

# Friends of the Council

*Providing Powerful Tools for Independence*

Spring 2007

## AMD at a Glance

### Wet AMD

- Abnormal blood vessels grow under the macula
- Loss of central vision occurs rapidly
- Early symptoms: straight lines appear wavy
- Patients often become functionally blind within two years
- Is always considered "advanced"
- Does not cause pain

### Dry AMD

- Generally affects both eyes
- Macular cells break down slowly
- Early symptoms: blurry spot in central vision
- Eventual loss of central vision
- Has an early, intermediate and advanced stage
- Does not cause pain
- Can turn into wet AMD

## Macular Degeneration Leading Cause of Low Vision

Chances are if you know four people aged 75 or older, at least one of them has some form of macular degeneration. Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is the leading cause of low vision in the United States. It affects nearly 1.8 million Americans and people over age 75 have a thirty percent risk of getting the disease.

AMD affects the eye's macula, which allows people to see fine detail, and gradually destroys central vision. The photos on the right illustrate the difference between normal vision and low vision due to AMD.

There are two forms of AMD – wet and dry. Dry AMD is generally less serious than wet AMD. In dry AMD, macular cells break down slowly. With wet AMD, abnormal blood vessels grow under the macula, rapidly causing damage.

### TREATMENT

There are no cures for either wet or dry AMD. However, some treatments can slow the rate of vision loss, prevent further vision loss and in some cases improve sight. Treatments include eye injections, photodynamic therapy and laser surgery for wet AMD; and high-dose antioxidants and zinc for dry AMD. Ask your doctor if any of these treatments may help you.

### LEADING A FULL LIFE DESPITE VISION LOSS

There's no question that losing vision can be devastating. According to the AMD Alliance International, people experiencing vision loss are significantly more likely to suffer from clinical depression than the general population. Denial, anger, fear and grief are all common emotions among people with AMD. Many people need help coping.

Fortunately, most people with AMD can remain independent. Low vision therapy, vision rehabilitation, technology training and support groups all can help people live full



Normal Vision



Age-related Macular Degeneration

*Photos courtesy of the National Eye Institute*

### RISK FACTORS FOR AMD

- AGE ..... People 60 and older are at greater risk than other age groups.
- SMOKING ..... Smoking increases the risk of AMD.
- OBESITY ..... Studies suggest a link between obesity and the progression of AMD from early/intermediate stages to advanced AMD.
- RACE ..... White Americans are much more likely to lose vision from AMD than African Americans.
- FAMILY HISTORY ..... People with immediate family who have AMD are at a higher risk of developing the disease.
- GENDER ..... Women appear to be at greater risk than men.

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# We Have A Story To Tell ...

## Dear Friends ...

One of our supporters, whose mother has macular degeneration, recently sent this story to me. Thank you for listening for our bell. We at the Council pledge to listen for yours.

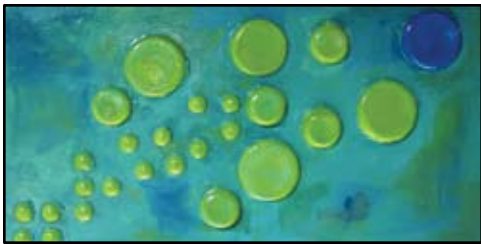
*Karen*

Karen V. Majkrzak  
Executive Director

*Just up the road from my home is a field, with two horses in it. From a distance, each horse looks like any other horse. But if you stop your car, or are walking by, you will notice something quite amazing. Looking into the eyes of one horse will disclose that he is blind. If you stand nearby and listen, you will hear the sound of a bell. Looking around for the source of the sound, you will see that it comes from the smaller horse in the field. Attached to the horse's halter is a small bell. It lets the blind friend know where the other horse is so he can follow. As you stand and watch these two friends, you'll see that the horse with the bell is always checking on the blind horse and that the blind horse will listen for the bell and then slowly walk to the other horse, trusting that he will not be led astray.*

*Sometimes we are the blind horse being guided by the ringing bell of other people in our lives. Other times we are the guide horse, helping others to find their way. Good friends are like that... you may not always see them, but you know they are always there. Please listen for my bell and I'll listen for yours.*

*Author Unknown*



## Art By and For People Who are Blind or Visually Impaired Pleases and Inspires

It's not too late to visit the Council offices and enjoy our art exhibit. Since early December, we have hosted an exhibit of art made by and for people who are blind or visually impaired. The exhibit is free and open to the public from 8am to 4:30pm Monday - Friday. Some of the artwork will soon be posted on our website, [www.wcblind.org](http://www.wcblind.org). Paintings are for sale, with 20% of the purchase price going to the Council to help fund programs and services for people who are blind or visually impaired.

Artists Albert Schmiege, Jamie Landolt and Mary Mesman are featured. Schmiege is a Mauston artist who has been legally blind since 1992 due to macular degeneration. Despite a lack of central vision, poor depth perception and color blindness, he captures on canvas his interpretation of the world. His paintings prove that the art of sight and seeing is not necessarily defined by those of us with 20/20 vision. He believes that blindness does not limit but rather enhances the creative process.

Landolt is a Milwaukee artist who creates "touchable" paintings. She challenges the conventional notion that painted art is only to be visually experienced. Landolt encourages people to touch her work, to feel each brushstroke and encounter the dimensional shapes that the canvas encompasses so that it might heighten the experience as they interact with the piece.

Madison collage artist Mary Mesman started painting 15 years ago, until the decline in her eyesight made collage art her main medium. In placing the collage elements, she relies on touch as much as vision and uses special lighting and magnification to view her work as she progresses through the piece.

From top to bottom:  
*Green With Envy* by Jamie Landolt;  
*Blue Ocean* by Albert Schmiege; and  
*So Whimsical* by Mary Mesman

# A Story Of Independence

## What is Low Vision Therapy?

Low vision therapy is designed to help someone with vision loss make the most of the vision he or she still has. It starts with a low vision evaluation. A low vision evaluation is not the same as a visit to your eye doctor. Your eye doctor diagnoses eye diseases and provides medical treatment. A low vision therapist works with your eye doctor to provide techniques and equipment to help you continue to do the everyday activities you enjoy.

In a low vision evaluation you may learn how to use your remaining vision more efficiently or how to improve lighting to enhance your vision. The therapist may recommend an optical aid such as a magnifier or telescope, and teach you how to use it. You may also learn techniques for recognizing people when you meet them, identifying your money, writing checks and playing cards.

Marshall Flax, MS, is the Council's certified low vision therapist. For more information about low vision therapy, call Marshall at 800-783-5213.



Marshall Flax conducts a low vision evaluation.

## JOIN US FOR A DAY OF FUN



Do you golf? Join us for Golf in the Fall at Bishops Bay on Monday, September 17th. Last year's outing raised \$10,000 which enabled us to sponsor *Macular Degeneration: Progress in Sight VI*, a symposium for the general public. Our golfers had lots of fun playing a great course, competing for prizes and learning what it's like to golf if you have macular degeneration or other vision impairments.

Sponsorships from \$100 to \$10,000 are available. Please call Kathy Lange-Novak at 800-783-5213 if you would like to be a sponsor or a golfer.

## MACULAR DEGENERATION LEADING CAUSE OF LOW VISION

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and independent lives. The Council offers many of these services (see *What is Low Vision Therapy?* above).

### RESEARCH

The National Eye Institute is conducting and supporting a number of studies to learn more about AMD. Some of this research is being conducted in Wisconsin at the UW Medical School in Madison and the Medical College of Wisconsin's Eye Institute in Milwaukee. Researchers are studying the genetics of AMD, the impact of dietary nutrients, healthy cell transplants and anti-inflammatory treatments.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about living independently with vision loss, contact the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired at [www.wcblind.org](http://www.wcblind.org) or 800-783-5213.

### SOURCES:

NATIONAL EYE INSTITUTE - [www.nei.nih.gov/health](http://www.nei.nih.gov/health)

AMD ALLIANCE INTERNATIONAL - [www.amdalliance.org](http://www.amdalliance.org)

PREVENT BLINDNESS AMERICA - [www.preventblindness.org](http://www.preventblindness.org)

## THANK YOU DELTA GAMMA!



Delta Gamma volunteers pose after helping out at the Council's Open House in December.

Since 1873, the Delta Gamma motto has been "Do Good." And the Madison chapter certainly does. Through its national Service for Sight program, the sorority is dedicated to both preventing blindness and helping people who are blind and visually impaired. The Madison chapter has assisted the Council with several projects.

## PLEASE SUPPORT OUR WORK

- Sponsor our golf outing.
- Golf in our golf outing.
- Volunteer.
- Designate your United Way contribution to the Council.
- Check if your employer has a "matching gifts" program.
- Set up a deferred gift.
- Support the White Cane Fund.
- Give an individual gift.

Call Kathy Lange-Novak at 800-783-5213 for more information.

## Macular Degeneration Symposium Set for April 18th, 2007

Researchers, clinicians, rehabilitation specialists and other experts will talk about the latest medical, scientific and rehabilitation advances at *Macular Degeneration: Progress in Sight VI*, a free symposium open to the public and sponsored by the Council and the UW Department of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences.

Providing the tools for better care and self-care is a major focus of the symposium. Marshall Flax, MS, the Council's certified low vision therapist, stresses the importance of coming together with other people living with macular degeneration to "experience the feeling of not being alone" and to hear from experts in the field.

Featured speakers include:

- Alberta Orr, MSW, one of the country's foremost researchers and writers on vision loss and aging
- Ron Danis, MD, who is studying the impact of dietary nutrients on macular degeneration
- Nansi Colley, PhD, who is studying the genetics of human macular degeneration

For more information, please visit the Council's web site at [www.wcblind.org](http://www.wcblind.org) or call 800-783-5213.

### WE ARE HERE TO HELP

If you or someone you know is blind or visually impaired, please call us at 800-783-5213. We provide rehabilitation services, low vision evaluations and therapy and assistive devices.

The Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired is a private, non-for-profit agency. Our mission is to promote the dignity and independence of the people in Wisconsin who are blind and visually impaired by providing services, advocating legislation and educating the general public. The Council is funded through an annual drive, private grants and bequests.



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