



# The Spectacle

Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh

Fall 2015

## Taking Baby Steps Each Day

### Retired Nurse Adjusts to Sudden Blindness

Five years ago, Carolyn Hartner retired from her job as a transplant unit nurse. Both she and her husband were enjoying retirement very much.

That exciting chapter of the Hartners' lives stopped abruptly one year ago. While Carolyn was recovering from back surgery, she suffered a pulmonary embolism that

compromised the blood supply to her optic nerve. She really does not remember much of the incident except waking up with no sight.

Today, Carolyn remains totally blind, and doctors have told her that she probably will never regain her sight. She cries a bit when she tells her story. Yet her outlook is amazingly positive despite having spent nine months in either a hospital or rehabilitation facility — bedridden for most of that time — and having to come to grips with her sudden blindness.

"I've certainly had my ups and downs," Carolyn explains. "But pre-blindness, I was the person who saw the



glass half-full. That's my personality.

"So, I had two choices: Number one: I could feel sorry for myself. Number two: I could move on. I don't want to use my energies to focus on why this happened to me. I want to move ahead."

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



*Erika Arbogast*

As president of Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh, I have the privilege of talking with many people and there are certain messages that I hear consistently. One of them is that we are the best-kept secret!


That makes me very proud of my staff and the work that we do to change the lives of persons who are blind or vision impaired. It also concerns me greatly that people in the community who need our services don't know who we are, what we do, or that we are here to help.

Our new building's location will help to make our presence known. The address is 1816 Locust Street, two blocks from UPMC Mercy Hospital with the back of the building adjacent to the Boulevard of the Allies. People will now actually see us from Downtown, the Side South, Oakland, and other areas of Pittsburgh. Moving our headquarters and consolidating two locations into one is not enough.

In addition to our relocation plans, we have launched an exciting new marketing plan. For the past few months, people have been hearing about us on NewsRadio 1020 KDKA AM and Star 100.7 FM. In addition to these radio commercials, Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services was one of the sponsors for the 32nd KDKA Spaghetti Breakfast held in September at the Heinz Hall Garden Plaza in Downtown Pittsburgh. I also had the pleasure of spending time and talking with Rob Pratte about the agency and our new building for his "Pittsburgh Works" radio program on NewsRadio 1020 KDKA. In mid-October, we again teamed up with KDKA radio to host a radiothon to raise awareness and much needed dollars for our agency and our clients.

We also have been airing TV commercials on WTAE. (Find us on YouTube!)

Thank you for taking the time to get to know us better and to learn about the amazing support and hope we provide to those who are blind or vision impaired. Now, will you do us another favor? Tell someone else!

We want everyone to know about us. 

# ***BVRs Expands Services to Residents in Southwestern PA***

Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh now offers employment support services in Fayette, Greene, and Washington counties and children vision screenings, transportation services, and support groups in Somerset County for individuals who have vision loss or other disabilities.

## ***Uniontown Office***

John McCune heads our new office in Uniontown and brings 18 years of workforce development experience to the employment support program. This program assists employers with recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified workers with vision loss or other disabilities. Job seekers receive help finding competitive employment through resume and interview preparation, job-seeking skill de-

velopment, community-based assessments, work site analysis for accommodations, job coaching, and follow-up services.

## ***Somerset Office***

VisionCorps of Somerset County and its employees joined BVRs in July 2015. Services provided to Somerset clients remain the same and are being coordinated from the same location.

BVRs President Erika Arbogast said, "We are extremely excited about the opportunity to provide services in our neighboring counties in southwestern Pennsylvania.

"The proximity of Pittsburgh to Fayette, Greene, Washington, and Somerset counties will allow for additional services to persons in those areas who are blind or vision impaired. We are thrilled to now be a part of this expanded community."

For more information about these locations:

Uniontown office

140 N. Beeson Ave.


Uniontown, PA 15401

724-430-6427

Somerset office

1590 N. Center Ave.

Somerset, PA 15501

814-445-1310 



*BVRs staff in Somerset County, from left, Linda Karosic, Mike Yoder, and Becky Fidler*

## Taking Baby Steps Each Day

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that with the help of incredibly supportive family and friends and the staff at Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh.

Carolyn's family is small — her husband, her daughter, and her two grandchildren — and very caring. She says, "I have a lot to live for."

She also has a wonderful circle of friends who, along with her family, provide love and encouragement to keep her moving forward. While Carolyn was hospitalized, her friends put together a visitation schedule so she would not be alone in her hospital room. She described that time as isolating: "Blindness


was so new to me. All I had was a call button (to summon a nurse)." Now that Carolyn is back home, her friends continue to help by taking her out.

The staff at Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services has made those outings a bit easier by designing specific mobility training for Carolyn. She learned to use a white cane with a walker for her back problems. She also learned to read Braille and to use assistive technology for computers and smart phones.

"Who knew about all of these gadgets and gizmos?" Carolyn says. "This technology is wonderful."

Wonderful is a word that Carolyn uses again and again to describe her six-week stay at Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services. "It has just been a wonderful experience. The staff and their commitment and dedication and kindness... They are so attentive," Carolyn says.

"I'm a nurse by background, and until you are affected personally by something like this, you have no idea..."

"But I am finding that I can do most things as before but in different ways. Every day I'm taking baby steps," Carolyn says. "...just as long as I get there." 



# BVRS Staff Welcomes Pope to USA


Even though Pope Francis did not stop in Pittsburgh during his recent visit to the United States, workers in our Industries division had a hand in his welcome to Philadelphia.

Our employees made road signs, towels, and pillowcases that were needed during the Pope's stay in the eastern part of our state. Specifically:

- Eight orange reflective 36" x 36" Road Closed Ahead signs
- Twelve orange reflective 48" x 48" Road Closed Ahead signs
- 2,208 white towels
- 200 white pillowcases



*Industries worker Larry Sell*

While our workers manufacture these items on a daily basis, this was a very special work order from state and local officials who were preparing to accommodate hundreds of thousands of visitors to Philadelphia. "We were very excited to be a part of Pope Francis' historical visit," BVRS President Erika Arbogast said. 

## Artists Hold 'Block Party' at Children's Museum




*Client/artist Paula Karafa*

Our Community Transition and Senior Transition programs hosted their annual art exhibit showcasing clients' works at the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh in August and September. An opening reception was held at the museum on August 13th.

The "Block Party" art show and exhibit was centered on a neighborhood theme and featured works created by adults with disabilities. Proceeds from the sale of the artwork and crafts

are reinvested into our programs for adults with disabilities.

The Community Transition Program seeks to develop, improve, and expand life-long learning opportunities for adults who have physical impairments or developmental delays. The Senior Transition Program offers a stimulating day of structured activities designed to enrich the lives of older adults with vision loss, hearing loss, and/or other disabilities. 

## Happenings



*Randy Dearth and  
Evan Frazier*

Randall S. Dearth, president and chief executive officer of Calgon Carbon, was the honoree of our 2015 Person of Vision event. This year's celebration took place on May 19th at Heinz Field. Evan S. Frazier, senior vice president of Highmark Health, was the honorary chairman and NewsRadio 1020 KDKA's Rob Pratte served as master of ceremonies. This year's event raised more than \$55,000 to support our clients and agency. We are grateful to Randy and Evan for making the evening a tremendous success and to our guests and the following sponsors: Calgon Carbon, The Auxiliary, BVRS, Gordon Terminal Service, Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, PNC Bank, A. Martini & Co., Associates in Ophthalmology, BNY Mellon, Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney, P.C., Mutual of America, Neishloss & Fleming, Inc., St. Lucy's Auxiliary to the Blind, and UPMC Health Plan.



*Rob Pratte during  
the live auction of a  
dinner prepared by  
Heinz Field chefs*



*Neal Rivers, Mike Pfeifer, Rich Yohe, and Mike  
Anderson with Steelers celebrity Marv Kellum*

We hosted the 19th annual Steelers Alumni Golf Classic at Diamond Run Golf Club on Monday, July 27th. The winning team (pictured at left) was from Easley & Rivers, followed by Glass America, Ricoh Americas Corp., and Mutual of America. This year's golf classic was another success, bringing the grand total from our annual outing to more than \$2.1 million! Thank you to our sponsors: 84 Lumber, PNC Bank, Calgon Carbon, Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, Neishloss & Fleming, and UPMC Health Plan.

## Thank You, Nancy Schepis

For 25 years Nancy Schepis served as our volunteer coordinator. A volunteer herself, Nancy trained others to work with our blind and visually impaired clients while she tirelessly logged tens of thousands of her own volunteer hours.


This summer she retired, and we already miss her tremendously.



“She is an inspiration. For us, there will never be another person like her,” Erika Arbogast, BVRS president, said.

Before taking on the volunteer coordinator position, Nancy volunteered as a mobility aide at The Greater Pittsburgh Guild for the Blind starting in 1973. Nancy was a committed and loyal volunteer and BVRS is forever grateful for her service.

In 2010, Nancy was awarded the prestigious Senator John Heinz Award for outstanding community service, which resulted in \$10,000 to BVRS on her behalf from the United Way.

“I am very grateful for my time at the agency,” Nancy said. She added, “Retirement hasn’t quite set in just yet; my internal clock is still getting me up at 5:00 a.m.” 

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## BVRS Welcomes New Employees

**Tony Leonzio** is our new maintenance coordinator.

**John McCune** heads our Uniontown office and **Jonathan Jodon** and **Bonny Bryner-Flowers** are Employment Support Services job coaches.

**Brian Rutherford** is a sewer in PBA Industries.

**Lisa Savinda** is our new Support Services/Transportation specialist.

**Ervin Pete** is a monitor in the Client Services Department.

**Jack Hatley** is a program specialist in Employment Transition Services.

**Tom Armstrong** is the Career Transition professional at the University of Pittsburgh.

**Sarah Lucas** is an accounting clerk in the Accounting Department.

Transportation Specialists **Linda Karosic** and **Mike**

**Yoder** and Vision Screener **Becky Fidler** from the Somerset County Blind Association, a division of BVRS, have joined the agency staff.

**Michelle Kuntz** is the new office manager for the Low Vision Department.

**Ryan Nichols** is a utility worker in PBA Industries.

**Maria Stewart** is a new Children’s Vision Screening technician.



**Blind & Vision Rehabilitation  
Services of Pittsburgh  
1800 West Street  
Homestead, PA 15120**

*Helping people who are blind or vision impaired achieve their goals*

United Way: Code 885171

Combined Federal Campaign: Code 48567

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Phone: 412-368-4400  
TDD: 412-368-4095  
[www.bvrspittsburgh.org](http://www.bvrspittsburgh.org)

Fax: 412-368-4090  
Toll Free PA: 800-706-5050



Director of Development and Public Relations: Leslie Montgomery-Reidenbaugh  
Editor: Debra S. Meyer Proofreader: Branden R. Glass

**AFFILIATIONS:**

National Accreditation Council  
Pennsylvania Association for the Blind  
UniqueSource Products and Services  
National Industries for the Blind

