



## *Time for a 'New Outlook'*

### Learning new skills to live safely with vision loss

The New Outlook Program at Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services offers classes and training in a variety of adaptive skills and techniques for seniors and others who are visually impaired.

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*"I graduated from the first (New Outlook) class, and I wanted to come back."*

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New Outlook meets one day each week, from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., for six classes. Students learn how to accomplish basic tasks — like cooking — safely in their homes. The goal of New Outlook is to enable seniors and others who are visually impaired to improve and maintain their ability to function independently at home.

This training is provided by BVRS's expert instructors at our facility in the residential neighborhood of Homestead, PA, just one mile from The Waterfront shopping center. Call our Information & Referral Specialists at 412-368-4400 for details. 



*Learning techniques to work safely in the kitchen are, from left, sisters Audrey Clark and Velma Wissner and Dolores Proviano (right) with BVRS instructor Heidi Pierce. All of the women have vision impairments.*

# President's Perspective

## *The Top Five Things I Didn't Know About BVRS Before Becoming President*

Prior to accepting the position as BVRS's President, I did a lot of research on the organization. I wanted to understand what the organization did, how it was composed, and what effect it had on the people who were served. After searching the website, reviewing 990's, and talking to individuals who were familiar with the organization, I thought I had a great understanding of the organization's impact.



*Erika Arbogast*

Then I started and realized to really understand the impact, I had to meet the people who had been affected and hear their stories. There are so many things I have learned since I started here in July. There are five specific things that I learned that made me feel very proud to be the leader of BVRS.

### **1. BVRS PROVIDES PRESCHOOL VISION SCREENING TO MORE THAN 10,000 CHILDREN PER YEAR.**

I was astounded to learn that 1 in 20 children have an undiagnosed vision problem. I was further amazed to learn that if these problems are caught in children by the time they are 3 years old, they have a 95 percent correction rate. Once the child reaches age 7, this correction rate decreases to only 5 percent. I take special pride in knowing that our organization is helping to prevent vision loss in children.

### **2. BVRS'S INDUSTRIES PROGRAM PROVIDES EMPLOYMENT TO 17 INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE BLIND, VISUALLY IMPAIRED, OR WHO HAVE OTHER DISABILITIES.**

Each of these individuals receives health benefits, paid sick, vacation and personal days, and a retirement plan. When conducting my research, I assumed that this program was a workshop program where individuals were paid sub-minimum wages and had no opportunity for benefits. I was so excited to learn otherwise.

### **3. BVRS'S INDUSTRIES STAFF MAKE ALL OF THE ROLL-UP ROAD SIGNS FOR THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA.**

Additionally, we make charcoal filters for submarines, and sew aprons and other textile products for the armed services.

*(continued on page 3)*

## Introducing BVRS New Board Members

Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh welcomes these new members of our Board of Directors:

**Lora E. Dikun**, vice president, Human Resources Operations, Giant Eagle, Inc.; **Dick Roberts**, president, Roberts Communications; State Representative **Marc Gergley**, 35th District; **Charles Mullen**, O.D.; **Mary Frances Dean**, president, St. Lucy's

Auxiliary.

Completing their terms on the BVRS Board are Frank E. Livorio, Citizens Bank; Elizabeth M. McCarthy; Penny McKenna, past president, St. Lucy's Auxiliary; Natalie M. Ruschell, Esq.; and Cynthia K. Troup, business consultant.

Thank you for your dedicated service to BVRS. 

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### President's Perspective

*(continued from page 2)*

**4. BVRS DOES NOT JUST PROVIDE SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED.** We serve youth and adults with autism, developmental delays, and behavioral health diagnoses through our adult day, employment, and transition programs. Since starting at this organization, I hear over and over again that most people are not aware of this fact.

**5. ALTHOUGH I KNEW THROUGH MY RESEARCH THAT THE ORGANIZATION PROVIDED PERSONAL ADJUSTMENT TO BLINDNESS TRAINING, I DIDN'T REALIZE HOW MUCH OF A DIFFERENCE THE PROGRAM MAKES IN PEOPLE'S LIVES.** Since coming to BVRS, I hear story after story of individuals who came to us depressed, afraid, and hopeless. After learning techniques to help return to activities they had done prior to losing their vision, each person reported a new sense of joy and independence.

Every day I learn new things about this organization that make me proud to work here. I wanted to share these items because I am sure others who are not familiar with the organization are not aware of these facts. I look forward to many more years of learning and informing the public of the great things we do here at BVRS! 

## Corporate Cup Ski Race Exceeds Goal

The 27<sup>th</sup> annual Corporate Cup Ski Race was held Friday, February 18 at Seven Springs Mountain Resort. We had a wonderful race, the weather was spectacular and the course was fast. The event was well attended with 14 teams and two individuals racing.

The **winning team** was **Lennon, Smith, Souleret Engineering, Inc.** (same team that won last year) featuring racers **Ryan O'Mahony, Zolin Cook** and **Eric R. Beringer**. Taking second place was Bayer MaterialScience with Gordon Terminal Services coming in third.

Dave "Bubba" Fullard, who is temporarily vision impaired, was the first to ski — breaking the course with a guide — and Olympic Gold Medalist Diann Roffe was the course forerunner.

Thanks to our wonderful committee headed by **Bruce Knepper** and **George Ehringer**, with members **Andy Gildersleeve, Paul Marlowe, Mike Wagner, Tim Chappell, Bruce Coleman, Robin**

**Hages, Ryan O'Mahony** and **Mark Booth**.

This year's event was a financial success raising more than \$35,000, exceeding the financial goal. 



*Bubba Fullard (right) with Bert Norton (guide).*

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***Mark your calendars and budgets for next year's 28th annual race, which will be held on a Friday in February 2012.***

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# Steelers Alumni Charity Golf Tournament Set for Monday, July 25 at Diamond Run

Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Service's 15th annual Steelers Alumni Golf Classic will be held **Monday, July 25**, at Diamond Run Golf Course.

Attendees this year will include former Steelers **Louis Lipps, Andy Russell, Robin Cole, Dwayne Woodruff** and many more, along with corporate sponsors Highmark, 84 Lumber, PNC Bank and UPMC Health Plan.

Golfers and others attending this year's charity tournament will have the chance to bid on fabulous auction items such as autographed Steelers and Penguins jerseys, a super ticket package, a trip to a Steelers away game that includes travel with the team, and many more.

If you would like to find out how you can participate in this event, either go to [www.blindvr.org/Golf](http://www.blindvr.org/Golf) or call Cindy Smith at 412-368-4400. 

## Walking for a Healthy Community and BVRs!

On Saturday, May 21 Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh participated in the Highmark Walk for a Healthy Community. The fun-filled morning included entertainment, celebrities, refreshments, games, and more.



*Taking part in this year's Walk for a Healthy Community were (from left) BVRs Board member Mike and Judy Zaken, Zachary and Holly Grabowski.*

More than 110 people registered to walk for BVRs and more than \$3,000 was raised.

BVRs was one of 69 organizations participating in this year's Highmark Walk. Not only does Highmark plan the event, but it also underwrites 100 percent of the expenses for the Walk. As a result, every dollar raised by BVRs walkers goes directly to support our programs for persons who are blind, vision impaired or have other disabilities. 

# BVRS Events

## *Oh What A Night...*

*This year's Girls Night Out, held April 14 at SouthSide Works Cinema, was a great success as more than 150 "girls" enjoyed champagne and chocolate, purchased specialty items and were treated to a private viewing of "Arthur." starring Russell Brand and Helen Mirren. This event brought in nearly \$7,000!*



## *Brentwood Daisy Troop Visits BVRS*



*Members of Daisy Troop 50650, based in the Brentwood neighborhood of Pittsburgh, visited BVRS and experienced first-hand how they might get around if they lost their eyesight. Ann Nicholson (pictured with her dog Heaven) and Heidi Pierce, BVRS rehabilitation instructors, worked with the young Girl Scouts.*

# Community Learns of Age-Related Vision Challenges at Blindness Awareness Day

Age-related vision problems—such as macular degeneration, cataracts and glaucoma—and the latest treatments available were the focus of Blindness Awareness Day Saturday, May 7, at the Radisson Hotel in Green Tree. The free event was arranged for seniors, their families and those with vision problems.

Ophthalmology specialists Dr. Louis A. Lobes, Jr., and Dr. Marshall Stafford discussed eye diseases, their respective symptoms and treatments that are available. Dr. Lobes spoke on macular degeneration and Dr. Stafford discussed cataracts and glaucoma. The doctors also answered questions from the audience.

Both presentations can be found on our web site, [www.BlindVR.org](http://www.BlindVR.org).



"I was totally unaware of the services offered by BVRS of Pittsburgh," one attendee remarked. "I received... information on macular degeneration and cataracts, and many of my questions were answered. Thank you. I have a lot of peace over my anxieties."

Blindness Awareness Day was made possible by the state Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services and the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind with funds provided by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. 



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*BVRS President Erika Arbogast is pictured with Dr. Marshall Stafford and Dr. Louis A. Lobes, Jr., at Blindness Awareness Day.*

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## Montana Resident Travels 4,000 Miles

When Sharol Geisser was 12 years old she was determined to participate in the local walk for the March of Dimes. She did it, but that evening after the walk she had to *crawl* just to get around.

Sharol was diagnosed with juvenile rheumatoid arthritis when she was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and was not able to participate in sports or even take gym class as she was growing up. JRA occurs in children under age 16 and causes joint swelling, stiffness and sometimes reduced motion. It can affect any joint and sometimes internal organs as well, and can lead to serious complications such as growth problems and eye inflammation.

But that diagnosis would not stop Sharol from the walk, and today—some 27 years later—it did not stop her from completing a 4,000-mile roundtrip from her home in East Helena, Montana, to Homestead, Pennsylvania.

Sharol is losing her vision due to her rheumatoid arthritis, and she

came to Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh and its Personal Adjustment to Blindness Training program for help.

Why the long trip?

“I researched three other facilities in other parts of the United States, and nothing compares to this place,” Sharol said of the BVRS facility in Homestead. “There are the dorms, and you do not have to be a state resident (to take part). My state counselor came here for a week to see what it’s like, and he told me the programs are flexible.”

BVRS’s Personal Adjustment to Blindness Training is a comprehensive immersion program that provides instruction in safe cooking, techniques of daily living, communication, orientation and mobility, exercise, sensory training, leisure time activities and more. The goal is for people with vision loss to develop the skills they need to become as independent as possible.

“My first priority when I arrived

# Wiles for Help in Staying Independent

here was to get the skills and the tools I needed to return to work as a nurse,” Sharol said.

But that changed. Two weeks into her stay at BVRS, Sharol suffered another vision decrease. She also has glaucoma, and was experiencing elevated pressure in her eyes.

“Returning to nursing is still my goal, but my top priority now is to become independent and stay independent if I lose more eyesight,” Sharol explained.

The flexibility of BVRS’s programs helped her to reach those goals. During the first seven weeks of Sharol’s stay, she relied on her

remaining vision as she went through training. As she started her eighth week, Sharol decided to continue her training blindfolded.

“It was my choice” she said. “I did everything under blindfold in case down the road I lose my vision totally.”

Sharol, who looks a dozen years younger than her 39 years, speaks matter-of-factly about her situation. “I believe you are given certain things in life that will make you stronger,” she said.

Sharol did not have specific expectations when she started the PABT program because she did not want to be disappointed. That did

*(continued on page 10)*



# Traveling the Extra Miles...

(continued from page 9)

not happen. In the cooking component, for example, Sharol explained that even though she cooked in the past, she now is able to use the skills she learned in the program to work more safely in the kitchen.

Sharol thought learning Braille would be the most challenging part of her adjustment training. "But I learned the whole alphabet—A to Z—and the numbers and writing it in five weeks," she said, pleased with her accomplishment.

not sure she will be able to continue in that role because of her vision loss. She is now researching other nursing options, such as patient advocate in a hospital.

"I really enjoy working one-on-one with patients and their families."

*Sharol now is back in East Helena with her three children: a 9-year-old son, 14-year-old daughter and 18-year-old daughter. The family likes to camp, swim, hike and picnic at the lake.* 

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***"There are no words that can express my gratitude to the instructors and staff at BVRS."***

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That's not surprising. Sharol is determined; she is upbeat and positive, and smiles often. "I've always had a positive attitude, even with the bad news of the recent eyesight loss. The positive is that my (eye) pressures are down."

She continues to make great use of her positive attitude—which she attributes to her mother—in planning for her future. Sharol was assistant manager and head nurse at an assisted living facility, but is



# Achieving Goals

## Grant Program Impacts Youth

It's now about mid-year for a BNY Mellon Foundation grant aimed at providing expanded and individualized services at Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh for youth who are blind or visually impaired.

"Great" is how BVRS staffers Barb Peterson and Sue Lichtenfels describe the progress of both the students and the program to date.

The \$50,000, one-year grant enables 20 youth to participate in BVRS's enhanced Employment Opportunities Project, a school-to-work program that prepares young people for employment. The overall goal is to acclimate students to their neighborhoods so they are able to

either work or volunteer near their homes. They receive orientation training and learn independent living skills.

A new mentoring component matches each student with an adult professional who is blind or vision impaired. Mentors give career guidance, discuss independent living issues and serve as a "buddy" for the students. They commit to one year of weekly phone or e-mail contact and a monthly outing with their student.

Mentors still are being accepted for the program. If you are interested, please contact Sue Lichtenfels, 412-368-4400 or [slichtenfels@pghvis.org](mailto:slichtenfels@pghvis.org). 



**Tired of your old car?**

**Skip the trade and DONATE!**



**Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh**

**Vehicle Donation Program**

**We'll take your car, motorcycle, RV, truck or boat — running or not. We'll arrange the towing and you receive a tax receipt. Just call us at 412-368-4400.**

**Proceeds benefit people who are blind, vision impaired or have other disabilities.**

# **C**ontributors *Getting to Know You...*

The Chuck Noll Road to Independence Society pays tribute to former Steelers Head Coach Chuck Noll, who served as Chairman of Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh Board from 1997 to 2004. Members of this prestigious group have pledged unrestricted gifts of at least \$1,000 per year for five years. Bob and Cathy Cornell of Gibsonia are among the members.

## **Question: How did you find out about BVRs?**

*We sought out BVRs. Vision, or lack thereof, has always been important, and when we decided to select a favorite charity to support, we chose BVRs.*

## **What motivated you to start supporting our mission?**

*It started with the School for the Blind and buying a Christmas tree every year. Of all the senses we would rather not lose, sight would be the one.*

## **What prompted you to increase your giving and become members of the Chuck Noll Society?**

*We had more money to give, so we did.*

## **Do you have personal experience with vision loss?**

*Bob had a detached retina a year*

*and a half ago, which is pretty serious, but pales in comparison to the needs of some of the people being served by BVRs.*

## **Are you personally acquainted with any of our clients?**

*Heidi (Pierce), who lost her sight a couple of months before we took our first tour of the facility in Homestead, was our tour guide. Attitude is everything, and Heidi had an amazing attitude for someone who so recently lost her vision. She later became an inspirational spokesperson (and rehabilitation instructor) for BVRs and left a lasting impression on us.*

## **Why support BVRs?**

*Everyone, who can, should pick at least one charity they feel strongly about and find a way to help regardless of the availability of government programs or subsidies. BVRs does a great job of helping those with vision loss and does so in an efficient way so your dollars will be well spent.*

If you are interested in learning more about the Society, please contact Laura Liggett, 412-368-4400 ext. 2232, [lliggett@pghvis.org](mailto:lliggett@pghvis.org). 



*Bob & Cathy*



ark Your CALENDAR

## Upcoming BVRS Events

***For Your Eyes Only*** annual tailgate party, **Friday, June 17** at the Boyd and Blair Vodka Distillery, Glenshaw

***84 Lumber/Steelers Alumni Golf Classic***, **Monday, July 25** at Diamond Run Golf Club, Sewickley

***Vision of Hope Luncheon***, **Wednesday, September 21** at the Field Club, Fox Chapel

***Person of Vision***, **Thursday, October 13** at the Westin Convention Center Hotel, Downtown

***St. Lucy's Auxiliary Medallion Ball***, **Friday, November 25** at the Wyndam Grand Pittsburgh Downtown.

For information, contact Connie Schwartz-Bedo, 412-368-4400 or [cschwartz@pghvis.org](mailto:cschwartz@pghvis.org).



### ***Eye Opener Luncheon***

*Heidi Pierce, a BVRS rehabilitation instructor and graduate of our Personal Adjustment to Blindness Training Program, was the speaker for the May 17 Eye Opener Luncheon at the Rivers Club. The luncheon introduced guests to the Chuck Noll Road to Independence Society. BVRS Board Chair Michael Romano served as master of ceremonies and long-time BVRS volunteer Julie Uritas-Giba also participated. The lunch was sponsored by Reflexite and First National Bank.*

## Your Help Wanted at BVRS

Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh needs volunteers to help with driving clients to and from doctor's offices, the airport and the bus station, serving as es-

corts for group activities like bowling, shopping, movies and other events, and helping staff who are blind or vision-impaired.

As a volunteer, you can participate on a set schedule or on an as-needed basis, and your special talents or interests can be accommodated. Training is provided.

For more information, contact Nancy Schepis, volunteer coordinator, 412-368-4400 or [nschepis@pghvis.org](mailto:nschepis@pghvis.org). 



*Nancy Schepis, center, with BVRs volunteers Marcia Sherwin (left) and Sophia Anisko.*

### ***Have Fun This Summer as a Teen Volunteer***

Looking for a fun volunteer opportunity this summer? BVRs needs teenage volunteers for its summer youth program, **June 20 - July 22**, which helps other teenagers who are blind or vision impaired prepare for college or a career. As a volunteer, you accompany the students to places like Kennywood, Pirate baseball games, Sandcastle and camping or just spend time with them in the evening. Schedules are flexible, and training is provided. Contact Nancy Schepis, volunteer coordinator, 412-368-4400 or [nschepis@pghvis.org](mailto:nschepis@pghvis.org).

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**1800 West Street**  
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## **AFFILIATIONS:**

National Accreditation Council, Pennsylvania Association for the Blind, Pennsylvania Industries for the Blind and Handicapped, National Industries for the Blind, Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired, ISO 2001 Certified (PBA Industries), United Way of Allegheny County Agency recipient of the Award for Excellence in Health and Human Services

## **Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh**

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**[www.BlindVR.org](http://www.BlindVR.org)**

BVRS is a 100-year-old nonprofit agency that serves people who are blind, vision impaired, or have other disabilities. The agency is an equal opportunity employer and service provider and does not discriminate against anyone, regardless of age, sex, race, religion, ethnic background, national origin, or disability.

A copy of the official registration and financial statement may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free, within Pennsylvania, 800-743-0999.

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If you prefer to receive your newsletter electronically, please e-mail your request to [enewsletter@pghvis.org](mailto:enewsletter@pghvis.org).