



JAMIE FRANCIS/THE OREGONIAN

Elvin Harris gets a morning hug from daughter Trinity, 4, at their home in Salem. Harris says he would be blind if not for the Oregon Lions Sight & Hearing Foundation, which helped pave the way for surgery on his eyes. He says one of the most frightening things about losing his sight was the thought that he would not see Trinity grow up.

## Surgery brought light back to dad's darkening world

**T**o drive a car. Or see the colors of the world. Or watch your children grow up.

Those were the things Elvin Harris couldn't do because of cataracts in both eyes. Already suffering from astigmatism, Harris says he could barely see three feet ahead of him. Instinct is how he pursued his on-again, off-again job as a landscaper.

"The crew covered for me," says Harris, 57, a Seattle native who now lives in Salem.

For Harris, the world was an ever-darkening place. But in 2007 it opened up, courtesy of the Oregon Lions Sight & Hearing Foundation. The foundation paid for corrective cataract surgery on Harris' left eye. Three years later, it paid for the same procedure on his right eye.

Harris can drive now, though he's still looking for steady work. Best of all, he can see his wife, April, and daughters, Jocelyn, 13, and Trinity, 4.

The surgeries are among several life-altering

programs offered by the foundation, which serves the entire state, particularly the uninsured and those living below 150 percent of the federal poverty level.

For example, the foundation offers hearing aids, worth \$2,000, for \$125. It provides life-changing eye and ear surgeries, including corrective cataract surgery, often valued at more than \$13,000 per eye, for free. The foundation has a network of surgeons who offer services at reduced rates; cataract surgeries cost roughly \$2,000 in this system and surgeons are paid by the foundation directly.

The foundation's broadest service is traveling clinics that visit schools all over Oregon, offering preventive vision and hearing checkups for children.

In a year, the foundation's programs benefit more than 100,000. This year, it was voted one of the state's 100 best nonprofits by Oregon Business magazine.

The foundation's annual budget is \$1.2 million

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#### WISH LIST

- 19a.** Donations to cataract surgery fund: \$15
- 19b.** Donations to hearing aid fund: \$10
- 19c.** Sight and hearing screenings for children: \$25
- 19d.** Vision exams for clients with special needs: \$20

and includes seven full-time staffers and four part-timers. About 90 percent of its budget goes to services.

The foundation has not been untouched by the recession. It lost a longtime sponsor recently, says Glen Gilbert, executive director. Its most crucial need is financial support to continue the core services it has provided since 1959. Any amount helps.

Ask Elvin Harris, who had not heard of the foundation until a few years ago. Waiting at a bus stop, Harris told a woman about his situation. She told him about the foundation.

"I can see everything better now," he says. "I'm like a baby fascinated by everything around him."

—D.K. Row