ROCKY MOUNTAIN LIONS EYE BANK

ANNUAL REPORT

2021-2022

Our mission is to fulfill the wishes of eye donors and their families to help another overcome blindness through transplantation and research.
It’s a privilege to continue serving as the executive director of the Rocky Mountain Lions Eye Bank. I am proud of our history and excited for the future we will share. We started the fiscal year in a great place, with a trusted name and a global reach. We also ended the year on a high note realizing we are part of an enormous network that impacts the lives of thousands of individuals and their families each year. The part we play in helping build better lives for eye tissue recipients is a source of pride and purpose for our staff and donation partners.

Partnering with ophthalmologists has always been a critical link to our success. Our strong relationship with them allowed us to provide quality eye tissue during the height of the pandemic and still today. We know all we do is the result of a collaboration of forces from our board of directors to staff, volunteers, donation partners and financial contributors. One of our most important partnerships is with hospitals and hospices where trained designated requestors talk to families about donation and explain the steps leading to eye tissue donation. Coroners and funeral service professionals are also important partners in the chain of eye tissue donation, so we can provide tissue to the final link – the surgeons who perform the sight-restoring procedures.

Most importantly, we realize our success is not without the sacrifice of those individuals who make the decision to be eye tissue donors: donors and donor families. And, of course, none of this would be possible without the Lions of Colorado and Wyoming that established RMLEB in 1982. All of this puts us in a great position to begin building the next chapter in our organization’s future. We are guided by purpose and must never lose sight of our mission to restore sight.
2,450 EYE DONORS GAVE THE GIFT OF SIGHT IN FY 2021-2022.

BECAUSE OF THE GENEROUS DONORS OVER OUR 40 YEARS, WE’VE BEEN ABLE TO PROVIDE:

OVER 58,000 EYE TISSUES FOR SIGHT-RESTORATIVE TRANSPLANTS AND RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERIES.

OVER 15,000 EYE TISSUES FOR ADVANCEMENT IN SURGERY TECHNIQUES AND VALUABLE MEDICAL RESEARCH.
2021-2022 Financials
July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2022

Revenue
$5,580,270

Expenses
$5,201,725

Charitable Contributions
$54,549

- 71% Individuals
- 26% Lions Clubs
- 3% Corporations
Eye surgeons link donors to recipients but are part of the larger chain in the gift of sight.

Dr. Michael Chen, Division Chief of Ophthalmology at Denver Health Medical Center, went into medicine because he wanted to help people. He also wanted to travel and see the world. The combination meant he pursued ophthalmology, a medical specialty that is desperately needed around the world.

“T saw much unnecessary blindness and preventable blindness,” he said of his time as a volunteer for Unite for Sight in Ghana. Some of this blindness was due to corneal blindness. After his cornea fellowship training, Dr. Chen went on to work at Tenwek Mission Hospital in Kenya for 2 years.

While there, he encountered a patient from South Sudan who had lived through the country’s civil war and was bilaterally blinded by corneal scarring. “He seemed to be locked in his world,” Dr. Chen said of the patient prior to receiving a corneal transplant.

After the surgery, he was a very different person. “I got to follow him at least a year out after his surgery, and I got to see his personality open up. He was engaged with his surroundings. He was making eye contact with people. That was a big success story.”
That story and countless others couldn’t have happened without the support of U.S. eye banks. While in Kenya, Dr. Chen worked mostly with the Alabama Eye Bank and the Delaware Valley Eye Bank. Despite their remote location, Dr. Chen said their clinic’s eye bank partners were able to get them donor corneas in a matter of a few days.

So great was his experience of working with eye banks that when he arrived at Denver Health and the University of Colorado in December 2021, Dr. Chen knew he wanted to reach out to his local eye bank: the Rocky Mountain Lions Eye Bank.

“I’ve been very impressed by the support the Rocky Mountain Lions Eye Bank has given us.” For over 40 years, RMLEB has provided high-quality eye tissue for transplantation and medical research to partner surgeons like Dr. Chen, locally and around the globe. We take pride in supporting the essential work of eye surgeons.

RMLEB is just one among 66 accredited eye banks in the U.S. The efficiency, robustness and interconnectedness of the U.S. system means donated eye tissue helps restore sight locally, nationally and internationally.
Additionally, RMLEB’s service area of Colorado and Wyoming remains among the top states in the country for people saying yes to donation, making the gift of sight possible. “We really must thank and be grateful to our societal culture that there are so many willing donors out there.”

The eye surgeon who transplants a donor cornea into a recipient is one of the most obvious key connection points between donor and recipient. Dr. Chen calls that direct connection a privilege and an important role of a surgeon.

“The blade is in our hands when the surgery happens; but at the same time, we couldn’t do our jobs if it weren’t for everybody else in the whole process. When my patients are behind closed doors thanking me after the surgery, I ask them if they realize that there were probably over 50 to 100 people who were involved in this.”

The Strong Chain of U.S. Eye Banking

The chain starts with the willingness of donors, but there are many more links between donor and recipient. There may have been family and friends involved in the decision-making. There’s the hospital staff who helped facilitate the donation process. The coroner and funeral service professionals were also likely involved.
There’s also eye bank staff, researchers improving techniques, those who make financial contributions, regulations and safety of the system and more. Even seemingly unassociated people, like those working at the local utilities, as part of making cornea donation and transplantation possible, according to Dr. Chen. Every link in the chain is integral; not a single link can be taken for granted.

“The gift of sight really is a gift, and it’s not to be taken for granted. I’m really appreciative of everyone in this process.”
ROCKY MOUNTAIN LIONS EYE BANK
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2021-2022

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