

Lighthouse

Tampa Lighthouse for the Blind

Tampa • Winter Haven

News Update

Maximizing independence and providing employment opportunities for persons who are blind or visually impaired

ADAPTATIONS HELP SANDRA ECKERT RETURN TO WORK FOLLOWING SUDDEN VISION LOSS

January 2008



Sandra uses a CCTV (monitor on left) and screen enlargement software (for monitor on right) in her office at work.



Sandra uses a hand-held magnifier to review and set appointments on the wall calendar.

Less than a year ago, Sandra Eckert experienced a sudden vision loss that threatened to end her career and rob her of her independence. As a diabetic, Sandra's eyes had developed diabetic retinopathy, a major complication of the disease that affects the retina or visual nerve center of the eye. The retinopathy led to retinal detachment or separation of the retina from the back of the eye.

With aggressive medical treatment, she was able to retain some of her eyesight, but was still faced with the prospect of losing the job that she had held for over ten years. Faced with uncertainty about losing her independence and her livelihood, Sandra became despondent. Social Security had denied her application for disability. It seemed that things were spiraling out of control. Sandra shared her despondency during a follow-up visit with the doctor who had originally diagnosed her

condition. It was at that time that he advised her to contact the Lighthouse for the Blind for assistance.

Sandra followed her doctor's recommendation without hesitation and contacted the Lighthouse's Winter Haven facility. She also contacted the Division of Blind Services. Sandra already knew how to operate a computer at her job but could no longer read what was on her computer monitor. The answer was special software that enlarges print and graphics on a computer monitor as needed. This software was provided to her by Division of Blind Services and the training in how to use it was provided by the Lighthouse. She was also provided with a special glasses, a closed-circuit television system (CCTV) for enlarging printed material such as mail, and a hand-held magnifier to help her use the wall calendar at work for scheduling purposes.

Fortunately, Sandra's boss agreed to hold her job open for her, pending her successful rehabilitation and return to work. With new hope, her spirits began to lift. Mike, her Lighthouse computer teacher, conducted a job analysis of her place of employment to determine what adaptations would be needed. He set up the CCTV on her desk and installed the screen enlargement software into her office computer. It was then a matter of making certain the screen enlargement software would work with her book-keeping and office (word processing, spreadsheet) software.

With all of her newly installed adaptations in place and working, Sandra was able to return to work part-time and resume what she was doing prior to the sudden loss of her eyesight. Although she is unable to drive and is dependant on her husband Lenny, (and other family members), to get her to and from work, she told Mike that she feels much better now that she is back at her old job and is being productive again. Although Sandra is continuing to battle with the complications that she still endures, she is to be congratulated for facing her dilemma with continued courage and for responding as she did to make such a rapid adjustment. The Lighthouse will continue to assist her as needed and will keep her updated on new developments in access technology.

MOBILITY AWARENESS DAY HIGHLIGHTS SAFETY ISSUES

Tampa Lighthouse for the Blind

Tampa • Winter Haven

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Rehabilitation Services
Low Vision Clinic
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Services Contracts
1106 W. Platt Street
Tampa, FL 33606
Phone: (813) 251-2407
Fax: (813) 254-4305

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Rehabilitation Services
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206 Avenue D N. W.
Winter Haven, FL 33881
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Fax: (863) 299-3559

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www.tampalighthouse.org

E-mail

tlh@tampalighthouse.org

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Several participants wore blindfolds and were led by trained guides.

National White Cane Safety Day, observed October 15th, featured a tour of downtown Tampa that involved several groups with a common goal. The goal was to raise awareness of the daily challenges faced by persons with disabilities in simply getting around. Named the Downtown Mobility Awareness Tour, the walk took place through downtown Tampa and involved several subgroups including blind persons with white canes, sighted persons wearing blindfolds or visual impairment simulators, guide dog users and blindfolded sighted persons experiencing what it's like to use a guide dog, and disabled and non-disabled persons in wheelchairs or walkers. 60+ participants came out to participate including city and county planners and politicians who gained a first-hand appreciation of challenges faced every day by persons with disabilities. A Hartline bus with a wheelchair ramp was set up at a bus stop along the route for participants to board using wheelchairs, walkers, canes, blindfolds, or vision restricting simulators. This particular bus could be lowered to the height of any curb to make the ramp level.

A scribe was assigned to each group to take notes of hazards observed by the participants. Participants were then treated to a box lunch in the County Center. During lunch, the scribes read



This Hartline bus was available for easy boarding by all of the participants.



Some blindfolded participants learned what it was like to be led by a trained guide dog.

their reports and turned them over to city and county planners. Recommendations included fixing broken tree grates and uneven sidewalks, removing fallen construction signs, improving drainage to eliminate standing water, and removing construction and other hazards.

The following organizations were partners in putting on this event: Tampa Downtown Partnership; Mayor's Alliance for Persons with Disabilities; Hillsborough County Metropolitan Planning Organization; Tampa Lighthouse for the Blind; Yes! of America United; Florida Department of Transportation; Hartline; Self Reliance; Southeastern Guide Dogs; and Division of Blind Services. Several participants wore blindfolds and were guided by other participants. Some elected to be led by guide dogs trained by Southeastern Guide Dogs. Hartline had a fully-accessible bus available for easy boarding by each disability group.

“SAM IS AN OUTSTANDING EMPLOYEE” SAYS HIS SUPERVISOR



Behind the scenes, Sam replenishes the various soft drink solutions to keep the taps flowing for McDonald's thirsty customers.

“Sam goes above and beyond the call of duty in doing his job,” added Bob Ross, Manager of the McDonalds restaurant located on North Highway 98 in Lakeland. Whether Sam is taking out the trash, putting up stock, cleaning windows or floors, doing light landscaping or maintenance, or helping toast rolls in the kitchen, he works energetically, maintains excellent attendance and punctuality, and would never think of taking his job for granted. In an industry where turnover is high, Sam's longevity



Sam works both indoors and outdoors to keep the windows spotless.

of six years is a rarity. That combined with his high productivity makes him an especially valuable employee.

Sam began having problems with his eyesight about ten years ago due to undiagnosed high blood pressure. Sam spent 5 days in the hospital while doctors struggled to get his blood pressure under control. His vision stabilized once his blood pressure returned to normal, but not before leaving him permanently legally blind due to optic nerve damage. Sam does have some useful remaining

vision, but is unable to drive and requires extra large print to read.

Prior to losing his eyesight, he was employed for several years by Coca Cola's food division working with citrus products and later in maintenance and as a stockroom clerk. After losing his eyesight, he worked for a year in the Lighthouse's Lakeland shop preparing food products for the Division of Corrections until the shop closed in 2001. Within a month, he had landed the McDonalds job with the help of the Lighthouse's job development specialist.

Sam is married and has eight children, three of whom are still in school. In his spare time, Sam enjoys spending time with his family, working around the house, listening to Talking Books, and working on his Zoom Text-equipped computer that he uses to help his kids with their homework. He also uses his computer to pay bills, read using the Zoom Text screen enlargement software, and compile music CDs.

CRYSTAL BAY ENTERPRISES OWNER DEBBIE HIETALA WINS ABLE TRUST ABILITY AWARD



Sharon Griffith (r), Able Trust's President presents award to Debbie Hietala who is accompanied by her guide dog, Maggie.

Debbie Hietala was featured in the previous issue of The Lighthouse for being awarded Employer of the Year by the (Tampa) Mayor's Alliance for Persons With Disabilities. As the legally blind owner/operator of Crystal Bay Enterprise, a cafeteria in the Hillsborough County Courthouse, Debbie has, over the years, provided meaningful employment to many other visually disabled persons. Additionally, she has mentored others, some of whom were her own employees, who went on to manage their own concession businesses.

Following Debbie's well-deserved recognition, the Lighthouse saw yet another opportunity to help her receive another prestigious award, this time

through the Able Trust in Tallahassee. The mission of Able Trust, a Florida Foundation, is to provide Floridians with disabilities fair employment opportunities through fund raising, grant programs, public awareness, and education. Consistent with its mission, Able Trust recognizes several Florida businesses and individuals each year through its Ability Awards in several categories. The Lighthouse's nomination enabled Debbie's Crystal Bay Enterprise to be awarded the Small Business of the Year Ability award for 2007 for the entire state of Florida. On October 9th, she received her award at Able Trust's Tenth Annual Ability Awards presentation, held in Tallahassee. Congratulations again, Debbie!

2007 GRADUATES HONORED AT HOLIDAY PARTIES



Tampa's Class of 2007.



Coleman Middle School's orchestra returned for the 8th consecutive year.



Everyone in attendance was served a full lunch and holiday cake after the ceremony.



There was plenty of fellowship served up along with the food.



Santa and Mrs. Clause took time out of their extremely busy schedules to drop by our Winter Haven graduation party.



Dwayne White was back to play holiday music on the piano at our Winter Haven graduation party.

Each of our graduates has had to face the difficult decision of accepting help, often at a time of despair. For all of them, it has meant facing their limitations and realizing that they could not go it alone. However, their lives changed dramatically for the better once they decided to take the classes offered. Seeing others faced with similar situations often made a big difference. So together they came and together they learned. One day, it dawned upon each of them that they were no longer helpless and that they could do much more than they ever dreamed possible. A new life has begun. Fast forward to graduation day. Our graduates arrive, often with family members, to celebrate and be recognized for the courage each has mustered up to get to where they are that day. Each graduate has worked so hard and accomplished so much in such a short time. After receiving their diplomas, they

were invited to share their experiences with everyone present. What has always been amazing is that, year after year, nearly all of the graduates have stood up, one by one, without any prodding whatsoever, to share his or her testimony, often with a good deal of emotion. Family members usually follow suit. A traditional party followed the graduation ceremony with a full lunch, complete with cake for dessert and bags of goodies to take home.

The Coleman Middle School Orchestra – Chamber Ensemble, directed by Edward Thanz, returned for the 8th straight year to provide wonderful holiday music for our Tampa graduation and holiday party. We thank them once again for adding so much to this occasion year after year.

At our 14th annual Winter Haven graduation party, the Winter Haven High School Orchestra, directed by Michael

Lawson, returned for the 3rd straight year to provide holiday music for our Winter Haven graduation and holiday party. Dwayne White and Eva Crowder also provided entertainment by taking turns on the piano. Once again, the State of Florida made the Nora Mayo Hall in the Florida Citrus Building available for this holiday party. Santa and Mrs. Clause, played again by Paul and Geneva Albright, returned to entertain, help serve the food, and hand out bags of candy. Paul and Geneva give generously of their time near the holidays every year to visit local schools as Mr. and Mrs. Santa Clause.

For both parties, we also wish to thank our hard-working staff for their efforts and creativity in organizing and carrying out these wonderful events. In addition, we would like to thank Division of Blind Services staff for attending and participating in both of our holiday

GRADUATES HONORED - CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4



Winter Haven's Class of 2007.



Winter Haven High School Orchestra entertained our Winter Haven graduation event for the 3rd consecutive year.

events as they have each year.

TAMPA GRADUATES

(in alphabetical order)

Christel Bove, Maria Calero, Bettie Charles, Francis Coune, Albert Davis, Molly Emmons, Vissadean Frierson, Gail Friskco, Carlos Gomez, Eliza Green, Leonard Green, Mark Harshbarger, Triston Hunt, Andrew James, Israel Jiles, Puliston Kirksey, Christine Kooy, Thomas Lambert, Charles Marchese, Bette Mertz, James Moore, Joyce Orié, Kathleen Peak, Toynita Pilcher, Madeline Ramos, Zelma Remillong, Peter Renaud, Maria Rodriguez, Rodney Rolle, Patricia Spann, Roberta Thomas, Helen Ann Whitney, Melchisedec Williams, Shawn Worthy.

WINTER HAVEN GRADUATES (in alphabetical order)

Chavara Andrews, Sam Andrews, Patricia Barbeau, Judy Black, Marjorie Burnett, James Burnsed, Evelyn Eby, Sandra Eckert, Marcia Flynn, Robert Frazier, Doris Furnish, Marjorie Gay, Maudie Goodman, Shirley Goodwin, Sandra Helms, Eunice Hendershot, Carolyn Hickman, Lisa Hiestand, Harold Jackson, Mickey Jacobs, Lois Jenkins, Earl Jones, Josephine Kelley, Robert Kish, Joanne Koch, Margaret Laturner, Florence Lindsay, Kenneth Mathis, Arthur McClure, Adam Palmes, Thalia Pedin, Dale Perez, Tia Sampson, Constance Sanford, Marcella Schreiner, Vikram Srinivasulu, Joyce Shipway, Katie Sommerlot, Mary Jo Sutherland, Sunshine Swearingen, Cheryl Taylor, Pauline Zumbach.

TRANSITION TEENS LEARN LIFE SKILLS TO PREPARE FOR ADULTHOOD



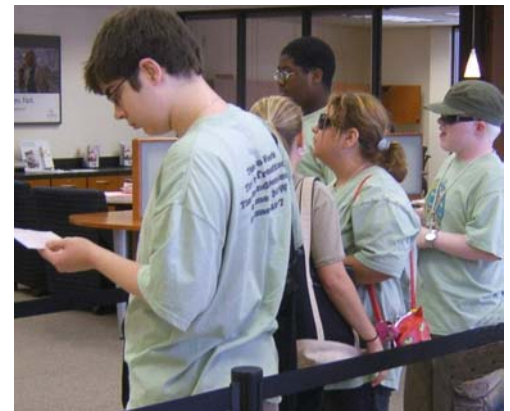
Cooking class includes preparation of meals on both electric and gas stoves.

Our year-round Transition program for visually impaired teens and young adults has successfully passed its one-year milestone. This program, offered in both Tampa and Winter Haven, helps its youthful participants to prepare for adulthood responsibilities including a substantial focus on workforce readiness. Other areas of concentration include daily living skills, orientation and



Work Experience involves actual paid work at participating businesses.

mobility, assistive computer technology, and other skills that support employment and independent living. Much of the learning is hands-on in community settings such as banks for cashing paychecks, retail stores for clothing selection, and grocery stores for selecting nutritionally complete foods, laundromats for clothing care, restaurants for eating etiquette, barber/beauty shops



One of the field trips was to a local bank to learn about check cashing and other aspects of banking.

for hair care, etc. This program was initially offered only during the summer starting in 2003, but because of its success and the realization that more of the same was needed, funding to expand the program became available from the Division of Blind Services. Workforce readiness involves a community work experiences during which

Continued on Page 6

ANDREW, THE BLIND MAGICIAN , WOWS OTHERS WITH MAGIC, SPIRIT



Andrew maintains an impressive repertoire of card tricks to entertain any audience.

Andrew Irizarry was born deaf and had a very difficult time learning normal speech. Years of struggle, therapy, and determination enabled him to develop his ability to speak and converse effectively with others. With the help of a summer camp leader, he developed a positive attitude and confidence at an early age. This along with his rich imagination would sustain Andrew through many setbacks and help him overcome many challenging obstacles. He attended a school for the deaf, then made a successful transition to a mainstream high school setting. He was a good student, but dropped out a year from graduating to help support his struggling family following a divorce between his mother and stepfather. He later earned a GED.

Upon reaching adulthood, Andrew tried several careers and was successful in each, but not always happy or fulfilled.



Working energetically to keep up with the demands of a very busy cafeteria.

Some of his careers included auto mechanic, commercial artist, massage therapist, and entertainer. Of his many occupations, his true love was and continues to be entertaining and helping others. Regardless of where he was working, Andrew found time to perform on the side as a pantomime, comedian, and magician. He has entertained on cruise ships, and in clubs, hotels, and on street corners. At one time, he was a student of David Copperfield.

Andrew shares his experiences in an inspiring book he wrote (titled [How I Overcame My Physical Disability with Positive Thinking](#)), focusing on challenges he faced from his hearing and speech impairments. Since then, he has had another major setback – a degenerative eye disease which has robbed him of most of his eyesight, leaving him

both hearing and visually impaired. No longer able to support himself in the entertainment field, he sought help from the Lighthouse and received job placement assistance to help him get his current job at Crystal Bay Cafeteria in the Hillsborough County Courthouse where he works as a cafeteria assistant. The Division of Blind Services helped him to relocate closer to his new job. The Lighthouse's mobility instructor taught him how to take the bus to and from work and travel about his complex work environment. Dealing with multiple disabilities has inspired Andrew to start a second book, currently in progress. His love of entertaining has never wavered – he sometimes puts on an impromptu show for Crystal Bay's diners. His energy and spirit are evident as he carries out card tricks and other sleight-of-hand feats. Last summer, he was featured performing on Fox's "What's Right With Tampa Bay," a local news feature series.

Andrew has a strong desire to help others with disabilities. He inspires others to think positively to overcome challenges, and maintains a website (www.andrewcaredis.com). He often speaks to churches and other groups. He has appeared as "Andy Flash – the Magic Mime" at birthday parties, cruise ships, night clubs and special events.

TRANSITION TEENS LEARN LIFE SKILLS - CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

the participants earn paychecks that participants learn to manage and budget through their own bank or credit union accounts. All of these activities are designed to help participants become and remain independent and self-sufficient throughout adulthood.

The participants are periodically rewarded for their progress and hard work with fun activities that are scheduled throughout the year. These include bowling, trips to museums and other educational attractions, theme parks, and other activities.



Students learn orientation and mobility to get around safely and independently.



Horseback riding is fun and encourages fitness for those along for the ride.

CONTRIBUTORS

Tampa Lighthouse for the Blind truly appreciates all of our donors. All contributions support programs and services at Tampa Lighthouse for the Blind. Although we can only list contributors who give gifts totaling \$50 or more, we are grateful for each gift. The names listed below include those whose contributions were received between July 1, 2007 and December 31, 2007. If we have inadvertently omitted or misspelled your name, we apologize and ask that you please let us know by calling (813) 251-2407.

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Irma Caravacci

Marie Burke

Alfred Leo

Robert Switzer

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Adeline Bailey

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Elizabeth Charney

Eugene Carson

June Carson

Muriel Chesbrough

David & Veronica

Chesbrough

John Gaddis

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Malama Omensetter

THE DAY IT SNOWED AT THE LIGHTHOUSE!



Frolicking in the snow.

Saturday December 15th was the day it snowed at the Lighthouse (Tampa location) for the benefit of the visually impaired kids in our Transition program and our new Early Intervention program. All had a great time frolicking on the snow mound. The parents and teachers seemed to have as much fun as the kids did. Some of the kids got together to make a mini-snowman.

MAJOR FUNDING SOURCES

City of Tampa
City of Winter Haven
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Department of Education)

Hillsborough County BOCC
Polk County BOCC
United Way of Central Florida
United Way of Tampa Bay

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Florida Association of Agencies Serving the Blind (FAASB)

National Accreditation Council for Agencies Serving
People with Blindness or Visual Impairment (NAC)

National Industries for the Blind (NIB)

Tampa Lighthouse for the Blind

1106 W. Platt Street • Tampa, FL 33606-2142

Upcoming Events

January 21

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Day observed (closed)

February

Low Vision Expo
8:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon
Christ the King Catholic
Church - 821 S. Dale Mabry
Hwy., Tampa, FL 33609
Call (813) 251-2407 for info.

April 19

20th Annual Beepball Classic
10:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon
Community Field at Legends
Field

May 26

Memorial Day observed
(closed)

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