Independence with Dignity
CVI’s Florence Maxwell Low Vision Clinic: A Lifelong Resource

For many years, Darlene Lodge knew she had macular degeneration but she had no symptoms and it didn’t get in the way of her work or personal life. Then in 2000, her diagnosis changed from dry to wet macular degeneration and the problems slowly began. Today she is considered legally blind.

Darlene first heard about CVI in the 1980s when she worked at the IRS. “Some of my colleagues were partially sighted or blind and they told me about the Center,” she said. Although she didn’t need services back then, Darlene knew that CVI would be there when she would eventually need help. And last year, she turned to the Florence Maxwell Low Vision Clinic for assistance.

“I was reminded about CVI when I took a class at Wesley Woods, which is where my husband Don and I now live,” said Darlene. The eight-session class was taught by Gina Adams, CVI low vision therapist, and was funded in part by the State of Georgia’s Drive for Sight program. According to Gina, Darlene was a wonderful student. “Not only was she a hard worker, but she shared ideas and encouraged others to participate as well,” said Gina. “Plus she was able to take general information she learned in class and immediately apply it to her own specific needs, which is exactly what we like to see people do.”

After completing the class, Darlene decided to visit the Florence Maxwell Low Vision Clinic to see if there were additional devices that could help her. “I knew I couldn’t permanently change anything,” she said, “so I went in with realistic expectations.” Her appointment began with a vision evaluation by Dr. Timothy Spence, who has worked as a low vision optometrist at CVI for 17 years. He assessed what she could see, and then determined what tools, techniques or devices would maximize her functional vision.

Within minutes after Darlene’s exam was completed, Dr. Spence forwarded his assessment to Gina Adams, CVI low vision therapist, and was funded in part by the State of Georgia’s Drive for Sight program. According to Gina, Darlene was a wonderful student. “Not only was she a hard worker, but she shared ideas and encouraged others to participate as well,” said Gina. “Plus she was able to take general information she learned in class and immediately apply it to her own specific needs, which is exactly what we like to see people do.”

Darlene and her husband Don at the VisAbility store
From the President

Where were you in ’62?

- For Atlantans, the year 1962 marked the founding of Community Services for the Blind, which through the years has become the Center for the Visually Impaired (CVI). As we approach our 50th anniversary in 2012, we are beginning to plan a celebration that will involve clients, volunteers, staff and donors in recognition of the essential resource this organization has become to people of all ages with vision loss. Our celebration will take many shapes and our history will be an integral part of many CVI events during 2012.

Anne Skae, former chair of the CVI Board of Trustees and the CVI Foundation Board, will be CVI’s 50th Anniversary Chair. Anne will gather a committee of CVI stakeholders who can help us honor our past, salute our clients’ and volunteers’ accomplishments, and share dreams for the future.

To prepare for this landmark year, I’ll use this column to tell bits of CVI history and stories of the committed men and women who have been responsible for our mission. So let’s start at the beginning.

In 1953, a group of concerned parents of blind children began an informal survey of community resources that could help their children become independent adults. When the group realized that there really were no options to meet either their children’s future needs or the needs of any person with vision loss, they contacted the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) and proposed a formal study. Atlanta Mayor William Hartsfield established an advisory committee led by George Henderson, Jr., southeastern sales manager, Galey & Lord, who had been a co-founder and officer of the Foundation for Visually Handicapped Children in Atlanta. George and his wife, Jean, were the parents of Anne Henderson Martin, who lost vision as an infant and has remained close to CVI throughout its history.

By November 1962, the committee made its recommendations and petitioned the State of Georgia to charter a new non-profit organization, Community Services for the Blind (CSB). This forerunner organization of CVI would provide professional rehabilitation services to Atlanta area adults who were blind and visually impaired, without regard to race, color or creed. Proposed services included mobility (a new academic discipline known at that time as peripatology); communication skills consisting of braille, typing and the telephone; social services; home management (for women only); grooming (for men only); and recreation opportunities.

The first location was in donated space in the Atlanta National Building at 50 Whitehall Street, S.W. Seven clients were served in the first year and the goal for 1963 was to serve 25 clients. Oscar Turk was the first executive director. Among the original trustees was Bartow Morgan III, father of current CVI trustee R. Brand Morgan.

The 1963 operating budget for CSB was $58,528 and 94.8 percent came from the Community Chest of Metropolitan Atlanta, now United Way. The budget included salaries for four full-time staff members, equipment, printing, educational supplies and materials, insurance, and transportation.

An early fund-raising event was the Atlanta premiere of the spectacular new movie ‘Lawrence of Arabia,’ starring Peter O’Toole, made possible by trustee Fred Storey of Storey Theatres, Inc. The event netted $5,075, a great success in 1963. Among the first financial supporters were the Virgil Warren Fund, Metropolitan Foundation of Atlanta, Fredes Wood Wilton Foundation, an anonymous local foundation, and the Junior League of Atlanta. Those same early donors have remained important contributors to CVI through the years, providing volunteers, wise counsel, and generous funding.

A key recommendation in the AFB study was that the Georgia State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation establish diagnostic programs and training for blind persons that could be funded by the State and provided at CSB. That early recommendation led to a long and valued partnership between the State and CVI and has allowed thousands of Georgians to receive the training and support they have needed to find successful employment and live independently.

Richard Wayne Edwards, former assistant superintendent of the Illinois Visually Handicapped Institute, was hired as the director in 1966. One of his first actions was to find a larger space for the growing organization. In 1967, CSB moved to a spacious residence at 1341 Ponce de Leon Avenue, which was remodeled to include classrooms and office space. A home management department was housed in the former garage apartment at the rear of the building.

By 1968, 453 clients were enrolled for services. Classes in crafts and the use of hand tools became available, along with support groups and counseling for individuals and families. A driver was hired to provide transportation to the center for clients. A large recreation program was offered by volunteers and activities included picnics and field trips. A newly developed state park, Camp Will-A-Way was designed to accommodate campers with a variety of disabilities and in 1971, a week-long camp for clients was held there. In addition to direct service to clients, staff in the late 1960s provided training in working with people with vision loss to 272 student nurses in Atlanta’s various schools of nursing.

In the late 1960s, the Community Chest initiated dialogue between CSB and Metropolitan Atlanta Association for the Blind, established by Professor P. J. Woods in 1944. The story of the new organization that was created from the two organizations will be the topic of my next column—stay tuned!
Cook Legacy Society Welcomes Charter Members

- The Mary Ann and Dick Cook Legacy Society concluded its 18-month-long charter membership campaign in April 2010 with 50 members, 20 of whom joined between October 2008 and April 2010. CVI is deeply grateful to these dedicated friends who have created a legacy at CVI to help future generations of people with vision loss find solutions for a better life.

Annual contributions to CVI help us provide quality services today. Legacy gifts – such as bequests, charitable gift annuities, and trusts – help provide continuing funding with long-term impact for tomorrow.

Mary Ann and Dick Cook Legacy Society Charter Members

- Anonymous*
- Anonymous
- Louis E. Arrants
- Mrs. Leo J. Bloch*
- Cathleen and Joe Blumberg
- Montague L. Boyd
- Sarah Page Boykin*
- Doris M. Bryant*
- Belle D. and Carl M. Camp*
- Mary Ann and Dick Cook
- Ruby M. Crawford*
- Ruth M. Crawford*
- Roger Dann*
- Cam Dotsey*
- Richard and Cathryn DuBowl
- Amanda Grace Dunn*
- Lois Edge*
- Subie Green
- Phillip R. Green
- Jennifer R. Hamilton
- Henry C. Heinz*
- C. Max Henderson*
- Marion Calhoun Hendrix*
- Susan G. Hogg*
- Susan Hoy
- Lorraine H. Jennrich*
- Anne Kilpatrick*
- Karen P. Kirkpatrick
- Dorothy Weiner Lavine*
- Jack H. Levin*
- Mac and Sima Martirosian
- Lois R. Manley*
- Teri McMahon
- Edward C. Miller*
- John D. and Martha J. Morris
- Martha Niblack*
- Lucille T. Nichols*
- Jeannette E. and Daniel Edwin* Plaster
- James Emory Powell*
- Susan Currie Prutzman
- John and Toni Rhett
- Katherine M. Riley*
- Anne B. Sae
- Joan M. Stuart
- Frank W. Virgin
- I. Newton Whiteside*
- Patricia R. Webb
- Bessie Wilder*
- Mary Taylor Wilson*
- Bill Woolf
- *Deceased

For more information about planned giving opportunities at CVI, please contact the CVI development office at 404-875-9011.

Corporate Sponsor Spotlight: Georgia Power

- Georgia Power Company is a valuable corporate partner that has provided volunteers and financial support to CVI for the past seven years. More than 50 Georgia Power employees have volunteered with CVI by assisting with special events like the True Blue Do, preparing large mailings such as holiday cards and event invitations, and serving on committees.

Through the Citizens of Georgia Power, the company’s employee community service group, Georgia Power employees have supported the True Blue Do every year since its inception in 2004. They have addressed and stuffed invitations, sold coins for the Flip for a Trip coin toss, and also helped staff the True Blue Do wine auction. In 2010, seven Georgia Power volunteers helped on the evening of the True Blue Do; the Citizens also sponsored the event with Georgia Power employees.

Angela Gillis, IT security analyst at Georgia Power and past state president of the Citizens of Georgia Power, rallies the Citizens each year to participate in CVI projects. Angela has served on the True Blue Do planning committee for seven years.

“We believe that helping others can make a difference in our community,” says Angela. “One of our initiatives within the Citizens of Georgia Power is to help in the areas of health and disability, so CVI is a great match for us.”

Ashley Koby, assistant to the vice president of transmission at Georgia Power, first became acquainted with CVI as a client in the 1980s. In 2004, he received Georgia Power’s Southern Style Excellence Award and selected CVI to receive the award funds. In 2009, Ashley served on CVI’s Sarah Woolf Spirit Award selection committee and he is currently in his third year as a member of CVI’s Program Services Committee.

In May, Lolita Browning Jackson, manager, external affairs, metro East Region – Atlanta Area, Georgia Power, joined CVI’s Board of Trustees. She will serve on CVI’s Advocacy and Marketing Committees. “I’m proud to represent a company like Georgia Power on the CVI Board. It’s a company that encourages its employees to get out into the community and get involved,” Lolita says. “I’m excited and looking forward to everything that lies ahead working with CVI.”

CVI could not accomplish its mission without the support and participation of these and hundreds more dedicated volunteers. To request information about volunteer opportunities with CVI, please contact Lara Tillery, volunteer services coordinator, at ltillery@cviga.org or 404-602-4369.

Citizens of Georgia Power volunteers at the 2010 True Blue Do: Carla Johnson, Katie Agress, John Fason, Clay Smith, Julie Espenscheid and Angela Gillis
Independence in Action

Congratulations to STARS (Social, Therapeutic, Academic and Recreational Services) student Christopher Abel! Christopher, who started learning braille in the BEGIN early childhood program, earned third place for grades 1-2 in the 2010 National Braille Challenge, the Braille Institute’s national reading and writing contest. Students were tested on their braille skills including reading, comprehension, speed and accuracy.

CVI Client Internships

Amanda Parkman at the Frazer Center
Jonathan Fulcher at G3ict (Global Initiative for Inclusive Information and Communication Technologies)
Lewis Tankersley at Georgia Lions Lighthouse Foundation
Linda Gray at MSA Global
Amalek Ndiaye at Georgia Library for Accessible Services

STARS students Tarik Suber, Nana Esi Afedzie, Roy Cody and Habtamu Wilson participated in CVI’s six-week Summer Enrichment Experience Program. From employment skills to personal safety training, the teens participated in classes preparing them for the working world. At the same time, they were able to take what they learned and put it to work. Through Georgia’s Business Enterprise program, each student worked at a vending site; locations included the State of Georgia Department of Human Resources and Department of Labor buildings and Fort McPherson.

Tributes

Emanuel Gluck, CVI client and supporter, passed away on May 1, 2010. He followed his beloved wife of 67 years, Rosalie Gluck, who died in October 2009. Mr. Gluck served as an Army Sgt. in Europe during WWII, then moved to Atlanta in 1945 where he began a long and successful career in sales.

Be Inspired!

- A poignant conversation between 16-year-old STARS student Luke Putney and his mother Nancy Hoddinott was featured on StoryCorps Atlanta on WABE 90.1 FM. Luke, who has progressively lost nearly all of his vision during the last five years, is a straight-A student, runs cross-country and plays the bass. You can listen to their story in the StoryCorps Atlanta archives at www.wabe.org/storycorps.

  StoryCorps, one of the largest oral history projects of its kind, is partnering with WABE to record, preserve, and share the stories of communities in Atlanta. You can share your story, too! Go to www.wabe.org/storycorps for more information.

- What do most five-year-old girls want for their birthday? Toys, dolls, stuffed animals or maybe a puppy? Not Jaia Alli. When she turned five, Jaia decided that instead of receiving gifts, she would rather have people give money to CVI. That way, CVI could keep helping her cousin Raveena, who is a BEGIN student. Following her birthday, Jaia came to CVI with her mother and proudly donated $205. Then the young philanthropist proceeded to check out the VisAbility store, where she found a couple of cool toys she thought Raveena might like!
For children involved in CVI’s BEGIN early childhood program and STARS program for older students, opportunities to learn by doing take place all year long. But during the summer, exploration and play take on new levels of fun. Every activity is geared to have a positive impact on the children, from strengthening independent living skills to feeling more comfortable around kids their own age. Through new experiences and fun learning opportunities, children who are blind and visually impaired get the chance to try new things and test the limits of what they can accomplish. This past summer, 32 children up to age five and their families participated in BEGIN’s SummerFest, six weeks of day camp. Fifty-five students who range in age from six to 21 participated in STARS Summer Enrichment Camps.

1 – Cynaya Hogan-McCown and Kennedy McMillon are ready for takeoff when BEGIN students boarded a Delta Airlines plane during a field trip to Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport.

2 – Andreus, a dog with Happy Tails pet therapy program, lets BEGIN camper Kaleb Phelps-Crisp show him some love.

3 – BEGIN student Jessica James tries out the big hair dryer during an outing to Doc’s Haircuts.

4 – Thanks to CVI’s partnership with the Junior League of Atlanta, Zoo Atlanta brought some furry, prickly and slimy friends to CVI this summer. STARS camper Augustu Pacleb and buddy guide Ruthie Harrison touch a snake in this photo, and other animal visitors included a rabbit and a hedgehog.

5 – Jordan Woods, STARS graduate and camp counselor LaKeisha Holmes (back row), Hadley Hanson and April Love pose with Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck at Six Flags Over Georgia.

6 – High-schoolers Krista MacCallum and Dawlyn Dieudonne get ready to drum during a drumming class led by Dr. Arvin Scott, a professor at the University of Georgia’s Hugh Hodgson School of Music.

7 – Student Richard Sims is led on horseback by Trevor Mulkey, a STARS graduate. His father, Mike Mulkey, owns Sun Valley Horsepark and graciously invites STARS to visit every year.
Q: If your vision is worse than 20/60 but better than 20/200, can you still drive a car?

A: Yes! For the past 40 years, bioptic telescopic systems have given thousands of Americans whose vision falls below the standard legal visual acuity limits the ability to drive. In Georgia, CVI has prescribed and fit hundreds of people with bioptics, providing them the freedom to get behind the wheel.

What are bioptics?
Bioptics combine prescription glasses with a small telescopic system which is mounted above the eyewear. The eyeglass portion provides general vision while the telescope aids in quick spotting of detail. Systems range in price from $800 - $1,500.

Who qualifies?
The basic candidates for bioptics are patients whose vision ranges from 20/60 to 20/200 in one or both eyes, with mild to moderate central vision loss and no significant peripheral vision impairment. Eligibility must be determined by a qualified eye care professional.

What is the process?
If you think that you may be eligible, the first step is to contact Cheryl Blewitt, director of CVI’s Maxwell Low Vision Clinic. The next step is to make a clinic appointment. At the clinic, you will meet with a low vision optometrist who will evaluate whether or not you meet the specific guidelines for the Georgia bioptic program. If you meet the criteria and elect to go forward, the optometrist will prescribe the appropriate bioptic system and a low vision therapist will train you to use it. You must then complete a 36-hour training course (including six hours behind the wheel), given by a driving instructor certified by the state of Georgia. Finally, your course results will be reviewed by CVI’s low vision optometrist to determine whether your application for driving bioptics can be forwarded to the Georgia Department of Driving Services (DDS). DDS will not process applications for bioptic driving privileges unless they are sent by CVI’s Low Vision Clinic or a doctor’s office.

Would you like more information?
The process of learning to use bioptics typically takes four months or more to complete. There is no guarantee of success, but for those who meet eligibility requirements, the success rate is very high. If you would like more information on bioptics, please call Cheryl Blewitt at 404-602-4284.

Matching Gifts: An Easy Way to Double Your Support

Maureen Flannagan with her mother, Sara

Maureen Flannagan has a soft spot for CVI. Her mother Sara was diagnosed with macular degeneration at age 50 and at the recommendation of her ophthalmologist, she came to CVI for services. Sara received vision rehabilitation training and support that allowed her to continue to lead an independent and full life despite her vision loss.

Grateful for the support her mother received, Maureen has been making annual contributions to CVI since 2001. What’s more is that she has enlisted her employer, Microsoft, to support CVI as well. Like many companies, Microsoft has an employee matching gifts program where employee contributions to nonprofit organizations are matched dollar-for-dollar. Maureen doubles the impact of her support to the Center by simply completing a form.

“I’m fortunate to work for a company that believes in helping organizations that inspire its employees. The matching gifts program is a great way for any company to invest in its employees and encourage them to support their communities,” says Maureen. CVI’s vision rehabilitation programs certainly fit the bill for Maureen. “I continue to give to CVI, not just because of the help that my mom received there, but also because of the programs for children and teens. I love how the BEGIN program helps infants and preschoolers with vision loss and how the STARS program helps school-aged children.”

While Sara has long since completed her training at the Center, the nonprofit VisAbility store keeps the Flannagans coming to CVI. “It’s where my mom gets the tools she needs,” says Maureen. “There’s nowhere else in Atlanta that has the latest and greatest technology for people with vision loss, not to mention the everyday items she uses, like a large print calendar or calculator and remote control with big buttons. They enable her to be more independent.”

If you would like to increase the impact of your contributions to CVI like Maureen did, check with your employer’s human resource department about a company matching gift policy.
These Are a Few of My Favorite Things… at VisAbility!

Joe McNeil, Sr., VisAbility customer and President, Blinded Veterans Association – Georgia Regional Group

The iBill: Currency Reader

“The portability of the iBill is great and the cost is even better - you can’t beat the combination of these two features.”

The iBill features an ultra-slim and compact “key-fob” design. Bills are identified in less than one second with ultra-high accuracy. All U.S. bills in circulation are announced clearly by speech, tone or with vibration. Cost: $99.99.

LaFayette Woods, VisAbility customer

The iTalk: Voice Activated Reminder Clock

“The iTalk is a hands-free clock that is easy to set. The best feature is that it will respond to anyone’s voice with command recognition. I also like the reminder assistant feature.”

Never forget an important task again. Record 10 reminders with alarm times for today, everyday or any day of the week. Loud reminder alarm playback repeats until you say “Reminder off.” Doubles as a voice-activated bedside alarm clock. Cost: $58.99.

Wilma Bloom, VisAbility customer

Merlin CCTV: Desktop Video Magnifier

“I call my Merlin the ‘Magic Lantern.’ Regular magnifiers just weren’t enough for me, and it is a tremendous help when reading small print and numbers, like with paying bills.”

With easy to use built-in controls that move with the screen, the Merlin features a 17-inch, 19-inch or 22-inch flat-panel monitor. Provides clear, crisp images with the highest resolution, and the screen pivots, tilts and swivels in all directions. Cost: $2,995.00.

Barbara Graham, VisAbility customer

Intel Reader: The Mobile Device That Reads Text Aloud

“Thanks to the Intel Reader, I’m now able to read independently and review my mail without asking for assistance. It has improved my whole outlook on life!”

This portable device combines a high-resolution camera and an Intel Atom processor which converts print text to digital text and reads it aloud. The Reader also highlights each word and can re-size text on its built-in LCD display. Intuitive functionality doesn’t require sight. Cost: $1,499.00.

Great Gift Items for under $30!

- 20/20 Bold Line Pen $1.00
- Hoyle Super Jumbo Cards Single $3.99
- Silver Talking Keychain $9.99
- Talking Clinical Thermometer $12.99
- Big LCD Display Talking Alarm $12.99
- Curved Talking Clock $12.99
- 3X Walters Pendant Magnifier $29.99
- Big Button Talking Calculator $14.99
- Talking Pocket Calculator and Clock $14.99
- Musical Bingo Dog $24.99

* Special Saturday Open House! *
Saturday, Dec. 4 from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
During this holiday season, our thoughts turn gratefully to those who make our work possible. It is in this spirit we say thank you and best wishes for the holidays and a happy new year.

Just in time for the holidays, CVI client Sharr'on Simmons (left) bakes cookies in her activities of daily living class with Vision Rehabilitation Therapist Abby Cocanougher.

Our Mission

The mission of the Center for the Visually Impaired is to empower people impacted by vision loss to live with independence and dignity.