

# 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*

### SHE TEACHES HER STUDENTS TO BELIEVE IN THEMSELVES



*Personal computer classes teach students how to use computers equipped with speech or screen magnification.*

Chelsea Bridges is usually the first person that a visually impaired person meets once he or she arrives at the Lighthouse's Tampa location for the first day of class to learn daily living skills. New students first come to the Lighthouse in a state of nervous apprehension, afraid of failing or appearing inept or incapable. They may still be despondent from losing their eyesight due to any of a number of causes. Many have lost their jobs and have otherwise suffered disrupted lives. All have lost their sense of independence and most are desperate to regain some semblance of it. As a certified and highly experienced rehabilitation teacher, Chelsea Bridges has helped many before them to go from a

state of helplessness to one of self-sufficiency in six short weeks. By the end of the classes, students are able to prepare meals, manage finances, use writing guides, organize their pantries, launder and organize clothing, and carry out many other household tasks. The students gain a tremendous amount of self-confidence throughout the duration of the classes. Family members are often astonished by their transformation from a state of dependence to one of autonomy.

Chelsea has drawn on her own experiences with lifelong visual disability to help the hundreds of other visually disabled persons that she has worked with over the 15 years she has worked at the Tampa Lighthouse for the Blind. Her own visual impairment, a complication of albinism, provided her with the empathy needed to relate well to her students, and vice versa. As a teacher, Chelsea exhibits an ideal blend of personableness and firm persistence. She has always been highly regarded by her students.

Chelsea was originally hired as a Social Worker/Rehabilitation Teacher trainee. Her elementary education degree and prior classroom teaching experience served as a good starting point for her new career choice. In just over a year after her starting date, she earned her Rehabilitation Teacher certification. She later entered Florida State University and earned her Masters

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Degree in Visual Disabilities in December, 2000 while continuing to work at the Lighthouse. She continued to expand her horizons by studying adaptive computer technology so she could teach personal computer skills to her students, many of whom were prior graduates of her daily living skills classes. She teaches them how to use computers equipped with speech or screen magnification so that they can listen to or magnify print and images on their computer screens. Chelsea went further to learn website development and became the Lighthouse's webmaster. Other areas outside her usual realm included helping with the Lighthouse's Teen Transition program and the adult Social Club. Outside of the Lighthouse, Chelsea served on the Board of Directors of the Florida Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Last summer, Chelsea was presented the Frank A. MacDonald Memorial Award in recognition of her tremendous growth as a professional and as a person who is visually impaired and has served as a role model for the hundreds of students that have gone through her classes over the years. Anyone who observes Chelsea in action sees a teacher who is not only admired, but well liked by her students and coworkers. The Lighthouse is fortunate to have such a high caliber of professional on its staff.

## TAMPA ENHANCED VERIZON RESOLUTION CENTER WINS MAYOR'S ALLIANCE EMPLOYER OF THE YEAR AWARD

# Tampa Lighthouse for the Blind

Tampa • Winter Haven

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*Rose Bass (R) of Verizon's Enhanced Resolution Center is greeted by Mayor Iorio before receiving the award.*

The Tampa Enhanced Verizon Resolution Center (EVRC) was awarded Employer of the Year by the Mayor's Alliance for Persons with Disabilities at an awards luncheon September 25<sup>th</sup>. The Lighthouse nominated EVRC for this award because of EVRC's ongoing commitment to accommodate people with disabilities. The Tampa EVRC has a long history of proactively providing accommodations to employees with visual impairments through the development of innovative strategies to remove barriers that are typically encountered while developing accessible work place solutions.

For example, Verizon trainers have worked in partnership with the Tampa Lighthouse for the Blind trainers to provide training in an accessible format and to assure successful delivery of the training solutions. Verizon consistently addresses potential accessibility concerns setting themselves apart from other businesses by seeking the Tampa Lighthouse's advice during all phases of their systems design development and implementation processes. They accomplished this by examining accessibility requirements at the beginning of the systems development process instead of

at the end. This approach has proven to be successful in providing accessible employment opportunities.

Though it has now become more standard for companies to allow remote access to Assistive Technology providers, Verizon was one of the first businesses to provide this valuable tool that has enabled us to create and deliver accessibility solutions in the work place much faster than the traditional methods.

The Tampa EVRC maintains communication with the Tampa Lighthouse after services are completed, in order to provide the employee with quick solutions whenever adaptive technology issues arise. This close relationship allows the employee to continue to do his or her job, in spite of technical challenges.

Another significant part of the Tampa EVRC's commitment to create and maintain an accessible work environment is their willingness to work with individuals who rely on public transportation and give them work schedules that coincide with public transportation schedules. This is extremely important as many or most people with disabilities must rely on public transportation.

Finally, the Tampa EVRC acts as a valuable community resource by allowing Lighthouse staff to schedule visits at EVRC with other corporations to afford them the opportunity to observe the accessibility solutions in a real time work environment.

For all of the above reasons, Tampa EVRC has shown itself to be a strong advocate for enabling people with disabilities to be a vital part of a diverse workforce.

### **"THE LIGHTHOUSE" IS AVAILABLE ON OUR WEBSITE**

Just go to [www.tampalighthouse.org](http://www.tampalighthouse.org) (Bobby-approved). A PDF version of *The Lighthouse* is also available via email upon request.

# PERFECT ATTENDANCE - A LIFELONG ACHIEVEMENT



*Joe Ed uses a hand-held scanner to check in packages for the Corps.*

Joseph Cannon, who goes by “Joe Ed”, could never be accused of being a “no-show.” That is because he has maintained perfect attendance at his mail clerk job for almost 8 years, taking time off only for vacations and holidays. Joe Ed survived annual cold and flu seasons, overcame transportation problems, and dealt with occasional inclement weather. Joe Ed is legally blind and unable to drive making him totally dependent on others for his daily rides to and from work. Residing in Baldwin, a rural town outside Jacksonville, adds to the challenge of getting around.

Joe Ed works in the mailroom at the



*Joe Ed delivers packages in addition to making four mail runs a day.*

Army Corps of Engineers, located in the Prudential Building in Jacksonville, Florida. The mailroom is operated by the Lighthouse under a special Federal service contract program designed to provide steady jobs with a decent compensation package to persons who are legally blind or disabled. The Lighthouse’s other service contract is the switchboard at MacDill Air Force Base.

Joe Ed has been working in the mailroom since the Lighthouse took over the contract in early January, 2001. As a Clerk II (the higher of two non-supervisory clerk levels), he sorts incoming mail; makes four mail runs per

day to deliver mail to 5 stories of the Prudential tower; distributes print shop jobs; processes bulk mail; delivers FedEx, Airborne, and UPS packages, prepares official documents for distribution, and prepares packages for shipment.

Joe Ed has severe tunnel vision which is 20 degrees or less (a normally sighted person has nearly 180 degrees). His remaining restricted field of vision is sufficient for him to carry out all of his duties and responsibilities even though he sees only about 10% of what a normally sighted person sees.

Maintaining perfect attendance seems to be a way of life for Joe Ed. He has also maintained perfect attendance at a previous job and as a teen attending high school. When asked his secret for staying so healthy, he said that “My secret is taking daily walks and making sure to take my vitamins every day.”

In his spare time, Joe Ed enjoys sports, fishing, doing ministry work at nursing homes and going to the beach.

## NEW SPECIALTY LICENSE PLATE GIFT CERTIFICATE PROGRAM INCLUDES THE NEW STATE OF VISION TAGS



The Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles has recently authorized the sale of gift certificates for any of its many specialty license plates, including our new State of Vision Tag. Proceeds from the sale of the State of Vision tag including the new gift certi-

cate will benefit Florida private agencies serving the blind and visually impaired.

Now anyone can purchase a specialty license plate by means of a gift certificate for any motor vehicle registrant. These gift certificates may now be purchased at an authorized auto tag office for any of the specialty license plates currently available in Florida. At the time of purchase, a receipt will be provided and a credit will be issued in the name of the gift recipient who then redeems it when purchasing the license plate. You do not have to purchase and

redeem the certificate at the same office. The gift certificate is not required to be presented to redeem the credit, just proper identification (i.e. Florida driver’s license or ID card). Once a gift certificate is purchased, the money is given to the sponsoring plate entity as specified by Florida Statutes. Therefore, refunds are not available for gift certificates.

This provides a great opportunity to give The State of Vision specialty tag as a gift. Please remember that in Florida, most registrations are renewed on the birth date of the registrant, so these gift certificates can be a great birthday gift.

## GRADUATES RECOGNIZED AT HOLIDAY GRADUATION PARTY



*Tampa's Class of 2008.*

Our holiday parties and graduation ceremonies took place on December 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> in Winter Haven and Tampa respectively. The focus of our holiday parties was to honor our many graduates who attended and completed programs that were designed to help them regain independence and/or secure employment. All of our graduates had one thing in common – the courage to admit they needed help and to make the commitment to attend and complete the programs needed to accomplish their goals. The outlook was bleak for many of the graduates who often harbored a sense of hopelessness before starting their various programs. At the completion of their programs (6 – 8 weeks), many were surprised as to how quickly the time had passed and also how far they had come. In most cases, the level of independence achieved far exceeded their expectations, restoring their self confidence.

What better time to celebrate this than the holidays! Family members were invited as well and encouraged to testify after the graduation ceremony as to how much their graduates had progressed. Our former graduates were also invited and many came to enjoy the festivities. Several graduates were not there for a good reason – they were working!

A traditional party followed the graduation ceremonies at both locations 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



*Coleman Middle School's orchestra returned for the 9<sup>th</sup> consecutive year .*



*Elida Barria and Ana Garcia were recognized for their volunteer work.*

the 9<sup>th</sup> straight year to provide holiday music for our Tampa graduation and holiday party. We thank them once again for being a special part of this occasion year after year.

At our 15<sup>th</sup> annual Winter Haven graduation party, Lake Region High School's Light Rain Guitar Ensemble, directed by Kathy Ginstead, made its debut appearance to provide holiday music for our Winter Haven graduation and holiday party. Following the Light Rain Guitar Ensemble was Dwayne White on the piano. Dwayne has been providing holiday entertainment for our Winter Haven graduations for several years. Eva Crowder, our Rehabilitation Teacher, accompanied Dwayne to form a holiday duet following the closing remarks. Once again, the State of Florida let us use the Nora Mayo Hall in the Florida Citrus Building available for



*A holiday lunch was served. Dessert consisted of a large graduation cake.*

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 events as they have each year.

### TAMPA GRADUATES (in alphabetical order)

Michael Akpewero, Ronnie Barnum, Diane Bobrowski, Eugene Brown, Maria Calero, Chandra Carter, Angelia Chism, Mary Corbett, David Curiel, Taurus Curmon, Irwin Dawley, Kevin Eaton, Phillip Eaton, Barbara Gaw, Joyce Grimsley, Gary Guth, Leona R. Haas, Janelle Haley, Chester Humphrey, Eric Johnson, William Johnson, Patricia Lopez, Lloyd Matthews, Theresa Mulkey, Rosa Myers, Arnold Nieuwendam, Maudie Noble, Edward O'Connell, Gerald Paradis, Christopher Phillip, Maria Rodriguez, Rodney Rolle, Rafael Ruiz, Idalene Rutledge, Loredana Simonetto, James Smithson, Martin Stahel, Edith Strickland, Gloria Valenzuela, Pearl Warren, Wilson Wingate, Betty Wise, Fay Young.

### WINTER HAVEN GRADUATES (in alphabetical order)

Mary Ann Breathitt, Henry Bucher, Gweneviere Burton, Natalie Condrey, Elizabeth Drumm, John Hall, Doris Hawkinsen, Alisha Hernandez, Yolanda Hernandez, Carolyn Hickman, James Johnson, Vijay Kishun, Luciano Naranjo, Linda Perez, James Robinson, Toribio Roque, Joe Rumph, Tia Sampson, Thomas Scarborough, Vince Schnickels, Susan Sirois, Ruby Smith, Jonathan Stephens, Delois Stokenbury, Charles Stoneback, Henrietta Valley, Angela Williams.



*Santa and Mrs Claus (a.k.a Paul and Geneva Albright) returned to our Winter Haven graduation party to delight the kids of all ages.*



*Winter Haven's Class of 2008.*



## STAYING ACTIVE KEEPS HER YOUNG AT HEART



*Doris loves to cook and was eager to learn new skills to help her function fully in the kitchen again.*

When Doris Hawkinsen, 83, developed glaucoma 20 years ago, then macular degeneration a few years ago in her only good eye, her lifestyle was not significantly affected until about a year ago. She received injections to stabilize her macular degeneration and preserve useable eyesight, but was still left legally blind. As Doris put it, she found herself “floundering” more than usual and decided it was time to do something about it so she called the Division of Blind Services office in Lakeland. Rob Risavy who became her counselor came to her home to interview her and assess her needs. He then referred her to the Lighthouse’s Winter Haven facility for

daily living skills classes. In just five weeks of classes, Doris learned everything from adaptive kitchen skills (she loves cooking, especially baking) to money organizing, talking watches, writing guides, orientation and mobility, and much more. Her instructor took her and the other students on shopping trips to practice their newly learned skills and learn how to utilize shopping assistants that stores make available to persons with disabilities. Doris responded well to her training because, as she puts it, she loves challenges. Her positive attitude which undoubtedly contributed to her success was most evident during our interview.

Doris wasted no time putting her newly acquired independence to good use. She volunteered for Florida First Start which is Polk County Schools’ mission program that provides donations of clothing, furniture, non-perishable food, and other needed items to low-income families with children in the public schools. She currently participates in bake sales and other fund-raisers for the program. Doris has also been donating blood continuously for 20 years. Doris has remained physically fit through



*Doris learned how to fold currency in unique ways for ready identification.*

a variety of activities including daily walks, shuffleboard, and, more recently, Bache ball, a competition where teams roll croquet-size balls toward a larger “target” ball, attempting to be the closest to the target.

Doris and her husband Don have enjoyed an amazing 62 years of marriage. When asked what her secret was for such a long marriage, she replied, “Give and take, but give more than you take.” Doris definitely follows that philosophy, but it is evident that she has benefitted in the process.



## “PATI” LOPEZ OVERCOMES EXTRAORDINARY CHALLENGES



*Pati helps this student identify a Braille character using enlarged Braille characters mounted on wood blocks.*

Anyone who spends any amount of time with “Pati” Lopez comes away with at least two positive impressions – one is her perennial cheerfulness and another is her positive energy. Her life’s story is beset with adversity, yet she has dealt effectively with one setback after another. Born in Guatemala, she and her family fled to Miami in 1986 to escape a civil war and the commandeering of family farmland by the government. When Pati arrived in Miami with her family, she had to learn English from scratch and undergo the extensive process needed to get a visa. She also had to go to school and get an education using a language she had just started to learn.



*With her background as a teacher for the visually impaired, Pati is more than qualified to assist with this class.*

Early in her adulthood, Pati was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa, a relentlessly progressive eye disease with no cure. When she learned of it, she went to the Miami Lighthouse for the Blind to obtain as much information as possible about available resources that she could use to plan her future. She attended the Florida State University, majoring in business, then switched her major to Education of the Visually Impaired, later graduating with this degree. She returned to Miami and began her teaching career, but developed lupus, another incurable disease, and had to stop working for a few years. With the help of a state-of-the-art medical regimen, her lupus eventu-

ally went into remission where it has remained ever since. However, with her vision deteriorating, she decided to move to New York City because of the better transportation. While there, she attended Hunter College, majoring in vocational rehabilitation counseling. She also sought services from Lighthouse International for mobility and computer training to help her cope with her steadily declining eyesight.

As if Pati didn’t have enough to deal with, a family emergency brought her back to Florida, this time to the Tampa Bay area. In early 2008, she contacted the Tampa Lighthouse and enrolled in daily living skills classes, vocational evaluation, and computer classes. After completing all of her classes and program services, Pati continued coming to the Lighthouse as a class assistant for the daily living skills class. With her degree and teaching experience, Pati accepted a job as a rehabilitation specialist at the State Rehabilitation Center in Daytona Beach.

Congratulations to Pati Lopez for all of her courage and positive outlook in overcoming all of the unusually daunting challenges that she has had to face and for thriving in spite of it all!

## SENIOR SOCIAL CLUB SPONSORED BY LIONS EYE INSTITUTE FOUNDATION

The Senior Social Club was organized to provide a much-needed social outlet for our many seniors. Nearly all of



*The Senior Social Club got together for a Thanksgiving luncheon in November.*

them have gone through one or more of the Lighthouse’s programs designed mainly to help them learn skills that enable them to live independently. Following completion of classes in daily living skills and personal computing, these seniors often seek additional activities that involve social interaction.

Thanks to the support of the Lions Eye Institute, the Senior Social Club became a reality. The Lions Eye Institute, founded in 1973 by a group of Lions Club members from Tampa, is devoted primarily to corneal transplants by means of distribution of eye tissues

needed for this sight-restoration surgery. The Eye Institute also supports related research and education.

The Senior Social Club organizes recreational outings such as trips to the beach, State Fair, and to fishing piers for fishing trips. For more information about the Senior Social Club, call 813-251-2407 or send an email inquiry to [tlh@tampalighthouse.org](mailto:tlh@tampalighthouse.org).



# 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, 2008 and December 31, 2008. 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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*We thank the following contributors for choosing Tampa Lighthouse for the Blind as a means of expression to honor or memorialize a friend or loved one*

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*Continued on Page 8*

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**LIGHTHOUSE YOUTH IN HOLIDAY PARADE**

Our Winter Haven Transition Program kids jumped at the chance to ride on a float in the Winter Haven holiday night parade. Many of the teachers and parents were there and enjoyed it as much as the kids did.



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

National Industries for the Blind (NIB)

**Upcoming Events**

January 19

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

May 9

21st Annual Beepball Classic  
10:00 - 12:00 noon  
Community Field at George Steinbrenner Field

May 25

Memorial Day observed (closed)

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Lighthouse  
for the Blind**

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