

A LIFETIME OF SERVICE IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI: 2026 LION AMBASSADOR OF THE YEAR

Saving Sight is proud to name Lion Dr. Teri Page of the Poplar Bluff Lions Club as the 2026 Lion Ambassador of the Year. For nearly two decades, she has brought vision care to one of the most rural corners of Missouri. The award was presented at Saving Sight's board meeting on June 13 in Kansas City.

Lion Teri joined the club in 2004 on the invitation of another optometrist in town. It continued a pattern at her practice: the doctor she succeeded had also been a Lion. "I believe in the Lions' mission of serving others," she said. "As vision and hearing are two of the components that Lions support, it was a great fit for me. At my first meeting, everyone was welcoming, and the group always has a lot of fun."

She's a licensed optometrist who owns and operates Pearle Vision in Poplar Bluff, but a full work schedule has never slowed her service. As one of just two optometrists in the club's Low-Vision Eye Program for Low-Income Residents, she has provided exams and new eyeglasses at a steep discount for roughly 20 years, reaching hundreds of people who might otherwise have gone without. The children stay with her the most. "I especially enjoy seeing the children who benefit from our organization," she said. "Learning is exponentially harder when a student has a vision deficiency."

That reach owes a lot to how the club runs its referral system. Poplar Bluff Lions has built strong ties with local schools and other service organizations, which helps direct people in need to the right resources — and Lion Teri has made sure the process moves fast once someone gets there. "Our system for patient approval is efficient, and the turnaround time is often less than a day," she said. "I keep applications in my office and have on many occasions started the process while the patient is waiting." Speed matters, she added, because the club tries to get people into glasses as quickly as possible.

When a patient's vision can't be corrected with glasses, Lion Teri doesn't stop there. She works with the club's vision program coordinator to connect them with advanced care at the Mid-South Sight and Hearing Center in Memphis.

Some of her biggest contributions are the ones easy to miss. At the club's Annual Chili Day, the fundraiser that pays for free eye



exams and frames for low-income residents, Lion Teri collects more than a hundred boxes for to-go orders every year, pulling them from behind local stores. "We have a wonderful Dollar General store that provides unlimited boxes of all sizes. I just have to collect them from out by the dumpster," she said. "Recently, Home Depot and Menards have been generous with box donations, so I feel like I've been robbed of my dumpster-diving event." The evening before the event, volunteers from the local high school and the Sierra Osage Girls Center, a juvenile detention facility, help the club prepare. "I love being able to interact with the girls from the center," Lion Teri said. "They enjoy volunteering, and I feel that our positive interaction at the event is both helpful to them and to us."

On the day itself, Lion Teri is the club's fastest delivery driver, moving several hundred orders in a three-hour stretch, a pace that's become a running joke among fellow Lions, who point to her long-time hobby of amateur car racing as the explanation. And without telling most of her fellow members, she quietly donates more than 1,000 individual peanut butter and cracker packs for the meals each year.

She has also been central to the club's two Missouri Lions Eye Mission Foundation events, held in Poplar Bluff in 2024 and 2026. At each one, she helped screen and examine more than seventy patients and recruited a second optometrist to join her. She brought screening devices from her own office to clear the backlog, including a new auto-refractor that

printed eye prescriptions almost instantly.

"Lion Dr. Teri Page has been instrumental in providing critical, life-changing vision services to hundreds of residents of the large, rural population of southeast Missouri," wrote Lion Wendy Williams, Missouri Lions Past Council Chair, in her nomination. "She is the epitome of the Lions Clubs International motto of 'We Serve!'"

Lion Teri says the recognition caught her off guard. "I was truly surprised and humbled by the nomination for the Saving Sight Award," she said. "There are so many Lions out there doing so much good work, and my small part is never enough. Saving Sight has a truly amazing mission and has done so much to aid in the prevention of blindness. I'm proud to be affiliated with them through this award."

To honor her partnership in service, Saving Sight made a \$1,000 donation in Lion Teri's name to the Animal Welfare Alliance in Poplar Bluff, the nonprofit she chose.

For Lion Teri, the math on service is simple. "Vision outreach through any organization is a 1,000 percent return on your investment of time," she said. "Knowing that you've helped even just one individual is a feeling that cannot be understated, much less helping hundreds. Vision is the most basic of senses for quality of life, maintaining employment, and connecting with others. It's a truly rewarding feeling every time we help anyone in need."