

MILFORD & DISTRICT LIONS CLUB

By PID Len Giffen April 2008

The Beginning

Like many Community Organizations, the Milford & District Lions Club began in the kitchen in 1974, specifically the kitchens of Robie Horne, Gordon Grant and Len Giffen.

The latter two were members of the Shubenacadie Lions Club and Robie was a former member of the Middleton Lions Club. During the early 1970's the Shubenacadie Club had grown and prospered and it was felt the time was right to start a new Club in Milford.

At the Kitchen meetings names of prospective members were listed, telephone calls were made and the organizational meeting was scheduled for the Milford Recreation Hall. The necessary 20 members were signed at the meeting and a date was scheduled for the official charter. In all a total of 27 members were listed as Charter Members by the deadline date and although that first party was held in the spring of 1975, the club was officially in operation with its new officers elected in January and the annual anniversary celebration has been held the last Saturday in January since, with the exception of a couple of occasions when weather forced a postponement of a week.

THE EARLY YEARS

The new club grew quickly and became very active both in the local community and the District level, which encompassed the entire province of Nova Scotia.

From the outset support for the Milford Recreation Association and its various activities was a primary objective of the club. That support has continued through to the present and with the exception of a couple of lean years, the club has funded about 50 percent of the annual operating costs of the Recreation Center as well as major contributions to the capital and grounds maintenance expenditures. In total the club has contributed about a quarter of a million dollars to the Milford Recreation Association over the first 25 years.

The primary source of funds for this activity has been the weekly Bingo at the MRA hall. Members contributed almost 1000 hours of volunteer labor per year to operate the Bingo, which for the most part had been financially rewarding but on occasion has faltered as well. In 2000 the expansion by the province into VLT's, casinos and lotteries negatively impacted most community Bingos.

Continued page 2

MILFORD & DISTRICT² LIONS CLUB

Our Bingo struggled to break even over several years and while we changed our format in hopes of finding a new winning formula such was not to be and the Bingo was permanently closed in 2002.

The annual Easter Breakfast is another activity that has been with the club since year one. It started modestly with pancakes and sausages but quickly took on a life of its own, growing and expanding into a full "all you can eat" breakfast and one of the social events of the year in the community. Now serving over 500 people each year. If you have friends or former schoolmates you haven't seen for years, just spend Easter Saturday morning at the Lions breakfast and chances are they will come through the door.

Youth activities have been another priority for the club since its inception and thousands of dollars are spent each year to that end. The three elementary schools in the area have all benefited from playground equipment, school trips, Christmas visits from Santa and other special events such as bike rodeos and the RCMP race for drug display.

In addition the club sponsors an Air Cadet Squadron and has supported the Scout and 4-H movements along with a number of sports teams and summer camps for local disabled children.

In 1977 the Club sponsored the establishment of a Lioness Club and is equally proud of the outstanding community service these women have contributed over the years. In the late 1990's the Lioness Club purchased a dog guide for an individual at a cost of \$6000.00

Early in the 1980's the need for transportation for community groups became evident and the Club responded by purchasing a van which was made available on a free loan basis, although voluntary donations for its upkeep were accepted. Over a period of 10-12 years some 500,000 kms. Were registered by community groups on 2 vans purchased and maintained by the Club

Changes in school board policy in the early 1990's precluded the need for this service to the schools and when the second van was retired, the project was allowed to expire.

Continued page 3

MILFORD & DISTRICT LIONS CLUB³

The need for professional entertainment in the local area was also identified in the early 1980's and the Lions Club responded by bringing Neptune theatre, a circus and a number of professional singers and performers to the High School and the MRA property. These projects were not envisioned as fundraisers and admission was priced to achieve a break-even bottom line.

In some cases a substantial financial guarantee was required and while some events made a profit, others resulted in a loss with the overall result being the achievement of a break even as planned.

Not many folks remember but long before recycling became the government operated program it is today the Milford Lions Club was into recycling paper, cardboard and glass in a major way. The little building on the front of Liola Reid's property was our glass breaking and storage area and periodically a twenty ton tandem truckload was hauled away to Moncton courtesy of Shaw's trucking.

Every single bottle of the thousands that made up each load was collected from our six drop box locations and broken by hand into steel barrels by Lion volunteers. We sometimes did get help from some young people who couldn't resist the lure of breaking glass bottles.

Many locals will also remember seeing Lions loading tons of newspaper into tractor trailers in front of the barn belonging to the late James Kerr on the site where Barb and Dorothy Aitken have built their home. The help of Air Cadets and other young people was also greatly appreciated on "loading days" and the club regularly earned three to five thousand dollars per year on this activity until, like seems to be happening with bingo, the government took over our business.

MORE 1980'S INITIATIVES

A new Arena for the area had been discussed for many years but no real progress was made until the Lions Club hired a professional firm to do a feasibility study. The results of the study were turned over to the Arena Association and became the catalyst for the development of the new building now operating in Lantz.

The Club installed school crosswalk signs at key locations along Highway #2 at a cost of \$2000.00 each plus maintenance and power bills also paid by the club throughout the 1980's and 1990's. Here again government policy intervened and after several years of discussion we were forced to remove them in 1998.

Continued page 4

MILFORD & DISTRICT LIONS CLUB⁴

Many people have now heard of "Lifeline", the program that provides shut-ins and the elderly with automated telephone dialing for assistance when needed. Once again, long before this was popular and became a profitable business; our Lions Club had developed its own system, thanks to the skill of Lion Jack van de Riet, and provided the service free of charge in our coverage area.

The service is still available, but we now provide it as agents of Lifeline in Halifax and the service is no longer free.

THE CHALLENGING 1990'S

The 1990's, particularly the later "90's were challenging years for the Club. Members aged and priorities changed. Work pressures and financial constraints all combined to challenge the Club. A smaller membership meant a greater load on each individual and yet despite these problems the Club continues to play a leadership role in many areas of activity and on an encouraging note as we left the 20th century the membership once again began to expand.

THE NEW CENTURY

Just prior to the dawn of the New Century the Club took on a firewood project as a fundraiser to help offset the drop in revenue from Bingo. The Club purchased 20 or so cords of wood in long length and cut, split, and delivered it to local citizens.

Then, "along came Juan" windy hurricane Juan, and trees were felled far and wide. As a community service members cleaned up fallen trees for seniors and disabled in the area and were approached by Milford Recreation Association to clear up the many fallen trees along their wooded walking trails with the wood recovered to be the property of the club. Three years and hundreds of cords of wood later the job was completed with a net gain for the club of about thirty thousand dollars plus a wood splitter and loader.

Surprisingly the core group of members who completed the work was almost all senior citizens and at the peak of the job in 2002 the average age of the crew that worked 5-6 days per week from 8 am till noon for 3 months was 68 years.

Continued page 5

MILFORD & DISTRICT LIONS CLUB

The same basic crew still process 50 to 60 cords of wood per year for sale by the Club at a net profit of 5 to 6 thousand dollars annually.

As noted earlier our mainstay fundraiser of Bingo in the early years died in 2002, but not for long. In January of 2007 the Club joined with four others to launch a Radio Bingo with a Truro Radio Station every Tuesday evening.

Lo and behold it has taken off like a rocket and proving to be an excellent fundraiser for the club. Hopefully the government won't decide to take it over.

The new Century brought a new Challenge to the Lions of the World to raise 150 million U.S. dollars for sight related projects in Campaign Sightfirst II and once again the Milford Club has responded with a \$5000.00 gift from the club and another \$5000.00 in personal gifts from members to our International Foundation which was recognized in 2006 as the number 1 charity in the entire world by the United Nations.

In addition to its ongoing activities the club has pledged a gift of \$5000.00 to the new regional hospital which will be realized from the proceeds of the annual fall roast beef dinner.

IN SUMMARY

In 1925, Lions were challenged by Helen Keller to become "Knights of the Blind". That challenge was taken up by the Lions and support for the visually impaired and blindness prevention has been a cornerstone of our activity ever since.

Since our founding in 1975, the Milford Club has actively supported the twin goals of blindness prevention and assistance to the visually impaired. As earlier noted in the reference to the Lioness Club's purchase of a dog guide, the Lions have annually supported the Canadian Lions own school in Oakville. This School, raises, trains and matches dog guides with the visually impaired, hearing ear dogs with the hearing impaired and special skills dogs with the physically disabled throughout Canada. In addition to its annual support to the operations budget the Club has contributed \$5000.00 to the construction of new and expanded puppy breeding and training kennel facilities for our complex and \$6000.00 for a dog guide.

Continued page 6

MILFORD & DISTRICT LIONS CLUB⁶

The work of the CNIB here in Nova Scotia is also supported by the Club and we have, for many years, collected used eyeglasses which are subsequently used in Lions Eye Centers in third world countries to improve vision for hundreds of thousands of individuals.

Lion David Manning has played a leadership role in Nova Scotia in both the capital campaigns for the new kennels and the used eyeglass program and in 2005 was elected to a 3 year term on the Board of Directors of the Lions Foundation of Canada. He went on to serve as Chairman of the Board in 2007/08.

Early in the '90's Lions of the world undertook a massive campaign to raise 200 million dollars to eliminate reversible and preventable blindness through out the world.

That campaign achieved its objective in 1995 and here in Nova Scotia the Milford & District Lions Club ranked Number 1 in its fundraising efforts.

Since 1995 millions of people in the third world have benefited and millions more will benefit from the permanent eye treatment centers and other projects established with the funds.

In addition to the ongoing activities of the club noted earlier our members continue to do the hundreds of little things every year that help someone in need. Splitting wood for a senior, providing free sick room equipment, sponsoring a youth public speaking contest, school bursaries, support for the Angel Tree, caring and sharing, the IWK; the list goes on and on.

In total the Milford & District Lions Club has raised and spent more than a million dollars on humanitarian service in its first twenty-five years. With the continuing support of our friends and neighbors we will do even more in the next twenty-five.

In 1995 Lion Len Giffen of our club was the first Nova Scotian in the 50 year history of the Organization in the Province to be elected to the International Board of Directors. During his 2 year term as Director he chaired the International Leadership Committee and continues to serve the International Organization as a Faculty Member of Leadership Institutes for Lions throughout North America.

MILFORD & DISTRICT⁷ LIONS CLUB

As a Director and Past Director Lion Len has conducted seminars and training events for Lions on five Continents.

The club continues to grow and we are fortunate to have attracted a number of new young members including some very capable women to take over from the seniors and ensure that community needs will continue to be met in the foreseeable future.

“TO BE CONTINUED”



In another 5 Years