-term stability.

## Lions in Action: Community Transformation

Eliza Park is more than a weekly meal or cleanup effort—it is a living model of community transformation. By working with the City of Raleigh, Wake County Continuum of Care, and local civic partners, Lions are showing how grassroots efforts can create systemic change.

With Lions supporting veterans, ROOTS leading cleanups, and Eliza Park bridging agencies to people, we are proving that the heart of Lionism beats strongest in service to the most vulnerable.

## Closing Word

This work is not charity—it is dignity, service, and hope in action. Where there is a need, there is a Lion. And where there is a Lion, there is hope.



## Spread the Word About Our Foundation

Use your hand held device to scan the code and then go directly to the [nclf.org](https://nclf.org) website, it's the perfect way to get citizens to learn about our foundation and encourage donations, now!

