

The eyes have it

THOMPSON LIONS USE NEW MACHINE FOR EYE SCREENINGS

BY RICH HOSFORD
VILLAGER STAFF WRITER

THOMPSON — A local chapter of an international organization is working to ensure all area children entering kindergarten will be able to see the chalkboard, read their books and generally live free of eye problems.

The Thompson chapter of the International Lions Club held the first of what members say will be many free pediatric eye screenings for area children at the First Steps Early Childhood Learning Center in North Grosvenordale on Wednesday, April 21. At the center, members of the club used a newly purchased machine to scan the retinas of 19 children between the ages of 3 and 5 in a search for a variety of eye defects and diseases, including nearsightedness and farsightedness.

Thompson Lion President Richard Cimochowski said the \$9,000 eye-scanning machine was purchased by the Lions' state leadership after the Thompson chapter had applied for a grant to cover the costs. The Connecticut Lions Eye Research Foundation purchased the machine through the Lions' Eye Health Program. The new program was launched by the Lions, working in cooperating with the Yale School of Medicine Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Science.

Cimochowski said the plan is to use the machine to test the eyes of young children throughout the area, free of charge, as part of the Lions' commitment to eye care and the fight against eye diseases. He said this program is focused on children of this age group because treatment is more effective if eye problems early are caught early.

"It's better to detect them while the child is in preschool so they can be corrected more quickly," he said.

The Lions Club has trained 10 of its members to operate the machine and the accom-

panying laptop computer. The actual test is quite simple, Cimochowski explained. The child sits in a seat about 3 feet from the scanner and looks at a little viewing device. The box has a smiley face on its front that the child can focus on as the test proceeds. At that point, the machine focuses on the child's retina and performs a scan.

"It's almost like a barcode scanner," Cimochowski explained. "It shouldn't take any longer than three seconds."

During the first run last week, some of the scans took considerably longer than three seconds, Cimochowski said. Some of the children were scared of the machine and refused to cooperate. Cimochowski said some of them thought the experience would be akin to getting a shot at the doctor's office, even though the test is done without any physical contact.

"Some of the younger ones didn't know what it was and were hiding their eyes," he said. "Some of them took about five or 10 minutes before they would look up."

Still, Cimochowski said the club members, who are all volunteers, had a good time at the learning center.

"It was pretty fun working with the kids. It was a good time," he said.

After the scan is complete, a printout with the results is produced so the child's parents or guardians can take it to an optometrist or ophthalmologist if there is a problem that needs to be addressed. The information also goes to the Yale School of Medicine, which uses it to track eye problems throughout the state.

Cimochowski said the Thompson Lions are planning to set up more screening sessions with other daycare and early learning centers throughout the region in the upcoming months. He said they are working with the Thompson School's Early Childhood Learning Center, which works with daycare centers throughout the town to set up addi-



Courtesy photo

A child at the First Steps Early Childhood Learning Center in North Grosvenordale gets his eyes scanned by the Thompson chapter of the International Lions Club. The screening, which was free of cost, checked for a variety of eye problems that are best dealt with when detected early.

tional dates.

At the same time, he said, the Thompson Lions will work with chapters from surrounding communities to train their members in the machine's use. Eventually, screenings will be done in those communities as well. If all goes well, he said, the hope is that the program will expand throughout all of Connecticut.

"This one machine is not going to serve the whole state, but once this pilot program is established, then they'll probably purchase more equipment for the rest of the state," he said.

The International Lions Club has many

programs focused on eye care and the prevention of eye disease. Eyeglasses are collected in the United States and distributed in developing countries to people who cannot afford to purchase them on their own. The Lions Eye Banks provide eye tissue for sight-saving surgeries, medical education and eye research. The club also provides cataract surgery and other eye care services to those at risk of losing their sight.

Rich Hosford can be reached by phone at (860) 928-1818, ext. 112, or by e-mail at rich@villagernewspapers.com.

Gagnon named Employee of the Year

PUTNAM — Day Kimball Hospital's 2009 Employee of the Year is Dennis Gagnon, microbiology supervisor in the hospital's laboratory.

The Employee of the Year was announced at Day Kimball Healthcare's annual corporators' meeting. Twelve remarkable hospital employees were eligible for the distinction, each having been chosen as a Day Kimball Hospital Employee of the Month by the hospital's Employee Council. Gagnon was previously awarded this honor for September 2009.

Often called into work in the middle of the night or on weekends to take care of a situation, Gagnon's unflinching dedication to Day Kimball substantiates why he was recognized with the organization's prestigious Employee of the Year award.

After receiving a mantle clock as a token of the hospital's appreciation, Gagnon said, "I am thankful to my peers and truly appreciate this honor they have given me. I am grateful that my profession allows me to live out my passion each day and in an organization as wonderful as Day Kimball Healthcare."

A special celebration was later held at the hospital to give all employees the opportunity to congratulate Gagnon.

Gagnon began working in the laboratory at Day Kimball Hospital in 1975. Over the years, he has advanced to a clinical level III microbiologist. Each day, he Gagnon is responsible for culturing specimens and analyzing them to identify various bacteria and determine which antibiotic will effectively treat the patient. He works closely with the physicians and is well respected among his peers at Day Kimball.

"Dennis is extremely deserving of this acknowledgment," said Kathy Smolen, director of the laboratory. "Our entire department is very proud of Dennis, and we enjoy having him as a part of our team."

Gagnon is a graduate of the University of Hartford with a degree in biology. He currently resides in Putnam with his wife. They have two daughters. In his spare time, Gagnon enjoys reading medical mysteries and spending time with his family and their dog.



Courtesy photo

Dennis Gagnon, (center) laboratory microbiology supervisor, is Day Kimball Hospital's Employee of the Year. He is pictured with John Miller, (left) chairman of the board of directors, and Robert Smanik, president and CEO of Day Kimball Healthcare.