

Fields Playground Group

1355 Countryside Drive | Mogadore, OH 44260

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An interview with the local Lions Clubs by Susan Monegan, FPG President

This last February 2020 I was invited to the Lions Club Annual Mardi Gras dinner /meeting. I was given the honor of being their guest speaker. The food, friendship and warm welcome put me at ease. It was there that I meet Lori and her Seeing Eye dog Riley.

I spoke with her by phone one year later and asked her if I may interview her? She was very kind and open during our phone call. Here is her story as well as that of the Lions Club.

Lori is currently the President of the Brimfield Lions Club. At the February 2020 dinner I shared our playground pictures and vision. It was there that I asked the Lions Club if they would consider sponsoring our contrast striping for our playground decks. During my presentation I spoke on my experiences with my little granddaughter Mila and her vision issues at playgrounds, and this is where I came up with this idea on the striping.

To my utmost surprise our GameTime representative, Taylor, told me that in all of the company's history NO one thought to ask about contrast striping for visual impairments! I was so surprised by this simple need and idea. So we are proud to be the first playground with contrast striping on our deck steps for the visually

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impaired. The striping also lets little ones to know when to step up or down. Our grey decking will be custom painted with marine grade paint in yellow. I know that we will not be the last to have this. Matter of fact, I believe it will be a standard for all playground decking in the future. Just a feeling.

Three Lions Clubs in Portage County are currently sponsoring our custom contrast striping. We cannot thank them enough!

My first question to Lori was, what does the Lions Club stand for?

Lori said that the Lions Club is the largest service organization in the world! Among many things they provide glasses to those in need, vision screening, as well as collecting used glasses to be repurposed.

Lori went on to tell me that Helen Keller visited their Lions Club state convention at Cedar Point in 1925. At this convention Helen Keller ask them if they would be “Knights of the blind”? They accepted.

Bill, past President of the Brimfield Lions Club, provided me with additional information. I wanted to be able to be historically correct in this story and am grateful for Bill’s further input.

Born in Tuscumbia, Alabama, USA, in 1880, Helen Keller developed a fever at 18 months of age that left her blind and deaf. With the help of an exceptional teacher, Anne Mansfield Sullivan of the Perkins School for the Blind, Helen Keller learned sign

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language and braille. A few years later, she learned to speak. As an adult she became a tireless advocate for people with disabilities. And in 1925 she attended the Lions Club International Convention and challenged Lions to become "Knights of the blind in the crusade against darkness."

The Lions accepted her challenge and their work ever since has included sight programs aimed at preventable blindness.

My next question that I asked Lori was, would you be willing to tell me about her visual issues? She lovingly shared her touching story.

When she was born in Ravenna, Ohio she weighed 1 pound 10 ounces. Her mother was told that Lori received too much oxygen which resulted in her visual issues. Lori received her first pair of glasses at age 3 from a teacher that was active in the Ravenna Lions Club. From this a friendship formed, and in 2003 she joined the Ravenna Lions Club. She has been active for 17 years now. She has held many different forms of office throughout this time in various other clubs. Today she is the President of the Brimfield Lions Club. She said she joined to give back all that the Lions Clubs had given her.

Her story continues. She wore glasses from age 3 to 26. She was legally blind and held a job at this point in her life. She told me that her mother always let her try things, never told her she could not. So as a little girl she taught herself in her backyard how to ride a bike. She told me she ran into the swing set, the house,

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and a stop sign but never gave up and sure enough learned to ride that bike! In 1995 or 1996 she came home from work experiencing floaters and flashes in her right eye. She went through a detached retina. Many surgeries followed as a result, and her right eye muscle became weak. She has lost the sight in her right eye as a result. Her left eye has glaucoma. She has 5% of vision in this eye. Her doctor told her she has “count fingers” vision.

She has a guide dog named Riley that she has received from Leader Dogs for the Blind out of Rochester, Michigan. Riley is a beautiful black lab and is currently 2 years old. They are a team.

I asked Lori to tell me how does Riley help you?

In this telling I came to the conclusion that Riley is her eyes and she is her ears. She said yes and gave me an example of walking outside. Riley stops at crosswalks and curbs as Lori listens for traffic noise. She will then tell Riley forward. Riley will not move until she senses it is OK. If they start to cross and a car is now making a right hand turn, Riley will stop right there and not move until that car passes. When they get to the other side of the street she stops to let Lori know to now step up onto the curb. Lori will use hand signals to tell Riley to go left or right at that time and on they continue.

Another example she gave me would be in parking lots. If Riley senses a running car she will stop until it moves. Same if a car is pulling into a driveway. Riley can find places for Lori to sit,

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checkout counters in stores, restrooms, and help at the pharmacies. What a team!

My closing question I asked Lori was, with your visual impairment as a young child and now blindness, what do you think the visual striping that Lions Club is sponsoring at the playground will do for the children?

She said she feels it will give them independence. In closing, Lori gave me a suggestion that I never thought of for our playground. I am now looking into that!

She said our playground sounds great. I extended an invitation to our playground. She said, "Sue, I am 50 years old and have not been to a playground in a very long time." I shared a secret with her. I said I have two swings designed for adults and they would be perfect for her to sit and swing on with Riley as she listens to the laughter and sounds of the children. I said ALL adults love to swing as well as me!

Thank you, Lori for sharing your story with us! I chose to give only her first name out of privacy.