

## What a Difference: Unusual Service Makes a Huge Impact

# LION



Lions Clubs International

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## Lending a Seat

When Rebecca Panton's clients need a wheelchair, shower seat or walker, she knows exactly where to go. As a home health occupational therapist, she has looked to the Bellingham Central Lions Club's Al Boe Lions Wheelchair Warehouse in Washington for the past 18 years as the premier source of free medical equipment.

"I work with people in their homes, and I work with a lot of people that don't have insurance that covers equipment," Panton said. "The lending bank helps those people who don't have insurance and those who need it to be safe. It basically means safety and also independence."

Al Boe, the club's president in 1992-1993, began a humble project to lend wheelchairs to those in need. Since his death, the project has grown to include a former three-car garage stuffed to the rafters with carefully cataloged medical equipment available to those in need. Lions repair, clean and refurbish equipment in an addition to the garage.

"It's free of charge and it's a great recycling project in a sense," said Dan Cantrell, president. "We have about 17 guys that three days a week or more are there working, repairing, cleaning up and giving out the different pieces of equipment."

The warehouse also assists those with temporary needs, such as items needed to recover from surgery or assist a guest from out of town.

"We have about 950 wheelchairs and powerchairs and we have about 745 checked out now," said Charles Nelson, a Lion who donates his time at the warehouse. "The number that we have out to the public is currently growing at a rate of 10 to 15 per month. We're also getting donations of equipment at about the same rate."

The Lions created a basic contract that lends four-wheel walkers, two-wheel walkers, knee scooters, low-vision equipment, canes, crutches and accessories for bedroom and bathroom to residents for three months. If the need persists and they are unable to purchase the equipment, the club will loan it out on an indefinite basis.



John Bradshaw adjusts wheel lock.

"We do a very brisk business," Nelson said. "Having a power chair is the difference in being a shut-in and being able to visit their neighbors and go to the senior center. They use our chairs as a bridge when they reach this point in life." Indeed, Panton said that while the items themselves are very ordinary, the effect they have on her clients' lives is nothing short of extraordinary.

"It enables them to get into the shower when before they may have only been sponge bathing," Panton said. "They really appreciate it because of the safety and independence it affords them and not having to rely on anyone else for those personal care issues."