

A Chicago Lighthouse
Publication

the Beam

February 2009 ■ Volume 8 Number 2



THRIVING ON LOVE AND SUPPORT

GROWING FOR SERVICE

Seeing What's Possible Dinner **2009**

Thursday, May 14, 2009 • 6pm - 9pm

**North Shore Country Club • 1340 Glenview Rd., Glenview, Illinois
Reception, Silent/Live Auction, Dinner and Music**

Guest Speaker, Michael G. May A visually impaired business executive and sports enthusiast, May founded the Sendero Group which has assisted those with sight disabilities by producing a pioneering accessible Global Positioning System.

Part of the proceeds from the 2009 Seeing What's Possible Dinner will be matched by the Kresge Foundation for the "Growing for Service" building project.

**For additional information contact Special Events at
312.997.3679**

Upcoming Events

Saturday, February 21, 2009

Brown Bag Lunch with District 1-A Lions

Saturday, March 7, 2009

Arcangelo Banquet & Awards

Saturday, March 7, 2009

Braille Challenge

Thursday, March 12, 2009

YPB Networking Event

Tuesday, March 24, 2009

Kiki's Bistro Dinner

Thursday May 14, 2009

Seeing What's Possible Dinner

For more info, please contact our Special Events Office at 312-997-3679.

Our Heartfelt Thanks

to John and Shirley Schlossman and their family, of the Jocardo Fund. We regret that their \$4,000 gift to the Lighthouse was unintentionally omitted from our 2008 annual report. Their most recent gift was for our Birth-to-Three Family Intervention Program.

Our thanks to you for your amazing generosity over the years!

Thriving on Love and Support

Visually Impaired, Sighted Couples Reflect on Relationships

They met at work. He noticed her one day in the cafeteria and asked for her number. She gave it to him and they wound up speaking that evening literally from sundown to sunrise the next morning! From there, they engaged in a whirlwind romance and were married in Las Vegas last July where Lighthouse President Jim Kesteloot gave the bride away (pictured on front cover). Like many couples this Valentine's Day, they plan on celebrating the holiday with red roses, candy and a quiet dinner. The only difference is that Becky and Steven Baldwin are visually impaired. Becky works in customer service for the Lighthouse's VA program while Steven is a blind vendor operator at the Prairie View Rest Area on Interstate 57.

"The fact that Steven and I are both visually impaired has actually bonded us together," Becky smiled. "He has a greater understanding and acceptance of my disability because he has it himself!" At the same time, she notes that both have learned many things from one another. "Just because you can't see doesn't mean you can't do lots of other things," Becky insisted. "Steven has taught me so much about traveling, shopping and more!" The couple maintained that one of the biggest stumbling blocks they encounter is a lack of understanding on the part of the public about people who are blind or visually impaired.

Echoing that's sentiment is Judge Nicholas Pomaro who directs the Lighthouse's Kane Legal Clinic. The Judge, who has been totally blind since childhood, counsels blind people facing discrimination in housing, employment and other areas. That discrimination often carries over to how visually impaired couples are perceived by others. "It is important to have an understanding and go past the blindness to see the inner soul of the person," he pointed out.

"The fact that Steven and I are both visually impaired has actually bonded us together," Becky smiled. "He has a greater understanding and acceptance of my disability because he has it himself!"

The Judge's wife of 41 years, Jean, who is sighted, has managed to go beyond her husband's blindness. "Nick's disability doesn't interfere with the wonderful life we have together", she maintained. Aside from assisting him with a few routine tasks, Mrs. Pomaro stated that the Judge performs everyday duties with such skill that, "We sometimes forget that he can't see. He even takes out the garbage," she laughed.

Another couple in which one partner is visually impaired while the other is sighted is Tom and Diane Perski. Tom is currently director of rehabilitation services at the Lighthouse while Diane is a professional woman who previously worked in the agency's Low Vision Clinic. Both had owned their own business in Arizona that helped people with visual impairments. "No one should ever look at entering a relationship with a person who is blind or visually impaired as any kind of burden," Diane said. "My husband, Tom, may be visually impaired, but he has other strengths that more than compensate for his disability. In fact, he helps me address weaknesses that I have."

She added that her husband, like many others with disabilities, is a very independent person. "In any relationship, both partners get the full package," Tom observed, noting that each person brings their own strengths to the table. In my case, I am a good listener and was able to counsel my wife on issues she was grappling with."

Donate Online!

The Lighthouse now accepts donations online from people in Illinois. We have partnered with Network for Good to securely process online credit card donations via the Network for Good Donor Advised Fund.

The new feature enables donors to make either a one-time gift or recurring donation monthly, quarterly, or yearly. Also, gifts can be dedicated to a family member, friend, or loved one. Share what's possible and donate now at:

www.thechicagolighthouse.org

New Agency Tour Schedule

Due to the large volume of tour requests, the Lighthouse now offers a set tour schedule to offer guests the most educational experience. Tours will be facilitated to individuals and small groups (6 or less) during the following times:

1st Wednesday of every month from 10-11:15 a.m.
3rd Wednesday of every month from 1-2:15 p.m.

Tours for groups of 6 persons or more (schools, organizations, companies, etc.) will be accommodated accordingly. To schedule a tour, please contact Brenda Schulze at (312) 666-1313 ext. 3138 or e-mail brenda.schulze@chicagolighthouse.org.



From Executive Director Janet Szlyk

A new presidential administration represents a time of optimism and hope. The Chicago Lighthouse joins all Americans in wishing President Obama well. While readily acknowledging that he will have to grapple with one of the worst economic slumps in the past 50 years, two raging wars in the Middle East, and a host of other pressing problems, we strongly urge him not to forget the critical needs of people who are blind or have other severe disabilities.

Already this group is coping with an unacceptably high unemployment rate of 70%. In addition, the aging of the nation's massive baby boom generation in the years ahead will mean a virtual explosion in the numbers of Americans facing vision loss. This will place even greater demands on our national health care delivery system.

To help ease this situation and better anticipate the needs of the future, the Lighthouse would like to propose the following key points in a Blindness/ Disability Agenda for both the President and the new Congress:

- Strengthen federal initiatives such as the Ability One and Randolph-Sheppard programs which help people with disabilities become employed, providing products for the federal government and operating vending facilities on federal property, respectively. Capitol Hill, incidentally, can become a model Randolph-Sheppard location by setting up vending facilities in House and Senate office buildings and other facilities in the nation's capital.

- Increase funding and accountability for rehabilitation programs which help people with disabilities become employed.
- Full enforcement of such far-reaching laws as the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Department of Justice and others.
- Enhancement of such programs as the Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) and New Freedom Initiative to encourage communities to create and expand transportation services for people with disabilities.
- Agencies receiving federal funds must make a concerted effort to hire and retain employees with disabilities.
- Go beyond the traditional, 9-5 type jobs when helping people with disabilities find employment. Look at programs which can help people start their own businesses and work at home.
- Expand health care insurance coverage for low vision services and adaptive devices.
- Provide more funding to early intervention programs for blind or visually impaired infants and their families.
- The federal courts have ordered the United States Department of the Treasury to make our nation's paper currency independently identifiable by people who are blind. President Obama's Treasury Secretary must be committed to carrying out this court order as expeditiously as possible.

Championing these measures will greatly enhance the quality of life for millions of disabled Americans. We hope that our new President will strongly support them!

LIGHTHOUSE SALUTES JIM KESTELOOT ON HIS LAST DAY

Staff, managers, board members and others bade an affectionate farewell to Jim Kesteloot on Thursday, January 15th, as he formally retired from the Lighthouse after an outstanding 40 year career. The goodbye ceremony which featured tributes from his admirers as well as a giant cake, fell on the 40th anniversary of the exact date, January 15th, 1969, when Mr. Kesteloot first began his career at the agency, initially as a placement counselor. He subsequently rose to the top post of president and executive director where he was able to implement a number of far-reaching programs that transformed the Lighthouse into a nationally respected authority on blindness.

Coinciding with his last day was publication of an article in the Arlington Heights Post, Mr. Kesteloot's hometown paper, which noted his contributions to both the Lighthouse and blindness community.



Josephine D' Amico, client of the Work Activities Program and a well-known personality at the Lighthouse, sang an original composition to Jim Kesteloot thanking him for his service.

To receive our most up-to-date Lighthouse happenings, sign up for our **E-News** at: www.thechicagolighthouse.org.

Lighthouse NEWS and EVENTS

LIGHTHOUSE SALUTES PRESIDENT OBAMA'S INAUGURATION WITH SPECIAL CLOCK

To mark the historic inauguration of Barack Obama as the nation's first African-American as well as the first Chicagoan to assume the presidency, the Lighthouse prepared a special clock in his honor. The clock, which was unveiled in time for Obama's inauguration on January 20th, is about 16 inches in diameter, has a white backdrop with roman numerals and is adorned with the presidential seal. It also has the words, "President Barack Obama, January 20th, 2009, Time for Change!"

The new president has been a strong supporter of the Lighthouse and its programs to assist people who are blind or visually impaired. Both he and his wife, Michelle, visited the agency in September, 2005. As a U.S. Senator, Obama championed efforts to strengthen the Lighthouse's clock-making operation and to expand employment opportunities for people with visual impairments.

LISA HILTON, TOM BURRELL ATTRACT CAPACITY CROWD AT LIGHTHOUSE BENEFIT

Lisa Hilton of Los Angeles and Tom Burrell of Chicago drew a standing room only crowd for a special Lighthouse fundraiser at Andy's Jazz Club, Thursday, January 8th. The event, which benefitted the agency's programs for people who are blind or visually impaired, also saluted the late Dave Margulis, a Lighthouse volunteer and donor who was a regular patron at Andy's.

Ms. Hilton has been praised for her service on behalf of blind children. She visited the Lighthouse last January and did a session with the agency's very own group of talented musicians, Vision Quest. Mr. Burrell, who appeared as a special guest performer, is universally admired as a marketing communications pioneer. He is founder and chairman emeritus of Burrell, one of the nation's leading

African-American owned full-service communications agencies.

LIGHTHOUSE WINS APPROVAL TO LAUNCH GROUNDBREAKING MODEL TO ASSIST BLIND VENDORS IN FINDING JOBS

A far-reaching initiative to assist blind vendors in finding jobs has been secured by the Lighthouse thanks to an agreement with the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS).

The arrangement, which will enable the Lighthouse to uncover new business locations for blind vendors statewide, builds on the existing Randolph-Sheppard Act, originally passed by Congress in 1936. The Act gives the right to people who are blind an opportunity to operate businesses in federal buildings as well as promotes businesses operated by blind vendors in city, state, county and private business buildings.

The Lighthouse's efforts on behalf of blind vendors were profiled in a CBS 2 special report that aired last December 30th.

LIGHTHOUSE RESIDENCY PROGRAM OBTAINS INITIAL ACCREDITATION

The Lighthouse's nationally prominent Low Vision Clinic has received another honor. Its residency program in Low

Vision Rehabilitation and Ocular Disease has been granted initial accreditation. Dr. Kara Crumbliss, director of the clinic, was saluted by accreditation officials for putting together an "excellent self-study and site visit." Under the auspices of the Illinois College of Optometry (ICO), the 12 month program provides an opportunity for the resident to achieve advanced competency in both low vision rehabilitation and the diagnosis and treatment of ocular disease. Training in low vision is offered at the Lighthouse and the Deicke Center for Visual Rehabilitation.

GENEROUS SUPPORTERS BRING HOLIDAY CHEER TO LIGHTHOUSE CHILDREN

The Annual Children's Holiday Party held on December 10th was made a little extra merrier this year thanks to generous support from the Central Lions Club, BLDD Architects, Mortenson Construction and Graphics Management.

The youngsters were also treated to a visit from Santa and his "biker" elves who distributed presents courtesy of "Toys for Tots".

The Birth to Three program also celebrated the holidays with its own special party on December 13th. Highlights included an appearance from Santa, games, arts and crafts, food and gifts for all, and a visit from the Kohl McCormick Story Bus.



From left to Right: Joe Vallez (Azteca Lions Club), Santa Claus, Jose Gutierrez (Azteca Lions Club), and Rich Zabelski (IPVI) pose in front of the Kohl McCormick Story Bus at the Lighthouse Birth-to-Three Program/IPVI (Illinois Parents of Visually Impaired Children) Holiday Party.