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Lions Club KidSight provides free vision screening

By Alfredo Vasquez
Special to the Courier

Lions Clubs International (LCI) wants to ensure that every Pre-K through first grade (3-6 years old) student is checked annually for vision disorders including near-sightedness,

far-sightedness, astigmatism, and other eye problems through a free photo screening program called Operation Kidsight.

The screening program is headed by LCI volunteers who have been trained to organize and conduct non-invasive, vision-screening sessions in local schools. The results are interpreted by trained-staff and

returned to families.

“The first six years of a child’s life are critical in the development of good vision,” said Hector Giron, one of the coordinators of the Dona Ana County Lions Club Operation Kidsight program.

The eye, muscles that control the eye, optic nerve, and the area of the brain that gives a child vision are completely developed, no matter how perfectly or imperfectly, by the time he or she enters first grade, explained Giron, who is a local educator with over 30 years of public schools experience.

“Eye problems are not always evident by simply looking at a child. Each day that the problems go undetected and untreated, a child’s vision may deteriorate to the point of irreversibility,” Giron stated. Consequently, undetected vision problems can be a serious barrier to learning. Poorly developed vision skills make learning difficult and stressful often resulting in reading avoidance, difficulty with comprehension, short attention spans and misbehavior in the classroom, he said.

“That is why early detection is so important,” said Giron, a member of the Lions Club of Anthony NM. “The earlier these conditions are detected, the more easily and successfully they can be treated.”

Giron and Bryson McCool, a member of the Lions Club of La Mesa NM, were at Anthony Elementary School, in the Gadsden Independent School District, recently to screen students in the school’s pre-K classes. Since January, they along with other volunteers have provided screening and education about early detection and treatment of vision impairments to about 2,300 pre-K through first grade students in the Gadsden school district.

Collectively, the seven Lions Clubs in Dona Ana County NM have screened over

6,500 children throughout the county school districts including Las Cruces.

“Younger children usually don’t report problems with their vision, especially if the problem is in just one eye and the other eye is compensating for it. Because vision may change frequently during the school years, a child should receive an eye examination at least once every two years or more frequently if specific problems exist. Detecting vision problems early can make a difference in future success in school, work, and life,” McCool said.

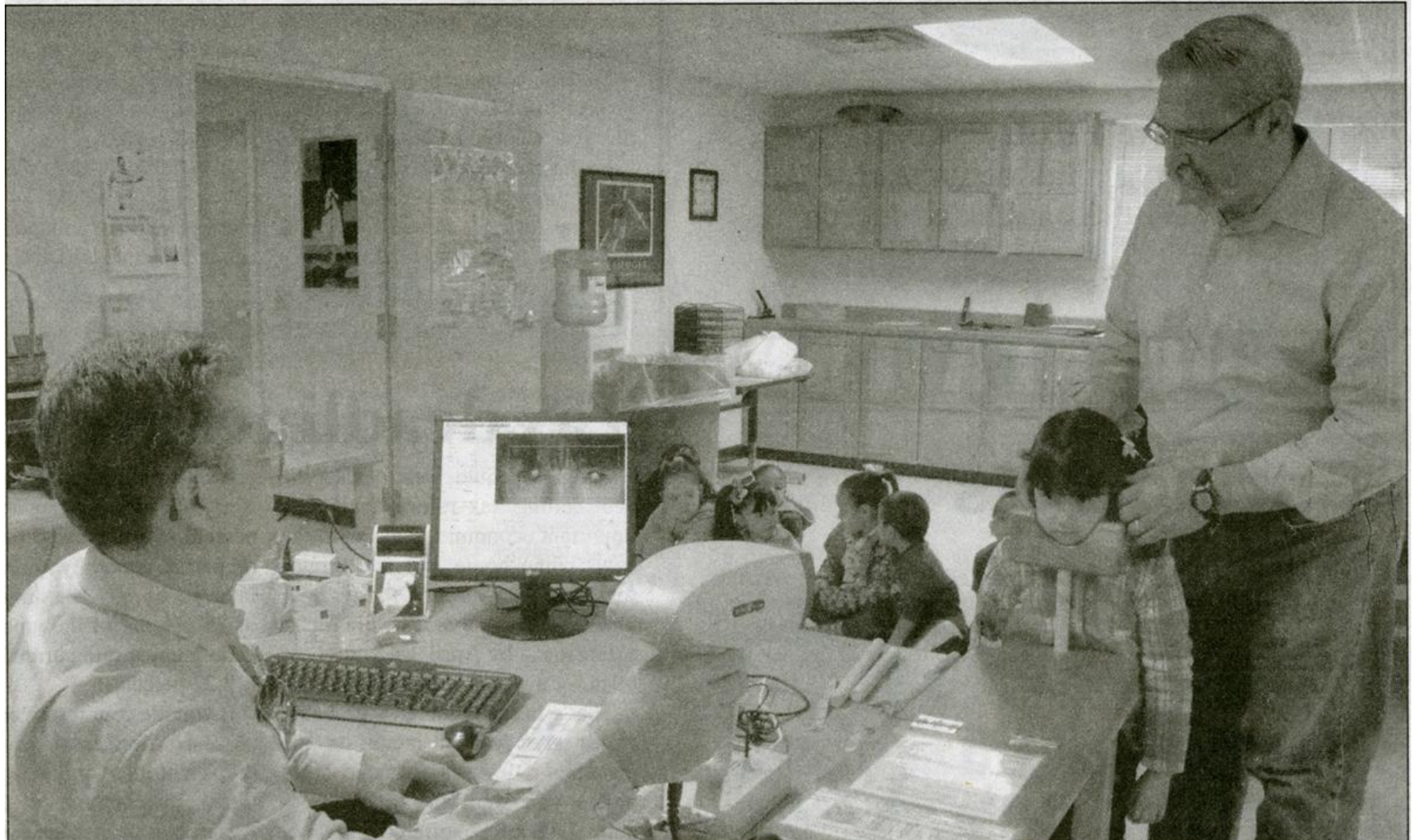
“Vision screening is an efficient and cost-effective method to identify children with

visual impairment or eye conditions that are likely to lead to visual impairment so that a referral can be made to an appropriate eye care professional for further evaluation and treatment,” McCool stated. He said that about 12 percent of the children they have screened received referral certificates.

Plans are to coordinate an Operation Kidsight program with LCI’s El Paso area chapters in the near future, according to McCool.

LCI has 46,000 clubs and 1.35 million members world-wide, which makes it the world’s largest service club organization.

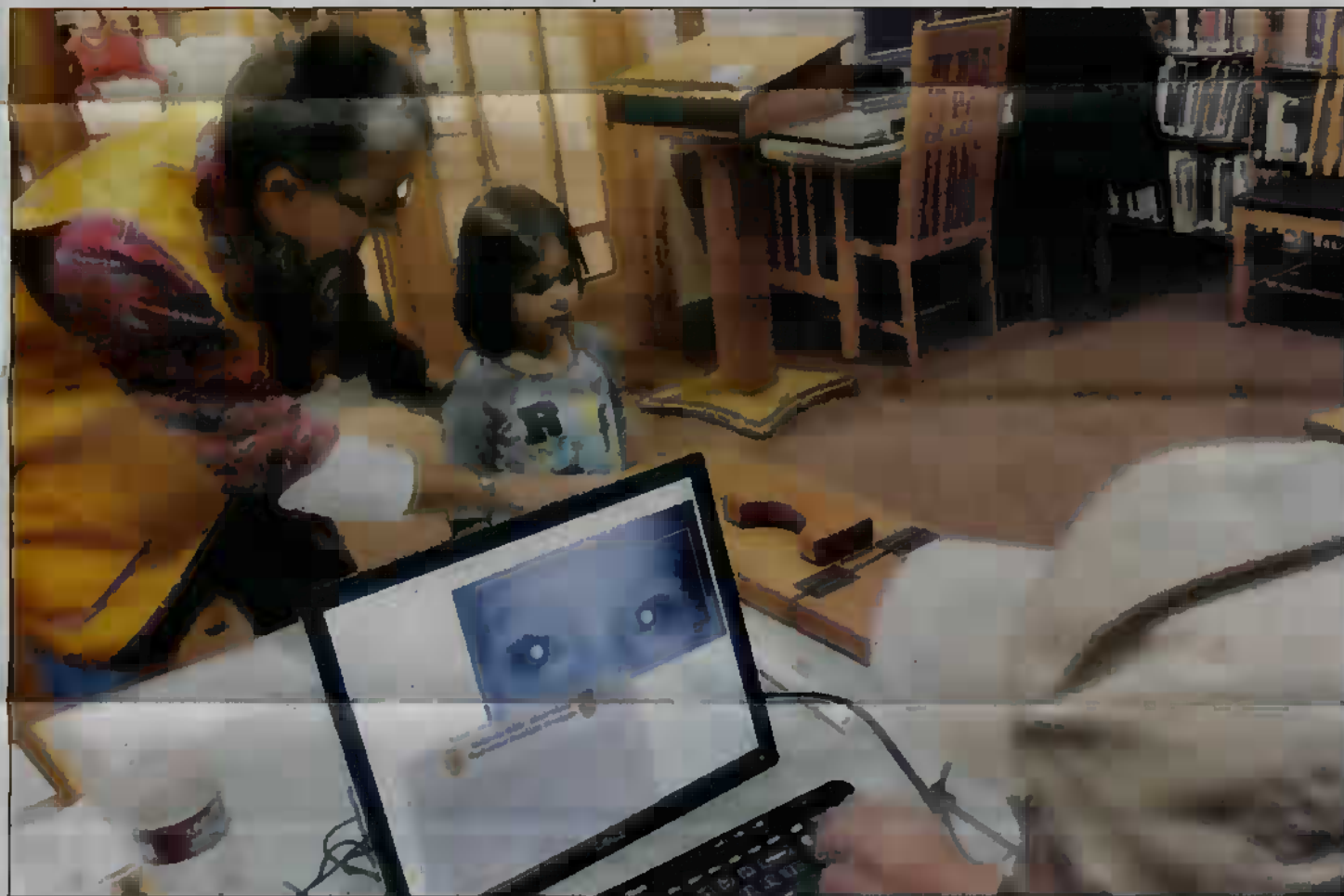
“LCI is one of the most effective service organizations in the world,” stated Giron. “Our members do whatever is needed to help their local communities, especially when it comes to children’s eye care.”



LOOK INTO MY EYES – Hector Giron (right) of the Lions Club of Anthony NM and Bryson McCool, of the Lions Club of La Mesa NM, were at Anthony Elementary School, in the Gadsden Independent School District, recently to photo screen students in the school's kindergarten classes. Photo screening is an automated technique that uses the red reflex to identify many types of eye problems. An advantage of this screening is that it is quick and thus useful with young children, as well as provides immediate information about eye conditions.

NOON LIONS NONINVASIVE TESTING DETECTS AMBLYOPIA

Screening: Wednesday results in two children referred to professional



DIANNE STALLINGS — RUIDOSO NEWS

Bella Brumlow, 4, is helped into position by Ruidoso Noon Lions auxiliary member Joan Kalkwarf Wednesday for amblyopia eye screening at the Ruidoso Public Library.

By Dianne Stallings
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Members of the Ruidoso Noon Lions are used to visiting area schools with the special equipment designed to detect amblyopia, or lazy eye, at an early age. But during a recent conversa-

tion with staff at the village public library, they realized an entire group of home-schooled children and toddlers may be slipping through the cracks.

Curt Dimberg, executive director of the New Mexico Lions Operation KidSight and a member of the Noon Lions, quickly moved to correct that situation.

Wednesday, Dimberg and other Lions members were at the library with an infrared Plusoptix "gun" that resembles those used by police to detect speeders. But as each child was placed into position, the gun recorded the eyes on a related computer screen. By the end of the morning session, 18 children were tested from ages 12

months to seven years and two were referred to a pediatric ophthalmologist, Dimberg reported. "Amblyopia, or lazy eye, is so common that it is the reason for more vision loss in children than all other causes put together, according to a recent study pub-

Tests

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lished by the American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus," Dimberg explained. "The Ruidoso Noon Lions conduct vision screenings throughout Lincoln County as part of a statewide New Mexico Lions KidSight project. State-of-the-art infrared equipment is used to detect risk factors, which could cause amblyopia. Preschool, kindergarten and first grade students are checked and if any sign of the factors that could cause amblyopia are found, the school will notify the parents that the child should be seen by an eye care professional."

Dimberg said more than one million adults under the age of 55 are suffering from vision loss, because the condition was not caught when it could be treated.

"If you catch it before the age of seven, generally the condition is easy to correct," he said. "Beyond that, the eye has developed and it is more difficult. It is a condition, not a disease."

Amblyopia is a decrease in a child's vision that can occur even when there is no problem with the structure of the eye, he said. It results when one or both eyes send a blurry image to the brain. The brain then "learns" to only see blurry with that eye, even when glasses are used. Only children can get amblyopia, which is diagnosed under several different headings, depending on the functioning of the eye, which include when one eye is not straight and the brain "turns it off," or cataracts have developed or an unequal amount of refractive error exists.

Dimberg explained that

during a 1925 international convention of Lions in Ohio, Helen Keller, who was deaf and blind, but inspired the country with her courage and efforts to raise awareness, challenged the organization to foster and sponsor the work of the American Foundation for the Blind, to focus on preventing blindness as well as helping those whose vision was impaired.

The noninvasive procedure used Wednesday did not require eye drops and the children tested seemed happy to choose a sticker for their reward. A pediatrician would have to pay a fee for each use of the equipment, Dimberg said. But because the Lions are a nonprofit, the organization is not charged by the German-based company, which also sold the equipment to the group at a discounted price.

Last year statewide in New Mexico, 19,258 children were tested and 13 percent were referred to a professional, Dimberg said, showing a compilation of the participating clubs and their statistics.

This year, testing sites were added in Farmington, Gallup and Santa Fe, with an increased goal of testing 25,000 children, he said.

Stops already are scheduled for 2014 from 8:30 a.m. to 11 a.m., March 28, at the Hondo Schools Multi-Purpose Room; from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., April 17, at the Ruidoso Convention Center; from 9 a.m. to noon, April 24, in the Cummins Gymnasium at Capitan Schools; from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., April 25, at Tularosa Elementary School; from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., May 1, at the Corona Multipurpose Room; and from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., May 1, at the Carrizozo High School Gymnasium. A date at Cloudcroft Elementary School in April will be announced.