

Leisure Worlder

OF THE MONTH

CARL W. OPSAHL

He began working with the handicapped as a teenager, but don't expect Carl W. Opsahl to elaborate on stories dealing with the past. That's because he prefers discussing those projects which currently fill his life. "You might say that I was born when I came to Leisure World," declares the man who spearheads two major vision programs in the county.

One is the local Lions Visual Aid Clinic, conducted monthly to demonstrate techniques enabling many visually impaired persons to perform everyday tasks. The other is the Lions District 4-L4 Mobile Van that tours Orange County, providing Sight, Hearing and Blood Sugar screenings.

A former Deputy District Governor of the service organization, Opsahl was named District Lion of the Year for 1980-81. This July he joins the distinguished list of Leisure Worliders of the Month selected by Home Federal Savings and Loan and the Leisure World Historical Society.

Opsahl was in the tire business in Long Beach for 38 years before retiring and moving to Leisure World with his wife Ardis in 1976. The following year he established the Laguna Hills Lions Visual Aids Center, a display housed in the community's library for eight months, with volunteers demonstrating a variety of aids for the visually impaired. The center evolved into the Laguna Hills Lions' monthly Visual Aids Clinic at Clubhouse Two, where residents and others may make appointments for free consultations with low vision specialists following a referral from an optometrist or ophthalmologist.

"Only 20 percent of the legally blind are totally sightless," Opsahl explains. "The rest are visually impaired, and many of these have gone as far as they can with prescription lenses." The solution for some lies in magnification devices and other techniques which enable them to read, write checks and hunt up information in telephone books.

"The main thing is to inform people," Opsahl says. Often the advice is simple, such as attaching an inexpensive clamp-on lamp to a reading chair to provide better lighting. Another tip is viewing television directly at eye level, either by sitting on floor cushions or raising the TV set. Positive thinking also is a major element in Opsahl's work at the White Cane Service project. "Learning to cope with handicaps is always part of my message," says the clinic coordinator.

Opsahl's role with the Lions District 4-L4 Mobile Screening Van began in 1978 and included planning, supervising construction and selecting the equipment for Sight, Hearing and Blood Sugar screening. Completed early in 1981, the van was funded with \$67,000 contributed by 58 Lion and 9 Lioness clubs in Orange County.

Considered unique for its full range of six screening procedures, the 34-foot white vehicle is stored at the Leisure World RV Center between trips. Its travel schedule runs the gamut from shopping centers and balloon festivals to colleges, hospitals and juvenile detention facilities.

Opsahl is described as "president, driver, trouble shooter and coordinator" for the Lions District Sight and Hearing Foundation, which administers the policy of the screening van. "We've been trying to get others involved in this," he says, "and it's exciting when that happens." On recent visits to hospitals and colleges, he trained 17 young students in one month to perform audiology screenings. "Some of them said they learned more there than they had in their classrooms," he adds.

Another major project for Opsahl was his work in the Case for Support of the Saddleback Community Hospital Eye Center, for which he presented a \$5,000 seed money check from the Laguna Hills Lions Club.

Friends often remark that Opsahl looks younger and more physically fit than he did upon arriving in Leisure World. "I tell them that all this work rejuvenates and invigorates me," he says. "It's great therapy." Assisting him with his busy schedule is wife Ardis, who efficiently handles many of the clinic appointment requests and other calls received at the couple's home. Wed 23 years, they first met as neighbors and started attending Long Beach Lions events together following the death of Carl's first wife.

Both recently were awarded five-year pins for their work in delivering Meals on Wheels. Opsahl's earlier activities in Leisure World included serving on the Mutual 57 Nominating Committee and as head of the community's Blind and Visually Impaired bowling group. He also is a member of Laguna Hills United Methodist Church, which has given its nod of approval to his time-consuming projects. "The church says I am working for God through the Lions," he notes.