



Confident on the Computer

What a difference a week made for Carolyn Giambalvo and Fran.

The 54-year-old Long Island, NY, native, accompanied by her yellow lab, Fran, came to Blind and Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh this spring for access technology training. Carolyn had never used a computer until about five years ago, when she started to learn the basics. A year later she started working at the Guide Dog Foundation for the Blind in Smithtown, NY, which since 1946 has provided guide dogs free of charge to persons who are blind.

"I was interested in learning to do more on the computer and in expanding my knowledge," Carolyn explains. She has retinitis pigmentosa

—diagnosed at age 27—and now is in the final stages of losing her sight. As a consumer services assistant at the Guide Dog Foundation, Carolyn takes requests for applications and works

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Daisy Troop 50650 from Brentwood toured our facility this spring and learned some of the basics that our clients learn, such as mobility and food preparation. Pictured with Maggie Winn, orientation and mobility instructor, are Ilaria and Alexa.

President's Perspective

In BVRS's 2011 annual report, I focused my article on thanking our volunteers. In this newsletter, I want to take a moment to thank our Board members for the time they devote, talent they share, and resources that they help BVRS to secure.



Erika Arbogast

This organization is extremely fortunate to have Board members from many different professions. We have legal, ophthalmologist and optometrist, finance and legislative representation; marketing professionals; human resources specialists; individuals who specialize in disability awareness; and community volunteers, to name a few areas of expertise. Our Board members take a very active role in the agency in many ways. I want to thank them for some of the great opportunities they have provided the agency over the last year.

In the last year alone, our Board members have:

1. Provided generous donations and sponsorships of our events
2. Offered us free space for our low vision program in the South Hills enabling us to pro-

vide our services to individuals who are not able to get to Homestead

3. Hosted fundraising and "friend-raising" events at their own homes or businesses to help people become more aware of, and involved with, the agency
4. Helped us to begin development of a compliance plan
5. Had their businesses and/or companies match donations or sponsor events
6. Provided human resources and legal consulting to the agency at no charge
7. Provided marketing consulting and discounted rates on advertising
8. Designed invitations and brochures for the agency at no cost
9. Offered internal staff trainings on management, ethics, and interviewing skills
10. Traveled to Harrisburg to advocate for BVRS and our transportation and funding struggles
11. Opened doors for us with friends and colleagues to secure contract services with private businesses (Industries and janitorial contracts)
12. Provided tremendous guidance to myself and the management team in many areas

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President's Perspective *(continued from page 2)*

The value of all of these services to the agency is immeasurable. We are all trying to do more with less and the contributions of BVRS's Board members have allowed us to focus more of our resources on the clients we serve. We are so thankful for the many things our Board of Directors does for us! 

Confident on the Computer

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on the application process for students who come to Smithtown for instruction. She also does speaking engagements for the agency.

After a week in the BVRS Access Technology Center, Carolyn feels she's received a good education on technology terminology and is more confident in her ability to perform searches on a computer. "I'll be able to navigate databases more easily," she says.

At the state-of-the-art BVRS Access Technology Center, students learn a variety of accessible technologies, including screen-reading software, screen magnification, Braille displays and other computer technology from knowledgeable staff, some of whom are visually impaired. "We approach technology from the perspective of people who are blind," explains ATC Coordinator Spero Pipakis. "That's what makes us different."



Carolyn Giambalvo and Fran

A bonus during her week of training and living in the BVRS dorm: Carolyn learned to navigate around the building. "This reinforced my ability to navigate with Fran... she's been very good."

Carolyn is very thankful for the opportunity to spend a week at BVRS. While here, three other persons were residing in the dorm and she describes her stay as a "great experience." She adds, "I always feel that we can learn from each other. We learn so much more than what we came here for." 

Employee of the Year Nominee in Our Midst

You can't help but notice that Evelyn Nickel is one upbeat person. She loves life and she loves her job, and that's what helped capture her dual nominations as Employee of the Year through Pennsylvania Industries for the Blind and Handicapped, Inc., and the National Institute for the Blind.

Evelyn is employed at PBA Industries, the BVRS North Side-based manufacturing and assembly division, where for 26 years she has sewn aprons, pillow cases and towels. She is vision and hearing impaired.

Evelyn said, "I'm honored to be nominated Employee of the Year—it's very special." She very much enjoys sewing and her favorite part of working is the camaraderie.

"My visual impairment has taught me determination, patience and a really good sense of humor," she explains.

PIBH named Evelyn one of 23 nominees for the 2012 PIBH Nettie Mann Achievement Award. Nominees are chosen based on the character they demonstrate in living and coping with their disabilities, especially in the workplace. The NIB Employee of the Year will be named in October.

"Evelyn is a hard worker who is dedicated to the agency and the mission of BVRS," PBA Industries Director Tara Zimmerman said. "She has a great sense of humor that keeps everyone she works with laughing.

4 "Evelyn can always be counted on to take on new tasks or help out where needed." 



Evelyn Nickel

Staff Get New Computers Thanks to The Auxiliary

The Auxiliary, BVRS, has given the agency \$57,000 for the purchase of new computers for staff and client use, allowing us to keep up with the latest technology. Many thanks to The Auxiliary for its generous support.

Summertime at BVRS

Unlike most summer schedules, the ones at BVRS do not drop back into low gear. This summer, for example, we are putting on two separate, simultaneous programs for teenagers.

For many years, BVRS has offered a five-week Adjustment to Blindness Training program for teens, funded through state Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services. Students who are vision impaired learn how to become more independent, develop new skills, and have fun with each other and sighted teen volunteers during planned recreational activities supervised by adult staff and volunteers.



Tandem bike pilot John Rowley and student T.J. Stewart take a ride. Helping out is Ashley Wolford, summer recreation program coordinator. Pictured in the background is volunteer Rachel Tandon.

Tech for Teens, a computer technology evaluation and training program for college-bound students who are vision impaired, is set for July 30 through Aug. 3. Students will be introduced to the latest computer access technology and learn strategies for using appropriate technologies in the university environment. 

Joelle Swyka, currently in the summer program, will enter her senior year at Moon Area High School this fall. She has been enrolled in our youth programming since November 2011, and is pictured at a recent BVRS Employment Opportunities Project event in which six students experienced dragon boating at the Three Rivers Rowing Association. Joelle enjoyed the experience so much that she decided to join the Association and learn to compete in competitive dragon boat races.



Photo by Diane Celidonia

BVRS Gives Businesswoman Second Chance

by Nancy Giuliotti
Individual Gifts Coordinator



Barb Clements, owner of Barbara Clements & Associates, had a thriving 30-year business teaching import and export trade companies about adherence to national and international compliance regulations. She traveled 90 percent of her time in the United States, Europe and Asia.

In 2010, Barb had several falls and broken bones, and thought it might be a neurological problem associated with her diabetes. It turned out that Barb had been slowly losing her eyesight. Waking up one morning with near vision loss in one eye, things started on a downward spiral as she began losing sight in her other eye and suffered a mini-stroke. At that point she was unable to fly, which drastically curtailed her teaching and consulting; she went from a \$900,000 profit in 2010 to having to layoff six employees in 2012.

Over the last year, Barb has endured several eye surgeries to improve what vision she has left.

Barb came to BVRS' Personal Adjustment to Blindness residential program in May for eight

weeks, learning how to manage her vision loss and increase her mobility. The instructors simulated conference rooms, offices and hotels where Barb might someday continue her work. She was taught how to label prescription bottles, and how to cook.

"The program really helped me professionally, physically and socially," Barb says. "I have confidence in myself once again and know that I can maneuver through life and meet the challenges that confront me."

Barb says BVRS is an incredible asset to the blind community and its instructors and staff are truly awesome. She will be returning for five additional weeks to enter the Computer Access Technology program where she will learn how to use a variety of technologies including screen-reading software, screen magnification and Braille displays.

Through BVRS' Personal Adjustment to Blindness and Computer Access Technology programs, Barb has gained back what she thought was once lost—her independence and ability to work again. And, on another positive note, Barb has just signed on three new mid-size import and export companies on the East Coast. With the help of family members, Barb will be driven or take the train to begin her consulting in the fall. 

Former Client Gains Courage to Pursue Art Career

Former client Kara Ruth Snyder is having a solo art exhibit at the Frank L. Melega Art Museum in Brownsville, PA, through Aug. 26. The show is entitled "Inward Morning" and 10 percent of all sales benefit Blind and Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh.

Kara, who has diabetic retinopathy and is legally blind, attended our Personal Adjustment to Blindness Training (PABT) in late 2006. "I was always interested in art, but I didn't have the courage or the time to pursue it," she said. "After going through PABT, I had the courage to pursue art."

"Kara brings a fresh and compelling quality to abstraction... the best abstract painter I have seen this century," Melega Art Museum Director Patrick Daugherty was quoted as saying.

Pictured above is Kara's work, "Listen," acrylic, pumice and oil on canvas, 48" x 48", 2012. This painting is on display at "Tone it UP!"—a juried group exhibit sponsored by Pittsburgh Society of Artists and held at the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts through July 22.

For details on Kara's exhibit at the Melega Art Museum, visit www.melegaartmuseum.org or Kara's website at www.inwardmorning.com. 



Kara was the speaker at this year's For Your Eyes Only fundraising event at the Sewickley Heights home of BVRB Board member Dr. Laura Pallan and her husband, John Tippins. She is pictured with current client Robert Yulfo.



Kara Snyder

What a Difference Our Volunteers **Eagle & Auxiliary Team**



BEFORE

AFTER

Clients and staff from our day programs are among the first to enjoy the revamped picnic area. Pictured are Kevin Overton, Amber Kinkaid (staff), Barbara Ryan, Bethany Liput (staff), David Smith, Bobby Akers and Tim Boyd.



BVRS is the recipient of a new picnic area thanks to the efforts of the Eagle & Auxiliary Team at Brentwood. As part of Zach's Eagle & Auxiliary Team, they provided hand rails to help make the ramp easier to use for clients and family and friends and Scotty provided a wheelchair for BVRS a better place and congrats to the Eagle & Auxiliary Team.

Also, very special thanks go to the Eagle & Auxiliary Team for the donation of new picnic tables. These items were donated in memory of a client who was a member of The Auxiliary.

Make: Up to Transform Picnic Area

...w wheelchair accessible ramp to
...orts of Eagle Scout Zach Toner of
...le Scout project, he also installed
...o safer. Special thanks to Zach—
...ut leaders—for helping to make
...atulations on his achievement.

...oes to The Auxiliary, BVRS, for
...bles, a bench and trash cans.
...memory of Eleanor Caplan, who
..., BVRS.

DURING

Eagle Scout Zach Toner prepares the area for the new ramp.



FINISHING TOUCH

Members of The Auxiliary, BVRS, are pictured at one of the new picnic tables. Sitting, from left, are Connie Schwartz-Bedo, Arlene Gallagher and Pat Hauser. Standing are Ruth Shaw, BVRS President Erika Arbogast, Dr. Frances Caplan, Cheryl Akers Stanton and Carole Nadzam, BVRS liaison to The Auxiliary.

Around the Agency

Behind the Scenes with ‘Precious Little Eyes’

by Carole Nadzam
BVRS Executive Assistant

“I had my eyes checked today!” That’s what the little sticker said that Graham and his friends were proudly wearing. What it said to me, as his Grandma, and to all of their parents was: Thanks to the Preschool Vision Program at BVRS, those precious little eyes were screened to detect problems that could keep them from seeing the world to their full potential.

Working behind the scenes at the agency has given me the opportunity to see how the many wonderful programs we offer function. I have to admit to a real soft spot for the Preschool program and remember when my own daughters had their eyes checked.

The children are screened for amblyopia, sometimes referred to as “lazy eye,” color blindness, muscle balance, and visual acuity. One of the most amazing things I have learned is that if caught before the age of 3, amblyopia has a 95 percent correction rate; if not detected until age 8, the correction rate drops drastically to 5 percent.

Over the years, I have helped out at screenings and really enjoyed interacting with the children and knowing that, in some small way, I **10** could help in the process—even

if it was just to walk the kids back and forth between their classrooms and the testing site. Because of what I have learned about the process and the effectiveness of these screenings, I was so thrilled to volunteer at Graham’s preschool in April. I encourage anyone who has a special little person in their life to make sure they have their eyes screened.

If our free screenings are not held at your child’s preschool or daycare, please contact BVRS, 412-368-4400, and arrangements can be made to ensure that your little one can also wear a sticker announcing to the world that “I had my eyes checked today!” And you will know that you are doing all you can to preserve their vision. 

Art Show of Support

Thank you to everyone for supporting and attending the Spring art show by the artists in the BVRS day programs. Due to its success, we are extending our artistic exploration to clay. With the recent purchase of a kiln, we plan to have our ceramics program running by September.

We are selling items made by our Community Transition program artists at Goodelicious Sweet Shoppe in Brentwood and at The Art Market gallery in Lawrenceville, a program of Milestone that supports artists with disabilities.

Support from Our Local Lions



A LION IN OUR TANKS! The Homestead District Lions Club has given BVRS a \$5,000 donation for the purchase of gasoline for agency vehicles. In the photo are (from left) Howard Caspar, Mark Minuto (Chair, Dispersement Committee), BVRS President Erika Arbogast, Homestead District Lions Club President Bea Virostek, and Dave Hahner, Sr.



Jean Colantoni (left), president of West Mifflin Lions Club and James Stone (right), treasurer, present a \$3,700 check to Development Associate Cindy Smith.

Many thanks to our local Lions!

BVRS Events

Steelers Alumni Golf Classic, Monday, July 30 at Diamond Run Golf Club, Sewickley

For information, contact Cindy Smith, 412-368-4400 ext. 2208, or csmith@pghvis.org.



For Your Eyes Only June 8

Pictured are BVRS Board Member Dr. Laura Pallan and her husband, John Tippins, the hosts at their residence Windward Estate in Sewickley Heights. More than 180 guests attended.

Highmark Walk for a Healthy Community May 19

Supporting BVRS at the Walk were, from left, Dr. Allen Press, Judy Press and George Bedo. The event raised more than \$3,000.



Girls' Night Out April 24

Having fun at this annual benefit party held at South-Side Works Cinema were, from left, Marsha Murman and BVRS Board Member Peggy Snavelly.

BVRS Honors Inaugural Members of St. Lucy's Legacy Society

On Saturday, June 2, Peggy Snavely, BVRS Board member and St. Lucy's Society Auxiliary member, hosted the St. Lucy's Legacy Society inaugural luncheon at her home in Upper St. Clair. It was a beautiful setting to honor the 12 St. Lucy's Auxiliary past presidents and ball chairs who wished to continue their support of BVRS' mission through a new avenue of philanthropy. BVRS President Erika Arbogast noted, "BVRS is truly grateful to St. Lucy's Auxiliary for being dedicated partners with us over the years to bring independence to persons who are blind and vision-impaired."

Society membership is open this first year to former ball chairs and presidents from the past 25 years. Future plans for the St. Lucy's Legacy Society include inviting all past leaders and officers to become members. A plaque is being designed to honor our first 15 members, and will hang in the St. Lucy's conference room at BVRS. We anticipate many future members to join as a way to continue their support of BVRS' mission once their active service in St. Lucy's Auxiliary has lessened. 

St. Lucy's Legacy Society Inaugural Members

***Michele Antonelli
Diana Bills
Regina Callahan
Annie Hanna Engel
Lin Getz
Julia Giba
Julia Gleason
Terri Hastings
Terry Jancisin
Mary Ellen Maher
Elizabeth McCarthy
Penny McKenna
Mary Ann McKnight
Patty Orringer
Peggy Snavely***



At the inaugural luncheon were, from left, Patty Orringer; Barb Clements, guest speaker and client; hostess Peggy Snavely; BVRS President Erika Arbogast; Rita Callahan; and Mary Ellen Maher. Also attending the luncheon but not pictured were Michele Antonelli, Julia Gleason, Terry Jancisin, Diana Bills, Julia Giba and BVRS former client and speaker Ginny Smiley.

Connie Schwartz-Bedo Retires After 15 Years

"We are not the heroes here. We just raise the funds that allow our instructors to do their jobs. They are the heroes."



Those were some of the words of wisdom that Connie Schwartz-Bedo left with her Development and Public Relations staff on one of her last days as their director. After

nearly 16 years on the job, Connie retired from Blind and Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh at the end of June. She began her career in 1997 as development director for the newly created consolidated agency, Pittsburgh Vision Services, formerly Pittsburgh Blind Association and the Greater Pittsburgh Guild for the Blind.

Over the years, Connie has helped to raise more than \$15 million through our development department. Additionally, she planned and implemented more than 75 special events and was instrumental in building the relationships with donors, foundations and community supporters that we have today. She oversaw the development of the Chuck Noll Society, a planned giving society that honors Chuck Noll, former head coach of the Pittsburgh Steelers and the emeritus chairman of the Board for BVRs.

"We are so happy for Connie but she will be greatly missed," BVRs President Erika Arbogast said. "Her constant smile and positive outlook on everything has been so important to the success of this agency."

"I have had the pleasure of working with Connie since 1999. First as president of St. Lucy's Auxiliary to the Blind, then as a director of the Board of BVRs, and finally as chair of the Development committee," Elizabeth McCarthy said. "Her wisdom, compassion and vision have stimulated my mind, molded my actions and kept me focused on serving the clients of BVRs. Development makes possible the work of this and all charitable organizations. It's not glamorous, or touching, and it is certainly not easy. Connie never let me or the development committee forget why we did what we did."

"Her leadership allowed people to find, develop and maximize their gifts. Then she quickly spun those gifts into gold for the visually impaired. Intelligence, passion and a great sense of humor, balanced by a commitment to make life better for others, has made Connie an invaluable asset for BVRs. She will leave a huge hole, and an incredible legacy."

"I wish her joy as she steps onto
(continued on next page)

Connie Schwartz (continued from previous page)

the next stage of her life," Elizabeth said.

Connie has been a fundraising professional for 34 years. Prior to joining the agency, she was the development director for two other social service agencies in Allegheny County and the executive director of a national branch of an educational nonprofit.

In 2007, Connie was named Outstanding Fundraising Professional of the Year by the Western Pennsylvania Chapter of Fundraising Executives. She was the chapter's president in 2009 and remains on the board in the role as foundation chairperson. She also serves on the board of the Pittsburgh Musical Theater.

Connie received bachelor's and master's degrees in psychology and education from the University of Pittsburgh and a certificate in nonprofit management from the Pitt's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs. She taught both fundraising and management of nonprofit orga-

nization courses at her alma mater and at Chatham University at the undergraduate and graduate levels for 10 years.

In addition to serving on the board of the Association of Fundraising Professionals, Western Pennsylvania Chapter, Connie enjoys theater, tennis and singing, and is a member of the choir at Temple David in Monroeville. Connie is settling into "retirement" by taking courses at Carnegie Mellon University and piano lessons. She and her husband, George Bedo, also plan to travel. Connie is the mother of two sons, four grandsons, two stepdaughters, one stepson and one stepgrandson.

Connie will continue her dedication to the BVRS mission by working as our grant writer on a part-time consulting basis. Connie said, "It has been my honor to work for an organization where all you need to do to be motivated is step inside our doors and watch someone leave on their own using their long white cane." 

BVRS Welcomes New Employees

Blind and Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh welcomes the following persons to our staff:

Beverly Rivera has joined the Client Services department as a case manager.

Jasmine Freeman has joined

PBA Industries as a utility worker.

Leslie Montgomery has been named director of development and public relations.

Teresa Elliott has joined the Client Services department as a monitor.



Blind & Vision Rehabilitation
Services of Pittsburgh

1800 West Street
Homestead, PA 15120

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Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh

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BVRS is a 102-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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