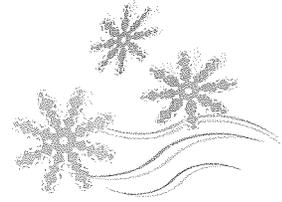




C.B.R.C. TORCH  
A PUBLICATION OF THE  
CENTRAL BLIND REHABILITATION CENTER  
EDWARD HINES JR. VA HOSPITAL



Winter 2013



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

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Accessibility options have been implemented to enable our visually impaired readers ease and greater access to articles that are of interest to them. If e-readers float the cursor over the list of articles and use the commands "control and click" they will be launched to the article of interest they select without having to scroll through each article.

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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. We are a CARF Accredited Program.

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### Comments or Subscriptions

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## Chief's Message

By Jerry Schutter

*Happy New Year 2013!*

We continue to experience change in our staff roster. A few more additions have taken place over the last few months. Check out Staff Updates column for details on whose coming and who's going.

We continue to get letters and e-mails from our former student patients, and are always happy to hear how you 'all are doing. Our Letters from Our Graduates column is a good reflection of our work. Thank you for the feedback and keep it coming.

The year 2013 will feature our Hines Blind Center Alumni Reunion this June. Messages from the HBCA on page 10 will bring you up to speed on the details. We look forward to visiting with our Graduates. Don't miss it!

The Inspiration to All piece is a bit unexpected. Bet you didn't know we serve more than Veterans from our four branches of the military. Read on to find out. Our Resource column provides some really good tips and may even get you to venture out into the community a bit and enjoy some activities. There is also a very informative article submitted by one of our patient's about Guide Dogs. And our Eye Conditions column will tell you everything you wanted to know about Cataracts.

## Staff Updates

By Sarah Baskis

University intern Joe Jorgenson will be finishing up in Living Skills and moving into a full-time permanent position in the near future. Congrats to Joe!

Theresa Roberts is our new part-time evening nurse. Theresa has been in the Nursing field for 25 years and also spent six years active in the Air Force and eight years in the Reserves. Welcome, Theresa!

Mike McCarthy will be serving in the capacity as Polytrauma TBI Fellow under a 1 year appointment. Mike will be working closely with our Polytrauma Blind Rehab Outpatient Specialist, Denise Van Koevinger during this appointment. Mike comes to us from Western Michigan University, as he recently completed a dual internship here at the BRC in Orientation & Mobility and Rehab Teaching/Living Skills over the summer and fall. Welcome Mike!

Ann Suchie, former TCF Program Support, current Outreach Coordinator for the Central Blind Rehabilitation Center (also responsible for coordinating the TORCH publication) has accepted a position in the Hines Hospital Director's office as Executive Assistant to the Director. We wish her luck in her new position.

Another notable fact concerning Blind Center staff members takes us to the 2012 *Feds Feed Families Food Drive*, sponsored at Hines VA Hospital this past Fall, where two of our Blind Center Nursing Staff, Lenoire Nealy and Belen Loos, were recognized for their outstanding efforts in supporting the 2012 food drive by donating 250 pounds each, of non-perishable food goods to aid hungry families. Receiving plaques and certificates on behalf of the Human Capital Officers Council USA, they are both now in the 'Feds Feed Families' Hall of Fame.

### **BRC Recreational Program**

Submitted by Mellissa Winter, RT

This past holiday season, the veterans enjoyed a variety of activities such as going to dinners, musicals, bowling, and more. The West Chicago, Batavia, Wheaton, and Addison VFW's continue to invite our veterans out for a homemade dinner and Bingo or entertainment not just during the holiday season, but throughout the entire year as well.

The veterans also had the opportunity to go to the Knights of Columbus in Oak Lawn, IL. Here, the members provided a catered dinner and also provided a trio of harmonica players who played some old time favorite music. The group of harmonica players have been together since they were in high school and are now in their 80's!

A trip to the Home Run Inn for pizza and a visit from Santa proved advantageous as all the Veterans received a gift. During the weeks leading up to Christmas, the blind center welcomed a group of carolers from the Willow Creek Music Group.



Looking ahead, we are once again working on featuring fishing as an outing during the warmer months. The Visual Skills Department along with Recreation Therapy will be working alongside the volunteers from Project Healing Waters to brainstorm ways to make fishing more accessible for our veterans.

### **Technology Today**

By CATs Staff



### **Apple's Latest Operating system; IOS 6**

Have you heard the latest buzz about Apple releasing a new I-pad? What does IOS 6 have to offer that IOS 5 did not? Changes have been made to a number of apps including Maps, Email, Safari, Siri, Facebook and more. Changes which most greatly affect the visually impaired population include Siri and accessibility. Siri is the function on the device which allows for hands free access to basic information off the internet. At the

push of a button, one can pose a question and it will answer with a response. This has revolutionized the way people search the web. No more pigeon English, just speak as you would to a human being and Siri will find an answer to your question, and can open apps for you instead of relying on you to find it. Accessibility improvements include the ability to use the Maps app and Zoom, together with Voice Over! Previously, one had to choose between large print or speech output. This offers the most support for those with visual impairments! Be aware though, we are not suggesting that you immediately replace your older device. Mileage varies; the new map is still being perfected and may pose difficulty for some users. You may already have a working solution to meet your goals. Consult your VIST Coordinator or Instructor to determine the most effective product to meet your needs and goals. Sources cited: <http://www.apple.com/ios/whats-new/>

## **An Inspiration to All**

By Maggie Elgersma  
**Serving a Special Agent**

The Hines Blind Rehabilitation Center has served thousands of veterans and active duty service members over the last 65 years, each one bringing a new story.



On July 17, 2012 Special Agent (SA) Joe Piersante was admitted to the Hines Blind Rehabilitation Center. SA Piersante was an agent for the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and a member of the Foreign-deployed Advisory Support Team (FAST) when he was injured during one of his tours in Afghanistan. The Special Agent was protecting his team as they boarded a helicopter when he was struck by enemy fire which pierced his helmet, entering his skull causing numerous head injuries including shattering the orbits of his eyes.

SA Piersante went through intense rehabilitation at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center and the Richmond VA Poly-Trauma Center before being admitted to the Hines Blind Rehabilitation Center in July. When Joe arrived at the Blind Center his number one goal was to go back to work. He was determined not give up and do whatever he could to remain independent. Being a previous college football player, Detroit city police officer and DEA Agent, Joe knew what it meant to work hard to achieve success. Joe, a soft spoken man hiding under a brawny tough exterior, is the result of previous life experiences that had made him into a man that was ready to work and would not allow himself to fail. He spent weeks learning JAWS to navigate the computer non-visually so that he could go back to the job he loved even though he would no longer

be able to perform the tasks he was so passionate about before he was injured. During his program at the Blind Center he made monumental progress and was able to meet his goals that he had set when he first arrived. The DEA's continuous support during SA Piersante's Blind Rehabilitation Program was a key factor in his success. Working with Joe was a privilege; he worked hard and persevered even when things seemed impossible. Joe will continue to be an inspiration to the staff at the Blind Center, fellow DEA agents and all those who cross his path.

## Letters from Our Graduates

The following letters or articles were received from Hines Blind Center Graduates.



CLICK, CLICK, TAP, TAP, RAP, RAP.  
IS THIS A CLOCK, A DRIPPING  
FAUCET? NO, IT'S A VISION  
IMPAIRED PERSON WALKING  
WITH HIS CANE--HIS PORTABLE  
SIGHT. IT'S ALWAYS ONE STEP  
AHEAD, PROVIDING SAFE, AND  
RELIABLE PASSAGE. IT SEEKS  
OUT WALKWAYS, CURBS AND  
STREETS, DOORS, STAIRS AND  
BASICALLY ANYTHING HE OR SHE  
WANTS TO FIND. THIS CANE FOR  
SIGHT GIVES THE INDIVIDUAL THE  
GIFT OF MOVEMENT WITH  
DIGNITY, CONFIDENCE AND  
INDEPENDENCE.

R. Reda  
*Madison, WI*

Dear Staff

What I took away with me from my experience at the BRC is confidence and purpose. The training and inspiration I received there helped me to overcome and adapt to my vision loss, not as a disability, but a challenge. Upon my return to Zablocki VAMC, I recognized a need for a peer support activity group and with the mentoring of my VIST coordinator, and support of our Patient Services Advocate, a visually impaired Veterans Activities group was begun. We have passed a milestone in August celebrating our groups' 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary. I share this accomplishment with you and your staff, not to toot my horn but to show how your efforts helped change my outlook from disabled to enabled, by adjusting and overcoming my personal obstacles. Thank you.

*Milwaukee, WI*

## Eye Conditions

By Susan Knauff

### Cataracts

Cataracts impact the lens of the eye. The lens works similar to a camera in that it helps to focus light rays onto the retina for clear vision. The lens of the eye has the ability to adjust the eye's focus by contracting and relaxing muscles, therefore, letting us focus on targets at varying distances both near, intermediate, and far. The lens itself is made up of mostly protein and water, where the protein is arranged in such a way to keep the

lens clear and allow light to pass through it without difficulty, according to the All About Vision website. Over time, some of the protein of the lens can clump together, which can cause a clouding in an area of the lens. This clouding is called a **cataract**, and over time can grow larger and cloud up more of the lens, affecting vision. Initially, the clouding may affect only a small portion of the lens, and the person may not even be aware of it. As the cataract increases in size, it clouds more of the lens and scatters the light that passes through the lens, which prevents a sharply defined image from reaching the retina. As a result, vision can be affected. According to the All About Vision website, cataracts are the most common cause of vision loss in people over the age of 40, and the main cause of blindness worldwide.

According to the Mayo Clinic, symptoms of cataracts can include the following: clouded, blurry, or dim vision, difficulty with night vision that progresses, light sensitivity, seeing “halos” surrounding lights, fading or yellowing of colors, double vision that occurs in one eye. There are three main types of cataracts, according to the Mayo Clinic:

1. Cataracts that affect the center of the lens are called nuclear cataracts; are often associated with aging.
2. Cataracts that affect the back of the lens are referred to as subcapsular cataract. Individuals with diabetes or

on high doses of steroid medications have a greater chance of developing this type of cataract.

3. Cataracts that affect the edges of the lens are called cortical cataracts. This type first appears as whitish, wedge-shaped streaks on the edges of the lens. As it progresses, the streaks advance into the center of the lens and interfere with light passing through the center of the lens.

No one knows exactly why cataracts are formed, but there are several identified risk factors that may be associated with cataract development: aging, UV radiation from sunlight, diabetes, hypertension, obesity, smoking, prolonged use of corticosteroids, statin medicines for cholesterol reduction, eye injury or inflammation, previous eye surgery, hormone replacement therapy, significant alcohol consumption, high myopia, and family history. With the onset of symptoms, vision can usually be improved with new glasses, magnification, stronger reading glasses, lighting, and other visual aids. When the cataract has progressed enough to seriously impair vision and affect daily life, then surgery may be indicated. Cataract surgery, according to the All About Vision website, is the most frequently performed surgery in the United States. With surgery, the clouded lens of the eye is removed, and frequently replaced with a clear, plastic, intraocular lens (IOL), which

sits where the lens used to sit and becomes a part of the eye. If a person is unable to have an IOL placed after removal of the lens, vision can often be corrected with eyeglasses or contact lenses, as long as other eye conditions are not present to affect one's vision.

#### References:

1. All About Vision  
<http://www.allaboutvision.com/conditions/cataracts.htm>
2. The Mayo Clinic  
<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/cataracts>
3. Encyclopedia Britannica  
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/336040/lens>

## RESOURCES

By Jamie Ogarek

### Recommendations and Resources for Participating in Activities and Events in your Local Area

*Great advice ...call in advance and plan your outings.*

The Art Institute in Chicago offers to have a historian walk with you to explain the paintings in great detail. While it might not be beneficial to just show up and expect this service, take the time to call ahead and find out when assistance is available. You and your family/friends will have a great learning experience. Check out

the museums in your area and find out what you have been missing.

Have you checked your local movie theatres to find out who is offering descriptive movies? MoPix ([www.mopix.org](http://www.mopix.org)) and AMC ([www.amctheatres.com](http://www.amctheatres.com)) do offer these services. Also, contact your cable company and find out if any of your television shows are offered in descriptive audio. This will be at no extra cost to you.

Have you tried using public transportation or local services such as dial-a-ride. If you haven't tried it, maybe 2013 is your year! Rather than continue to ask your spouse for a ride, try to be more independent! If public transportation is unavailable in your area, contact your church, service organizations and/or chamber of Commerce. Seniors can utilize Eldercare Locator at ([www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov) or 1-800-677-1116) for transportation. *Another secret tip, if you have found a driver and really enjoy their company, offer to pay for gas.* If they insist that you do not pay, consider buying them a cup of coffee and/or a meal on behalf of their services. Contributing your part to this relationship can go a long way in a more enjoyable ride.

If it's too cold outside, try a stimulating indoor activity. Consider enrolling in Hadley School classes at [www.hadley.edu](http://www.hadley.edu). They offer a wide variety of new classes. You can learn

through podcasts or PC conferencing and can complete these courses at your own pace.

If you need help or advice remember you can always contact your VIST Coordinator with questions and concerns. Does your VIST Coordinator offer a monthly support group? You never know who you will meet and resources you might discover available to you in your area. Try something new and bring on the New Year with vigor.

### **Message from the HBCA**

By Melody Angelini



Happy New Year to one and all! It's the beginning of a new year and an odd numbered year at that. For those new to the Alumni this means it's time for election of new officers and for the Reunion. If you want to be in on all the information going out, be sure to make those dues payments for membership.

Not sure of your status? drop a line to [hbca1981@sbcglobal.net](mailto:hbca1981@sbcglobal.net).

The Reunion is always held in June of the odd numbered years in the Chicago area. This offers members an opportunity to return to Hines for a picnic and a chance to visit with staff members, old and new.

The date for the Reunion is June 20<sup>th</sup> through the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013. The hotel is the Countryside Holiday Inn on Joliet Rd in Countryside. On the 21<sup>st</sup> we will have a picnic at the CBRC at Hines VA Hospital. So keep an eye on your mailbox for the election packet and the Reunion information. If you haven't received any information from us by April, it's time to contact us at [hbca1981@sbcglobal.net](mailto:hbca1981@sbcglobal.net).

## OUTREACH

### Know your VIST

The Visual Impairment Services Team Coordinators, better known as (VIST) are your case managers for Blind Rehab Care and Services and your first contact when you need to enroll or apply for a program. Whether it be your first admission to the Blind Center, a special program to meet unique needs, or a refresher, these representatives are key. The following is a current updated list for the Central area Region VIST Coordinators.

<u>VIST Coordinator</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>PHONE</u>
Paul Hemmes	Cincinnati, OH	(513) 475-6397
Paul Hemmes	Dayton, OH	(937) 268-6511 X2631
Matthew Page	Columbus OPC	(614) 257-5325
Beth Levine	Youngstown OPC	(330) 740-9200 X1580
Marianne Ryan	Cleveland, OH	(216) 791-3800 X4240
Jennifer Troyer	Detroit, MI	(313) 576-4888
Bill Bernhard	Battle Creek, MI	269-223-6607
Gerald Rickert	Ann Arbor, MI	(734) 845-3064
Deanna Austin	Indianapolis, IN	(317) 988-2576
Jeff Stroud	Danville, IL	(217) 554-5406
Jeff Stroud	Peoria, IL	(309) 497-0790
Novalea Welch	FT Wayne, IN	(260) 426-5431 x72650
Leland Lewis	Saginaw, MI	(989) 497-2500 X11852
Eric Strong	North Chicago	(224) 610-5429
Pat Zeinstra	Hines, IL	(708) 202-2351
Melinda Dunlap	Chicago, IL	(312) 569-7531
Leon Haith	Milwaukee, WI	(414) 384-2000 X41832
Rhonda M. Chambers	Madison, WI	(608) 256-1901
Patricia Staller	Iron Mountain, MI	906-774-3300 X34515
Sue Greeno	Tomah, WI	608-372-3971 x61554
Kevin Jacques	ST. Louis, MO	(314) 652-4100 X54121

<b>VIST Coordinator</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>PHONE</b>
<b>Paul Clary-Archuleta</b>	<b>Kansas City, MO</b>	<b>(816) 861-4700 x56924</b>
<b>Martha Allen</b>	<b>Leavenworth, KS</b>	<b>(913) 682-2000 X52011</b>
<b>Betty Howerton</b>	<b>Marion, IL</b>	<b>(618) 997-5311 X54815</b>
<b>Bob Hamilton</b>	<b>Wichita, KS</b>	<b>(316) 651-3682</b>
<b>Lauren Swift</b>	<b>Columbia, MO</b>	<b>(573) 814-6458</b>
<b>Anna Perry</b>	<b>Sioux Falls, SD</b>	<b>(605) 333-6891 X7860</b>
<b>Broderick Burks</b>	<b>Minneapolis, MN</b>	<b>(612) 725-2000 x1814</b>
<b>Heidi Ampe</b>	<b>St Cloud, MN</b>	<b>(320) 255-6480 X7235</b>
<b>Bonnie Whitson</b>	<b>Des Moines, IA</b>	<b>(515) 699-5410</b>
<b>Jean Butler</b>	<b>Omaha, NE</b>	<b>(402) 995-3188</b>
<b>Lisa Tatge</b>	<b>Iowa City, IA</b>	<b>(319) 338-0581</b>
<b>Jody Schommer</b>	<b>Fargo, ND</b>	<b>(701) 232-3241 X3056</b>
<b>Galen Britain</b>	<b>Black Hills, SD</b>	<b>(605) 745-2000 X92558</b>



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**FREE MATTER FOR THE BLIND  
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