



Bantry Bay Lions part of Lions District 133

Who are Lions?

In 1917, Chicago business leader Melvin Jones asked a simple and world-changing question – what if people put their talents to work improving their communities? The answer was to form an organization in Chicago called the Lions. Just three years after their founding, Lions became international when they established the first club in Canada. Mexico followed in 1927. In the 1950's and 1960's international growth accelerated, with new clubs in Europe, Asia and Africa. Almost 100 years later, Lions Clubs International is the world's largest service club organization, with 1.4+ million members in more than 46,000 clubs in 207 countries. They are also one of the most effective with every penny collected being funnelled into the activities undertaken. Administrative costs are funded by member donations and all members are unpaid volunteers.

In 1925, [Helen Keller challenged Lions](#) to become "knights of the blind in the crusade against darkness" and they accepted. Today, sight programs remain one of their defining causes. For nearly 100 years, their members have worked on projects designed to prevent blindness, restore eyesight and improve eye care for hundreds of millions of people worldwide. Lions volunteer to take part in sight projects that have:

- Saved the sight of more than 15 million children by providing eye screenings, glasses and other treatments through Sight for Kids.
- Established or strengthened paediatric eye care centres that have helped more than 120 million children.
- Helped halt the spread of trachoma in Ethiopia by providing 10 million doses of the sight-saving drug azithromycin annually.
- Prevented serious vision loss for more than 30 million people worldwide.
- Improved eye care for 100 million people by training more than 650,000 eye care professionals and building 315 eye hospitals.
- Distributed more than 147 million treatments for river blindness.
- Provided nearly 8 million cataract surgeries.
- Vaccinated 41 million children in Africa against measles – a leading cause of childhood blindness.
- Set up 2876 collection locations where you can donate your eyeglasses which are no longer needed so that someone else in a third world country can see.

When it comes to meeting challenges, their response is simple: “we serve”. In 207 countries, in hospitals and senior centres, in regions battered by natural disaster, in schools and eyeglass recycling centres, Lions are doing community volunteer work, helping, leading, planning and supporting. Because they're local, they can serve the unique needs of the communities they live in and because they're global, they can address challenges that go beyond borders.

In recent years, the Lions have responded to natural disasters in Pakistan, New Zealand, Haiti, Japan, Thailand, and Indonesia by supplying tents, food, clothing and water-purification tablets. Based on a recent report of Lions Clubs worldwide, it is estimated that each club donates an average of US\$9,900 annually to charitable causes, totalling US\$449 million. Each year Lions Club members volunteer approximately 76 million hours, which is **equivalent to 36,500 people working full time for the year**. The above provides a global perspective of who the Lions are. Now let's look at the organization closer to home.

The island of Ireland has 117 Lions Clubs with almost 3000 members, collectively called District 105-I. Locally, the Bantry Bay Lions Club was formed in 2005 by Ernie Lewis and has grown to 27 members. In 2010 the Bantry Bay Lions were voted “Club of the Year in District 105-I as a result of their outstanding contribution to fundraising for flood victims in Ireland and creating a quality interactive website. Over the years they have formed solid partnerships with local representatives of the Red Cross, St Vincent De Paul, West Cork Development Partnership, ICA and Defibrillator Groups, some of who were present at the Club of the Year celebration. In the photo, Jerry Desmond (left of cup, President in 2010) is seen holding the cup with Ernie Lewis (repeat President in 2011) and members of the Bantry Bay Lions and their partner groups.



Since 2005 the club has gathered momentum and has been involved in numerous local fundraising and project assistance, including:

- Support to the Palliative Care Unit.
- Donations to Special Needs Unit for Bantry National School.
- Donation to Red Cross for New Ambulance.
- Donation to the collection for Fishing Tragedy Victim's Families.
- Bantry Hospital Funds for Ophthalmic Equipment.
- Bantry Inshore Search and Rescue (BISRA) - sponsored purchase of Dry Suits.
- Annual Christmas Food Appeal 2005-2016.
- Distribution to Beara Caring Project.
- Bantry Red Cross, MABS, St. Vincent de Paul.
- Bantry Hospital & St Josephs' Day room.
- Annual Cork Mini Marathon 2005-2016, raising sponsorship for Lions general charity fund.
- Putting Game - Glengarriff "Fun Days" 2005 - 2016. Highly successful paintball shooting game introduced in 2016. Proceeds to Community Hall.
- Putting Game - Gaelscoil Bheantraí Fun Day. Proceeds to Gaelscoil.
- Putting Game - Bantry Agricultural Show 2005-2016. Highly successful paintball shooting game introduced in 2015 and continued in 2016. Proceeds to various charities.
- Bantry St. Patrick's Day Parade Sponsor.
- Bantry Girls Basketball Club donation of practice vests.
- Donation of protective hats to the Atlantic Challenge Team.
- Donation to local school for swimming lessons.
- Lions' Raffle - prizes sponsored by local business and proceeds to Lions charity fund.
- Donation to Bantry Bay Scouts.
- Donation to Bantry Rowing Club.
- Donation to Cancer Connect.
- Fireplace for St Josephs' Day Room.
- Ongoing collection of eyeglasses from 3 locations in Bantry town (hospital, library and Kenneally Opticians), resulting in thousands of pairs sent to third world countries to assist the sight impaired.
- Provide Defibrillator A.E.D. unit and ongoing support to Bantry Red Cross Defibrillator Group.
- Irish Flood Appeal 2009, furniture, toys and monetary donation, winning "Club of the Year".
- Donation to Junior GAA to purchase goalposts.
- Santa's Grotto 2010 and 2011. Proceeds to Jack and Jill Foundation.
- International earthquake and flood fundraising for relief efforts in Pakistan, Haiti, Thailand, New Zealand, Japan and Indonesia.
- Provided 14 courses to help identify people with thoughts of suicide and direct them to suicide first aid resources. Also provided courses to give people the tools to take the initiative, when necessary, to intervene and help prevent the suicide.
- Introduced "Message in a Bottle" (MIAB) to the Beara Peninsula. This initiative provides emergency medical personnel with instant access to patient medication and allergy information when they are dispatched to people's homes.
- Introduced the "Cuddly Lion" to the Ambulance Brigade to help traumatised children cope with being transported to hospital.
- Organized and hosted a "Murder Mystery Theatre Dinner" to raise money for the Air Ambulance organization and raised over €1000.

The success of any club cannot be achieved without the support of the local community. Over the years, the people of Bantry and the surrounding area have been extremely generous with their contributions of money and time. The club must also continue to grow its membership to maintain and even improve that success. To this end, the Bantry Bay Lions are always looking at recruiting new members. As a Lions club member, you'll join a local group of service-minded men and women who are doing volunteer work to support your community – right now. You'll also become a member

of Lions Clubs International, a respected international organization, a leader in your community and a friend to people in need.

There are many reasons to become a member. As a Lion, you will:

- Help your community and gain valuable skills
- Make an impact on people's lives – locally and internationally
- Learn to be a leader – and lead a respected organization
- Energize your life and have fun

You'll grow personally and professionally and you'll know that the community volunteer work you perform is worthwhile and appreciated.

If you are interested in becoming a member of the Bantry Bay Lions, you are cordially invited to their monthly meeting at the Christian Fellowship Hall, Bantry at 7pm on the second Thursday of the month or you can Email **bantrybaylions@gmail.com**. To learn more about the Bantry Bay Lions you can visit their website at www.bantrybaylions.com .

Submitted by John P Dervan
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