

Friends of the Council

Providing Powerful Tools for Independence

Spring 2008

MAKE YOUR WEB SITE ACCESSIBLE TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

We are pleased to announce that we recently received a grant from the Public Service Commission/ Universal Service Fund to create "Accessible Web Sites 101." This new workshop will train web masters at local nonprofit and business organizations to make their web sites accessible to persons with disabilities. An informational brochure will soon be available. Call 608-237-8112 or send an email to betsy@wcbblind.org to learn more.

My low vision evaluation with Marshall was the best \$54.80 I've ever spent!

When Fran D. was in her 50s, she was diagnosed with cone dystrophy, a retinal deterioration whose functional effect—a blind spot in the center of one's vision—is similar to that of age-related macular degeneration.

"My doctor told me I got cone dystrophy 40 years late," she reflected. Suddenly, simple tasks like driving, shopping and cleaning her house became impossible or difficult, at best. "I had to retire seven years early from my job as a Resident Care Technician at Mendota Mental Health Institute. At first, I had to give up doing a lot of things I took for granted."

Fran admits that she did nothing about her visual impairment for the first five years. "I was in denial. I thought it would go away with time, but it didn't. Now, I've learned to accept my situation and cope with it."

Fortunately, Fran's ophthalmologist told her about the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired and suggested she learn about the support and resources we offer.

She met with Marshall Flax for a low vision exam. "It was the best \$54.80 (a fee paid to the UW Hospital Vision Clinic) I've ever spent!" she exclaimed. Marshall taught Fran how to use her vision more effectively and introduced her to many adaptive tools and equipment. "I always loved reading, and with a CCTV (closed-circuit TV), I can read more of the newspaper now."

Fran also met Brent Perzentka in the Sharper Vision Store, and she has found items that make everyday tasks more do-able.

According to Fran, Program Assistant Ann Salazar is "simply amazing!" She has been inspired by the way Ann, who is totally blind, functions so successfully. "Ann is always so friendly and helpful when I call."

At Marshall's suggestion, Fran joined the Portage Low Vision Support Group formed by Neil Ford, a member of the Council Board. "I learned so much at my first meeting! People shared ideas, tips and emotional support." Neil showed Fran how to use her computer more effectively, and she's thrilled because "I didn't want to give that up."



Program Assistant Connie Pagel (right) checks prices on a pair of sunglasses for members of Neil Ford's low vision support group, of which Fran is a member.

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We Have A Story To Tell ...

Behind the numbers...

We recently tallied program statistics for 2007, and we'd like to share a few highlights.

- Total number of people served: 9,412
- Sharper Vision Store customers: 3,575
- People who received computer technology training or advice: 803
- People who attended Council presentations: 2,329
- Macular Degeneration: Progress in Sight VI Symposium attendees: 707
- White canes distributed: 764
- Low vision evaluations administered: 172
- Rehabilitation training visits: 126 (6-month reporting)
- Advocacy: 226
- Volunteer hours (from 27 people): 3,212

Your generous donations of time, talent and treasure made many of these accomplishments possible. Thank you!

Home living made easier

In this issue, we're launching a new column to answer your questions about coping with low vision. You may have questions for yourself, a family member or a friend. We hope to offer you tips, techniques, tools and encouragement for living independently at home.

Send your question to kathi@wblind.org. If we publish it, we'll send you a coupon for \$10 off your next Sharper Vision Store purchase.

Question: I've always tried to be punctual for appointments, but recently, I find that I've been late for some important events. How do people who can't see well tell time?

Answer: Large-print, talking and tactile clocks and watches are all available through our Sharper Vision Store and in various consumer products catalogs.

A few cautions...The "voice" quality of some talking devices is very high pitched and may be difficult for some people to hear clearly. Also, the procedure for resetting the time when batteries have been replaced or at "daylight" time changes can be very complicated on some watches. Large print is interpreted differently by various manufacturers, and not all raised markings are easy to feel. If possible, arrange with a rehabilitation teacher to try different timepieces before you purchase one.



You won't be late when you use a talking alarm clock! It's one of the many products we offer to help you keep track of time.

Calendar of upcoming events

JUNE 20 — Vision Loss: Finding Powerful Tools for Independence
\$10 for full-day seminar, materials, continental breakfast and lunch
Kimberly, Wisconsin.

OCTOBER 11 — White Cane Safety & Awareness Walk
Help us raise awareness for the White Cane Law and funds to support the Council's programs, services and advocacy.

OCTOBER 14 — Progress in Sight VII
Macular Degeneration Symposium at the Alliant Energy Center
Madison, Wisconsin.

A Story Of Independence

Let's play a game

Leisure pursuits enhance everyone's life—young and old. They're an important part of our lives because we all need to relax and take a break from time to time.

Losing your vision doesn't mean losing your physical or mental energy, and it doesn't mean you can't find fun and rewarding pastimes.

Take games, for instance. Did you know that many games, including cards, BINGO, checkers, dominos, chess, Scrabble and even Monopoly, are available in formats specifically designed for people with visual impairments?

Large-print and tactile markings, some in Braille, are used to make these games accessible. In the Sharper Vision Store, we carry all these games as well as large-print Sudoku and crossword puzzle books.

Brent Perzentka makes sure the store is well stocked with card and board games. Our best selling are playing cards, BINGO, and Scrabble. If you don't see a game you'd like, Brent will investigate and order it, if it's available. "We try to handle special request orders for games we don't carry in the store," he said, "and there's no additional shipping charge to the customer."

It pleases Brent when someone discovers the availability of large-print and Braille card and board games. He remembers a customer who was thrilled when she found a Scrabble game she could play with her daughter. When she was diagnosed with wet macular degeneration a few years ago, she stopped playing Scrabble with her daughter, and she dearly missed those fun times. Now, they're both back to enjoying this experience together again.

**Brent believes playing card and board games offers
"...nice bonding for families and friends. There's fun,
laughter, and sharing that add to the joy of life."**

Rehabilitation training instructor Nancy Prussing seconds that notion. "Interacting with others in a recreational way is great for EVERYONE, not just those with a visual impairment. It lightens the load, brightens the day, and makes living all worthwhile. Finding adaptive ways to recreate is what living is all about."

Any tips for playing cards with blind and visually impaired folks? Brent recommends that you call the card you're laying down.



Many games, including Braille Monopoly, are available in formats specifically designed for people with visual impairments. Our Sharper Vision Store carries many of them.



Large-print BINGO cards bring back the fun of this very social game.

Donate to the Council online!

Did you know that you can shop the Sharper Vision Store and donate to the Council online?

From the comfort of your computer, at any time of the day or night, you can purchase items from the store or support our work.

Visit www.wcblind.org to do this. It's fast, easy and secure!

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Fran feels grateful that she reached out and contacted the Council. "For 55 years, I never knew it even existed, but it has become a wonderful resource for me. The Council has helped make my life simpler and given me more self-confidence. I wish I hadn't waited so long to make that call, but I sure am glad I made the connection!"

We invite **you** to connect with the Council and learn about the powerful tools for independence we provide for blind and visually impaired individuals who live in Wisconsin. Call 1-800-783-5213 or visit www.wcblind.org for more information and help.

WE'RE 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, therapy and assistive devices.

The Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired is a private, not-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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