



The Spectacle

Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh

SPECIAL ISSUE Summer 2015

New Beginnings —

Bringing Together Services, Clients, Staff



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



Erika Arbogast

Remarkable events mark the history of Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh (BVRs). We celebrated our centennial five years ago. We've experienced two agencies joining together to have a greater impact on individuals who are blind, vision impaired, or who have other disabilities.

Now we embark on an extraordinary new beginning that will bring all of our services, all of our staff, and all of our clients together under one roof in a central location with nearby and frequent public transportation.

BVRs' new home is 1816 Locust Street in Pittsburgh's Uptown neighborhood (see the building rendering on the front page). We have designed this location specifically to deliver our services in a more efficient way with a client-centered, integrated approach. The five-story, 87,000-square-foot headquarters building with an accessible rooftop gives us additional space in which to operate. By enhancing our current programming and adding additional services in one central facility, we can provide a community of support for our clients, which our research tells us will result in an increase in the number of people we serve.

A state-of-the-art, more accessible facility for both clients and staff is crucial to growing and flourishing in the future. We are extremely excited about the many new opportunities we will have to change the lives of persons with vision loss and other disabilities by fostering independence and individual choice. We look forward to moving into our new home by the end of the year.

Thank you for embarking on this new beginning with us. We are delighted to have you join with our visionary Board of Directors and exceptional staff as we build new opportunities to serve persons who are vision impaired or who have other disabilities. 🌅



Local Officials, Public Treated to Preview of New Building

Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services (BVRS) held a press conference in late March to preview our new headquarters in Pittsburgh's Uptown neighborhood. The new location provides people who are blind, vision impaired, or who have other disabilities a place to learn, socialize, and engage in programming that meets their needs. BVRS invited special guests state Sen. Wayne Fontana and Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald, who along with Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto's office have provided vital support and enthusiasm throughout the agency's relocation process, to address the attendees.

Sen. Fontana, who represents a large portion of the City of Pittsburgh, said at the building preview, "This is an exciting time for the Uptown neighborhood, with the addition of Blind and Vision Rehabilitation Services helping to drive economic revitalization. The agency has developed a creative re-use of an existing building, with one of the hallmarks being a 5,000-square-foot rooftop garden that not only directly relates to their mission but also contributes to the beautification and green initiatives of the neighborhood."

'This move is essential to our community and will create 11 new permanent jobs, many of which will be filled by individuals with disabilities...'

Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald reiterated the Senator's remarks and explained the county's role in supporting the project with a \$200,000 Community Infrastructure and Tourism Fund Grant, which supports construction of the rooftop garden. He added, "This move is essential to our community and will create 11 new permanent jobs, many of which will be filled by individuals with disabilities, especially within the manufacturing and assembly division at BVRS, and retain 83 existing positions."



Erika Arbogast with state Sen. Wayne Fontana and County Executive Rich Fitzgerald.

In closing remarks, Agency President Erika Arbogast detailed some reasons for the move: "We serve a population that doesn't have the opportunity to drive. They often rely on public transportation, which is very sparse at our current location. After hearing loud and clear from our program participants and others in the community that our location was the biggest barrier to services, we decided to seek an alternate location, which is 1816 Locust Street. Our new home will be a place full of hope and potential." 🌅

New Opportunities to Change the Lives of Persons with Vision Loss



SARAH LUCAS

In a new city, unemployed, and losing her eyesight, Sarah was referred to Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services by the state Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services. Here, she received training through our Access Technology Center on computer magnification and screen reading software, an essential for Sarah to continue her career as a comptroller. She also participated in a job readiness class, which helped her to regain confidence and taught her to be comfortable when explaining her eye disease. Her training and restored confidence have paid off. Sarah now takes two buses to work and two buses home from her job here in the accounting department at Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services.



LOUISE CHUHA

Louise was born blind, but is undeterred by her vision loss. She dreamed of a full life, of marriage, and of a career, and that vision has become a reality for her. Before coming to Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services as a rehabilitation teacher, Louise lived with her husband in Connecticut, where she taught computer classes and braille. Now retired, she continues her relationship with Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services as one of our loyal volunteers, who, among other things, mentors current clients. Louise also volunteers for other organizations and sings in her church choir.

Rooftop Garden



Our new building will have an accessible facility on the roof to provide adaptive training for clients who are blind or vision impaired. The Rooftop Sensory Garden will provide a controlled environment where our rehabilitation instructors will help clients build confidence as they navigate various travel scenarios, such as concrete sidewalks, grassy areas, and raised curbs when going to work, to school, or shopping. The Rooftop Garden also will feature sensory stimulating plants, fountains, bird feeders and other features such as wind chimes. In addition, the green space will provide our staff and clients a safe place to exercise their guide dogs.

Pediatric Exam Room



The Children's Vision Screening Program is our foremost contribution to the prevention of blindness. Its goal is to identify children experiencing vision problems and ultimately refer them to eye care specialists for diagnosis and treatment. Our new home will feature an expanded Pediatric Vision Screening Department. These new accommodations will house "kid-friendly" furnishings to reduce anxiety and increase compliance during examinations and training.

BVRS offers intensive, full-immersion, residential training, lasting anywhere from 4 to 12 weeks for persons with vision loss. Clients, who come from across the United States, receive individualized, one-on-one instruction in orientation and mobility, communication skills, and daily living activities, such as meal preparation, room cleaning, shopping trips, and leisure outings in a real-life setting. Research has shown that full-immersion residential training programs help individuals with vision loss adapt better and more quickly to their personal surroundings when they return home.

Training Kitchen



Erika's Rachel Carson Challenge

Challenge is an understatement.

June 20th, the day of the Rachel Carson Trail Challenge, dawned dreary, soggy, warm, and humid. And then it rained for the last five hours of the hike. Much of the narrow trail was muddy, “like quicksand,” Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services President Erika Arbogast explained.

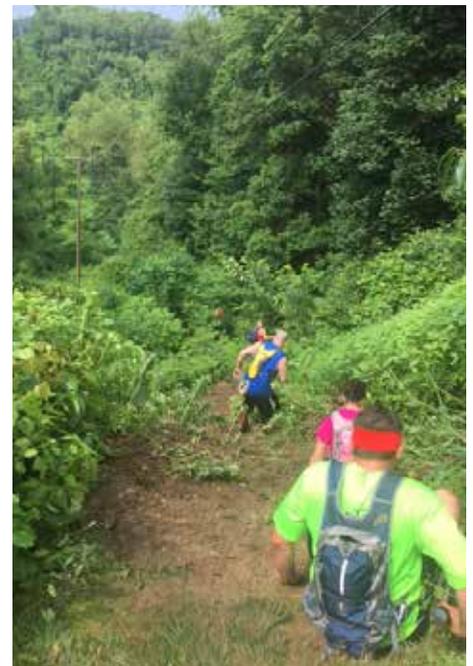
The Rachel Carson Trail Challenge is a 34-mile long, one-day, sunrise-to-sunset endurance hike. Unlike a footrace, the challenge is not to win but to endure, to finish the hike in one day. Erika undertook the challenge to raise awareness of the programs offered at Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh and to support the agency's relocation later this year to the Uptown neighborhood of Pittsburgh.

“Earlier this year as we were deeply focused on our plans for a new headquarters building that will consolidate our two locations into one and bring all of our services under one roof, I decided we really needed another goal to support our consolidation efforts,” Erika said. “That goal is to create awareness for our programs. The public needs to know about these services.”

Erika took on the Rachel Carson Trail Challenge as she does all of life's challenges: with analysis, planning, determination, and focus. For months she trained, many times climbing the stairs at the Cathedral of Learning, the University of Pittsburgh's 42-story educational building. In the end, she endured. “The challenge to endure is the same philosophy we teach our clients,” Erika explained. “It is not about winning the race, but enduring through the challenges they face both during training at the agency and managing their everyday lives.

“With the support of family, friends and my co-workers, I chose this challenge for a variety of reasons,” Erika said. “It forced me outside of my comfort zone. Also, I knew it wouldn't be easy, but at the end of the 34-mile long hike, I could take this experience and apply it to areas in my life.”

Erika exceeded her goal to raise \$10,000 to support the relocation of Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services from Homestead to Uptown. There is still time to take the challenge to support Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services as we embark on our new beginning to a newly renovated building with a new awareness of what we do and who we serve: www.crowdrise.com/erikasrachelcarsonchallenge/fundraiser/BVRSPittsburgh. 🌞





Thank you to the corporations, foundations, and individuals who have generously supported our New Beginnings Capital Campaign. Our new location will provide a collaborative environment that enables BVRS to meet all of the needs of our clients and employees in a single setting. To date, we have raised \$2.4 million toward our goal of \$2.7 million. However, we won't stop fundraising when we reach

\$2.7 million. Every dollar we raise above the goal will make a tremendous impact on our clients and agency by enhancing our programming and providing additional improvements to the new building. We are extremely grateful for the support and commitment of the community toward our New Beginnings!

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 Homestead District Lions Club
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 The Auxiliary, BVRS
 Wilkins Elks Lodge No. 577

*Also contributed to Rachel Carson Challenge.



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