



C.B.R.C. Torch

*A publication of the*

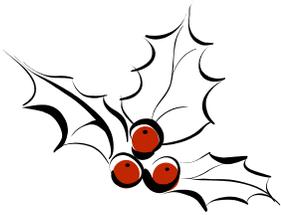
*Central Blind Rehabilitation Center*

Hines, Illinois 60141

Winter/ 2012



# Holidays at Hines VA Central Blind Rehabilitation Center



*"Let it light the pathways of the blind, that their dignity may be restored."*

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## Mission Statement

The mission of the Blind Rehabilitation Center is to provide high quality blind rehabilitation service through the provision of a broad range of programs. As the rehabilitation needs of the blind and visually impaired population change, it is the center's intent to be at the forefront and a recognized leader in the development and implementation of the individualized treatment modalities, health care and prosthetic devices. Its primary goal is to provide the skills and training with equipment necessary for independence. Specialty programs such as computer access training, electronic travel aids and electronic reading machines are provided to eligible veterans. Public education including the Family Training Program is directed at improving the level of understanding to the general public.

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**-Hines Central Blind Rehab Website**

[www.hines.va.gov/services/blind/index.asp](http://www.hines.va.gov/services/blind/index.asp).

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## Message from the Chief

Happy New Year! The holidays at the Blind Center were most enjoyable with many activities and events.



Check out page 4 for all the details! We hope your holidays were pleasant and that you find yourself happy and healthy at the start of 2012.

In looking back at 2011, we have much to be happy for. We were especially honored by the visit we had with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs in October. It was good to offer our Commander in Chief a first-hand look at what we do to serve our Nations Veterans.

We've made much progress on our wait list in 2011, which means Veterans will not have to wait as long for an admission date to come for Blind Rehabilitation. We've also improved some of our training areas and classrooms with sound-proofing panels that not only provide privacy but divide the large classroom into 2 or 3 training spaces. These are especially helpful in the Communications and Computer Training areas.

We've done our best to keep current with the latest in technology and assistive devices and applications for those devices to keep our veterans as

close to the forefront of communications as possible. With the incorporation of iPhone and iPad training for appropriate needs, we feel we've met the need.

We greet 2012 on somewhat of a sad note in that we bid farewell to a couple of staff members, one to retirement and another is just moving on. Read the "TORCH Glows" for all the details.

Get healthy in 2012! Check out our article on [Healthy Living](#) and visit the VA sponsored MOVE program website. It will kick-start your efforts to get healthy this year.

Thank you for your cards and letters over the year and through the holidays! We're happy to share some of your thoughts in our 'Letters from our Graduates' piece. We always welcome feedback from our Veterans, it helps us know we are meeting your needs and shaping our program, so, keep them coming. Our website is up and running and cited in several places in this publication, use the 'contact us' link on the website to send us your thoughts or comments on the TORCH.

## Holiday's at Hines VAH Blind Rehabilitation Center

By Chrissy Delbridge



This December the Blind Rehabilitation Center looked extremely festive, decked out with wreaths on all the patient room doors and colorful holiday decorations in all patient areas.

December twenty-first was the day of the Veteran Holiday Party. The emcee was Laura Luckow; she did a fantastic job getting things started. The entertainment was provided by Joe Cantafio, "American Patriot Awardee" 2004, who played the guitar, sang, and talked about the troops that he entertains all over the world. Joe has performed for the Blind Center Veterans before, and continues his career of public speaking and song today. Additional entertainment was provided by staff members, Maggie Elgersma and Becky Dennis, who sang "O Holy Night" with Joe playing the guitar.

We were happy to host the Hospital Director, Ms. Helman, who stopped by to wish the Vets a happy holiday season and thank them for their service to our country.



Refreshments were provided during the party and all had an enjoyable time. The party concluded with holiday songs, during which time Santa arrived to distribute gifts for all the veterans.



## Secretary of Veterans Affairs Visits Hines Blind Center

On October 14, 2011, Secretary Shinseki, traveled to Illinois on an Educational tour of three VISN 12 VA Facilities. Those facilities included the recently activated James A. Lovell Federal Health Care System, the 1<sup>st</sup> VA/DoD combined health care center, Jesse Brown VAMC, and Hines VA Hospital.

Retired U.S. Army General Eric K. Shinseki was nominated by President Barack Obama on December 7, 2008, to serve as Secretary of Veterans Affairs. His nomination was confirmed by the Senate on January 20, 2009, and he was sworn in as the seventh Secretary of Veterans Affairs on January 21, 2009. Secretary Shinseki served as Chief of Staff, United States Army, from 1999 to June 11, 2003, and retired from active duty on August 1, 2003.



The focus of the Secretary's visit was to learn about the status of the newly implemented VA/DoD joint system that was activated October 2010 with

the formerly known, North Chicago VAMC, ascertain the progress in the management and facility modifications that have recently been implemented at the Jesse Brown VAMC, and to gain some knowledge of the unique programs and services offered at Hines, the largest and oldest VA in VISN 12, in the way of Blind Rehabilitation.

Hines Blind Center was the 1<sup>st</sup> Blind Center Secretary Shinseki ever visited. Our staff was honored and happy to share our program and mission with the Secretary. As indicated in photos below, he was genuinely interested in what we offer our nation's heroes. Hines Director, Ms. Sharon Helman, and VISN Director, Dr. Murawsky were equally pleased to showcase the specialized program available at this VA Facility.



Secretary Shinseki is committed to providing quality accessible health care to Veterans everywhere. He reminds staff regularly through e-mail communications, of the mission of the VA and that each of us plays a part in that mission.

## **Performance Improvement Department Updates; Living Skills**

By Chuck Brancheau

While the Living Skills department has undergone dramatic changes over the last two years with the implementation of the Guide™ computer training program and the addition of the iPhone and iPad devices, we constantly strive to emphasize the importance of using basic blind rehabilitation skills to overcome deficits left by vision loss. Veterans are assessed in all areas of Living Skills when they first enter the program, goals are established and instruction begins. With many of the skills and devices that are presented in Living Skills, there are always approaches that can be used in place of a device. For example, many people are eager to receive a color identifying device to assist them with identifying colors for clothing. While this is a good device, it is not always accurate. Sometimes, a simple approach to labeling clothing with buttons and or pins might work more consistently. There are many great devices and advances for the visually impaired in meeting everyday needs, but prior to all of the advances there were basic adaptive approaches to meet these needs which are the foundation to what we teach in Living Skills. We will continue to explore, evaluate, and issue new devices, but the basic skills will still remain.

## **BRC Recreational Outings And Events**

by Melissa Winter



The holidays presented many opportunities for veterans to be hosted at a variety of venues for holiday dinners. From Knights of Columbus to Military Order of the Purple Heart, holiday activities filled the evenings and weekends all through the month of December. We continue to thank our Service Organizations for their support of our Recreation Program at Hines and look forward to more events in 2012.

On January 5, 2012, three veterans went to Wilmot Mountain in Wisconsin to go snow skiing. While one of the veterans was a seasoned skier, the other two veterans put on their skis for the first time. The novice skiers learned the basics with the assistance of volunteers from the Wilmot Mountain Snow Sports School, Great Lakes Adaptive Sports Association (GLASA) and Adaptive Adventures. The Hines BRC will be going downhill skiing again with GLASA and Adaptive Adventures in January and February.

Hines will also be going skiing this winter with the American Blind Skiing Foundation. If there is snow on the ground, the veterans will also have an opportunity to go cross country skiing in February with GLASA.

Are you interested in skiing? Some organizations to look into would be United States Association of Blind Athletes (USABA), the American Blind Skiing Foundation, Ski for Light, GLASA, and Adaptive Adventures.

On the inside, the BRC has made some improvements in recreational activities in the way of Wii and X-Box game systems. With over 10 games to choose from including Wii *The Price is Right*, *Jeopardy* and *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* and X-Box *Activision Call of Duty* and *Wipe Out*, Veterans have much to choose from in the evenings and on the weekends if they want to stay-in.

Wii tournaments have been rumored and might be on the horizon with the right number of participants. These game systems are just another example of some of the new things Veterans can learn while an in-patient at the BRC.

**GOLF Season is on its Way!**  
Since 1948 Hines Blind Center has had the unique opportunity of being part of the United Voluntary Service Swing Club Program. This program allows the patients of the Blind Center to golf at several local country clubs in the Chicago land area. The program begins in May and then ends at the beginning of October. Usually over a dozen outings occur each season.

This program is run by the Swing Club volunteers as well as volunteers from

the various country clubs. The volunteers help the veterans tee up the ball and line up their shots. At the green, volunteers also assist golfers in pacing of the distance from their ball to the pin by standing close to the cup or steadily tapping the pin in the cup.

The golf outings are a welcome break from the everyday classroom activities and give the veterans a chance to socialize and practice adaptive skills. Some veterans have reported going back home after their training and asking for the clubs back from relatives so they can once again pursue the game.

Not only do the country clubs offer a few swings at the club, they also provide lunch and sometimes entertainment afterwards. The skills that are practiced during these outings help encourage the veterans to go back to their daily lives and have the confidence to enjoy pastimes. Our center is very thankful for all that the UVS Swing Club offers our veterans.



## TORCH GLOWS

by Sarah Baskis

### It's a GIRL!

Becky Dennis (Manual Skills) and her husband, Aaron, welcomed their second child on September 22, 2011. Addison Louisa Dennis was 5 lbs. and 13oz. at birth and 19 inches long. She has chubby cheeks and is very cute!

### Goodbyes...

Nikki James has accepted a position as a Manual Skills instructor at the new BRC in Biloxi, Mississippi. Nikki's last day at Hines will be February 1st. Nikki has been working as a TCF intern primarily in Computer Access Training and Manual Skills for about the past two years. Good luck to Nikki in her new position!

### Nurse Chris Retires

Chris Dipompeo has retired after 32 years of service at the Hines VA. Her last day was December 31<sup>st</sup>.



Chris spent her first 15 years working in Spinal Cord Injury Service at Hines VA Hospital and the last 17 years working in the BRC. Many of the veterans know Chris as the nurse that works midnight until 8am and gives wake-up calls at 5:30am. The staff will miss Chris and the laughs

she provided with her witty and entertaining additions to the night notes.

Many people have asked Chris what she will do in retirement. Some of her plans are to: travel, finish random projects started around her house over the years, take a creative writing course, learn to golf and learn how to make stained glass and jewelry.

In her own words, Chris says it best: "What has kept me here all these years is not the great pension plan or all the holidays we get off. It's been the people, the folklore, the history, the feeling of a grand family. And that is what will be hard to leave yet I know it will be a part of me always."

Staff celebrated with Chris at a Retirement Tea at the Blind Center on December 15<sup>th</sup> and an offsite dinner at a local banquet facility in January 2012. We wish Chris the best in the future for a happy and healthy retirement.



## Who's Still Who At the BRC

By Susan Knauff

Kathy Smith has been a fixture at Hines Blind Center for almost 25 years. She works in the Living Skills department where she teaches



Kathy Smith

Activities of Daily Living, Adaptive Kitchen Skills, Braille, and Communications. She first became interested in blind rehabilitation after meeting other people that were studying in the field. "I felt that this was a career that suited my personality, as I enjoy working with people." At Hines, "I enjoy my co-workers and the veterans I work with. Each person has a unique personality and has different experiences to share about themselves. I also enjoy teaching the variety of subjects that are available in the Living Skills department."

Outside of work, Kathy enjoys spending time with her family, especially camping and riding bikes. Her family is what she is most proud of, which includes her husband, Scott, daughter, Ashley, and golden retriever, Libby. Her daughter, Ashley, is someone who consistently makes her laugh "because she thinks outside of the box about things that I might never think of." Their dog, Libby, short for Liberty, "still acts like a

puppy, wild and wiggly! She loves to greet us at the door and give wet kisses on the nose."

Favorite holidays also conjure up images of family for Kathy. "I love the Thanksgiving holiday. I enjoy visiting with family and eating the traditional roasted turkey, sage stuffing, mashed potatoes, giblet gravy, brussels sprouts, cranberry sauce, and pumpkin pie!"

Back in the day, Kathy had goals for big adventure – "I wanted to visit Australia, live in New York City, and parachute from an airplane. I no longer have these aspirations! Instead I just would like to re-decorate my house." Also, if she had tons of money to spare, another goal she would love to be able to do is "to give it away to people in need."

Kathy has served as a mentor to countless interns who have completed their internships at Hines Blind Center, and is an easily approachable and friendly source for staff to approach whether for team needs or for blindness-related information, particularly pertaining to Living Skills. Kathy is a devoted, patient, and skilled instructor to the veterans she serves at Hines Blind Center.

## Computer Corner

By Mike Dugan

### System Access Mobile Network (SAMNet)

There is some exciting news in the world of computer access for blind and visually impaired veterans. In this article I will discuss the System Access Mobile Network (SAMNet). At Hines the staff of the Computer Access Training department is currently evaluating this new option. So far our exploration of SAMNet is very encouraging.

Serotek is a Minnesota based company that has been developing software for the blind community over the last several years. Programs have included a screen reader called System Access and one called Remote Incident Manager that we have been using at the CBRC to troubleshoot issues with veterans' systems. At \$400, System Access is one of the lower cost access options on the market. It seems to be the primary agenda of Serotek to develop and market functional, lower cost choices.

SAMNet incorporates System Access and an online network. The best thing about this is that it is absolutely free to veterans who are eligible for services from the VA's blind rehabilitation program. This is a free lifetime membership. If you are interested, you need to fill out an online application. This will activate a

SAMNet account for thirty days. In that time, Serotek will contact your VIST Coordinator to generate the paperwork necessary to validate your eligibility. Once Serotek receives the final application, you will be granted your life membership.

Now, here is a little bit about the network itself. Serotek has tried to bring together the most popular applications including email, a social network, an address book, digital talking books, described movies and much more. When you sign on you are presented with a list of about twenty choices arranged like a menu. You can navigate using tab and shift tab or the arrow keys on your computer. Use Alt left arrow or backspace to move to the previous page.

To sign on you will need a user name which is generally your phone number including area code. When you acquire the software, you are also given a pin number that is the same as a password.

Using a preferences window, you may adjust voice settings or print. If you want different voices you can purchase speech engines from Serotek. In addition, you can set the speed, pitch and screen echo. For large print users there are three fonts and sizes ranging from 12 to 64X.

SAMNet uses Screen Access as its default screen reader. This means that you do not have to own a screen

reader to use the network. Serotek suggests that if you are using JAWS you should put it to sleep when you are using the SAMNet browser. If you do this, JAWS will still speak in all other applications. It is the same with WindowEyes.

At the Serotek web site you can read much more about SAMNet. A page containing the help documentation presents information on all aspects of the network. For more information go to the site at [serotek.com](http://serotek.com) and open the SAMNet Vets link. You can also email Serotek at [info@serotek.com](mailto:info@serotek.com) or call them at (612) 246-4818.

## RESOURCES

Much like the Resource class that our Manual Skills area offers to our inpatients, this column offers links, tips and suggestions for helpful information that our Veterans might find useful.



### GPS and Computer Monthly Discussion Groups- Hines Chapters

Veterans Helping Veterans. Just dial the 800 number and when it tells you to put in your access code follow the prompts and you're there.

### Computer Support Conference Call

Date: First Thursday of every month  
Time: 10:00 to 10:50 am (CDT)  
Conference call in number:  
1-800-767-1750  
Access Code 44125

### GPS Support Conference Call

Date: First Tuesday of every month  
Time : 10:00 to 10:50 am (CDT)  
Conference call in number:  
1-800-767-1750  
Access code 44125

If you would like to be included in the e-mail reminders on the calls, which include agenda topics, please send an E-mail to:

**Richard Olson:**

[rwoverna1@sbcglobal.net](mailto:rwoverna1@sbcglobal.net)

Please include which your name, contact information and which group you would like to be added to.

### Voice Activated Information Line

If you are finding it hard to get information about weather, sports, entertainment, or news, you can call the following numbers to get information just by using your phone. When you call, you will hear a recorded voice that reads a menu. Simply speak to the voice activation computer to tell them what you want to listen to.

Tell ME: 1-888-835-5630 or 1-800-555-8355. BING: 1-800-246-4411.

### GOOGLE Accessible Search

A popular home page for our veterans is the Google search engine accessible search. Check it out!  
[www.google.com/accessibility/labs/search/](http://www.google.com/accessibility/labs/search/)

## Devices for Reading the TORCH

By Chrissy Delbridge

Veterans enjoy reading the TORCH newsletters that come out quarterly; it provides great news about what is going on here at Hines BRC. We've been trying to make sure that veterans are making the best use of devices that they receive at Hines Blind Rehabilitation Center. One way of ensuring that this happens is to encourage veterans to use the aids they have to read the TORCH. If you have received a device that allows you to read including a CCTV, stand magnifier and/or portable CCTV you are encouraged to use them to read the TORCH. If you received training on another device to meet your reading needs including the scanner, SARA, KNFB reader or computer, please make use of them to keep current with the going's on at Hines Blind Center. Eventually, the cassette version will no longer be available.

### Compact Audio Cassettes

Between the early 1970's and late 1990's the cassette was one of the most common formats for pre-recorded music. Over the past 10-12 years, technology continues to move forward with new means of recording music or information. Today, many individuals retain recordings on CD (compact disc) or on an MP3 player, iPod or other



similar device. These advancements are making Cassette versions of recorded material almost non-existent. The popular web encyclopedia 'Wikipedia' refers to audio cassettes as '*almost an obsolete format.*' As a result, it is becoming ever more difficult to obtain blank cassettes to bring you the TORCH in an audio version. Having said this, we will now be asking our readers to select one of (2) formats for which they can still receive the TORCH: the Print format and e-mail. The publication will also be available on our website

[www.hines.va.gov/services/blind/index.asp](http://www.hines.va.gov/services/blind/index.asp).

As stated in the previous article, there are a number of prosthetics devices that can be used for reading the TORCH. Many of our veterans have received these same devices during their rehab training program. We will continue to phase out the audio cassette version over the next year.

Please consider one of the alternates so you can continue to keep current on the Blind Center at Hines the next issue is the last issue you will be able to receive via audio cassette.

See the tear out section at the end of this publication for **a mail in response** on your preferred version. Thank you

## An Inspiration to All

**“Problem-solving his world...”**

By Kevin Kistner

Carl "Mike" Merritt, a United States Navy Veteran, was a scratch golfer and huge sports lover. He spent his career managing an appliance/ electronics store. He loved to mingle and interact with his customers, who many became his friends. He also enjoyed watching his grandchildren play sports, especially football.



Several years ago Mike's life started to become difficult as his vision began to decline. Driving, working, and his beloved Golf game were now a struggle, and this led to a steep loss in self-esteem and activity levels. He found it tough to watch any sporting event and even stopped going to his grandchildren's events. His blood sugars levels became out of control and his health declined.

In 2011, Mike took the courageous step of leaving his home town and he entered the Hines Blind Rehabilitation program. The first several weeks were difficult because Mike had not been pushed in a while. He had resigned himself to what he "could not" do. However, as his program continued, Mike became increasingly optimistic. He began to utilize his

remaining vision, his cane, his mind to problem-solve his world...and as this all unfolded, Mike Merritt started to change. With help from the medical staff, he got his sugar levels under control, and even cut his intake of insulin. Mike was soon seen helping new admits, joking with peers and staff and needing less and less prompting to be independent. Mike Merritt has homes in Michigan and Florida, multiple grandchildren, dusty golf clubs and a new realization on just how full his life really is. This is now coupled with the right attitude, devices and strategies to embrace the next several chapters of his life.

## BRC Veteran Invents Audible Rain Gauge

By Sarah Baskis

Exhibiting innovation, utilizing the skills and devices he learned at the Blind Center, Veteran Dave Bell independently developed an adaptive accessible rain gauge.



Recently returning to the BRC for a GPS program, Dave Bell brought along with him his new invention. Dave developed and designed the "Audi Tact Rain Gauge." Consisting of a modified click ruler, a modified liquid level indicator and a rain gauge available at any hardware store, Dave went to work with determination.

Using a six inch square piece of wood with one hole for the rain gauge to sit in and another hole for the click ruler to sit in, and a liquid level indicator with extended electrodes extending down into the rain gauge, Dave saw success. A loud tone emitted when the electrodes touch the water at the top of the rain gauge makes this invention complete. We wish Dave a lot of luck with his new invention.

## Letters from our Graduates

The following letters were received from Hines Blind Center Graduates:



“To all the instructors and others who so willingly gave of their time and effort. I have so much more confidence now, and am willing to try more things. I am tacking a bible school class now, something I have wanted to do for a longtime. Thank you again. What a truly magnificent program.”

*Kenosha, WI*

“I would like to say thank you to everyone on the Hines staff. You are the most professional, knowledgeable, considerate, and patient group of employee I have ever been associated with. I enjoyed my stay and learned a lot.”

*Waco, TX*

## Healthy Living Fat Out.....Flavor In

A little fat goes long way. One teaspoon of butter or oil has 5 grams of fat and about 45 calories. Check out these tips to cut fat and add flavor:

- When eating out, ask for the topping or sauce to be put on the side. Ask for lower fat options like salsa, mustard, or ketchup.
- With salads, choose fat free/reduced fat dressings, flavored vinegar, or lemon juice. Ask for the dressing to be served on the side.
- Pick lean cuts of meat, poultry, and seafood. Trim away any fat or skin.
- Cook foods without adding fat. Use nonstick cooking spray instead of butter, margarine, or oil when grilling, frying, or sautéing. Use non-stick cookware. You can sauté in a small amount of broth. If you do add fat, use a small amount of olive or canola oil.
- Choose to bake, roast, grill, steam, poach or pan sauté instead of frying. If roasting or baking in the oven, use a rack to raise the food up off the bottom of the pan to allow the fat to drip away.
- Instead of using ham hock or fatback to season vegetables, use lean ham or broth to get the meat flavor.

- Use napkins or paper towels to blot out extra fat from foods. This helps with pizza or fried foods.
- Taste your food before spreading on butter or margarine. Choose another topping. Try using fruit butter or low sugar spreadable fruit on toast.

The VA has launched a program to help veterans get healthy. The following is an excerpt from the website listed below:

*"The MOVE!<sup>®</sup> Program has been tailored to meet the individual needs of each veteran. MOVE!<sup>®</sup> provides guidance on nutrition and physical activity and allows you to set the pace through goal setting and a stepped level approach. Your MOVE!<sup>®</sup> healthcare team at your local VA medical center will provide you with lots of support and follow-up."*

Handouts available on the website, "Spice It Up" and "Recipe Smart Substitutions", will give you more ideas on how to cut fat and add flavor. Visit the Web site [www.move.va.gov](http://www.move.va.gov) and get moving!

## Brand Name Versus Generic Drugs

By Emery Whitlow



If you're used to buying low-cost generic prescription drugs, it takes only one eye-popping bill for a brand-name drug to realize that the cost difference can be huge. Sometimes, a brand-name may be your only treatment option. Also, it can be difficult to understand why certain drugs are generic and others aren't. Amid this confusion, you could end up buying a brand-name drug when a less costly generic alternative is available. The active ingredients in generic drugs are the same as in brand-name drugs. However, they may look different or have different inactive ingredients; such as fillers or coloring agents. Generic drugs approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) must meet the same rigid standards of strength, quality, purity and potency that are applied to brand-name drugs. Every type of strict regulation that is applied to brand-name drugs by the FDA is also applied to FDA-approved generic drugs.

Still myths persist that generic drugs are significantly different from brand-name drugs. If you stick to buying a brand-name drug because you feel that a generic isn't the same, you're likely spending more than is necessary. It's not because the generic drug is of lesser quality that

the same brand-name drug. Generic drugs are less expensive because the companies that make generic drugs don't recoup the costs of drug research and development, clinical trials, marketing, and advertising as do brand-name drug manufacturers. These costs can run into the hundreds of millions of dollars for a single drug. A generic drug manufacturer needs only to reverse engineer the known chemistry of a brand drug and then find a way to produce a product that meets FDA standards. Once patents and exclusive sales right of brand-name drug have expired, generic drugs can begin to enter the market.

It can take decades for a brand-name drug to become available as a generic. The initial patent life a new drug is 20 years, but a patent can be obtained at any point in the drug development stage. If a patent is obtained early, research and development time may eat up a decade or more of patent life before the FDA approves the drug for use. A patent obtained later in the development process may buy more time for the drug to be sold under patent protection.

Beyond the initial patent time, patent extensions of up to five years may be granted if FDA regulatory delays slow the process of bringing the drug to market. After FDA approval of a drug, the FDA may allow a drug company to remain the exclusive seller. The goal of these extensions is to find a balance between consumer-friendly

pricing and offering enough profit incentive to drug companies to that they continue to invest in research. Often state laws and insurance co-pay rules, not to mention vigilance on the part of many doctors and pharmacists, can alert you even prevent you from buying a brand-name drug when a less expensive generic alternative is available. Medicare Part D insurance plans report that when a generic drug is available, it's dispensed 99 percent of the time on average over the brand name equivalent. However, your doctor can still prescribe a brand-name drug over a generic, if necessary.

If your doctor prescribes a brand-name drug, ask whether a generic drug in the same class or related class might work instead. Among the various classes, some drugs may have a generic version and some may be available only as brand-name drugs.

## **Seeing Things? Charles Bonnet Syndrome** By Susan Kanuff



Are you seeing polar bears in your garage? Or little children in pink tutus? Or vibrant flowers blooming? Or ladies dressed in 18<sup>th</sup> century clothing? Even though you know that these images are not real, it still makes you wonder if you are going a little bit crazy. This

phenomenon of seeing visions that the person knows are not real is called Charles Bonnet Syndrome. It is very common amongst individuals who have low vision. Drs. Lylas Mogk and Marja Mogk have written a book entitled "Macular Degeneration, The Complete Guide to Saving and Maximizing Your Sight", and in this book, an entire chapter is devoted to discussing Charles Bonnet Syndrome. Drs. Lylas Mogk and Marja Mogk have found in their research that 20% of their patients experienced these visions. According to the Mogk's book, Charles Bonnet was an 18<sup>th</sup>-century Swiss naturalist and philosopher, whose grandfather had low vision from cataracts. His grandfather would describe his experiences of seeing things that he knew were not there. Later in life, Charles Bonnet also experienced vision loss and experienced phantom visions as well. The theory behind why this happens is similar to those who experience phantom limb pain after an amputation because the nerves are still active and firing signals to the brain, and then the brain interprets those signals. With Charles Bonnet Syndrome, a part of the visual system becomes impaired and is not able to pass on the visual information to the brain, as a result the brain starts creating its own images. According to the Mogk's book, there are six criteria that Charles Bonnet established to determine if the person is experiencing phantom vision:

1. They happen when fully alert and awake.
2. You know that they are not real.
3. They happen in normal perception; you can be looking out the window and see a monkey sitting on the porch.
4. They are exclusively visual. They are not combined with sounds or sensations.
5. They appear and vanish without a cause.
6. They can be funny or annoying, but not scary or grotesque.

The Mogks found that there was no rhyme or reason behind how often the visions occur, the duration with which they occur, or how long the visions will continue throughout the person's lifetime. So, the next time that you see a tiger in your living room or balloons floating in your bathroom, remember that this, although an annoying or confusing occurrence, is common, related to your vision loss, and has a name – Charles Bonnet Syndrome.

Reference:

Mogk, Lylas and Mogk, Marja. Macular Degeneration The Complete Guide to Saving and Maximizing Your Sight. 1999, 2003.

## Looking for HBCA Membership Participation

Dear HBCA Members and supporters,



The purpose of the HBCA is to provide a support network to blinded veterans and their families after they return home. We would like to suggest a way for you to utilize the skills you acquired while at the blind center. You can actively participate by donating your talents and time to assist the HBCA team to keep the organization healthy. You can participate by joining one or more committees. The committees are:

**MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE** – chairperson: Terry Kebbel  
Needs members to make phone calls and assist in maintaining the database

**FUND RAISING COMMITTEE**– chairperson: Melody Angelini  
Needs at least one member per state to assist with making presentations and phone calls

**FINANCE COMMITTEE**- chairperson: Johnny Williams  
Needs members interested in financial planning for the organization

**PUBLICATION COMMITTEE**– chairperson, Jim Hoffert

Needs writers in assisting with production of e-newsletter and other publications

**REUNION COMMITTEE**– chair people: Rick Olson; Melody Angelini  
Needs members from the Chicago Area to assist with preparation for odd year reunion

**RESOLUTIONS & BYLAWS COMMITTEE** – chairperson: Joe King  
Needs members to review bylaws for updates

To join a committee, contact Rick Olson via email at [rwoverna1@sbcglobal.net](mailto:rwoverna1@sbcglobal.net) or call (708) 202-2273.

Thank you,  
Rick Olson, President HBCA

PS: Be sure to look for our first telephone conference.



**C.B.R.C. TORCH**

Building 113 (124)  
Hines V.A. Hospital  
Hines, Illinois 60141-9999

**FREE MATTER FOR THE BLIND  
& PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED  
POSTAL MANUAL PART 135**

**C.B.R.C. TORCH  
P.O.BOX 5000 (124)  
Hines, IL 60141**

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**Please see my selection for Preferred Format for receiving the TORCH Publication of the Hines Blind Center Alumni:**

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