



THE BLIND  
& VISUALLY  
IMPAIRED  
CENTER  
OF MONTEREY COUNTY INC.

# BLINDFOLD

225 Laurel Avenue, Pacific Grove, CA 93950

(831) 649-3505

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

## Spring 2017

### NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### Vision Care & Assistive Technology Day

The Marjorie R. McNeely Low Vision Clinic is pleased to be hosting Vision Care & Assistive Technology Day on June 17<sup>th</sup>.

Two low vision specialists will talk about vision loss, and vendors of various assistive technologies will have items on display.

This event is co-sponsored by the Meals on Wheels of the Monterey Peninsula and the Sally Griffin Center.

**Date:** Saturday, June 17  
**Time:** 10:30am – 3:30pm  
**Location:** Sally Griffin Center  
700 Jewel Ave  
Pacific Grove, CA  
**Cost:** FREE but donations requested  
**RSVP:** Space is limited to 75.  
Diana at 831-649-3505  
or [diana@blindandlowvision.org](mailto:diana@blindandlowvision.org)

**Admission is FREE** but donations are requested to defray costs, which include a free bag lunch.

**Reservations are required by noon on Monday, June 12th.**

#### Volunteer Opportunities

We are seeking volunteers to staff the front desk, answer the phone and greet visitors: 9:00am-1:30pm Tuesday, Thursday or Friday.

Tuesday Ceramic Art Class Volunteers: Tuesdays from 11:00am – 2:00pm with lunch or 12:00noon – 2:00pm without lunch.

#### Peer Support Groups

##### **English:**

- 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday from 10:00-11:30 a.m. at 225 Laurel Ave, Pacific Grove
- 2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday from 9:00-10:30 a.m. at St. Ansgar's Lutheran Church, 72 E. San Joaquin St., Salinas

##### **Spanish:**

- 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday from 9:00-10:30 a.m. at St. Ansgar's Lutheran Church

Please contact Karen for more information: 831-649-3505 x104.

#### Apple Store Discover Accessibility Classes

The BVIC is pleased to collaborate with the Apple Store, Del Monte Shopping Center to provide "Discover Accessibility" workshops on the accessibility features of the Mac and iPhone/iPad. To sign-up, visit their website: [https://concierge.apple.com/workshops/R305/en\\_US/](https://concierge.apple.com/workshops/R305/en_US/)

## **President's Message**

### **Dr. Ken Hunter**

A wise man once said that the only constant in life was change. This seemingly contradictory statement certainly applies to the Blind and Visually Impaired Center (BVIC) of Monterey County. In the past two years, the BVIC has seen a major change in its staff, its Board of Directors, and in its resolve.

When I first visited the BVIC, Jackie Johnson was the Intake Coordinator. She was the person who introduced me to the BVIC's programs and services. She also made the important referral to the VA Palo Alto's Western Blind Rehabilitation Center in Menlo Park. Jackie signed me up for the Braille and Talking Book Library in Sacramento. She also referred me to the other staff at the BVIC. I met Renna Weaver, the Orientation and Mobility instructor. She gave me my first white cane and taught me how to use it in my community. She also paid a visit to my home where she oriented me to my furniture and appliances. The next person I met was Dr. Moonset Yu, the Low Vision coordinator. She helped me with various magnifiers and arranged a Low Vision Clinic examination with Dr. Andrew Wodecki. Dr. Yu's and Dr. Wodecki's expertise was invaluable.

Through my association with the BVIC, I became a member of the Board of Directors working closely with Jeanne Cordero, the Executive Director of the BVIC. Joining the support group under the tutelage of Ron Kihara and Diane Davenport proved to be immensely satisfying. But a change was in the

works. In quick succession Jackie, Jeanne, Renna, and Moonset all retired.

This change was a period of great transition. Diana Trapani came on as our new Executive Director. Under her leadership, the BVIC was able to recruit Karen Levin, an Independent Living Skills coordinator as well as an instructor in braille. Karen is also fluent in Spanish and can complement the BVIC's presence in the Salinas Valley. Additionally, Diana was able to bring Jenny Swad, a technology and low vision coordinator on board. Finally, with Dr. Wodecki's departure, Diana was able to hire Dr. Katie Wendt as our new Low Vision Clinic optometrist. Diana also brought in two part-time Orientation and Mobility contractors to serve the needs of our clients. To say that this effort was Herculean is an understatement.

Staffing was not the only change at the BVIC. The Board of Directors was also undergoing some growing pains. Longtime members such as David Lloyd, Sonja Jackson, and Ron Kihara all stepped down. And sadly, Shirley Doolittle passed away. In their wake, new board members such as Becky Stewart, Celia Barberena, and Marty Lipp have joined the team. Long term board members such as Russ Hatch and Tom Gardner have provided stability.

The Board continues to meet quarterly, as well as once a year for its annual meeting. With this change in leadership has come a new vision for the BVIC. Strategic planning, fund development coordination, marketing plans, computerization, and a revision of our

mission statement have all contributed to a new sense of excitement and accomplishment at the BVIC.

Another wise man once said that the more things change, the more they stay the same. This adage certainly applies to the BVIC. Despite our obvious changes in personnel and infrastructure, we are still the same organization that serves the needs of our visually-impaired here in Monterey County. I encourage each of you to drop by the BVIC and see our new look. You'll be surprised at all the new changes and comforted by the recognition that we are still the same.

### Executive Director

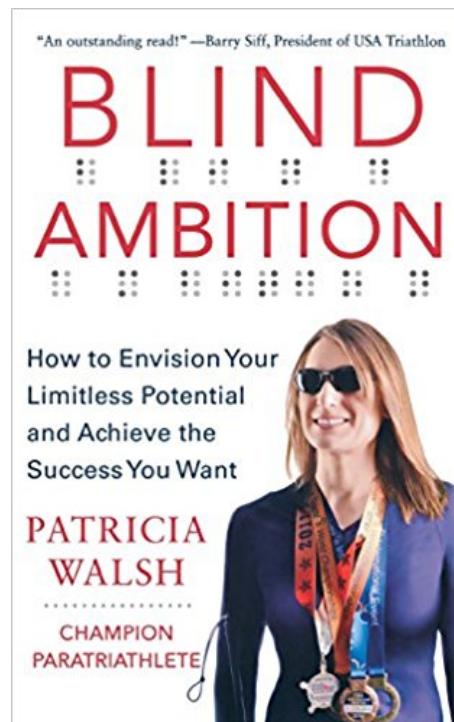
**Diana Trapani**

**Diana Trapani, Executive Director**

### **AFB Leadership Conference**

March 2-4, I attended the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) Leadership Conference in Crystal City VA. It proved informative and educational on many fronts. First, it was my first time being in a large crowd of mostly blind or visually impaired people. This made me mindful to slow down, pay closer attention to everyone around me, and aid if anyone seemed to be looking for something, such as the registration desk or a seminar room.

Each morning of the conference began with a general session speaker, each inspiring in different ways. One speaker was blind para-athlete, Patricia Walsh.



She is a high-level software designer, motivational speaker, Olympic athlete and a two-time Ironman competitor. She recently published a book: "Blind Ambition: How to Envision

Your Limitless Potential and Achieve the Success You Want". I purchased both an audio and print version for our lending library. Please let me know if you would like to borrow either version.

The conference offered a variety of educational sessions. I attended sessions about the Older Individuals with Blindness (OIB) program, nonprofit boards, collaborating with senior providers, funding and the Paralympics. I learned that many of the other centers face the same issues we do such as funding and meeting needs in rural areas. These and other issues were discussed in several of the sessions.

In 2015 and 2016, AFB gathered information from service providers and older Americans with vision loss in response to the White House Conference on Aging. From this they

have launched a renewed National Agenda on Aging and Vision Loss. Over the past many months, more than 200 people have engaged in discussing and organizing around four priority goals: 1) funding for services; 2) the availability and quality of professional services; 3) collaboration across systems; and 4) funding for low vision devices. To learn more or become involved contact Sarah Malaier: [SMalaier@afb.net](mailto:SMalaier@afb.net). Current concerns include the federal budget and a shortage of trained blindness professionals.

I had the opportunity to talk with a representative from Mississippi State University. They received a multi-year grant to create and run the *National Research & Training Center on Blindness & Low Vision*. They conduct research, provide training, and network with service providers. They offer some free services, on-line classes and information. Be sure to visit their website: <http://www.blind.msstate.edu/> and see what may be helpful to you.

Since the DCF grant funds, which is paying for attendance at conferences, is focused on assistive technologies (AT), I visited all the vendor tables and attended the AT sessions. One device displayed is the U.S. currency reader, which anyone registered with the Braille and Talking Book Library can request for free. The user simply inserts the edge of a paper dollar bill into the device and the audio plays the amount. We have application forms in English and Spanish, as well as a sample for

demonstration and training in using it. Applications can also be downloaded on their website: <https://www.moneyfactory.gov/uscurrencyreaderform.html>



Another money reader is a free iPhone app called Eyenote. It scans U.S. currency and announces its value back to the user. The app can be downloaded for free from the Apple App Store.

I talked with a trainer from the 1 Touch Self Defense Project who offered to visit us and provide an introduction to their program. Stephen and Joseph visited our Tuesday peer support group on March 21<sup>st</sup>. 1 Touch Project is a comprehensive self-defense program designed specifically for people who are blind or visually impaired.

The program teaches hands-on self-defense techniques for dealing with bullying, aggressive behavior and assaults. Stephen discussed the *perceived* notion that visually impaired people are vulnerable. Then he explained and demonstrated some basic self-defense techniques and ways to convey

awareness. 1 Touch provides workshops and coaching certifications courses. To learn more, visit their website:  
<http://www.1touchproject.com>.

In my down time, I used the local metro system to cross the Potomac River and visit a few of the museums at the National Mall. Although, we experienced wind and cold weather in the 30's, the week before the conference, the weather was in the 70's and many of the trees, bushes and flowers were blooming. This made for scenic strolling from museum to museum.



The wind was strong enough to call Washington Monument flags to full attention.

During the 1960's my dad was an electrical engineer at NASA. He started with the GEMINI projects and worked through Apollo XIII. As a child, life revolved around the space program, as just about every dad in our neighborhood worked at NASA. Neighbors would gather together to watch the televised missions on our old black and white television and marvel that we could see and hear the astronauts from the moon!

I thoroughly enjoyed visiting the space program exhibits in the National Air and Space Museum. It reminded me of the NASA company picnics, Houston facility open houses, and the many astronauts I had chance to meet, but was too young to appreciate the magnificence of their accomplishments.



Suspended from the ceiling is one of the capsules used for re-entry.

Under our hotel was access to the metro and a mini-mall with several restaurants. I found the very fun "King Street Blues" and enjoyed pulled pork, ribs, draft beer and good blues music. Every wall, corner and odd space was painted or filled with a lively scene or blues characters.





Overall, the AFB conference was well worth the time for professional development, as well as personal enjoyment. Disability Communications Fund supports technology and programs that serve the communication of Californian's with disabilities. Their 2017 funding focus is "training the next generation of AT and AAC experts". Without their grant funding, Sam, Jenny, Karen, Katie and I wouldn't be able to attend these informative conferences and share what we learn with you. Thank you DCF!

### **Vision Rehabilitation Therapy**

**Karen Levin, VRT**

#### **Phones for Low Vision and Blind Seniors**

In early March, I attended the CSUN conference in San Diego. CSUN is an annual assistive technology conference providing a wide array of educational sessions and

vendor exhibits. I attended an all-day training called "Intro to Assistive Technology". This class provided an overview of a wide array of devices available for use with children and adults with a variety of visual, physical or hearing and communication impairments.

I attend several other sessions which talked about ZoomText Fusion, From Low Vision to No Vision, Excel Tips and Tricks, What's New in Jaws 18 and Magic 14, and Google Apps Accessibility. One particularly interesting session I attended provided information and suggestions about cell phones for seniors living with no or low vision. I thought the information I learned may be informative to you.

Living in a rural or urban area often plays a part in deciding which service provider to select. It is recommended to research more than cost and minutes. Coverage, dependability and compatibility with your phone type (apple or android) are things to consider.

When deciding to purchase a phone, it can be helpful to keep in mind your needs, the ease of use, Seri (voice) access, voice dialing, and the dial buttons. Are the dial buttons easy to see and/or feel, are they tactile or not, do they have large enough fonts for you to easily read, is there contrast in the color of the number on the button?

What type of operating system does the phone use and what are your needs? Some phones require low vision users to purchase third party software in order to be accessible, and some operating systems are completely inaccessible.

What types of accessible features does the phone offer? How easy is it to learn to use these features? Does the store offer free classes in a location and at a time that you can attend?

Some of the accessible phones reviewed in the session include these: Snapfon, Emporia, Doro phones, Jitterbug, LG Terra, Convoy 4, Samsung Gusto 3, Alcatel flip phone, and iPhone.

Pricing also plays a factor, especially for seniors on a fixed income. Some phones are reasonable however, they may not have the features you are seeking. Other phones are more pricey but have more accessible features. Initial purchase price, monthly minutes, and monthly fees are also factors to consider when selecting a cell phone. In the end, make sure that it has the accessible features to assist with your personal needs and meets your financial budget.

If you have questions – call me!

### **Low Vision Clinic**

**Jenny Swad, CLVT/COMS**

#### **Task lighting: An essential need for those with low vision.**

Did you know that as we age, we need two times more light in order to perform certain tasks more comfortably? When we add low vision to the equation, it becomes imperative that we use the correct lighting in our living space. Two very important considerations are the type of bulb that suits the task at hand and the placement of the light. Fortunately, there are now many choices as to what types of lights we use in our homes that will allow

us to continue enjoying reading, writing and various hobbies.

Though there are different types of lighting in a home, when I do a home lighting assessment, my goal is to improve task lighting. First, consider what type of lamp and bulbs you are currently using to go about your day - for example, sitting in the living room to read or do crossword puzzles, sitting at the kitchen table to look at medications or to see the food on your plate, or spending time in your office to read documents, write checks, and even sew. Are you using a dark lamp shade that “eats” all the projected light from the bulb? Is your lamp too far away from your task?

Let’s address the types of bulbs that are available in hardware stores – warm (yellow light), cool (blue light), and natural spectrum (white light). So, while the *type* of lamp you use is important, the bulb is equally important. It is no longer just about wattage.

Now, depending on the task at hand, will a floor lamp or table lamp be the best option for your room? Put the lamp on the side of your best eye; if it is a floor lamp, place it slightly behind you and over your shoulder. In order to get the best possible result, work with someone to make sure that there are no shadows on the material you are trying to view.

If you would like an in-home task lighting assessment, I currently have a table lamp that has all three bulb colors *and* a brightness control that I can bring to you. Feel free to call me if you would like to set-up a task

lighting assessment in your living space. Once you know the best light for your eye condition, you can more confidently purchase what you need.

I conclude by going back to the subject of overhead room lighting. It is best if you keep all your rooms at the same illumination level so that your eyes don't have to go through the adjustment of going from a dark room to a bright room and visa-versa. Ever so important is that you have a light on at night to get from your bedroom to the bathroom and back again. Also, consider plugging in a timer for certain lights or using automatic censored lights to decrease your risk of falling due to insufficient lighting.

If you want to schedule a home lighting assessment, please call me.

## **Rehabilitation Assistant**

**Samantha Kelley**

### **Video Chat & Video Photo Apps**

Hello Everyone! As you all know, technology is changing on the daily, making it harder and harder to keep up with the latest and greatest gadgets and phone apps. Recently, I discovered two different smart phone apps that might be of interest to you. Both aim to assist the blind and visually impaired with daily tasks of all sorts. Though each app operates in a different manner, they strive for the same goal – helping the user solve a problem independently and on the spot. Both are free and are compatible with smartphones and tablets.

**Be My Eyes** – The Be My Eyes App connects a user to a volunteer through a live video stream. Say for example you have a basket of thread in front of you and you need to find the blue one. You would open the Be My Eyes app on your phone and it would automatically connect you with an available volunteer who can see what you are seeing through the camera on your smart phone. They can direct you where to point the camera and you can ask them whatever it is that you need to do. Where is the blue thread? The volunteer can guide you through the basket until you find it together. It's as easy as that! What's more is, for the almost 33,000 blind and visually impaired people using the app, there are over 457,000 volunteers. So, say for example it's 3:00 a.m. and you are on a late-night sewing bender (hey, it happens!). Be My Eyes can connect you with someone in a different time zone, somewhere in the world, who is awake and can assist. Visit their website: <http://bemyeyes.com/>.

**BeSpecular** – BeSpecular is another app with a different method of function. With this app, you take a photograph of the item/question in play, record a voice memo or write a text with your question, and send it out. BeSpecular uses an algorithm to connect you to the right people, considering age and physical location. For example, if you are in the kitchen and are unsure of whether you are about to cut into a red onion or a white onion, you can photograph said onion, write or audio record your question, and send it off. Typically, you will have a response from a volunteer within 30 seconds. One example



showed a visually impaired woman preparing for a job interview. She was unsure of whether her outfit was suitable, so she snapped a photo with her phone, recorded “Will you tell me if this outfit works for my job interview?”, and sent it off. Within seconds, a volunteer received the inquiry and sent her a message back saying that the outfit was lovely and wished her good luck.

Visit their website:

<https://www.bespecular.com/> .

In closing, each of these apps pair users with eager and willing sighted volunteers who can help with basic, everyday tasks. It allows an individual to ask for help in real time instead of having to wait for someone to show up or feel like you are bothering a friend or family member. This way, it’s anonymous, on the spot, and you are asking assistance from someone you *know* genuinely wants to help. If you would like more information or need help finding or downloading these apps, don’t hesitate to contact me.

### **Retinitis Pigmentosa Research**

#### **Dr. Katie Wendt, OD**

Recently I attended a talk at UC Berkeley’s School of Optometry given by Dr. Tim Schoen of The Foundation Fighting Blindness (FFB). FFB is the world’s leading private funder of research for cures for inherited retinal diseases (IRDs). Examples of IRDs include Usher, Stargardt, Best and Retinitis Pigmentosa. Because these diseases are all caused by one gene defects (e.g. deletion, duplication or insertion) they are also known as the “orphan” retinal diseases.

Dr. Schoen relayed that the FFB and Blueprint Genetics are collaborating a pilot project to advance the clinical trials process for those with IRDs by working to grow the data in a Foundation-supported patient registry. IRD-affected patients or family members may register in the international registry at [www.MyRetinaTracker.org](http://www.MyRetinaTracker.org). Some patients will be eligible for free genetic testing.

What is the value in genetic testing for those with IRDs? Genetic testing yields the most accurate diagnosis and can predict the disease’s severity as there are different types (levels) of some of these diseases. Additionally, genetic testing confirms inheritance patterns and is required if one is seeking any type of gene therapy in the future.

Research is leading to exciting possibilities in the field of gene therapy. Gene therapy works by taking the specific disease replacement (no defect) gene and incorporating it into virus. In RP studies, the virus is injected into eye and through transcription allows for non-defective proteins to be assembled.

There are many more discoveries awaiting in the field of gene therapy. The Foundation Fighting Blindness website ([www.blindness.org](http://www.blindness.org)) has a News & Research section. You can read more about the latest in vision research there.

### **2016 Annual Report Data**

This past year was one of changes and setting the stage for growth of the BVIC. With change we usually experience challenges, and

that was the case here. Change started with the retirement of four long-time staff. This brought challenges of gaps in service and the need for new staff in a competitive field due to the low numbers of qualified professionals. We were very fortunate to find three outstanding program staff in Jenny, Karen and Katie!

With new staff comes different skill sets, experience and points of view. This leads to changes in how things are done, as each new employee brings their own style and viewpoints on work flow, efficiency, documentation, and the like. Over the past few months we have been learning to work together and determining where to make changes for the better.

Even with the breaks in service, during 2016 we served a total of 323 unduplicated clients with the following statistics:

<b>Primary Eye Condition 2016</b>
56% = AMD
19% = Other (stroke, birth defect, optic neuropathy, corneal edema, tumor, etc.)
7% = Diabetic Retinopathy
7% = Unknown
6% = Glaucoma
4% = Retinitis Pigmentosa
1% = Cataracts

<b>Gender 2016</b>	<b>Race 2016</b>
67% Female	73% White
33% Male	15% Hispanic
	12% Asian
	11% Black
	16% Other/Unknown

<b>Region of Residence 2016</b>
59% = Peninsula
31% = Salinas Valley
9% = Other/Unknown

<b>Age 2016</b>
3.4% = Teens/20's
1.2% = 30's
2.8% = 40's
6.5% = 50's
11.8% = 60's
13.3% = 70's
31% = 80's
22.3% = 90's
2.5% = 100+
5.3% Unknown

Typically, clients utilize more than one service offered at BVIC. This data represents the services utilization by percentage of total 2016 clients served.

<b>Service Area 2016</b>
57% = Low Vision Clinic Services
37.2% = Low Vision Clinic with eye doctor
51% = Intake/Referral/Support
61.3% = Assistive Technology/Device Sale
16.7% = Other Support Services
30.3% = Vision Rehabilitation Therapy
13.9% = Orientation & Mobility Services
2.2% = Ceramic Art Class
8% = Tuesday Socialization & Lunch
8.7% = Tuesday Support Group
1.9% = Thursday English Support Group
.6% = Thursday Spanish Support Group

We distribute information about our vision loss and our services throughout the county. In 2016 more than 2348 people indirectly received services through our outreach efforts.

**Community Outreach** is a growing service offered by BVIC. We provide basic low vision training to other service providers, attend

health fairs and/or present informational sessions at senior living communities and in the wider community.

If you would like us to visit your living community or attend your community event, please contact Sam at 649-3505.

## **We extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who supported us in 2016!**

If we misspelled your name or missed listing you, please contact the office.

### **2016 Donors**

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The BVIC thanks everyone for their support. If we misspelled your name or missed listing you, please contact the office.

***BVIC extends a very special acknowledgement to Nick Pasculli and the TMD Creative team for their superior support, guidance, work and in-kind donations! We couldn't have accomplished it all without your talents and efforts. We are off to a great start in 2017 and thank everyone for their support!***

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**Sample bequest language:** "I give, devise and bequeath to The Blind & Visually Impaired Center of Monterey County, Inc., a nonprofit corporation of the State of California, located at 225 Laurel Ave., Pacific Grove, CA 93950, (tax identification number 23-7221588), [amount, %, specific items, etc.] of my estate."

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Operated by the Old Capitol Lions Club, Chariots for Charity vehicle donations support the BVIC with cash donations from the sale of donated vehicles. For more information or to donate a vehicle, please contact Russ Hatch at 831-659-5360.