

# 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*

### LIGHTHOUSE TRANSITION STUDENT CHOSEN FOR GRAND CANYON TRIP



*A group pose at the rim of the Grand Canyon.*

Lighthouse Transition student McKenna Murphy, 15, was one of 10 blind or visually impaired students nationwide chosen to spend two weeks last summer at the Grand Canyon carrying out activities designed to build leadership skills and help the environment. These activities included studying ecology and Native American culture, rafting the Colorado River, hiking trails accessible only from the river, and carrying out a service project involving restoration of a campground. Prior to the trip, the students got acquainted with each other through conference calls and gained some mental preparation about their destination and mission. Homework was a vital part of their preparation.

The trip was offered by Global Explorers, a nonprofit organization that arranges educational and service trips as part of its "Leading the Way" program for visually- and hearing-impaired students. McKenna's vision teacher, Teresa Martinkovic, found out about the trip and encouraged McKenna to apply for one of the coveted slots. One of the

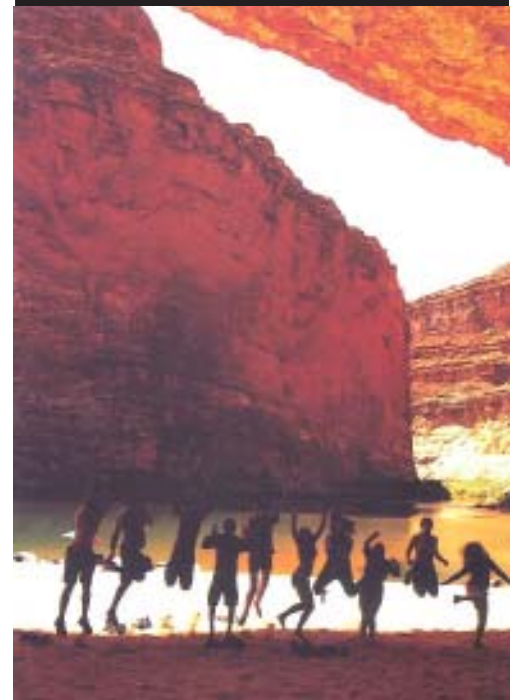


*The group on one of many hiking trips.*

requirements was to raise \$2,300 (required as a leadership exercise) which she did partly by selling decorative tiles designed by her mother, an artist. The design, a tree with high branches and winding roots wrapped around an acorn, included McKenna's own message that states, "Never underestimate the power inside of you." McKenna also raised money by holding a raffle for the prize of cleaning the winner's house (with her teacher's help, as in "M&M Housecleaning," joked her teacher).

Once there, McKenna was "blown away" by the natural beauty of her surroundings. She and her nine fellow participants were encouraged to take in the sounds of nature by means of "soundscaping" which is complete immersion of one's senses into the natural surroundings by sitting still and focusing on them for up to 30 minutes at a time. They rafted down the Colorado River and were taught recovery techniques such as falling from a raft into the

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*The frolicking students form an interesting silhouette on the backdrop of one of Mother Nature's greatest creations.*

chilly rapids. They shunned tents to camp out under the stars in their sleeping bags which insulated them from the chilly night temperatures. They carried out their assigned service project by restoring a campground which included cleaning up the adjoining trails. The two weeks spent there gave them life experiences they will never forget.

McKenna has congenital ocular albinism which impairs her ability to see bright lights, glare, and colors. She can read print in a dim room, but has trouble with overhead projectors. She is able to work on a computer. There is very little

*Continued on Page 3*

## DELTA GAMMA MAINTAINS HISTORICAL FOCUS ON BLINDNESS

# Tampa Lighthouse for the Blind

Tampa • Winter Haven

## Contact Information

### Tampa

Administrative Offices  
Transition Services  
Rehabilitation Services  
Low Vision Clinic  
Magnifiers & More Store  
Services Contracts  
1106 W. Platt Street  
Tampa, FL 33606  
Phone: (813) 251-2407  
Fax: (813) 254-4305

### Winter Haven

Early Intervention  
Transition Services  
Rehabilitation Services  
Low Vision Clinic  
206 Avenue D N. W.  
Winter Haven, FL 33881  
Phone: (863) 299-3633  
Fax: (863) 299-3559

### Web Site

[www.tampalighthouse.org](http://www.tampalighthouse.org)

### E-mail

[tlh@tampalighthouse.org](mailto:tlh@tampalighthouse.org)

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*Delta Gamma members put on a car wash to benefit the Lighthouse's Transition Program.*

Delta Gamma, a college sorority, has maintained a priority on preventing blindness since 1936, but has also endeavored to further the cause of those who are already blind or visually impaired. The origin of this movement was a woman named Ruth Billow, blinded in a childhood accident, who made an impassioned plea at a Delta Gamma convention in 1936, asking that Delta Gamma make a difference in the lives of those with limited or no sight. She would have been overwhelmed by the accomplishments of Delta Gamma since then.

Last year, University of Tampa's Delta Gamma -Epsilon Theta Chapter Sorority, became involved with the Lighthouse's Transition Program for blind and visually impaired teens. Sara Matthews, Volunteer Coordinator for UT's Delta Gamma, has been extremely helpful in providing member volunteers for the Transition program. Initially, they helped out with social activities such as teaching dance classes and assisting with games, then took on a talent show, car



*Delta Gamma members Priscilla and Sara (left side), and Kelley (right side) pose with Lonnie and Andy (center) at the Lighthouse's Halloween party.*

wash, and bake sale. The student volunteers also helped out with the Halloween Party (20 of them!), and have become more involved with the weekly Transition meetings throughout the school year. To balance things out for both genders, they brought out some volunteers from a neighboring fraternity to help with the social functions. The volunteers served as judges for the grilled cheese and pancake cookoffs (all survived at last check!) and discussed college life with our teens. During the dances, the volunteers made sure all of our teens got on the dance floor – no wallflowers allowed! Additionally they raised money for the 5K Run for Sight, put on by the Lions Eye Institute Foundation. Also, back in April of 2009, Delta Gamma won a Greek competition on campus – their prize was \$500 for their charity of choice which was the Lighthouse's Transition program. Every year, Delta Gammas everywhere collectively give over 96,000 Service-for-Sight volunteer hours. The Lighthouse believes that the University of Tampa Delta Gammas give more than their proportionate share of hours to the Lighthouse and wishes to express its sincere thanks to this fine organization.

## LIGHTHOUSE NOMINATES GULF COAST INDUSTRIES FOR MAYOR'S AWARD



*Ann Lanning, a visually impaired GCE employee, was chosen to attend the Luncheon with Project Manager Mercy Ransom and accept the award.*

Gulf Coast Enterprises (GCE) was nominated by Tampa Lighthouse for the Blind for the Mayor's Alliance 2009 Employer of the Year Award. Although Gulf Coast didn't win the top award, the company was a strong runner-up and a winner in the eyes of many.

Regardless of what anyone can say about the sluggish economy, Gulf Coast Enterprises has defied every one of

those odds that would have them struggling along with everyone else. When most businesses were laying off workers or not hiring, Gulf Coast hired over 70 new employees in 2009. Only two of the new hires were without disabilities because none of the disabled candidates at the time had the required military secret clearance for the jobs requiring it. Other noteworthy items include:

1. 85% of Gulf Coast's workforce have disabilities.
2. As a major employer, Gulf Coast has a retention rate of over 95%.
3. They had over 418 days without an accident and still counting (as of late 2009).

Gulf Coast Enterprises has the contract to clean over 2 million square feet of office space at the base. This also includes the office of General Petraeus. But how the employees are treated at

the MacDill Air Force operation in Tampa, FL is the real story of this employer.

Ms. Mercy Ransom, Project Manager, states that their Mission is "Helping People Overcome Life's Challenges." Mercy has been project manager for 10 years and believes that everyone deserves an equal opportunity to work and it is the right thing to do. The employees are provided with ongoing training and are provided with opportunities to advance within the organization. Most supervisors start out as regular custodians.

Mr. Francisco Berroa-Prensa, Targeted Employment Specialist, emphasized that if there is ever an issue with an employee, his/her job coach is invited to help resolve the issue. Francisco made a great statement for the organization. We focus on employee's abilities, not their disabilities.

## GRAND CANYON TRIP - continued from Page 1



*They rafted to settings not accessible by car or on foot.*



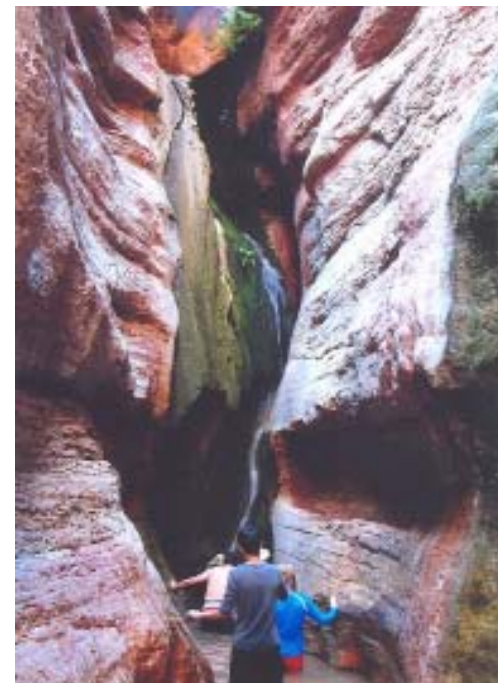
*Students learned recovery techniques to use in case their rafts capsize in the turbulent rapids.*



*Showering under a waterfall.*

that holds this energetic eighth-grader back – she helps her mother make decorative tiles, takes tae kwon do, enjoys reading, works in her school's media center and has been accepted into the International Baccalaureate program at Hillsborough High School.

McKenna, no stranger to adventure, has also gone on two trips to Space Camp at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville, Ala. Last April, she and a group of peers spent two days in



*Wading through a narrow passageway.*

Colorado with Erik Weihenmayer, the first blind climber to scale Mount Everest. Weihenmayer has written two books about his experiences.

## HOLIDAY - GRADUATION



*Coleman Middle School's orchestra returned for its 10th consecutive year!*

Our holiday parties and graduation ceremonies took place on December 4<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> in Tampa and Winter Haven respectively. The highlight of these events was the recognition of our many 2009 graduates who completed programs enabling them to live independently, obtain employment, and or learn adaptive computer skills. All of our graduates worked very hard and, in many cases, exceeded their expectations in developing the skills needed to achieve their goals.

In Tampa, invitees began arriving early to mingle with others and enjoy the holiday ambiance. The graduates then lined up and marched to Pomp and Circumstance to their seats. A moment of silence was observed in honor of April Stanley, a DBS counselor, who recently passed away. Following the presentation of diplomas, the graduates and family members were invited to give testimonials about their experiences and progress made or observed. Most of our graduates were inspired to stand up and speak.

Lighthouse alumni were also invited and several did come to enjoy the festivities.

A party following the graduation ceremonies at both locations featured a complete lunch, graduation cake for dessert and bags of goodies to take home. In Tampa, a culinary class at Wharton High School prepared the



*Tampa's Class of 2009.*



*Many turned out to enjoy the festivities.*

chicken and pasta lunch, then delivered and served it to everyone there. The Coleman Middle School Orchestra – Chamber Ensemble, directed by Edward Thanz, returned for the 10<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 16<sup>th</sup> annual Winter Haven graduation party, Lake Region Ensemble, directed by Michael Lawson, returned for its second year to provide holiday music for our graduates and guests. Also providing musical entertainment were Richard Hopkins and Dwayne White on the piano. Dwayne has been entertaining our Winter Haven holiday gatherings for several years. The State of Florida let us use the Nora Mayo Hall as they have for all of our past holiday gatherings. Santa and Mrs. Claus, 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



*Lunch consisted of chicken, pasta, rolls, salad, iced tea, and graduation cake.*

Claus.

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. Finally, we wish to thank the Lions Eye Foundation for generously sponsoring our Tampa graduation party.

### TAMPA GRADUATES

(in alphabetical order)

Bruno Adamo, Ruth Balfour, Bryon Bewsher, Ophelia Burney, Cecil Cala, Maria Calero, Chandra Carter, Angelia Chism, Jabari Corley, David Curiel, Carlos Diaz, Doris Drake, Frances Ellison, Molly Emmons, Edna Gonzalez, Judith Green, Mary Jackson, Virginia James, William Johnson, Shirley Keech, Russell Kinney, William Lancaster, Elizabeth Langevin, Crystal McIntosh, John Mercado, Pete Mullino, Willie Nelson Jr., Oscar Paquin, Alexander Perez-Vargas, Howard Petroff, Cynthia Pinkney, Julius Roper, Valmarie Royal, R. C. Russell, William Scott, Delton Shelton, Sheri Siegel, Ollie Smith, Sara Stolman, Richard Thomas, Roberta Thomas, Jeanette Vazquez, Joseph Vinci, Kathleen Ware, Helen Ann Whitney.

*Continued on Page 5*

## HOLIDAY - GRADUATION *continued from Page 4*



*These chefs-in-training from Wharton High School's culinary arts program prepared, delivered, and served lunch.*

### WINTER HAVEN GRADUATES (in alphabetical order)

Darlene Acree, Edna Andrews, Helen Bachman, Melody Baxter, Britny Belskis, Larry Birdsong, Perry Boswell, Robert Braze, Kim Bryant, Greg Burnett, Doreen Clayton, Jesus Cruz,



*Winter Haven's Class of 2009.*

Harry Dean, Margaret Dene, William Drum, Jean Eddy, Sandra Flake, Gary Flanagan, Charles Fulse, Theresa Gagnier, Michael Harper, Mary Helms, Yolanda Hernandez, Gordon Hillman, Sherika Hill, Richard Hopkins, Wiley Jones, Edward Kusluch, Thomas Lundie, Anna Grace Nicholson, Laura Rixman, Toribio Roque, Thomas



*Lake Region Ensemble, directed by Michael Lawson, returned for the second year to provide holiday music to our Winter Haven graduates.*

Scarborough, Terry Scovel, Susan Sirois, Twila Shuman, Viva Smith, Cecil Stafford, Mary Stower, James Supej, and Henry Wilczynski.

## UNITED WAY OF TAMPA BAY ANNUAL DAY OF CARING



*The volunteers learned the sighted guide technique by taking turns wearing blindfolds and guiding each other.*

This year's United Way-sponsored Day of Caring was a fall celebration with a good ol' fashioned lunchtime cookout for our clients, past and present. We were fortunate enough to have two groups adopt us: Traveler's Insurance—their 2<sup>nd</sup> year helping us out, and Enterprise Leasing (new) giving us a total of 21 volunteers. Before the preparations began, the volunteers were treated to a hands-on orientation that included an agency tour complete with computer *Tampa Lighthouse For The Blind*

technology demonstrations, a look at the extensive lineup of Magnifiers and More Store merchandise specially adapted for blind and visually impaired persons, and experiences under the blindfold focusing on proper sighted guide and white cane techniques.

The volunteers did a wonderful job organizing and preparing food for the cookout, then serving it to our clients and their guests. They grilled hamburgers and hotdogs, set up the serving line, served everyone, and cleaned up afterward. Many Lighthouse employees helped to facilitate the activities and pitched in to help with the preparation and cleanup. For dessert, freshly-churned ice cream with fruit was served.

The turnout was quite good and the weather cooperated. It was a wonderful time for many to see old friends not seen in a long time and for the staff to get caught up on how our past participants have progressed since their last involvement in the various Lighthouse programs. The volunteers had a great



*Current and former Lighthouse clients were all invited to a good ol' fashioned fall picnic of hamburgers, hotdogs, potato salad, chips, and home-made ice cream.*

time as well and several expressed a desire to return next year.

### CURRENT AND BACK ISSUES OF THE LIGHTHOUSE AVAILABLE AT OUR WEBSITE

Just go to our website at [www.tampalighthouse.org](http://www.tampalighthouse.org), click on NEWSLETTER (listed on the right side of Home Page), then click on issue (by date) desired or click on Archives for dates earlier than January 2007.

## GARY FLANAGAN, MAKING THE MOST OF A DIFFICULT SITUATION



*Gary's closed circuit TV (CCTV) enlarges printed material enabling him to read it.*

Gary Flanagan, 63, has not had a good year. He lost most of his eyesight and his spouse passed away. Twelve years ago, he lost the use of his left eye to optic neuropathy, an disease that attacks the main nerve of the eye. At the time, he still had full use of his right eye, enabling him to continue working, until last year when this same eye disease, in only one week's time, robbed him of the use of his remaining eye. Reduced to seeing only shadows, indistinct forms, and colors; he was no longer able to

continue at his job as a new construction inspector for the City of Winter Haven. To compound matters, Gary has had a host of other health problems.

Last August, at his daughter's urging, Gary began classes in Independent Living Skills (meal preparation, Braille, communication skills, orientation and mobility) at the Lighthouse's Winter Haven location. He also obtained a modified home computer and a closed-circuit TV (CCTV) reader through the Veteran's Administration and had both installed through the Lighthouse's Rehabilitation Technology program. Eva, his rehabilitation teacher, was impressed by Gary's level of independence, especially with all that has happened to him in such a short period of time. While he was attending classes, he put his newly learned skills to use by riding the bus around town. Although Gary's classes were interrupted by urgent personal business, he expressed how much the classes had helped him

and felt he was able to travel and live much more independently. He was emphatic in his praise for all of the Winter Haven staff. His increased confidence level empowered him to turn down a doctor's recommendation that he move into an assisted living facility.

These days, Gary, who is retired for now, has been pursuing his passion for fresh-water fishing, mainly for speckled perch. Fishing has enabled Gary to maintain a sense of normalcy in his life which is extremely important for helping him get through this difficult phase. He also does all his own cooking including grilling on his porch. Gary does most of his own housecleaning with occasional assistance from a maid service. He expressed interest in volunteering when he is ready and when the right opportunity comes around. In the meantime, we will be checking in on Gary from time to time to see how he is faring and to offer any further needed assistance.

## HILTON RESERVATIONS AND CUSTOMER CARE WINS GOVERNOR'S AWARD



*Sandra Koch accepted the award for Hilton Reservations and Customer Care, accompanied by DBS Director Joyce Hildreth.*

Hilton Reservations and Customer Care (HRCC) was awarded the Governor's Award as Statewide Employer of the Year Award because of their ongoing commitment to recruit, hire, and accommodate people with disabilities. Hilton Reservations and Customer Care also won the (Tampa) Mayor's Alliance for Persons with Disabilities Award in 2006 after the Lighthouse had submitted its nomination of HRCC for the award. HRCC's training instructors enable blind and visually impaired clients to learn alongside their sighted peers who observe how adaptive equipment is used to make the job accessible. Their Information Technology Department works with the Lighthouse to set up the adaptive technology equipment before training and pre-tests it to make certain it

is ready for the trainees' use. They communicate with the Lighthouse following the training in order to resolve adaptive technology issues as needed. This allows the employee to continue doing his or her job, despite technical challenges that may arise.

Another noteworthy practice of HRCC is their willingness to adjust work schedules for employees who rely on public transportation. Additionally, the staff will often go beyond what is expected from this kind of company. For example, while one woman was on medical leave, several employees took care of her guide dog while she recovered.

The Lighthouse applauds HRCC as a prime example of an exemplary corporate citizen.

# 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, 2009 and December 31, 2009. 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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Helen Ann Whitney

# Tampa Lighthouse for the Blind

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Association for Education and Rehabilitation  
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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)

## Upcoming Events

Monthly - 2nd Thursday, 11:00 a.m.

Polk County Blind Veterans  
Fred's Restaurant -  
2120 Harden Blvd.  
Lakeland, FL 33803

Monthly - 4th Saturday, 12:00 noon

Polk VIP/ACB  
Clara's Butterfly Café  
1533 S. Combee Road  
Lakeland, FL 33801

January 12 - March 10

Independent Living Classes at  
Sun City Center - St. John The  
Divine Episcopal Church -  
1501 Del Webb Blvd. Call  
813-251-2407 for information.

May 1

22nd Annual Beepball Classic  
10:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon  
Community Field at George  
Steinbrenner Field

May 31

Memorial Day observed  
(closed)