

the Beam

Summer 2015 ■ Volume 15 Number 1

A Chicago Lighthouse
Publication

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF ADA



From the President and Chief Executive Officer Janet P. Szlyk, PhD

Twenty-five years ago this month, President George H.W. Bush helped transform American society by signing the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). By guaranteeing equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities in employment, public accommodations, governmental services and tele-communications, this landmark legislation has broken down barriers and provided opportunities previously closed to millions of Americans.

Thanks to the ADA, for example, big city transit systems like the CTA have become much more accessible with the installation of wide doors on trains and buses to accommodate people in wheelchairs and sound systems to announce stops for those who are visually impaired. Furthermore, restaurants, stores and other public accommodations have taken steps to ensure that individuals who are disabled are able to fully take advantage of the programs and/or services they offer.

Despite these considerable advances, much more needs to be done to assure that people with disabilities have the same access to opportunity that other Americans enjoy.

The major stumbling block remains a stubbornly high unemployment rate. For example, seven out of 10 people who are blind or visually impaired lack a job. Employers need to make a much stronger commitment in this area. One answer is to promote partnerships between

social service organizations who work with people with disabilities, government and the private sector.

At The Chicago Lighthouse, we have partnered with the Illinois Tollway and the University of Illinois at Chicago to launch a state-of-the-art call center, which has furnished employment to more than 300 individuals, more than half of whom are blind, visually impaired, have other disabilities or are Veterans.

Another issue hindering the full acceptance of people with disabilities in our society is attitudinal. Unfortunately, negative attitudes and stereotypes abound and governmental action can only go so far to change them.

It helps to eliminate these stereotypes at a young age. At The Lighthouse, our new Preschool for All is doing just that by bringing together children who are both sighted and visually impaired. In this blended environment, they are learning mutual respect and understanding at a young age. We would encourage that similar efforts be undertaken. We also ask that the worlds of sports, entertainment, the arts and other fields of human endeavor do more to showcase the talents and amazing accomplishments of people with disabilities.

Happy 25th Birthday, ADA!
Let's celebrate by reaffirming our commitment to fostering a more just and equitable society as the original law envisioned!





“Brainport essentially draws a picture on John’s tongue, and he has to figure out what that is,” Maeng stated. “It takes training, patience and time, but it is a very promising start!”

First Brainport Patient Trained at Chicago Lighthouse following FDA approval

He is a self-described “technology geek” who loves to tinker around with gadgets and other devices.

He plays the piano.

He is actively involved in volunteer work and derives a tremendous amount of satisfaction in helping others.

Friends describe him as a real “go-getter” who strives for excellence in everything he does.

The fact that he is totally blind has never stopped him from achieving his goals.

Meet John Vickers, an energetic 20-year-old from Dallas, Texas.

John’s can-do attitude has helped earn him another distinction. He is the first patient in the U.S. to receive training with the innovative BrainPort V100 vision device following its approval from the Food and Drug Administration.

Developed by Wicab, Inc., a Middleton, Wisconsin-based medical company, the BrainPort V100 is a nonsurgical assistive visual aid that translates information from a digital video camera to a blind person’s tongue, through gentle electrical stimulation.

Thanks to the BrainPort V100, individuals like John who are blind have the ability to do things like reach for nearby objects; identify letters and numbers; and even become aware of surroundings in an industrial setting.

Recently John, along with his guide dog Marcella, traveled to The Chicago Lighthouse, which has been a key BrainPort V100 research partner with Wicab, to test the device.

The Lighthouse was chosen as a partner because it is nationally known for its innovative programs on behalf of people who are blind and for having an extensive network of contacts.

“I heard about The Lighthouse and the BrainPort V100 clinical testing while serving as a volunteer with the American Foundation for the Blind in Dallas,” John recalled. “I was intrigued by the possibility and wanted to give it a try.”

Upon his arrival at The Lighthouse, John, who lost his vision at the age of 5 due to a brain tumor, was assisted by Meesa Maeng, a research associate with the agency’s renowned low vision research laboratory directed by Dr. Janet Szlyk, a highly respected research scientist and President and CEO of The Chicago Lighthouse.

Maeng explained that the BrainPort V100 consists of a postage-stamp-size electrode array for the top surface of the tongue, a base unit, a digital video camera, and a hand-held controller for zoom and contrast inversion.

She added that there’s a device in John’s mouth connected to a video camera on his glasses. Using software on a laptop, a sighted observer may see two images of a flower. The first is a direct feed from the camera. The second image is a graphic display of the data sent to John’s tongue, which John learns to interpret as the scene around him.



The images above demonstrates how information from the camera is represented on the tongue. Left image: camera image; Right image: Graphic rendering of the tongue display.



Profile: MICHAEL SMITH

VETERAN AND UI HEALTH CALL CENTER AGENT

He joined the U.S. Navy and had a chance to see the world. He has a strong interest in film and broadcasting. He also enjoys bowling and cross-country running.

Most importantly, he derives his greatest satisfaction from helping others.

Meet Michael Smith, a U.S. Navy Veteran who attained the rank of Second Class Petty Officer and who is a recent addition to the team at the UI Health Customer Service Call Center here at The Chicago Lighthouse.

"I heard about the job while attending a Veteran's fair last winter," Smith recalled. "I have been a long-time admirer of the work The Lighthouse does for people with disabilities so this just seemed like a perfect fit!"

A Detroit native who studied at San Jose City College in California, he says his life has been guided by four main principles: Be impeccable in your speech; don't take anything personal; don't assume anything; and, always do your best.

Asked what he likes most about his job as a call center agent, Smith flashes a broad smile and says: "I just love to help people with their problems. If someone needs to get in touch with a doctor, for example, and I help make that happen, I can take pride in that."

Along the way, he has developed a strong empathy for people with disabilities.

"As someone who was homeless when I was younger, I've had first hand experience in dealing with adversity."

Smith added that in America, we seem to have an appreciation for individuals who are disabled and welcome their contributions to our society.

For his immediate goals, he hopes to excel at his job in the call center and perhaps pen a screenplay on his experiences.

"I've been fortunate to have come into contact with so many wonderful people. I only hope that I could do justice to their remarkable stories!"

Brainport (continued)

"The BrainPort V100 essentially draws a picture on John's tongue, and he has to figure out what that is," Maeng stated. "It takes training, patience and time, but it is a very promising start!"

Commenting on the experience, John stated that it was like "soda pop bubbles popping on my tongue" but he found the testing procedure most illuminating.

Then, accompanied by Maeng who held the Brainport device, he took a walk around the building. Thanks to the device, John was able to stay centered on the sidewalk and avoid stepping on plants and shrubbery.

"It was a wonderful experience and I felt in control of my equilibrium," he smiled, adding that he sees a great deal of potential with the BrainPort V100 and is eager to participate in further testing.

He expresses optimism about the overall impact technology like the BrainPort V100 will have in opening additional doors for people who are blind.

"The technology is amazing and is making things possible that would have been inconceivable just a few years ago."

For his part, John wants to help others cope with their vision loss by pursuing a career in counseling.

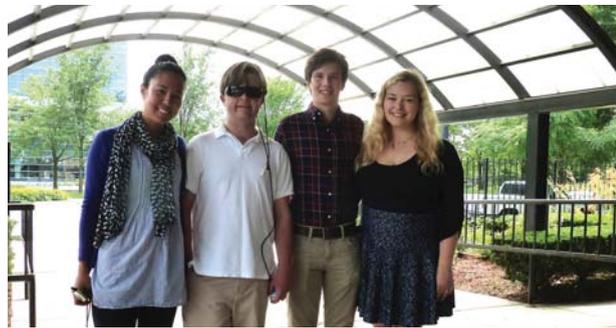
"He is fantastic and has a marvelous upbeat attitude," noted Maeng who also took him to a number of Chicago tourist attractions during his visit.

After spending time at The Lighthouse, he felt right at home.

"Everyone here has been terrific. I really appreciate their assistance, hospitality and encouragement."

When asked how he planned to wrap up his Chicago visit, John laughed and said that he wanted to "chow down on the city's legendary deep dish pizza!"

If interested in Brainport technology, contact Patricia Grant, clinical research director at Wicab, Inc., at 608/829-4511 or email pgrant@wicab.com



Shown left to right are Meesa Maeng, John Vickers, Patrick Andrade and Charlotte Jackson. Patrick and Charlotte are summer interns at The Lighthouse who accompanied John during his walk in which he tested the Brainport device.

PLANNED GIVING—With a planned gift (like a gift in your will or trust) to The Lighthouse, you can help thousands of people The Lighthouse serves each year AND obtain significant financial benefits. In making a planned gift, you will also have the satisfaction of knowing people with visual impairments in the future will benefit from your generosity today. For more information, please call Jen Miller, Senior VP of Development, Planned Giving, at (312) 997-3643 or jennifer.miller@chicagolighthouse.org.

LIGHTHOUSE DINNER HONORS ABC 7, CONGRESSMAN DAVIS; SHOWCASES \$2 MILLION GIFT

Both a longtime public servant and media outlet took center stage May 14th as The Chicago Lighthouse saluted Congressman Danny Davis and ABC 7 for their outstanding support of people with disabilities.

The Lighthouse gave its highest honor, the "Beacon of Light" Award, to Congressman Davis and ABC 7 during its 2015 "Seeing What's Possible" Dinner at the Drake Hotel.



Congressman Danny Davis, ABC7's Josea Sanders, and Richard Boykin.

The gala event, which attracted more than 340 guests, raised nearly \$300,000 to assist Lighthouse programs for people who are blind, visually impaired, multi-disabled and Veterans.

Lighthouse President & CEO Dr. Janet Szlyk used the occasion to announce that the 109-year-old organization received a \$2 million dollar gift from Mrs. Beatrice Mayer to fund the agency's new seniors center. Dr. Szlyk thanked Mrs. Mayer, who received a standing ovation, for her generosity and investment in The Lighthouse.

She also congratulated the award recipients and extended her appreciation to all the agency's supporters for attending the dinner. In addition, Dr. Szlyk singled out for special praise Lighthouse board member and noted Chicagoan Anida Johnson "Cookie" Cohen who served as dinner chairman.

CHICAGO LIGHTHOUSE REMEMBERS DR. ALFRED ROSENBLOOM

It is with deep regret that we report the recent passing of Dr. Alfred A. Rosenbloom, an internationally respected optometrist who helped found The Lighthouse's world-class Low Vision Clinic.

A member of the National Optometry Hall of Fame, Dr. Rosenbloom often remarked that our clinic was "one of the oldest and most prominent in the U.S." He was in attendance in 1955 when Helen Keller dedicated both our current headquarters building at 1850 W. Roosevelt Road, as well as the clinic itself.

At the agency's Centennial Symposium Dinner in 2006, The Lighthouse saluted Dr. Rosenbloom for his many contributions to Low Vision Service, to the thousands of patients he has served, and the field of Low Vision across the world.



Alfred A. Rosenbloom, Jr., OD, MA, DOS

CHICAGO LIGHTHOUSE NORTH HOSTS 3RD ANNUAL MIKE DITKA CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENT



Coach Mike Ditka on the putting green at last year's event.

The Chicago Lighthouse North, located in Glenview, will host its 3rd Annual Mike Ditka Charity Golf Tournament on Monday, August 31, 2015.

Thanks to board member and chair of the golf tournament Sandy Forsythe, this very special event will take place at the acclaimed North Shore Country Club, 1340 Glenview Road, in Glenview, home of the 2013-2015 PGA Encompass Championship Tour.

In addition to Lighthouse board member and tournament namesake, Mike Ditka, other celebrity participants will include former Chicago Blackhawks players.

Registration and the Practice Range will be open, beginning at 10:00 am, followed by the shot gun start and lunch served on the course at 11:30 am. Cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, silent auction and an awards ceremony will take place immediately after the tournament.

For more information on tickets, sponsorship and underwriting opportunities, please call 312-447-3448, email Lindsay.Inglis@chicagolighthouse.org, or visit the event website at <http://chicagolighthouse.org/ditkagolf15>

LIGHTHOUSE WINS VETERANS EMPLOYMENT LEADERSHIP AWARD

Citing its innovative practices in employing Veterans and service members, The Chicago Lighthouse was given a Veterans Employment Leadership Award in May.

Accepting the honor was Angela Kearney, human resources generalist who assists in recruiting Veterans for employment opportunities in call centers managed by The Lighthouse.



Angela Kearney and Dr. Janet Szlyk displaying the Veterans Employment Leadership Award.

The award also saluted the organization for "recognizing the value and talent that Veterans bring to the workplace" and for "providing inspired leadership through partnerships with federal and state Veterans employment programs."

Lighthouse President and CEO Dr. Janet Szlyk congratulated Ms. Kearney and her colleagues in the human resources department for this "amazing honor!" She also thanked The McCormick Tribune Foundation, which has provided a grant to train and employ Veterans in our call centers. Dr. Szlyk noted that in just a few years, The Lighthouse has gone from employing one Veteran to nearly 70 and is fully committed to recruiting more.



The Chicago Lighthouse

for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired

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The Chicago Lighthouse

Third Annual Mike Ditka Charity Golf Tournament

Monday, August 31st | North Shore Country Club, Glenview, IL

www.chicagolighthouse.org/ditkagolf15

The Chicago Lighthouse 29th Annual House & Garden Walk

Wednesday, September 9th | The North Shore

www.chicagolighthouse.org/housegardenwalk15

Lighthouse North ART AND VISION: Wine and Cheese Reception

Sunday, October 11th | The Chicago Lighthouse North, Glenview

www.chicagolighthouse.org/ArtAndVision