

## Georgia Lions Camp, Inc. History

Dr. C.M. Blanton, Lion Don Lynch, along with several others from the Okefenokee Lions Club, held a camp for 22 visually impaired children at the Laura Walker State Park in 1972. Failing to get enough support for a camp for blind kids, no camp was held in 1973. Dr Blanton talked to Lion Joe Cox, along with several other District Governors and Past District Governors about the situation. Dr. Blanton came to the Quitman Lions club to speak about the camp. The Quitman club gave \$100 toward the expense of the camp for the Blind. According to Dr Blanton, the Quitman Club was the first Lions Club in the state to make a cash donation to the camp.

A 2<sup>nd</sup> camp was held at Epworth-By-The-Sea in 1974. This time Dr Blanton had the support of the Quitman Club, a few clubs in District B & E and Lion Joe Cox. Lion Joe Cox's wife and his oldest daughter, Yvonne served as counselors for that camp. Lion Don Lynch and Lion Joe Cox went each night and on the weekends.

At the State Convention in Savannah in 1975, the State Lions voted to support a Camp for the Blind. The first officers of the camp were elected at that meeting. Dr

Blanton was elected President and Lion Joe Cox was elected Secretary. Lions Don Lynch was elected Treasurer.

In 1974, Dr Blanton, Lion Don Lynch, District Governor Don Anderson and Lion Joe Cox formed a committee to look for some property on which the Lions could build a camp. The committee contacted then Governor, Lion Jimmy Carter about the possibility of getting the land that was a part of Laura Walker State Park. The Trip to Atlanta was successful in that 63 acres were set aside from the Laura Walker State Park tract of land for the use by the Lions of Georgia for a Camp for the Blind.

In 1975 the 3<sup>rd</sup> Camp was held at Epworth-By-The-Sea while work began on the building of the camp at its present site. The first camp was held on 63 acres in 1976. PDG Don Anderson followed Dr Blanton as President and Lion Ray Rowell was elected to complete PDG Ray Peters term. Then Ray Rowell was elected to serve a complete term. However, due to a change in his work status Ray Rowell served only ½ term. PDG Joe Cox was elected to complete Ray's term and then PDG Joe Cox was elected for a complete term. Doy Barks was appointed Board Secretary and PDG R.C. Cunningham was appointed Treasurer

There were approximately 13,000 visually impaired persons in Georgia when the camp was chartered as a non profit organization on September 12, 1975. Today we have about 250,000 persons living with visual impairments in the State of Georgia. Over the years we have provided and planned safe recreational experiences for more than 3000 people.

At the Georgia Lions Camp, the focus is on the abilities of the people who come to the camp. They have enjoyed swimming, canoeing, nature study, horseback riding arts and crafts, field events and much more.

Recently, the camp has returned to the spirit of the Lions who started the camp by adding new programs and expanding the services that are offered. We are collaborating with professionals in various disciplines and with organizations across the state to add updated programs that will address the wide variety of interests and concerns of persons in the Visually Impaired community and their families or close associates.

The camp recently hired Ron Worley as the Program Manager for the 2019 camping season. Ron is planning a program that will enhance this year camping experience

for those campers that attend. The 2017-2018 camping year included inaugural programs for high school students moving to independent living, for parents of young students having visual impairments, and for the military veterans who have lost their sight.

The camp is all about continued expansion of our programs to foster the development of personal motivation and self-confidence, self-reliance, leadership and personal skills all in a fun-filled experience in an outdoor atmosphere.