



The Spectacle

Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh

Spring 2014



Finding New Ways to Do Old Things

It was a cold, rainy, windy day, and it was Diane Faust's day to take a bus ride by herself. She got to the bus stop and was terrified, wanting to turn around and go back. She was just not ready. But, she convinced herself to "put on big-girl pants," get on that bus and go to the card store. It was only a 10-minute trip and the card store was three shops down from the bus stop. As Diane got off the bus, she headed straight to the store right in front of her. It was a pharmacy and she needed something for her headache! Then she went to the card store.

"But I did it," she says. "And it was a huge step."

Diane is rapidly losing her vision, and the bus ride was part of the training she's receiving in the Personal Adjustment to Blindness Training program at Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh. The 52-year-old mother of two daughters, ages 22 and 21, quit her job as the business manager of an insurance agency last year. She had worked in that job for 15 years handling human resources, finance, accounting, licensing and even maintenance at times. She really liked her job but felt she could no longer handle the workload efficiently.

She quit for the good of the company.

But, that's Diane. She cares about others. Her immersion in the 12-week adjustment to blindness training program

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Changing the lives of persons with vision loss and other disabilities by fostering independence and individual choice.

President's Perspective



*Erika Arbogast
President*

This is a very exciting time for Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh (BVRPS). We have just purchased a facility in Uptown that is centrally located for our clients. We have many exciting plans for additional programming once we move to our new home. This near-future transition is also challenging us to discover products and services that in the long term will help us to be less dependent on traditional funding sources.

With that specific goal in mind, we have become a distributor of Crypton, a high performance fabric that features a patented integrated moisture barrier. Not only can we distribute Crypton fabrics to businesses across the country, but we also will begin manufacturing items such as bed sheets, pillowcases, tablecloths, placemats, and table runners with this amazing fabric.

You might be thinking, “What about Crypton fabrics makes this business line a long-term product growth and employment generator for BVRPS’s Industries program?”

Where do I start? Crypton fabrics are stain-resistant, water-resistant, and proven to be disinfectable when used in conjunction with EPA-approved Crypton Disinfectant and Deodorizer. Crypton fabrics contain an odor and mildew-resistant anti-microbial, are bedbug and dustmite resistant, and are GREENGUARD Gold certified for healthier indoor air quality, qualifying for LEED CI certification. You have to see it work to believe it! You have probably sat on Crypton fabrics many times without realizing it. Major corporations and organizations using Crypton fabrics in their facilities include: Walt Disney World, Johns Hopkins, UPMC hospitals, Marriott, Hilton, Carnival Cruise Line, McDonald’s, and The Olive Garden.

Through distribution and manufacturing of new product lines that are made with Crypton fabrics, we plan to grow our Industries program and thereby create more jobs for individuals who are blind or vision impaired in our community. We are extremely excited about this opportunity and the possibilities it will create for those we serve.

Please keep us in mind for any fabric needs you may have for your home or office. We pride ourselves in offering Crypton fabrics for a reasonable price. If you would like more information on the fabric and products we offer, please contact Tara Zimmerman at tzimmerman@pghvis.org. And make sure you read *The Hands Behind the Amazing Crypton* article on the next page. 

The Hands Behind the Amazing Crypton!




Since its founding more than 100 years ago, Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh has maintained a manufacturing facility that provides jobs for persons who are blind or visually impaired. The current group of Industries division craftspeople create a variety of goods for both public and private sectors such as construction safety products, portable highway signs, signage, and textiles. And now, they can't wait to get their hands on Crypton.

Over the years, the Industries division has grown and prospered due to the workmanship of our employees, 96 percent of whom are blind or visually impaired. This division of Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh was honored by National Industries for the Blind, the nation's largest employment resource for people who are blind, with the 2013 Employment Growth Award for efforts to increase employment retention, growth and upward mobility for people who are blind. It is the second consecutive year that Industries has been recognized. Industries also was named a finalist for the Pittsburgh Business Times 2013 Manufacturer of the year.

The Industries division is responsible for all aspects of Crypton distribution and production, and will be working with other National Industries for the Blind (NIB) agencies to see if there are ways that Crypton can be used to increase their product lines.

"The nice thing about the addition of the Crypton fabric product line is that we will not



only grow and exceed our mission but also help persons with visual impairments or disabilities gain employment," explains Tara Zimmerman, director of Industries. 

Industries staff




Working on the ‘Soft Skills’

While college degrees and technical skills are important for many jobs, “soft skills” are essential to a strong, vibrant workforce, according to researchers. Employers increasingly are looking for new hires who can communicate beyond their smart phones, who have initiative, work ethic, are team players, and possess interpersonal skills.

These skills cannot be developed overnight, through an all-day seminar, or by memorizing a book. With that in mind, we have focused this year’s Employment Opportunities Project (EOP) job readiness


curriculum on providing our teen clients who are visually impaired practice in six soft skill areas deemed vital by the U.S. Labor Department’s Office on Disability Employment Policy.

Using role-plays, self-assessments, and practical activities, the curriculum provides teens with hands-on activities to strengthen their competencies in communications, networking, enthusiasm and attitude, problem solving and critical thinking, professionalism, and teamwork. For example, the leadership lesson concludes with one student directing a team of two other students to build a structure solely through verbal directions.

Job readiness instruction is an integral part of our Employment Opportunities Project, which prepares students ages 14 to 21 who are blind or vision impaired for employment. 

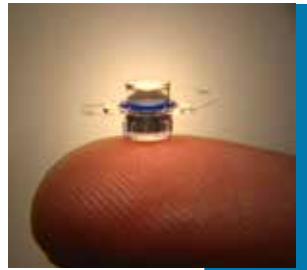


Vision Screenings Exceed Goals

One year after expanding our former Preschool Vision Screening program into the new Children’s Vision Screening program, we have surpassed previous years’ screening numbers. As of the end of May, our professional vision screening technicians had screened more than 13,000 children, ages 1 to 6, in Allegheny County. 

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Low Vision Team Part of New Treatment Program for End-stage Macular Degeneration

Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh's low vision staff is excited to be part of a team offering a groundbreaking new treatment program for patients with end-stage age-related macular degeneration, the leading cause of blindness in older Americans.

The comprehensive treatment program has been designed by CentraSight and is the only treatment program available in the United States that uses an FDA approved implantable telescopic lens. In the Pittsburgh area, the treatment program is available through a multidisciplinary team including Blind & Vision Rehab Services, Dr. Viki Christopoulos and Dr. Pamela Rath.


"Imagine the heartbreak for someone who gradually loses the ability to see her grandchildren, husband and the people who mean the most to her. Now imagine her joy when she can see them again," says Dr. Erica Hacker, our low vision optometrist.

The CentraSight treatment program uses a tiny telescope that is implanted inside the eye. Potential patients undergo medical and vision evaluations to deter-

mine whether they may be a good candidate. After an eye surgeon implants the telescope in an outpatient procedure, the patient then works with vision specialists at Blind & Vision Rehab Services to learn how to use their new vision in their everyday activities.

Dr. Hacker said she has received more than a dozen requests for information on the new treatment; three persons have been screened by low vision staff. "The telescope implant is not a cure," she explains. "Patients must meet age and cornea health requirements to be considered a good candidate.

"But for those who are good matches, this is such an exciting treatment program for persons who may have had little hope previously."

For more information on the telescope implant and who qualifies for the treatment, contact Dr. Hacker at 412-368-4400 ext. 2231. 



Erika Hacker, Viki Christopoulos and Melynda Gradich, low vision occupational therapist.

On the Road to Independence: *Findin*

(continued from page 1)

is just another way she can lead by example for her daughters – just in case they are ever faced with life-changing challenges. She also is determined to remain self sufficient so that her daughters don't have to someday have the talk about who will take care of mom.

"I want independence," Diane explains. "By the skills and confidence I am learning here, my daughters will know that I'll be okay and they can loosen the rope a bit."

Diane recounts the day she and another student in the program went to lunch – alone – after a volunteer drove and dropped them off at a nearby restaurant. "We did just fine, and the restaurant is still there," she says, laughing.

Some days, though, Diane does not laugh and doesn't feel like leaving the house. Like the day – one of her toughest – when she received a letter qualifying her for long-term disability insurance or another day when a letter told her she would be receiving Social Security Disability. She didn't have to fight for those financial benefits, which made her sad at the seeming finality of her situation.

But because of the people she's met and worked with at Blind & Vision Rehab, Diane knows that these feelings are normal. "Here, I feel I'm among my peers. We are all different, but we all have vision issues. And what's helpful is sharing our stories with each other. We learn that we are not alone."




Diane has had minor vision loss over the past 30 years, with cataracts and eye surgery at a relatively young age, and over the last 15 years her night vision has been deteriorating. She explains that her doctors aren't sure what is causing the damage to her optic nerves and are hoping, at this point, to find a way to preserve what little remaining vision she has left. She first came to Blind & Vision Rehab five years ago to learn assistive technology at the Ac-

g New Ways to Do Old Things

cess Technology Center. Now, she is back for adjustment to blindness training and additional access technology training.

“This program is introducing options and giving me the confidence to try to find new ways of doing things,” Diane explains. Along with riding a bus solo and the accompanying confidence, she is learning safe cooking methods, how to use screen-reading software on a computer, Braille, smart phone applications, and she is becoming more assertive. She likens this educational experience at Blind & Vision Rehab to retraining her brain as she moves from a visual world to an auditory one.

“Now I am at the place in my life – what do I want to be when I grow up... I have no clue, and that’s a large part of the reason why I am here,” Diane explains. “I’ve thought, ‘What on earth does the world do with people like me?’ I have that fear ‘What am I going to do? What can I do?’”

Diane can do just about anything she takes on, is the consensus of several of her instructors. She is motivated, the A student all teachers enjoy having in their classrooms. And that sentiment is mutual. “I just think this program and the instructors are awesome,” Diane says. 



“I have not had a challenge that one of the instructors here has not been able to help me with.”

Vision of Hope Luncheon

St. Lucy's Auxiliary to the Blind will hold its annual Vision of Hope Luncheon Thursday, Sept., 18, 2014, at St. Clair Country Club in Upper St. Clair. The luncheon, with entertainment by Rick Purcell, silent auction, raffles and designer purse auction, also includes the awarding of the annual St. Lucy Scholarship to a BVRS student. For tickets and information, please contact Audrey Reilly at doubledals@comcast.net by Sept. 1.

Thank you to St. Lucy's Auxiliary to the Blind for the generous gift of \$200,000—proceeds from the annual Medallion Ball recognizing young women for their volunteer efforts in the community. The Auxiliary's continued support truly impacts our clients' lives.

Pictured (from left) are St. Lucy's Ball Co-Chairperson Julia Sheridan Gleason, St. Lucy's Ball Chairperson Mary Frances Dean Johnson, BVRS President Erika Arbogast, and St. Lucy's President Mary Lee Gannon. Since 1959, St. Lucy's Auxiliary to the Blind has given BVRS \$3,255,366.



Each year on Oct. 15, White Cane Safety Day celebrates the achievements of persons who are blind or vision impaired. The agency, with the support of The Auxiliary, BVRS, celebrates too, by passing out information and providing free vision screenings in Downtown Pittsburgh. Mark your calendars today for the 2014 White Cane Awareness Rally on Wednesday, Oct. 15.





Our 30th annual Corporate Cup Charity Ski Race and Sporting Clays event on Feb. 28 was a huge success and raised more than \$60,000. Pictured are committee members (back row from left) Tim Chappell, Paul Marlowe, George Ehringer, Chip Desmone, Jim Schmitt, Mark Booth and Tim Cowan; (front row) Will Snyder, Bruce Coleman, Sharon Landau, Chris McClure and Robin Hages. Committee members not pictured are Bruce Knepper (chairman), Tom Zogelman, Joe Paul, John McWilliams, Larry Souleret, and Andy Gildersleeve.



Blind & Vision Rehab's annual "Girls' Night Out" fundraiser April 30 at the Hollywood Theater in Dormont featured a private screening of "Breakfast at Tiffany's," starring Audrey Hepburn. Each spring, women from all over Pittsburgh come to this event to connect with their girlfriends, watch a great movie and support our mission. Pictured (from left) are committee members Denise Gipson, Michele Antonelli, Terry Jancisin and Peggy Snavelly. The event raised nearly \$7,000.

Employment Transition Services Receives Recognition

As part of National Volunteer Week in April, clients in our Employment Transition Services program received the following recognition from ASSET STEM Education, a national Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education improvement nonprofit:

"On behalf of all of us at ASSET STEM Education, thank you for your continuous dedication to our organization. We are incredibly grateful for your time commitment! The work you do to clean, sort, bag, and pack STEM education materials in our Materials Support Center impacts more than 7,000 teachers and 225,000 students nationwide."

Blind & Vision Rehab is honoring Laura S. Karet, chief executive officer of Giant Eagle, Inc., as its 2014 Person of Vision. The celebration is set for **Thursday, June 26** at 6:00 p.m. at Heinz Field, East Club Lounge. Sy Holzer, president of PNC Bank - Pittsburgh, and Dan Onorato, executive vice president and chief external affairs and communications officer for Highmark Inc., are serving as honorary chairmen. For tickets or more information, please call 412-368-4400 ext. 2253.



Steelers

Alumni Golf Classic

Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh's 18th annual Steelers Alumni / 84 Lumber Golf Classic is **Monday, July 28** at Diamond Run Golf Club, Sewickley. Each golf foursome is captained by a former Steelers player, coach or other sports celebrity, and the day includes continental breakfast, lunch, cocktails, awards dinner and live auction. For more information, contact Cindy Smith, 412-368-4400 or csmith@pghvis.org. Since its inception 17 years ago, the golf outing has generated more than \$1,900,000.

Members of Daisy and Brownie Troops from Brentwood visited us in March and experienced first-hand how they might get around if they lost their eyesight. If your group is interested in an educational tour at Blind & Vision Rehab Services, please call Leslie Montgomery, 412-368-4400, ext. 2253.



The Pitcairn/Monroeville Lions Club has donated \$2,500 to us—proceeds from its 5K Run for Sight last November. We also received t-shirts in the bargain—modeled by our staff from the Senior Transition Program.

BVRS Names New Board Members...

Michele Antonelli, a community volunteer who has been involved with the agency in committee and volunteer roles for more than a decade.

Glenn J. Breisinger, partner and chief financial officer/vice president of Associated Partners, LP, and Liberty Associate Partners, LP.

Michael J. Zaken, retired, U.S. Steel Corp.

... and Welcomes New Employees

Sarah Lewkowicz has joined the Prevention of Blindness program as the parent liaison.

Teka Eberhardt has joined the Client Services department as an Employment Transition specialist.

Eric Moreira has joined the Client Services department as a Community Transition Program assistant.

Steve Hamlin is our new receptionist/security guard.

Thomas Singleton has joined the Administrative department as the maintenance coordinator.

Tiffany Turner has joined the Client Services department as a Vocational Training specialist.

Tenisa Montgomery has joined the Client Services depart-

ment as a Vocational Training specialist.

Jacqueline Connors has joined the Client Services department as a program assistant.

Hannah Greene has joined the Client Services department as a Community Transition program specialist.

Donna Daum has joined the Client Services department as a Personal Adjustment to Blindness Training rehabilitation instructor.

Kaylee Dellert has joined the Client Services department as a Personal Adjustment to Blindness Training occupational therapist/rehabilitation instructor.

Tracey Turner has joined the Client Services department as a Personal Adjustment to Blindness Training monitor.



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Helping people who are blind or vision impaired achieve their goals

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