

# Kids in focus

## Lions vision screening program targets children



Photo by Art Dahlke

Cedarburg, Grafton and Thiensville-Mequon Lions Club members talk with students at First Immanuel Lutheran School about what the short eye exam entails.

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**CEDARBURG** — For decades, the surest way to discover a vision issue was to read off a vision chart. But what do you do when you're testing someone who can't read, and possibly may not even be able to speak yet?

Ken Jonas, Paul Lazzari and Dr. Kyle Ross know the answer to that. The three men head the Cedarburg Lions Vision Screening program and they are putting their time and effort to good use in providing vision screening for the youngest members of the community.

"We do vision screening for people as young as six months old," explained Jonas, who co-chairs the committee with Lazzari. "You can't use normal vision charts — they can't read."

For children a little older, there are vision charts with recognizable symbols on them, but that still doesn't help. Instead, the program relies on a camera-type device that takes an image of the child's eyes.

"We know that there are a lot of issues that show up early in life, and with some of them, there are things that can be done to help them," said Jonas. "As you get older, the standard solution is to just fit you with glasses and you're a bit stuck."

Instead, the club uses a device that identifies the most prevalent childhood vision disorders, including nearsightedness and farsightedness, astigmatism, unequal pupil sizes and eye misalignments and issues such as cataracts or scratches.

"It does it very quickly and the machine is calibrated for use from about 3 feet

away from the child," he said. "All they have to do is look at it."

Jonas said that the Lions Clubs' services are not meant to take the place of an eye care professional, rather they provide a referral to the parent or guardian that there is a potential vision issue.

While the Cedarburg Lions Club has long provided vision screening to the Cedarburg Public Schools for many years and for children up to 18 years, the machine has helped to broaden the number of students the club can screen.

"It's very efficient and very fast — we use it for children up to third grade," Jonas said, noting that traditional vision screening methods are used for older children.

The device used by the area Lions is on loan from the Lions Club District that the club belongs to. Jonas said that there are about four machines available for use by clubs within the district.

In addition to incorporating the use of the device, the Lions Clubs are also expanding the scope of its vision screening program.

"We hope to move beyond the public schools, and have started going into parochial schools and we hope to eventually include more private and homeschool students," said Jonas, who said his team recently provided vision screenings to students at First Immanuel Lutheran in Cedarburg.

Local Lions have also gone into the Milwaukee Public Schools to help out, as their clubs are part of the geographic district that includes Milwaukee County.

"There really aren't any Lions Clubs on the north side of Milwaukee, so we occasionally go down to MPS and provide vision screening services," said Jonas. "The kids down there will sometimes tell us in advance that they don't see very well and they are happy to have us screen their vision for them."

He said that the Lions Clubs also work in conjunction with Prevent Blindness Wisconsin, which will work with parents and guardians to help find coverage, pay for an exam and get kids the corrective measures they need.



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Local Lions involved in the Vision Screening Program are, back row from left, Robert Gosewehr, Ken Jonas, Dennis Corrigan and John Bitter; front row from left are Mike Quigley and Paul Lazzari.