

Pioneers Adapted in the Challenging Days of Covid-19

As it did in the lives of everyone, Covid-19 changed Longview Pioneer Lions Club's activities and means to accomplish things. All our customary service and fundraising events disappeared for longer than two years. But the pandemic didn't stop our desire to serve our community in whatever ways we could. We pulled out our creative hats, put them on and built new ways to connect with each other, serve our neighbors and raise funds to help others. Here's what we were able to do during the worst days of Covid:

Kettle Corn Project Popped

We created a new fundraising project. We began to make and sell a variety of flavors of kettle corn and caramel corn outside, under a canopy in the corner of a grocery store parking lot. The product was made and served by a small team of masked Lions, who cooked, bagged, and delivered the product to drive-up customers right at the window of their cars. The project became an almost instant hit, is pleasingly profitable and continues to this day!



Marketing at its finest! Lion Sandy Catt waves in the customers.

Adopt-a-Senior Served Graduates

We created a new service project. Homecoming and Senior Prom. Decorating lockers. Getting measured for cap and gown. Senior "skip." The flurry of parties to celebrate twelve years of growth together in scholarship, teamwork, friendships, achievements; saying goodbye to long-time schoolmates and hello to an exciting new future. The celebratory commencement ceremony.

The Covid-19 pandemic eliminated almost all high school graduation traditions marking that important rite of passage. So Pioneer Lions found a new way to celebrate local graduates at this significant milestone in their lives; to help make a positive difference in the life of graduates and to let them know that their community members honor each of them. We adopted high school seniors. By adopt, we meant to purchase a gift and deliver it to a local graduating senior. The concept was to remain completely anonymous—no social media or newspaper articles or publicity



Lion Cindy Sessions shows the Certificate of Appreciation awarded to her by Lions Clubs International President 2019-21 Dr. Jung Yul Choi.

in any way. The process was simple: to buy items or gift certificates from small local businesses and give the gift. This was totally about the students.

To engage local school superintendents of Longview Public Schools and Kelso School District, an extensive contact list was developed to identify appropriate student recipients and get necessary permissions. The club's ad hoc group reached out to two local Rotary clubs, business owners, friends, and families; anyone they could think of to participate.

Their work in this excellent service project paid off! Individuals donated money, and project chair Cindy Sessions did the shopping! After more than 500 hours of volunteer work and lots of smiling, the project was wrapped up. More than 150 graduating seniors received recognition gifts for their hard work, from people they never met!

In February 2021, the club expanded the Adopt-a-Senior program into a zone project. Three high school teachers at Longview's alternative high school adopted their students. Kelso Rotary and Longview Noon Rotary clubs joined the effort, which recognized 122 students this year. Neighboring Kalama Washington Lions Club worked with the town's local VFW organization to gift all 54 Kalama High School graduating seniors.

Zooming Together

We created a new way to gather. Our club continued our weekly meetings—we just moved them onto an electronic platform for a year during those worst days of the pandemic. Members quickly learned the ins and outs of Zoom, how to look presentable from the waist up, and joined their fellow Lions for an hour each week of fellowship, information sharing, and planning. Guest speakers joined by electronic link to add enrichment to our meetings. The model provided only a shadow of the satisfaction of meeting together in person, but we all felt good about helping to keep ourselves and each other safe. Those days only helped us appreciate each other more!

Spring Conference: A Breezy Event

We wore our coats to congregate. The Governor who served our Lions District of about 40 clubs during the days at the height of Covid infection and mandatory social distancing, is a member of Pioneer Lions Club. He chose to hold his district conference, the highlight of the Lions year for regional and local Lions alike (and generally a white tie and sparkles event), in his jeans, outside at a park in our community. It was cool, in more ways than one! It was brisk; and may have even rained a bit. But there were big smiles all around, lots of food in the buffet line, many encouraging words shared and deserving, dedicated Lions recognized for their service to the district. It was a fun and rewarding day!



A group of Pioneer Lions at lunch in the park shelter during Spring Conference 2021.