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Local Lions Club Gives \$400,000 to Shiley Eye Institute at UC San Diego Health

Downtown San Diego Lions Club makes largest gift ever to a single project; will support Shiley BioBank research lab

With the goal of accelerating research to prevent blindness, the Downtown San Diego Lions Club Welfare Foundation has made a \$400,000 gift to support the UC San Diego Shiley Eye Institute's BioBank—the largest gift the local organization has made to a single project. This gift contributes to the [Campaign for UC San Diego](#).

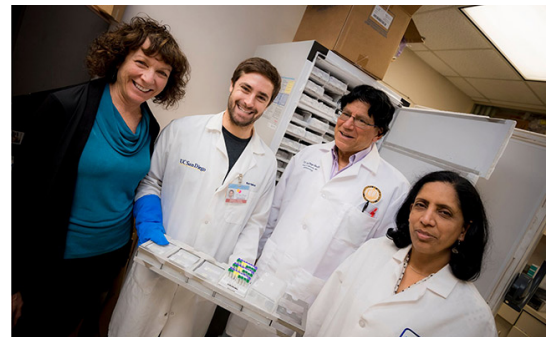
In recognition of their support, the BioBank research lab at the Shiley Eye Institute has been named the Downtown San Diego Lions Club BioBank for Vision.

The BioBank was launched in 2012 with the goal of leveraging the latest in bioinformatics technology and genetic-sequencing tools to advance understanding of diseases such as macular degeneration, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy—all of which are leading causes of blindness in the United States.

The BioBank provides a library of biological samples with complete medical and family history and other demographic information that researchers can utilize to learn about predictors for diseases (biomarkers) and effectiveness of therapies.

“The BioBank allows our ophthalmology team to make remarkable advances in understanding the biology of diseases and the promise of personalized medicine,” said Robert N. Weinreb, M.D., chair and Distinguished Professor of Ophthalmology and director of the Shiley Eye Institute. “The support from the San Diego Lions Club Welfare Foundation aids our research and helps us to better diagnose, prevent and treat eye diseases.”

Lions International has a long history of service to prevent blindness, restore eyesight and improve eye health. In 1925, Helen Keller urged Lions everywhere to become “Knights of the Blind.” Since then, sight programs have been a hallmark of Lions Clubs around the world, including the Downtown



Physician-scientists at the Shiley Eye Institute use biological samples housed in the Downtown San Diego Lions Club BioBank for Vision to advance treatments for eye diseases. From left: Linda Zangwill, Ph.D.; Matthew Holman; Robert N. Weinreb, M.D.; and Radha Ayyagari, Ph.D.

San Diego club.

In keeping with this focus, the local club came to UC San Diego with the goal of supporting a major project that leverages the latest technology and research to help patients with blinding eye diseases.

“The BioBank has the potential to make a significant difference for the thousands of patients in San Diego with blinding eye diseases, as well as patients around the world,” said Steve Zapoticzny, president of the Downtown San Diego Lions Club. “We are thrilled to join the Shiley Eye Institute—the nation’s leading institute for efforts to prevent and cure blindness—in this partnership.”

Terry Loftus, past-president for the Downtown San Diego Lions Club, led the partnership proposal along with fellow Lion and past-president George Saadeh.

“We were looking into stem cell and genetic research that is making strides toward curing these diseases,” said Loftus. “When we came across an article about what UC San Diego is doing in this area, the pieces started to fall into place.”

More than 150,000 individuals in San Diego County suffer from retinal degeneration, glaucoma or diabetic retinopathy. At the Shiley Eye Institute, doctors and researchers have made measurable progress in addressing these and other primary diseases of vision.

In 2014, the Institute created the Richard C. Atkinson Laboratory for Regenerative Ophthalmology to investigate cell replacement therapies, tissue engineering and other biomedical advances to reverse vision loss and blindness. Researchers are also working closely with the Sanford Stem Cell Clinical Center at UC San Diego Health to explore novel stem cell approaches.

“Our physician-scientists are involved in diverse and collaborative research projects that aim to improve treatments for eye diseases and hasten the day when blindness is entirely preventable,” said Weinreb. “The BioBank provides a critical resource that they can draw upon to accelerate the translation of research into treatments.”

The San Diego Lions Club Welfare Foundation is the nonprofit agency that funds the charity and public service operations of the Downtown San Diego Lions Club. Established in 1922, the Downtown San Diego Lions Club is involved with a wide variety of projects that serve children, seniors, veterans and others in the local community every year. In addition to the Shiley Eye Institute, the organization has supported many other sight programs, including a \$300,000 gift in 2009 for the San Diego Center for the Blind’s technology center.

Learn more about the Shiley Eye Institute [here](#). For information about the Downtown San Diego Lions Club, which is celebrating its 95th anniversary, visit their [website](#).

MEDIA CONTACT

Kristin Schafgans, 858-822-3353, kschafgans@ucsd.edu

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