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Lions Club donation aiming to break down barriers for visually impaired students

Lions Club groups around the world have been focused on helping people with disabilities for decades. Now, thanks to a \$50,000 gift to the University of Lethbridge, the Picture Butte chapter will be making a difference for students with visual impairments.

“The original mandate of the Lions group is to help the visually impaired,” says Doug Jackson, Picture Butte Lions Club board member. That mandate goes back to the early 1980s, when the Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides began providing trained guide dogs to Canadians with disabilities.



Jackson says the donation is also about honouring the legacy of long-time member Ron LeClaire, who passed away in 2011. “He left \$250,000 to our group and it was designated for a blind organization, but that organization no longer exists. To honour his wishes, we really wanted to use the funds to help the visually impaired.”

The Lions Club is hoping the donation will provide a new opportunity for students who dream of pursuing an education, but might have more barriers to knock down than others.

“University of Lethbridge students are here because they want to get ahead in their lives,” Jackson says. “The scholarship is to help give them a step up; people who want to get ahead but might be held back because of disabilities.”

Each year, the Picture Butte Lions Club Award for Visually Impaired Students will go to a continuing or entering undergraduate or graduate student enrolled in any degree program with a documented disability. The award will be given based on academic achievement, with preference given for financial need.

The award is an important step toward making ULEthbridge an even more inclusive place.

“This award is significant for our University. We want to ensure that all our students no matter their background get access and opportunity to inclusive, affordable and quality education,” says Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Executive Director Martha Mathurin Moe.

“This is only the beginning, and we look forward to working with our community to continue to remove barriers to education,” says Mathurin Moe.

The donation is the first to be matched by the University of Lethbridge, following an announcement in October that the Board of Governors is pledging [\\$10 million in match funds](#) for the establishment of new endowed student scholarships.

“The difference a donation like this can make is truly significant,” says ULEthbridge Vice-President, External Relations Kathy Greenwood. “The ultimate goal of the matching initiative is to provide permanent and sustainable support for students by rewarding creative, athletic and academic excellence, removing barriers to education and reducing student financial insecurity.”

Greenwood says the gift will allow more students the opportunity to pursue their passions at the University of Lethbridge.

“We thank the Picture Butte Lions Club for this generous donation, and we hope it will inspire more philanthropic support from the community in support of student awards and scholarships. Endowed funding like this will lay the foundation for future generations of students by ensuring a university education remains financially accessible.”

The first award will be given out in the 2023/2024 academic year.

For more information on how you can support student scholarships:
<https://www.ulethbridge.ca/giving>

This news release can be found online at [Picture Butte Lions Club donation](#).

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