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APRIL 2016

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### OPENING EYES FOR SPECIAL OLYMPICS ATHLETES

*Wisconsin eye doctors will provide benevolent care at 2016 Special Olympics Lions Clubs International Opening Eyes Program Events*

**MADISON, WI** – Special Olympics Lions Clubs International Opening Eyes Program events in 2016 will be held on **Saturday, April 9** at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh and **Friday, June 10** at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, where volunteer Wisconsin doctors of optometry and their staff will be on-hand to provide quality vision and eye health care to athletes. The Special Olympics Lions Clubs International Opening Eyes Program hosts biannual, statewide competitions each year in Wisconsin.

The Special Olympics Lions Clubs International Opening Eyes Program provides year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy, and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills, and friendship with their families, other athletes, and their community. The Special Olympics Lions Clubs International Opening Eyes Program and the benevolent vision and eye health care provided by volunteer optometrists is part of the Healthy Athletes Program. Despite a mistaken belief that people with intellectual disabilities receive the same or better health care than others, in actuality, they typically receive sub-standard care or virtually no health care at all.

According to Special Olympics Lions Clubs International Opening Eyes, “The mission of the initiative is to improve the quality of life for the millions of individuals diagnosed with intellectual disabilities by optimizing their vision, eye health and visual skills through quality eye care. Objectives of the program include providing screenings to Special Olympics athletes, educating athletes, parents and coaches about the importance of regular eye care, educating and changing attitudes of eye care professionals about the vision care needs of persons with intellectual disabilities worldwide, and increasing knowledge of the vision and eye health needs of persons with intellectual disabilities through research.”

Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) Past President and Milwaukee and Madison area optometrist Dr. Kellye Knueppel is the Clinical Director in Wisconsin for the Special Olympics Lions Clubs International Opening Eyes Program, a position she has held for the past 15 years. She is joined in her volunteer management of the program by fellow Milwaukee area optometrist Dr. Heather Navarro, in charge of recruiting volunteer doctors for the program. “Each time we hold an Opening Eyes event, we find several athletes who have significant vision problems who do not have glasses, confirms Dr. Knueppel.”

Since 2001, Special Olympics Lions Clubs International Opening Eyes Program events have been held 28 times in Wisconsin. In that time, over 130 different Wisconsin Optometric Association member optometrists have volunteered 451 days’ worth of service, examining 7,039 athletes and dispensing 5,436 pairs of glasses and prescription sports goggles. In 2015, 28 optometrists, 9 optometry students, 19 para-optometric technicians and opticians, 62 Lions Club members, and 20 other volunteers assisted with the program over the course of two events. Funding for the program is provided for by Lions Clubs International, and many optometrist volunteers have participated on multiple occasions. International sponsors of the program include the following companies: Safilo – frames and sunglasses, Essilor (WOS in Wisconsin) – lenses and all finishing off-site, Liberty – sport goggles, and Santinelli – cuts and edges on-site.

The Special Olympics Lions Clubs International Opening Eyes Program is made special and successful because of the volunteer optometrists, paraoptometric technicians, and the many other volunteers who donate their time and services to help those with special needs to both enjoy this fun event and to see the world more effectively every day. **To volunteer or get more information about the program, contact The Vision Therapy Center, [sowie@thevtc.com](mailto:sowie@thevtc.com) or 262-784-9201.**

#### **About the Wisconsin Optometric Association**

*The Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) is a nonprofit affiliation of licensed doctors of optometry and associated businesses dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of the vision welfare of the people of Wisconsin. The WOA accomplishes its goals through: education and dissemination of information, organized governmental activity, legislation and regulation, mediation with consumer and public interest groups, and provision of collective benefits to its members. Approximately 640 doctors of optometry are currently members of the WOA, located in nearly every county in the state. All members must be licensed to practice optometry by the State of Wisconsin. For more information, visit WOA’s website at [www.woa-eyes.org](http://www.woa-eyes.org).*