

Wednesday, March 8, 2006 15

# On a mission to give back to the community

Jean Bonchak  
JBonchak@News-Head.com

## Lions

Dubbed "Knights of the Blind" by Helen Keller, Lions Club members work to raise funds to aid sight- or hearing-impaired individuals, among the club's other endeavors.

Bob Rayl, president of the Chardon Lions Club, says his group is "one of the best-kept secrets around ... we just go about doing our community service."

Some include providing eye exams, frames, lenses and hearing equipment for area students, scholarships, donations to needy families and WomenSafe, an organization providing assistance to victims of abuse and their children.

The Chardon Lions also sponsor a youth football program for kids ages 7 through 13. A first golf outing last year at Hemlock Springs in Geneva brought in \$3,500 to help support the league.

Lions participate in the Geauga County Maple Festival, which takes place annually on Chardon Square. The group does much of

the maintenance.

With five active members, the Fairport Harbor Lions are small in number but mighty in efforts.

President Niles Oinonen says, "We have problems getting members, but we're here, we're alive and well."

Along with their own fundraising events, he says the chapter receives support from Fairport Harbor Village churches and other organizations in helping those with vision and hearing difficulties.

Oinonen, a combat veteran, said he recently experienced troubles himself when his capillaries "let go" and his eyesight was completely lost for a time.

"It gave me a totally different viewpoint on people being born with this problem," he said.

An offshoot of the Lions organization is the South Euclid Lioness Club, which has existed about 30 years. Members donate finances for those needing glasses and hearing aids, and also contribute to the Make-A-Wish Foundation, St. Jude Ranch and other charities.