

STORE HAS AN EYE ON RECYCLING FOR CHARITY BIRMINGHAM OPTOMETRISTS COLLECT 2,000 PAIRS OF GLASSES

ALEX P. KELLOGG
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

They stack up on top of each other in a frayed cardboard collection box with a handwritten sign that reads, "We Recycle Your Old Glasses." The box sits on the front desk at Vision Specialists of Birmingham against a backdrop of state-of-the-art eyewear.

Customers, or those who've heard through word of mouth that the shop donates eyeglasses to the local chapter of an international charity, drop off pairs at their leisure. When the donated glasses begin to pile up, they are stored in boxes in the basement of the shop's owner, Debby Feinberg. Every year or so, they are handed over by Feinberg, a 48-year-old optometrist and mother of two, and her father, Paul Feinberg, a spry 80-year-old optometrist, to the local chapter of Lions Club International. The charity combats vision impairment, blindness, drug abuse and diabetes. This ritual took place again earlier this month, when the Feinbergs donated more than 2,000 used eyeglasses to the club. The donation was their largest ever. The club will turn the glasses over to a distribution center in Indiana in the coming weeks.

"We just put a sign up, and ever since, we've been a depot," said Paul Feinberg, who lives in Bloomfield Hills. "Debby deserves all the credit." His daughter said, "I never imagined we would have collected as many eyeglasses as we are." And yet, "it's a quiet thing," she said, alluding to the fact that her father doesn't like to make a big deal of it. She went into practice with her father 23 years ago, but he started donating to the club seven years before that from his own practice.

Largest donation

Before helping load a fellow club member's van with several boxes of donated eyeglasses, Margaret Jasica, president of the Birmingham Lions Club and a longtime Birmingham resident, said the Feinbergs' donation was the largest the charity had ever received. There was no formal ceremony, though Paul Feinberg was beaming in a blue blazer, loose slacks and a striped tie.

Barbara Clark, a 51-year-old mother of five who lives in Hazel Park, donated three pairs of eyeglasses recently and found two more the other day that she plans to donate. She and several of her children wear glasses. "It's a wonderful program," said Clark, who went to Vision Specialists for treatment in February for dizziness, migraines and other problems due to a rare condition known as vertigo heterophoria. The Feinbergs specialize in treating such patients, whose eyes are not level and thus must strain to see images.

Helping developing countries

Cheryl Gumenick, 44, of Birmingham said she hopes to donate again. Gumenick dropped off a pair of reading glasses two weeks ago that friends and family said they didn't like. Gumenick had bought them for just \$22 at CVS, so she didn't think twice about giving them away.

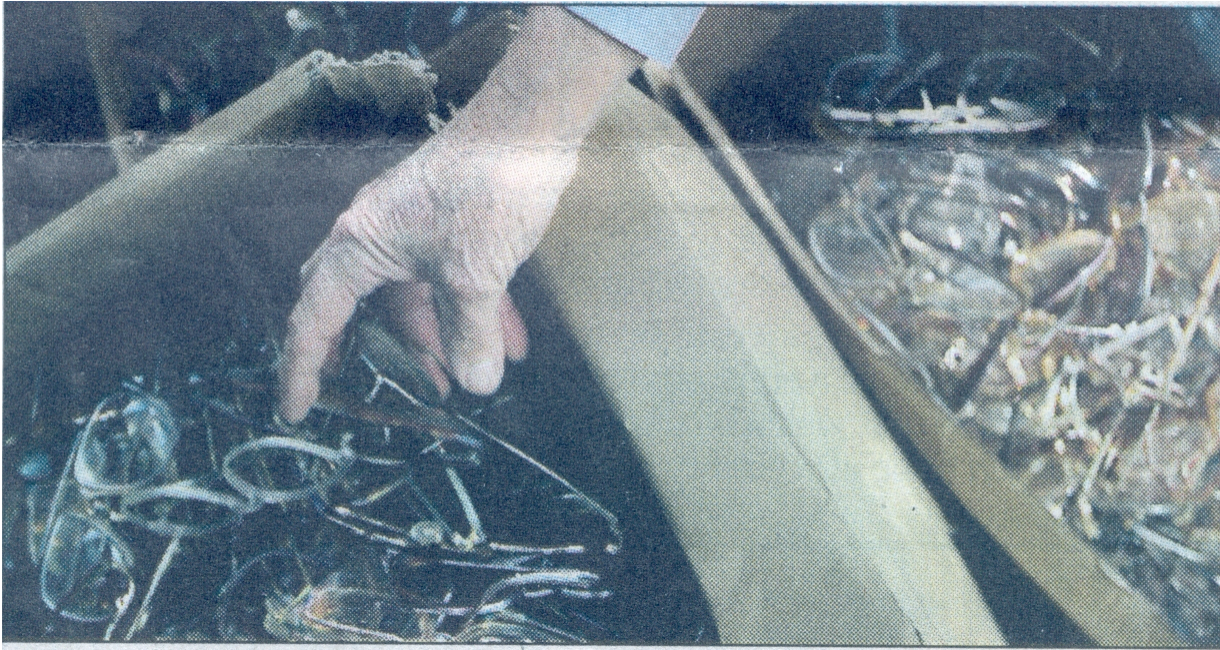
"I was sitting in the waiting room in between my son's and daughter's exams, and I saw the sign that they have," she said. "I thought, OK, I can do that."

Before driving away from the shop, Jasica praised Paul Feinberg: "There are people throughout the world in developing countries that will have the opportunity to see because of the effort he's made to gather these glasses."

Contact ALEX P. KELLOGG at 248-351-3693 or akellogg@freepress.com.

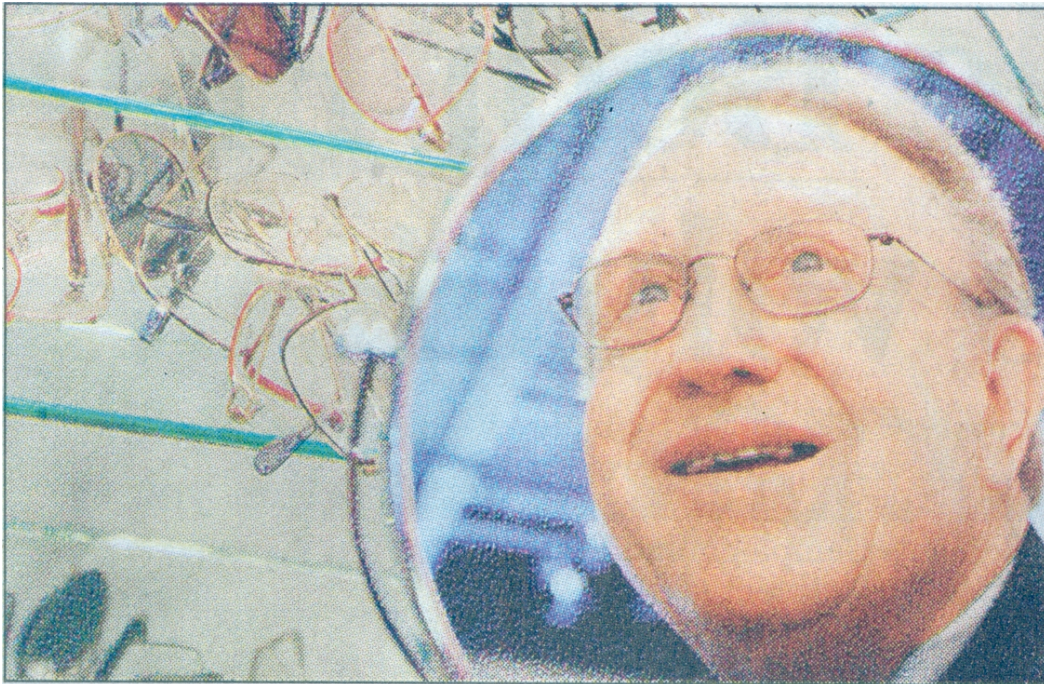


Photos by AMY LEAIV6 /Detroit Free Press - Paul Feinberg, 80, and his daughter, Debby Feinberg, 48, both optometrists at Vision Specialists of Birmingham, display some used eyeglasses before donating them to the Lions Club.



Paul Feinberg digs into some of the glasses he and his daughter donated for people who can't afford them, usually overseas. "These are people, for example, who never saw more than 10 feet clearly, and they thought everyone saw that way," Feinberg said. "We put the glasses on them, and suddenly they can see. They can see the leaves on the trees."

DETROIT FREE PRESS | WWW.FREEP.COM



AMY LEANG/Detroit Free Press

Paul Feinberg reflects on his 30 years of donating eyeglasses to the Lions Club.

How to help

- Vision Specialists of Birmingham is at 700 N. Old Woodward and open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays. Donations are welcome anytime.
- The Birmingham Lions Club, which has about 50 members from throughout the Birmingham and Bloomfield area, meets every Wednesday at noon at the Birmingham Community House, 380 S. Bates. For more information about the club, visit www.lionsclubs.org.