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LensCrafters Donates Glasses to Cherokee Kids

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SALLISAW, OK - Five days of heat and heart at the Cherokee Nation's Redbird Smith Health Center resulted in free eyeglasses for young people. Cooperative efforts of the Walking Shield American Indian Society and the LensCrafters Foundation provided the opportunity. The tribe's Sallisaw clinic hosted a group of volunteer eye care providers from across the United States July 10-14. Children aged 5-21 received eye exams and glasses. A wide choice of frames was available.

Sallisaw hosted LensCrafters' Vision Van, a 40-foot long mobile eye clinic equipped to provide exams and dispense glasses.

"It's a great deal," said Sallisaw resident Tina Christie. "Both of my kids wear glasses and it is very expensive." Christie visited the LensCrafters Vision Van Tuesday with her two young children, who were also treated to face painting by staff of the Cherokee Nation/Healthy Nation program and snack cakes donated by Little Debbie Gentry, Ark.

One youngster who received the service had never had an exam before, and looked around in wonder after being fitted with his new glasses, exclaiming: "Look at the leaves on that

tree!"

Donna Gourd, project coordinator for the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma Health Service, said everyone involved has devoted extra time and effort to make the project work. The project served between 90 and 125 patients per day from across the Cherokee Nation's 14-county jurisdictional area. "We worked with staff from all of our clinics to identify kids who really need this service."

Volunteers and clinic staff set up a tent outside the clinic to accommodate waiting patients, and Vision Van volunteers worked along side Cherokee Nation staff in ninety and one hundred degree weather to match patients with glasses. Gourd said Regina Christie, Wynema Bush, Frieda Thompson, Vic Moses and Linda Brooks are among the many tribal employees who went the extra mile to organize and facilitate the project.

"Redbird Smith Health Center staff have been hospitable, accommodating and invaluable in making the project a success," Gourd said. "Buddy Holt and Jennifer Scoggins have really set the tone for cooperative progress. Without their leadership and 'can-do' attitude it would not have been possible for us to help this many people in this space of time."

Holt and Scoggins are full-time employees at the Sallisaw clinic; Christie, Bush, Thompson and Brooks work elsewhere in the tribal organization.

"It takes many people with various talents to accomplish a project such as this," said Gourd. "We really had to connect and cooperate to pull it off." Steve Stockton, project manager for the LensCrafters Foundation, said volunteers came from LensCrafters stores as near as Tulsa and as far away as North Carolina and Canada to make glasses.

"LensCrafters has done this in many areas of the United States and in some other countries as well," said John Castillo of Walking Shield. "These people give up their vacation time to volunteer. They seem to enjoy the project and we all do it for the kids." Castillo said the Vision Van visited Oklahoma last

year, working with the Kiowa and Comanche tribes, and that this year's schedule has included visits to Sioux tribes in Ft. Berthol and Spirit Lake, North Dakota.

Walking Shield is a non-profit, California-based organization that provides humanitarian and educational assistance to thousands of American Indians across the country. The LensCrafters Foundation, with LensCrafters, Inc. and Lions Clubs International, sponsors a family of charitable vision care programs known as "Give the Gift of Sight." One such program is the Vision Van Mission.

For more information about the "Vision Van Mission" and other work of the "Walking Shield American Indian Society", contact Castillo phone: 714-634-9583.

Contact information:

[Walking Shield American Indian Society](#)

628 N Eckhoff Street

Orange, California 92868

Phone: (714) 634-9583 ~ FAX: (714) 634-9587

E-mail: Walkshield@aol.com

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