

SL Lions Club has addressed kids' needs for over 60 years

For a long time after it was founded in 1941, the Sugar Land Lions Club was the only service club in town. "Almost everyone was a member," says Lion Leon Anhaiser, remembering his first few years in the club. "Lions worked for either Imperial Sugar Co. or Sugarland Industries, so it was pretty easy to recruit members."

The Lions have been involved in so many activities in Sugar Land, but it is the swimming pool that Anhaiser recalls first. "I was the acting City parks director, a volunteer position! The pool came about because the indoor pool at the school gym had been closed and the swimming holes around town were dangerous. We went door to door, asking for \$25. The Lions were committed to raising the \$35,000 the pool was going to cost. The city of Sugar Land was not involved at all."

But the Imperial Sugar Co. was involved. "Yes, Imperial told us if we got half the money--\$17,500—the Kempner Foundation would match that -- very generous. We were almost there, but we went to the bank and borrowed just enough to get to our goal." It took but four months for the Howard Pool Co. to construct the pool in 1967 (the city donated one acre and Imperial donated another acre for the site), which was Olympic size, 50 meters by 50 yards. The pool had the latest filtration technology and also had "cool deck" which kept the pavement from becoming hot under the summer sun. "We were committed to two things: teaching every kid how to swim and forming a swim team, which was why we needed an Olympic-size pool," says Anhaiser. That swim team –the Sugar Land

Sharks--continues to compete and has had thousands of swim team members over the years.

Another of the many youth-oriented projects was the Little League and baseball field. "This was Lion Fred Baker's 'calling,' his life's work really," says Anhaiser. Baker organized the initial Little League—just two teams, the Sugar Land Lions and the St. Theresa Knights. "The umpires were all Lions, and we maintained the field, bought the equipment. And the field was named after Fred-- Baker Field." Tens of thousands of baseball games have been played at Baker Field.

"Youth has always been the focus of Lions," says Lion Jack Grounds. Probably the best known Lions' effort is the Texas Lions Camp in Kerrville, a camp for disabled kids that has just about every activity you could imagine. Sugar Land Lions have sponsored Boy Scout Troop 148 for over 50 years, and for the past five years have sponsored the Leo's at St. Laurence Middle School, 7th and 8th graders who are already volunteering in their community.

The Lions continue to address the challenge issued to Lions International in the 1920's by Helen Keller—help people's sight. The Sugar Land Lions have collected over 17,000 used eye-glasses that are distributed in third world countries and performed (to date) 290 eye exams on children referred by school nurses. "If they need glasses, we'll make sure they get them," says Grounds.

Article as seen in the Fort Bend Star

Money Magazine and CNNmoney.com rank Sugar Land as one of America's Best Places to Live.
2700 Town Center Blvd. North | Sugar Land, TX 77479-0110 | tel: (281) 275-2700 | fax: (281) 275-2318

Copyright © City of Sugar Land | Posted on 10/22/2009