

SPOT ADVANCES CHILDREN'S VISION SCREENINGS

The Center for Vision Loss has added new vision screening equipment to its Prevention of Blindness program. Called Spot, powered by PediaVision, this state-of-the art technology can detect vision issues such as near-sightedness (myopia), far-sightedness (hyperopia), blurred vision and eye misalignment (strabismus) in just seconds. The equipment provides a comprehensive, reliable analysis which enables our vision screeners to make informed decisions quickly about the need for follow-up diagnosis by an eye care professional. Last Spring, our staff first introduced Spot with great success at vision screenings in Lehigh and Northampton Counties.

Center for Vision Loss has provided vision screenings for almost 40 years and strongly believes that they continue to be a vital part of our community outreach. Because 90 percent of learning is acquired through vision, we now have a wonderful new tool that helps us work more easily with young children to detect problems which if corrected early can improve their readiness for school. Spot enables us to screen children as young as 6 months and is also very effective with children who have autism or other disabilities.

On July 28, 2011, the Pocono Mountains Community Fundraiser recognized the importance of vision screenings to children's health by awarding a grant of \$43,800 to the Center for Vision Loss. The grant enabled us to purchase a second Spot to expand our vision screening program for young low income children in Monroe County. Sanofi pasteur also provided an additional \$6,500 to support our efforts.

To date, Nell Mayotte, Prevention of Blindness Coordinator in our Monroe County Office, reports that she and fellow staff member Nichole Miller, have screened 999 pre-school children using grant funds. Of this number, 112 children, or 11%, were referred to an eye care professional for follow-up. These screenings were conducted in 57% of the 70 preschools and day care centers which Mayotte identified in Monroe County.

In 2010-2011, the Center for Vision Loss screened 4,491 children and adults in Lehigh, Northampton and Monroe Counties. If you wish to schedule a vision screening for your students or community group or event, contact Dawn Sellers (Lehigh County representative) or Ruthie Asmus (Northampton County representative) in the Allentown Office at **610-433-6018**. Call Nell Mayotte in the Monroe Office at **570-992-7787**. If you are interested in volunteering in the vision screening program, call Rita Lang, Manager of Innovative Programs, at **610-433-6018, x. 231**.



Prevention of Blindness Coordinators Dawn Sellers (l) and Nell Mayotte (r) demonstrate how they use Spot to screen vision.

SPOTLIGHT ON CUSTOMER ACTIVITIES

On December 9, customers gathered to welcome the holiday season by learning to bake various kinds of tasty cookies.



On December 10, the Lehigh Valley Saturday AM Lions Club sponsored a fun holiday party for our student customers.



OUR MISSION

To provide a comprehensive set of preventative, rehabilitative, support and social services enabling blind and visually impaired clients to achieve their personal goals and restore quality of life consistent with those goals. Programs will provide a balance of independent living skills and social services to meet individual needs across a diverse client base and also help reduce the incidence of vision loss in the community through prevention of blindness and remedial eye care services.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR...

I recently attended the Lehigh Valley Alliance on Aging Conference where we learned of new research conducted on aging in the Lehigh Valley. One of the graphs broke out reported percentages of Lehigh Valley older adults with disabilities. When you look at vision disabilities, the percentages are less than some other disabling conditions. It seems 8.4 % of Lehigh County and 6.9 % of Northampton County survey respondents over 60 reported a vision disability.

That seems like a relatively low incidence problem, especially compared to some other disabilities--until you run the numbers. If you apply the above percentages against the population of those over 65 taken from the 2010 census in both counties, you come up with approximately 7,150 people. And this doesn't include Monroe County, our other major service area, or estimates of people younger than 65 who have vision loss. Add the fact that the baby boomers are now beginning to swell the numbers in the "over 65" category and the scope of the problem becomes even broader.

Clearly, the challenge is here. What can the Center for Vision Loss do to reach all those experiencing vision loss and how do we respond in the most effective way to meet a diverse set of needs? We have already started a dialogue on what direction the agency should be going. Our mission could not be more imperative: to have a positive impact on the quality of life of those in the Lehigh Valley facing issues of vision loss.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Douglas A. Yingling".

Douglas A. Yingling, Executive Director

SPOTLIGHT ON CUSTOMER ACTIVITIES

A MIXED BAG OF ADVERSITY AND BLESSINGS

Editor's Note: In this issue, we introduce you to one of your neighbors who has faced her severe vision loss with the help of the Center for Vision Loss and the PA Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services and now uses her retail business to support people in need.

Marisa's Mixed Bag, a stylish boutique in Lower Nazareth, is filled with eye-catching designer and gently used clothes, accessories, children's toys and more. Owner Marisa Balzafiore's charm and sincerity are apparent. What is not apparent is that Marisa, 42, is legally blind and cannot see your face because she has Stargart's Disease, an eye condition in which central vision is lost while some peripheral vision is retained. Sometimes it is referred to as juvenile macular degeneration.

Marisa's journey with Stargart's began at age 21 while studying special education at Kutztown University. Because this disease is relatively rare, her eye doctor had difficulty diagnosing it and treating her properly. It also progresses quickly. Within four years, Marisa went from having increasing difficulty seeing the blackboard and recognizing friends to 20/400 vision, a change that literally happened overnight.

Losing her sight and independence made Marisa angry and depressed, common reactions to this major life changing event. But she also became more determined than ever to fulfill her passion to teach. After her initial diagnosis, the university put Marisa in touch with the PA Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS). Later she also contacted Visual Impairment & Blindness Services (now Center for Vision Loss). Her caseworkers helped her acquire Zoom Text screen reading software and eye glasses to enhance her remaining vision. Marisa also had a person assigned to her as a reader. Nevertheless, because she didn't look abnormal, some people, including a few of her university colleagues, were still not convinced Marisa was blind and needed extra support while others outright discouraged her from finishing her education. Their comments just made her work harder. As Marisa



Marisa Balzafiore sits with "Lady Bling," an accessorized stuffed dog, which she is donating to the agency's Basket Bingo & Brunch raffle in April.

puts it, "If you tell me I can't do something, I will--it will just take me longer to get the job done." She received her degree in 1992.

After graduation, Marisa held various positions in special education. However, it was not until she taught severely disabled children at the Vitalistic Therapeutic Charter School that she finally realized her own life was not all that bad. Marisa also credits a year working with counselor James Van Horn for helping her recognize that her "cup was half full, not half empty." His counseling, coupled with her deep spiritual faith, gave her the strength to move beyond her disability and understand that her vision was a deterrent to living a fulfilling life only if she allowed that to happen. "That's when I decided not to hold any more pity parties for myself," Marisa recalls.

In 2009, Marisa became determined to find a creative way to balance her career and home life and share what she had learned about overcoming adversity. Thus Marisa's Mixed Bag was born--a store dedicated to women who need inspiration to re-design themselves. To focus on vision issues,

SPOTLIGHT ON CUSTOMER ACTIVITIES

Continued from page 3

Marisa and her husband have developed and produced their own line of magnifiers worn on long chains as elegant jewelry. These high quality gold or silver plated magnifiers are adorned with cameos and beautiful stones. They are truly a fashionable way to assist someone who needs personal magnification to perform daily tasks. Marisa has also provided a selection of these magnifiers to sell in our Vision Aids Store with a portion of each sale benefitting our vision rehabilitation services.

Marisa is now working with BBVS and the Lehigh University Small Business Development Center to obtain a grant to take her business to the next level. She invites everyone to visit Marisa's Mixed Bag, located at 216 Nazareth Pike, Bethlehem. The store is open Tuesday-Friday, 10 am-6 pm and Saturday from 12 noon-4 pm. Call **610-725-1655** for more information.



A "SENSE-ATIONAL" TOUR



Center for Vision Loss customers, staff and volunteer sighted guides were treated to a wonderful sensory tour of specific works in the permanent collection of the newly-expanded Allentown Art Museum of the Lehigh Valley on February 16, 2012. The group first focused on the *Adoration of the Shepherds*, an oil on canvas painted by Giovanni Agostino da Lodi in 1505. The museum docent did an outstanding job in describing the artist's use of vibrant colors to portray the work's subject matter. For added emphasis, she circulated tactile materials including an artist's palette with raised sections to replicate the feel of the paint, a miniature canvas, and

a paint brush and knife like the kind used by the artist to apply his paint to the canvas. Period lute music playing in the background enhanced this look at art and life in 16th century Italy. Our customers were also encouraged to stand as close to the painting as they wished, allowing them to have the optimal visual experience.

Our group then moved along to explore three sound sculptures created by Harry Bertoia. Constructed of various sizes of brass and copper rods, each sculpture vibrated differently to make unique sounds when the docent gently brushed her gloved hand across the top of the pieces.

Following the tour, everyone viewed the current exhibit, "Who Shot Rock and Roll," lunched in the museum café and browsed in the museum gift shop. Rita Lang, our Manager of Innovative Programs who organized the event, stated, "We commend the Allentown Art Museum for its stimulating 'sense-ational' tour which made art come alive for our customers. Our experience was enjoyed by everyone."

WHAT'S NEW?

FOCUS ON FABULOUS AND FUN FUNDRAISERS

Tickets are still available for the 6th Annual Center for Vision Loss **Basket Bingo & Brunch** fundraiser on Sunday, April 22, 2012, at the Historic Hotel Bethlehem, 437 Main Street, Bethlehem. The price of \$55 per person includes the fabulous Hotel Sunday Brunch followed by 20 games of bingo featuring Longaberger products, a basket raffle and door prizes. Pre-paid reservations are due by April 13.



The **Highmark Walk for a Healthy Community** kicks off at 9 am on Saturday, June 2, 2012, on the SteelStacks Campus in Bethlehem. Our agency is one of 23 non-profits participating in this annual event sponsored by Highmark Blue Shield.

The money raised by people walking for Center for Vision Loss comes 100% to our agency. You can take part in the 5K or 1 Mile Fun Walk as an individual, a team, a family or a virtual walker. Register today at highmarkwalkbethlehem.towercare.com/centervisionloss.

Tickets for the **2012-2013 Raffle** were mailed in February. Each raffle ticket costs \$10; 6 tickets cost \$50. Six winning tickets will be drawn monthly starting in July, 2012 and continuing through June, 2013. Take a chance and support Center for Vision Loss, too!

For more information about these fundraisers, please contact Karen Z. Huetter, Development Director, at **610-433-6018, x. 241** or go to www.centerforvisionloss.org.

VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION SET

Volunteers, the behind-the-scenes people who give their time, talent and spirit to the work of the Center for Vision Loss, will be recognized at a special event scheduled on Sunday, May 6, 2012, from 2-4 pm at the agency offices in Allentown. Manager of Innovative Programs Rita Lang reminds all volunteers to mark the date on their calendar and notes that invitations will be mailed soon.

WISHES DO COME TRUE

Just how often does your whole wish list come true? The Morning Call's "Be An Angel Campaign" fulfilled all of the Center for Vision Loss's wishes during this past holiday season. Thank you to Robert Huetter for purchasing a heavy duty paper shredder; to the Sarubin Family for their contribution to purchase disposable products for customer activities and to Madeline Koehler for purchasing the iZoom Portable Screen Reading software. We appreciate their kindness in providing these items which help us support our programs and services for our blind and visually impaired customers.

2011-2012 Raffle Update

2011-2012 Raffle tickets are still available at \$10 each or six for \$50. Call Stephanie Houck at **610-433-6018, x. 245** to purchase them. Winning tickets are drawn monthly through June, 2012. Raffle proceeds support the agency's programs and services.

List of Winners: December, 2011: Bob Kern, Angela McCallum, Bob Gabriel, Tony Swartz, R. Kradjel, Tom Yezerski; **January, 2012:** John Vrabel, Marie Matyas, Emily Werkheiser, Robert & Sandra Smith, Darryl Shive, George & Jean Weaver; **March, 2012:** Arlene Fabian, Dick Peters, Jane Morelli, Bethlehem Eye Associates, Nancy Ruhmel, Lois Frederick. **Congratulations to all!**

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM FRAUD AND IDENTITY THEFT

Customers in our Monroe Office took part in a dynamic session about fraud and identity theft on February 13, 2012. The session was presented by David Schallcross from the PA Attorney General's Office. Here are some highlights:

- Don't give out personal information on the phone, through the mail, or over the Internet.
- Keep items with your personal information in a safe place. Shred charge receipts, copies of credit applications, insurance forms, bank checks and other financial statements that you are discarding.
- Don't use easily available information like your mother's maiden name, your birth date or the last four digits of your social security number as passwords to your credit card, bank and other accounts.
- Only carry all your credit cards, Social Security card and passport when needed.
- Don't put your social security number, telephone number and driver's license number on new checks when you order them.
- Never give out your credit card number or bank account number over the phone to a business or organization unless you are sure they are reputable.
- Carefully monitor your monthly credit card statements and report inaccuracies immediately.

The Attorney General is the chief law enforcement officer of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Go to **www.attorneygeneral.gov** to find out more about fraud, consumer privacy and registering complaints.

POTENTIAL DRY AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION TREATMENT BEING TESTED

In February, the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind reported that drug researcher StemCells Inc. (STEM) received authorization from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to start a clinical trial on the potential treatment for dry age-related macular degeneration (AMD).

AMD is the leading cause of severe vision loss in people over the age of 55. It occurs when the small central portion of the retina, known as the macula, deteriorates. This disease, primarily associated with aging, gradually destroys the sharp central vision needed for seeing objects clearly. This is the vision used for common daily tasks such as reading and driving.

Most patients with AMD have the "dry form" which currently has no approved treatments. StemCells' trial will evaluate the safety and efficacy of the company's lead therapeutic product candidate, HuCNS-SC cells, as a treatment for dry AMD.

AMD is expected to increase dramatically as the baby boom generation ages. Stem cell transplantation may be viable as a future therapy for AMD, but in the meantime, the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind recommends that anyone over the age of 40 gets a comprehensive eye exam each year. Only through exploration and detection by an eye care professional can treatment begin that may be able to slow the progression of AMD and help save your vision. AMD risk factors include smoking and second-hand smoke, obesity, family history of AMD and age (over 55). In addition, Caucasians are more likely to lose vision from AMD than African Americans, and the majority of people age 50 and older who have AMD are women.

GIVING PAGE

The Center for Vision Loss is the region's only non-profit agency dedicated to improving the lives of people affected by vision loss. In 2010-2011, our programs and services touched the lives of 10,598 residents of Lehigh, Northampton and Monroe Counties. Help us continue our programs and services through a tax-deductible gift today. **Enclosed please find my gift in the amount of \$_____.**

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ ST ____ Zip _____

Phone (_____) _____

E-mail _____

☐ Please check here if you give us permission to add your e-mail address to our electronic mailing list. We will never share your e-mail address with any other group.

This gift is a tribute ☐ In Honor Of ☐ In Memory Of

Name _____

☐ Please notify the following person regarding this tribute gift:

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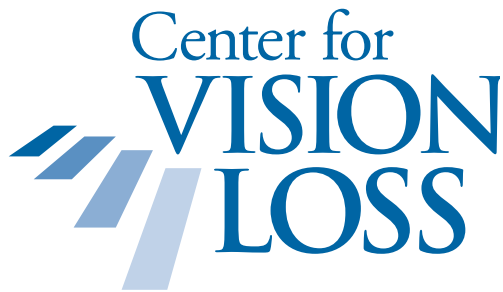
HELPING TO ASSURE OUR AGENCY'S FUTURE

Friends and supporters of the Center for Vision Loss play an important role in ensuring the agency's future and financial health. A Bequest (Gift by Will) is one of the easiest gift options to choose. Bequests may be restricted or unrestricted. Contact your tax and/or legal advisor with respect to your personal circumstances and remember that everyone needs a will regardless of the amount of their assets.

**Please detach and
send with your contribution to:
Center for Vision Loss
845 West Wyoming St.
Allentown, PA 18103**

All gifts to Center for Vision Loss are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. The official registration and financial information of the Center for Vision Loss may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

**Questions?
Contact the Development Office
at 610-433-6018, x. 241.**



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Save the Date

2012 CHRYSALIS AWARD DINNER

Honoring

DR. FRANCIS A. SALERNO
ASSOCIATE CHIEF OF GERIATRICS
LEHIGH VALLEY HEALTH NETWORK

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2012 • DESALES UNIVERSITY

The Chrysalis Award is presented to a blind or visually impaired person who has transformed the world around them. Since 1990, Dr. Salerno has transformed geriatric medicine, care and studies in the Lehigh Valley and beyond.



Please let us know if you would rather receive this newsletter electronically by calling **610.433.6018, x 241** or go to our website at **www.centerforvisionloss.org**. Also let us know if your mailing address has changed or if you wish to be removed from our list.

VISION is published three times a year by the Center for Vision Loss for our donors, volunteers and friends in the community.

Douglas A. Yingling
Executive Director

Karen Z. Huetter
Editor

"IT'S A TERRIBLE THING TO SEE AND
HAVE NO VISION." HELEN KELLER



SERVING LEHIGH, NORTHAMPTON AND MONROE COUNTIES



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