



## Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh

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



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# Dear Friends,

**2**015 marked an extraordinary new beginning that is bringing our clients, services, and staff all together in a newly renovated facility centrally located in Pittsburgh's Uptown neighborhood.



*Erika Arbogast  
President*

Acquiring and renovating our new headquarters required a major investment, which was partially funded through a \$2.7 million capital campaign. We are delighted to report that we have surpassed our goal by \$290,000 and continue to raise dollars to support expanded programming and services, like our rooftop sensory garden.

The success of this project and the campaign are the result of the hard work and dedication of many individuals, including the members of our Board of Directors, all of whom supported the campaign, and our staff who contributed an amazing \$35,000. The dedication of our leadership and staff demonstrates the importance of our relocation and our commitment to individuals who are blind or vision impaired.



*Louis A. Lobes, Jr., M.D.  
Board Chairman*

As preparations for our move continued, we expanded services for persons who are blind or vision impaired into neighboring counties. We now offer employment support services in Fayette, Greene, and Washington counties, and we offer vision screenings for children, transportation services, and support groups through our Somerset County Blind Association division. We also entered a new phase in an innovative partnership with Giant Eagle, the University of Pittsburgh, and the United Way that prepares transitioning youth with disabilities for competitive employment. Please read "Our Achievements" on page 5 to learn more about this exciting program.

We look forward to a great first year in our new headquarters and anticipate even more amazing changes in the lives of persons with vision loss.

Thank you for your continued support. We are appreciative of you, our generous donors and loyal friends, who are committed to our mission.

*Please enjoy the new look of our Annual Report. We've designed it to be brief in form but comprehensive in scope!*

# OUR SERVICES

Last year, approximately 14,000 children and 1,000 teens and adults throughout southwestern Pennsylvania found hope in our comprehensive and personalized services. We are a nationally accredited nonprofit that believes in independence through rehabilitation. Our mission is to change the lives of persons with vision loss and other disabilities by fostering independence and individual choice.

## Individuals Served in 2015



### REHABILITATION PROGRAMS

Computer Training  
Low Vision Rehabilitation  
Adjustment to  
Blindness Training  
Independence Skill  
Building  
In-home Training

**607**



### EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

Teen School-to-Work  
Program  
Individual and Employer  
Support Services  
Employment Training  
Industrial Employment  
Program

**204**



### COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Vision Screening for  
Children and Adults  
Structured Day  
Programs  
Case Management

**14,208**

# OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

## *Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services Plays Major Role in Preparing Youth for Employment*

**G**ainful employment fosters independence and individual choice for persons with disabilities, and we, as an agency, are passionate about this.

Over the past year, we forged a unique partnership with the United Way and Giant Eagle called the Career Transition Project. The concept behind the project is simple, yet innovative: Our employee Barb Graham is the embedded career transition professional at Giant Eagle and is there to help high school students with disabilities obtain work exposure and paid employment, as well as to work with team members to ensure employment success. This joint venture has been phenomenally successful.

The project was launched as a pilot in August 2013 in partnership with the United Way of Allegheny County's 21 and Able Program, the Allegheny County Executive's Office, and Giant Eagle, Inc. The initial goal was to employ 24 high school students during the first two years of the project, but nearly triple that number participated in the program. Giant Eagle employed 65 students and worked with an additional 375 others. For many, this was a first job that provided invaluable experience during their transition from high school to post-secondary education or to working careers. They worked in a variety of areas such as the bakery, prepared foods, deli, produce, WetGo, and the front end.

The Career Transition Project was so successful that the United Way received funding from a national foundation. In the winter of 2014, the United Way was awarded a \$378,000 grant from the Kessler Foundation to expand the project and to include more local employers. The University of Pittsburgh has joined the project and BVRs employee Tom Armstrong is the career transition liaison there. Eleven individuals have found gainful employment at Pitt, and Tom continues to work with many others.





Adam has a simple goal in life: ***“I just want to learn how to make it on my own.”*** He’s on his way to achieving that goal after completing our Adjustment to Blindness Training program. Adam has learned to read Braille, to cook, to use a white cane, and to sew. “I’m just amazed at all the stuff that’s out there to help,” he says. Music is an important part of Adam’s life – he started playing the trumpet when he was 8 – and he hopes to use his new skills to further his interest in musical instrument repair and learn to play piano, guitar, and banjo.



## IN THEIR

Emily is among the teenagers with vision impairments who attend our five-week summer career and community adjustment program where they learn to navigate life after high school. ***“I’m definitely thankful for the skills I’ve learned here...”*** The teachers are energetic and committed to helping us. They are teaching us the skills we need which is very good for all of us.” Emily likens her instructors to “stepping stones on our path of life. They are helping us to grow and have the skills we need to become successful adults.”



Angela's struggle with vision loss has been a long, and at times, exhausting journey. ***"I cried. I was terrified. I just didn't know how to be this blind person."*** But since coming to Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services, she has overcome her vision loss and gained confidence in herself and in her abilities. Angela has moved to her own apartment and has enrolled in an urban university where she plans to graduate with a bachelor's degree in public relations and advertising.



## WORDS...



Carolyn developed sudden blindness following a pulmonary embolism that compromised the blood supply to her optic nerve. She was rushed to the hospital but when she regained consciousness, her vision was gone. Her doctors say that she probably will not regain her sight. Following a "wonderful" six-week stay at Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services, this positive, retired nurse continues to see the glass half-full and her outlook is so positive. ***"I don't want to use my energies to focus on why this happened to me. I want to move forward."***

# KEY LEADERSHIP

## *Michael Zaken*

Former Client, Board Member



*Michael Zaken and his wife Judy*

**M**ichael Zaken is serving his third term on Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services Board of Directors. His leadership commitment started in 2007 and since then he has become a true advocate for BVRs. As an individual who is vision impaired and a former client, Michael brings a unique perspective to the Board of Directors. "I am able to look at the agency from the inside out."

Michael serves not only as a Board member but also as a volunteer helping with the agency's White Cane Awareness Day celebration each October, participating in test groups for our Access Technology Center, and supporting the technology users group for former BVRs clients.

Michael also likes to give back to the community. In retirement after 38 years of working in the computer field for corporate giants Rockwell International, Gulf Oil, and US Steel, Michael is a busy man. He serves as treasurer of the Pennsylvania Council of the Blind and president of the Pleasant Hills Lions Club. "I like to keep active," he says.

"I have been helped through the years by Blind and Vision Rehabilitation Services and the state Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services. What they did for me, the services they provided, has helped me to be successful and I want others to have the same opportunities."



# A FAMILY AFFAIR

## *Michele Antonelli*

Volunteer, Board Member



*Denise Gipson, Michele Antonelli,  
and Jessica Antonelli*

**M**ichele Antonelli's passion for Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services began more than 20 years ago as a member of St. Lucy's Auxiliary to the Blind, which supports BVRs through fundraising. At the completion of her role as Medallion Ball chairperson, Michele was asked, and happily agreed, to help plan a special fundraising event for BVRs. She has been supporting the agency as a volunteer and donor ever since.

Her passion for the agency has grown throughout the years, particularly during those early fundraisers she helped plan. "We invited clients to speak and I realized how BVRs gave these individuals their lives back. The organization gives people a new lease on life, and I want to be a part of that."

Michele's commitment continues to grow in her new role as a member of the Board of Directors. "I am so pleased to have been asked to do this. I believe as a Board member I can do more."

In addition to her work with the Board, she is a wonderful ambassador for the agency. Michele continues to work on our Girls' Night Out committee with her daughter, Jessica, and her sister, Denise Gipson. For Michele it was an easy decision to engage her daughter and sister to support BVRs. "We have been volunteering together for years and working together is a family affair. We are so proud of this event and the impact it has on clients' lives."

# FINANCIAL INFORMATION

## CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF ACTIVITIES

YEARS ENDED JUNE 30, 2015 AND 2014

	2015	2014
<b>Unrestricted Net Assets:</b>		
Support and revenues:		
Service income	\$ 2,063,585	\$ 1,887,893
Sales	2,393,608	1,831,739
Donations and grants	2,838,861	1,324,865
Investment income	293,752	208,466
Income from trusts	229,924	201,466
Realized/unrealized gains (losses)	48,585	1,052,558
Other revenues	100,724	159,396
Net assets released from restrictions	1,348,016	157,205
Total support and revenues	9,317,055	6,823,588
Expenses and losses:		
Program services:		
Industries	1,858,148	1,710,756
Rehabilitation	1,201,886	1,347,564
Vocational services	964,707	962,284
Community and support	322,426	224,281
PBA Products and Services	397,280	308,285
Total program services	4,744,447	4,553,170
Management and general	996,547	968,448
Development	539,650	428,366
Total expenses	6,280,644	5,949,984
Loss on impairment of building	-	1,000,000
Total expenses and losses	6,280,644	6,949,984
<b>Change in Unrestricted Net Assets</b>	<b>3,036,411</b>	<b>(126,396)</b>
<b>Temporarily Restricted Net Assets:</b>		
Donations and grants	905,608	254,955
Net assets released from restriction	(1,260,904)	(75,247)
<b>Change in Temporarily Restricted Net Assets</b>	<b>(355,296)</b>	<b>179,708</b>
<b>Permanently Restricted Net Assets:</b>		
Investment income	156,153	91,711
Realized/unrealized gains (losses)	24,197	483,599
Net assets released from restriction	(87,112)	(81,958)
<b>Change in Permanently Restricted Net Assets</b>	<b>93,238</b>	<b>493,352</b>
<b>Change in Net Assets</b>	<b>2,774,353</b>	<b>546,664</b>
<b>Net Assets:</b>		
Beginning of year	17,575,594	17,028,930
End of year	\$ 20,349,947	\$ 17,575,594



# OUR NEW BEGINNING

Over the past year, we have watched the transformation of 1816 Locust Street in Pittsburgh's Uptown neighborhood from an old warehouse into our new headquarters. Construction is complete and we are excited to occupy our new space.

The building has been designed specifically to deliver services with a more efficient, client-centered approach. We have much more space to operate and to expand programs in our new 87,000 square-foot facility, which features a functional rooftop sensory garden. By enhancing our current programming and adding services in one central location, we will provide a community of support for our clients, which our research shows will increase the numbers we serve.

This state-of-the-art facility is more accessible for both our clients and our staff and is crucial for us to grow and flourish in the future. We are extremely excited about the many new opportunities we will have to help people reach their highest level of independence.



## THANK YOU

Thank you to our loyal friends and donors who have generously supported us this year. Each and every dollar that you gave not only strengthened our day-to-day operations but also the 14 different programs that serve nearly 1,000 adults and teens, and more than 14,000 children. Every gift has a tremendous impact. Thank you for your support, your continued commitment to our New Beginnings, and for making a difference.

*Donations made during fiscal year 2015 are listed under News/Information on our website [www.bvrspittsburgh.org](http://www.bvrspittsburgh.org).*



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

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