



# The Spectacle

Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh

Summer 2013

## Former Client Returns to Volunteer

What better compliment: “I did so well,” Richard Kuzma confidently says of the training he received in computer technology and adjustment to blindness from Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services (BVRS) of Pittsburgh.

Yet, it does get better: “I

decided to turn around and volunteer.”

For 3 to 4 hours each week, Richard volunteers in the BVRS Access Technology Center, where he runs updates and installs software on the computers. He also is the moderator for a group of Blind & Vision Rehab alumni who gather each Thursday to discuss what is new in access

technology and any problems they may be experiencing with computer hardware and software (see [Talk Tech Thursdays](#) on page 6).

In January 2012, Richard suddenly lost his vision following glaucoma surgery. For three weeks, the West Mifflin resident tried to comprehend going from a job in technology support for a software  
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*Richard Kuzma helping out in the Access Technology Center*

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

## President's Perspective




*Erika Arbogast  
President*

Since I started at Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh, many have shared their stories about the good times they experienced at our former facilities. I hear about the support groups, dart and craft groups, and other social events that took place at these locations. People talk about the liveliness that was in the air and how these facilities were a daily destination for many of the individuals we served.

Those stories and many others have directed the vision for this organization, and my goal is that we will again experience this connectedness. While our current facility is beautiful and certainly has the physical capabilities for all of these events to occur, those who use our services have difficulty getting here to Homestead. Over the past few years, public transportation to our facility has become sparse and, at one point the bus stop directly across from our building was slated to be eliminated completely. We have and continue to reach out regularly to our legislators to inform them of the great need for this bus stop, but we are constantly at risk for the stop to be eliminated.

Diminishing public transportation continues to be an enormous obstacle for our clients. Therefore, our Board of Directors has voted to search for a new building that is in a central location with frequent and nearby public transportation. I am so excited when I think about the possibilities and how the organization will grow and flourish in a more accessible facility. I frequently dream about the programs and social offerings that we will be able to implement once we are in such a location. As we search for a facility, one thing is clear: We will not compromise on location or accessibility for those we serve. This, of course, challenges us to find the perfect location and may mean that the search process takes a while to produce results. Even so, I wanted to share our vision for Blind & Vision Rehab with our clients and loyal friends.

Finding a new facility and moving is never easy. The learning process regarding commercial real estate has been complex and rewarding, and this effort will allow us to make the best possible decision for our clients and supporters. We recognize there will be a lot of additional work over the next few years but it will all be worth it in the end. Blind & Vision Rehab continues to do amazing things for the individuals we serve. Once we eliminate the transportation barriers, the possibilities will be endless for the agency. As Helen Keller says, "Alone, we can do so little. Together, we can do so much."

Look for regular updates on our progress through emails and future newsletters. Your continued support will move this organization to new heights. 

## *Bring on the Challenge!*


Evell Jones likes challenges — whether they involve learning new skills for his job or even just the challenge of getting to work every day. This bold and positive attitude landed Evell an Employee of the Year nomination by Pennsylvania Industries for the Blind and Handicapped, Inc. (PIBH).

Evell started working for PBA Industries, the manufacturing and assembly division of Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh in 2011 when he moved to Pittsburgh from Chicago. He joined the staff as a utility worker, but wanted to learn all he could about the agency and the different products it produced. As a result, he now is able to do multiple jobs within PBA Industries.

“My favorite thing about coming to work at PBA Industries is the people I work with,” Evell says. “They are amazing every day.” He was ecstatic about being nominated for Employee of the Year by PIBH. “I never thought that someone like me would have such an honor.”

“He takes every job asked of him and looks for ways to make the job more efficient, productive and accommodating to persons with vision loss,” says Tara Zimmerman, director of PBA Industries. “Evell volunteers to try new things and once he learns something, he helps to train his co-workers so they can add to their skills. He’s a strong leader and advocates on behalf of himself and his co-workers.”



Off the job, Evell is a member of a blind bowling league in which he is undefeated in all events. He also participates in a sighted league. Between the two leagues, Evell has bowled six perfect 300 games. He is a member of the National Organization for Albinism and Hypopigmentation. Evell sits on the board of the nonprofit group Life Ain't Scripted, Inc., and he mentors young adults with albinism. 

## ***New Technology Allows For Expanded Vision Screenings***

One in every 20 children has an undetected vision problem, but those numbers will likely improve for the children of Allegheny County thanks to the efforts of Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh and its trained vision screeners, who have started to use the PlusOptix screening device.


This new device, which screens both eyes simultaneously in less than a second, will expand our former Preschool Vision Screening program into the new Children's Vision Screening program for children ages 6 months to 6 years and will enable Blind & Vision Rehab

to provide this free service to greater numbers of Allegheny County children. The goal is to triple the number of children screened during the 2013-14 school year.

The device provides immediate pass/fail results for

- Amblyopia
- Far-sightedness (hyperopia)
- Shortsightedness (myopia)
- Astigmatism, which results in blurred vision
- Anisometropia, a lack of balance between each eye's ability to refract light
- Corneal reflexes for eye misalignment
- Anisocoria, or unequal pupil sizes

Color discrimination screening is also provided to children 3 years of age and older. If deviations from normal vision are detected during the screening, parents are notified and encouraged to follow up with an eye care professional.

Since its inception 45 years ago, Blind & Vision Rehab's screening program — our foremost contribution to the prevention of blindness — has benefited more than 250,000 preschool-aged children throughout Allegheny County. If you know of a local day care center or preschool where vision screening is not currently provided, please contact Diane Pakler, 412-368-4400 ext. 2293, or [dpakler@pghvis.org](mailto:dpakler@pghvis.org). 



### ***Vision Screeners Honored***

The Preschool Vision Screening staff (now Children's Vision Screening) were honored by the Allegheny Intermediate Unit for contributions to the children enrolled in the Early Head Start and Head Start Programs.

## ***Access Technology Staff Provide Website Accessibility Assessments***

Our Access Technology Center (ATC) is known for providing expert technology assessments for individuals who are vision impaired. That expertise has now been tapped for providing assessments on the accessibility of websites.


Recently, ATC was approached by National Industries for the Blind (NIB) to provide website accessibility assessments for its own site [www.nib.org](http://www.nib.org) and its 75th anniversary site [www.nib.org/75th-anniversary](http://www.nib.org/75th-anniversary) for accessibility. ATC currently is working with our sister agencies to submit bids to provide website accessibility assessment for the federal gov-

ernment.

Website accessibility is crucial to persons who are blind or vision impaired so they are able to easily access and use information that is shared on the Internet.

Our assessment process on accessibility involves navigating the website using a variety of access technology, including screen reading software, Braille displays and screen magnification, to determine how easy it is to find and process information. We also use a variety of Internet browsers for site navigation. Accessibility reports are then sent to the organization's web developers.

As part of the process, a users' group of persons with differing backgrounds and abilities is set up, and members are asked to perform certain tasks on the website. The users' group provides a report on its progress that includes problems and recommendations for improving the site. Once that data is compiled, we provide it to the website developer.

ATC has been assessing websites on request for more than a decade, and has worked with Pennsylvania Electric Choice, Community College of Allegheny County and Johnson & Johnson. We are happy to assist businesses and corporations of all sizes. Contact Barb Peterson, 412-368-4400 ext. 2245, to discuss website accessibility. 



*Access Technology Center  
staff member Art Rizzino.*

# Talk Tech Thursdays: *Providing Value*

*By Ellen Goldfon*

Twice monthly, a lively and inquisitive group of students meet in the Access Technology Center at Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh. Our subject: computer talk. Led by energetic, enterprising entrepreneur Richard Kuzma, whose hobby is providing refurbished computers to individuals who are blind or visually impaired, the group usually is made up of three to five eager participants who swap ideas and computer know-how over coffee and treats. I am one of those eager participants.

The group originated under the umbrella of a supported Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield initiative for employment preparedness, but soon evolved into a gathering of good friends who share one love: computers.

Says Rich, “Once the employment training was completed, I became very interested in continuing what we had started three months prior in our job readiness program. By then, so many of us had formed genuine friendships, and continuing this beneficial gathering made sense for each of us.”

Each of us comes to the table with our own reasons for remaining active. As a recently retired writer of articles for the web at the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children, I found myself — like so many new retirees — asking the question, “Is this all there is?” as I attempted to awkwardly acclimate myself to the new challenges of retirement. The old resume needed serious work — and so did I — so with some trepidation, I timidly

entered the job readiness class along with at least 10 other eager professionals.

A lifelong visually challenged woman, I am accustomed to living as a blind person. Computers have been an integral facet of my everyday life, so I found myself in awe of my classmates who, unlike me, were still in the process of acclimating to a world that had changed dramatically for each of them due to the rapid onset of blindness. When a disability as potentially devastating as partial or total blindness enters the otherwise everyday life of a person, tasks once thought to be a snap have to be relearned. It made me wonder: Were I forced to encounter such an unforgiving life circumstance, could I be even half as resilient as my new friends?

An ongoing creative process, our group of friends solves problems for each member. Family man and father of five grown children, Albert receives valuable assistance with upcoming job fairs and catching on to the intricacies of the NVDA screen reader.

A comptroller for a large corporation, Sarah finds herself in a new city — Pittsburgh — and having to relearn new methods for doing accounting, which she has done for more than 13 years. Originally from a small town in Kentucky, Sarah is forced to acclimate to a much larger city and to new ways of doing her life’s work.


A businessman who owned his own company, Richard also finds himself adjusting to an abrupt onset of sight loss, but is able to combine an avid interest and love for comput-

# able Computer Knowledge to BVRS Alums

ers that he had prior to becoming blind with newly acquired resourcefulness.

A program slated to last only a year has burgeoned into what promises to be a lifelong gathering of good friends. Every week provides a new discussion topic, a wish by each of us to help one another, and a true eager-

ness to see what adventures await us around each corner.

If you would like to become a part of our computer users group or know someone who would benefit, contact ATC instructor Tracey Morsek at 412-368-4400 ext. 3414. 




*Talk Techers, pictured from left, Sarah Lucas, Rich Kuzma, Albert Schartzberg and Ellen Goldfon.*

## Former Client Returns to Volunteer *(continued from page 1)*

company to “sitting around at home” with no vision. “After three weeks I said, ‘I’m not going to sit here. This is stupid. I need to do something.’”

So, Richard called Blind & Vision Rehab. Last June, he received training at the Access Technology Center and returned in the fall for Personal Adjustment to Blindness Training.

When he’s not helping out at Blind & Vision Rehab, Richard is refurbishing — or “repurposing” as he likes to call it — old or broken computers with accessibility software. He then gives the computers to persons with vision impairments, including his friends from the alumni computer users group. Check out Richard’s website [EyesFree.org](http://EyesFree.org). 

Welcome to the new sensory garden at BVRS that was designed and created by Matthew Scotti (pictured below left), an Eagle Scout candidate from Mt. Lebanon and volunteer for our summer program for teens. A sensory garden is specifically created to be accessible and enjoyable to persons with a disability and provides individual and combined sensory opportunities that they may not normally experience. Located near the front entrance to our Homestead building, our garden is a beautiful space for clients to enjoy flowers, herbs, a water fountain, and benches. Matthew raised more than \$2,500, along with donations of topsoil, stones, and the water fountain. Thank you, Matthew!



Blind & Vision Rehab's annual "Girls' Night Out" fundraiser was at the historic Hollywood Theater in Dormont and featured a private screening of "Wait Until Dark," starring Audrey Hepburn. Each spring, women from all over Pittsburgh come to this event to shop, watch a great movie and support our mission. At left, Cindy Brown decides what to buy from vendor Marsha Murman of Chloe's Adornments. The event raised approximately \$5,000.





**B**lind & Vision Rehab honored Art Rooney II, president and co-owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers, as its 2013 Person of Vision. The celebration took place at Heinz Field, and Sy Holzer, president of PNC Bank-Pittsburgh, served as honorary chairman. Pictured from left are Sy Holzer, BVRs President Erika Arbogast, Art Rooney and Board Vice Chairman Dr. Louis A. Lobes Jr. The event raised \$135,000.



**T**hanks to the celebrities, players, sponsors, volunteers, and staff for a perfect day of golf at Diamond Run for our annual Steelers Alumni Golf Classic. We're well on our way to hitting the \$2 million mark over the 17 years of this fantastic event. We honored Matt Bahr — pictured with BVRs Board Member Amanda Cavill — with the Old Ranger Award, given each year to a former Steeler. Winning golfers, representing Mosites Construction, were Steve Mosites, Dave Sunseri, Erik Bertrand and Jason Malatak, playing with Troy Benson.



Our new Young Professionals Group hosted an exciting evening of sushi rolling taught by Penn Avenue Fish Co. experts at the ToonSeum. Kristen Gigliotti, a former student in our summer program for teens, gave our 71 guests some insight about her amazing experience at BVRs. The event raised \$3,500. If you are interested in joining our young professionals team or learning more, contact Leslie Montgomery, 412-368-4400 ext. 2253.



We've been recognized for our more than 300 percent increase to the 2013 Scouting for Food Drive. Boy Scouts started this drive in 1987, with businesses and organizations such as BVRs joining in to help feed the hungry in southwestern Pennsylvania. Our Employment Transition Program participants collected food donations and Community Transition Program participants shopped for food with cash donations. Pictured above are Bill Park, director of programs, Laurel Highlands Council, Boy Scouts of America; Meghan Patton, ETS team leader; ETS Food Scouters Angie DiBattiste and Erin Wagoner; and Carole Nadzam, BVRs executive assistant.



Thank you to Discovery Christian Church for sponsoring "A Night To Remember," a formal "prom" evening for young adults who have developmental, physical or mental disabilities. Our Employment Opportunities Program staff helped to get our students to the prom. Pictured at right walking the red carpet is Sikira Scheetz.

## ***BVRS Names New Board Members...***

***Bert Maier***, director, systems integration, Deloitte Consulting LLP.

***Stephanae McCoy***, member, Pennsylvania Council for the Blind and Golden Triangle Council for the Blind.

***Patricia Orringer***, secretary-treasurer, United Bronze of Pittsburgh, Inc.

***Cynthia Troup***, business consultant.

## ***... and Welcomes New Employees***

***Saderia Wiley*** has joined the Client Services department as an employment training specialist.

***Sally Taylor*** has joined the Administration department as vice president of finance and administration.

***Lisa Gamrat*** has joined the Client Services department a Community Transi-

tion Program specialist.

***Mary Lou Hunt*** has joined the Client Services department as a monitor.

***Leah Vietmeier*** has joined the Client Services department as a Community Transition Program specialist. 



**S**taff and participants in our Employment Transition and Community Transition programs attended the Celebration of Success luncheon hosted by the Intellectual Disabilities Committee of the Conference of Allegheny Providers. The celebration recognized the many accomplishments of individuals who live and work in the community. John Schneider, second from right, of the Community Transition Program was recognized for his positive attitude. He is pictured with, from left, Bobby Akers, Heather Peterson and Tara Ursiny.



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**AFFILIATIONS:**

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