

2006

Wisconsin Council of the Blind  
& Visually Impaired

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*Hope for the Future*

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ANNUAL REPORT  
WHITE CANE FUND REPORT

*Promoting dignity and independence of people in Wisconsin  
who are blind or visually impaired.*

# HOPE FOR THE FUTURE



The Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired has undertaken positive change and significant growth during the past four years. In our past three Annual Reports, we have reviewed our History, Mission, and Vision. Signifying this process of self-review is the growth symbol, which has been displayed in each of our past three annual reports. The growth symbol appears here for the last time, representing the positive outcome of this process.

We proudly present our Annual Report for 2006, *Hope for the Future*. Our review and planning efforts have produced positive growth and a very optimistic future. Thank you for sharing the journey with us.

## OUR MISSION STATEMENT

The Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired is a private, not-for-profit organization. Its mission is to promote the dignity and independence of people in Wisconsin who are blind and visually impaired by providing services, advocating legislation, and educating the general public.

## OUR VISION STATEMENT

The Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired will be the premier organization serving people who are blind and visually impaired statewide. Through internal excellence and effective collaboration with other organizations we will:

- Establish a statewide presence in Wisconsin with a focus on underserved areas and populations,
- Facilitate comprehensive education and training for consumers, professionals, and the public,
- Increase opportunities for meaningful employment among people who are blind and visually impaired, and
- Act as a link to services, advocacy, technology, and information promoting the independence and enhanced quality of life of people who are blind and visually impaired and their families.



# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Heartfelt thanks to the many fine people and businesses who support the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired.

This report will give you an idea of who we are and how we spend the money entrusted to us. Each year, we wrestle with finding the best ways to reach out and serve the people who need our help most. With the high cost of travel these days, it's hard to justify trips for the entire Council, but experience has taught us that being active and visible is critical. Recently, we held a large seminar and Council meeting in the Kenosha area. There, I was forcefully reminded of just how important it is for people to see the Council in action.

During lunch, I was approached by a woman who was working in our hotel and had noticed the Council members. She was amazed and thrilled to find out about the Council and to see us living normal and productive lives. Our message was one of hope, and it was received loud and clear. She couldn't wait to get back to her church group to tell them of the wonderful experience she had. She knew several people who need the services we offer but, more importantly, she wanted to tell them about blind people who worked, played, and lived their lives to the fullest.

Many people fear the loss of vision more than any of the other senses. By getting out there and doing what we do, we demonstrate that there is hope and help. Loss of vision isn't the end. You can live a useful and productive life. That is time and money well spent!

The Council proudly introduced a new digital short film at our 2006 annual awards banquet. Available on DVD and short enough to be downloaded from the Internet, we will use it in presentations all over the state to introduce our Council and its important mission. The film is called "Hope," and it, too, shows blind and visually impaired people living their lives with energy and purpose.

While our travels and new DVD are just a small part of what we've accomplished in the past year, these powerful messages open eyes and say in more than words that life does not end when vision is lost. Hope and help are what we provide, and we've been doing that for more than 55 years.

To all our supporters, we gratefully say "Thank you." You help the Council advance our mission, provide services, and show the people of Wisconsin there is hope and a way to make a difference.

Sincerely,

Chris Zenchenko



# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

As all of you who have supported us already know, the Council is a valuable asset in the state of Wisconsin! When I joined the Council in January 2006, I quickly learned just how talented and dedicated Council members and staff are. During my first year here, many significant changes occurred as a result of past strategic planning and the hard work of all at the Council.

We are pleased to tell you about our exciting and challenging plans for the future. These initiatives are guided by a new Vision Statement created jointly by Council and staff members during a planning retreat weekend last winter.

The now-familiar mission of the Council describes our purpose: to promote the dignity and independence of people in Wisconsin who are blind and visually impaired by providing services, advocating legislation, and educating the general public. This strong mission statement remains unchanged. Adding a vision statement provides clear direction for future Council activity at a time when the need for services is increasing throughout the state.

A strong vision statement offers many benefits to our organization. It captures the spirit of the Council and describes our hope for the future. It motivates staff and Council to achieve measurable new goals. And it challenges us to stretch and work in true collaboration with other organizations. It will also encourage new financial and volunteer support, and allow more blind and visually impaired people access to our services throughout the state. It reads:

The Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired will be the premier organization serving people who are blind and visually impaired statewide. Through internal excellence and effective collaboration with other organizations, we will:

- Establish a statewide presence in Wisconsin with a focus on underserved areas and populations
- Facilitate comprehensive education and training for consumers, professionals, and the public
- Increase opportunities for meaningful employment among people who are blind and visually impaired; and
- Act as a link to services, advocacy, technology, and information promoting the independence and enhanced quality of life of people who are blind and visually impaired and their families.

The three primary initiatives for our future work are: Growth, Outreach and Statewide Expansion; Education/Training; and Employment. Each broad initiative has specific goals and objectives over a three year period. We are hopeful and enthusiastic about our future, and we invite you to join us in this very important work.

Sincerely,

Karen V. Majkrzak



Executive Director  
Karen V. Majkrzak  
addresses a group in  
Door County.

## SERVICE TO OTHERS IS OUR TOP PRIORITY

From Madison to Hayward, from Green Bay to La Crosse, we seek to connect the Council's programs and services to individuals in need. We are always striving to find new solutions for people who are blind and visually impaired. Our organization is best evaluated by the feedback we receive from those with whom we work. Consumer evaluations help us learn, adapt, and most importantly, improve the programs we provide. The Council is faced with meeting the many changing needs of the individuals we serve. We are proud to share with you some of the recent feedback we have received.

*"My mother had macular degeneration for the past 12 or 13 years. She enjoyed receiving the large-print calendars from you. Mother also had a white cane from you. She was happy to have these free services. Because our family strongly believes in the service you provide for Wisconsin's low vision and blind [people], we posted a note at the funeral home during Mother's wake, stating, 'No thank you notes will be sent; instead we will make a donation to the Wisconsin Council of the Blind [& Visually Impaired].' We know you will do more good with a donation than we could by spending it on postage and thank you notes!"*

- Elaine D.

*"I just recently lost the vision in one eye due to a detached retina. It came as a shock. Then I heard about a seminar put on by the Council of the Blind [& Visually Impaired]. I attended, and it helped me tremendously. I was encouraged and supported by everyone who was there. Thank you so much. Keep up the good work."*

- Father Sam M.

*"Thank you for coming to Wild Rose, for all your helpfulness and practical suggestions, and for sending the key chain so promptly—all have been put to good use, making life easier, which is much appreciated."*

- Eileen P.

Helen Knolinski, age 95, received the Council's Lifetime Achievement Award in May 2006 as part of the Philanthropy Day program in Shawano, WI. She has been the coordinator of the low-vision support group in Antigo for the past 10 years. Her gifts of time and leadership have created a true legacy to many Northern Wisconsin residents.



## THE LEGACY CIRCLE: FUNDING OUR PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

The Legacy Circle was created seven years ago to acknowledge and honor the generous individuals who take steps to ensure the financial health of the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired. These generous friends remember the Council through bequests, retirement plans, life insurance policies, or trusts.

More than 272 individuals have contributed to the endowment with a specific legacy gift. Since November 2000, the Council has received \$2,810,000 in bequests. Many of our donors have been long-time friends of the Council. Others whom we have known less well choose to show their gratitude for the Council's involvement and leadership. Each financial gift makes a positive impact and is invested in the George Card Endowment Fund, which serves as the mainstay of financial support for our programs and services.

In 2006, the Council formed a new partnership with the highly-respected Bankers Life and Casualty Company to provide friends of the Council with an opportunity to participate in Medicare Supplement Insurance at a lower-cost group rate, take advantage of retirement and estate planning, and work on new ways to include the Council in charitable giving and Legacy Circle planning. This partnership helps the Council increase awareness of its programs and services throughout the state for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

To invest in the future of the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired by becoming a member of the Legacy Circle, or to get involved in the new partnership with Bankers Life, please visit the Council's website at [www.wcblind.org](http://www.wcblind.org) or call 800-783-5213.



Council member Bob Hueller, the original author of the motion to create the Legacy Circle, assists a consumer.



Marshall Flax is Director of Vision Rehabilitation Services at the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired. He provides low vision services and orientation and mobility training through the Council and the UW Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences.

(Photo by Andy Manis)

## PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

In March 2004, the entire Council and staff spent two days looking into our future and sketching out a plan to meet anticipated challenges and future needs. This strategic plan, which is reflected in the Council's new vision statement, is essential to our growth, effectiveness, and efficiency. The Council and staff remain committed to achieving these goals.

The year 2006 saw many significant expansions and improvements in our programs and services. Low vision therapy and rehabilitation teaching have become two of our most prominent programs providing individualized service.

We are very proud of all the programs and services we offer, and we are glad to share them with you here.

### SERVICES AND SUPPORT

- Low vision rehabilitation program
- Rehabilitation teaching
- Orientation and mobility training
- One free white cane a year to all legally blind residents of Wisconsin
- Assistive devices and adaptive technology
- Technology programs and assistance
- Braille and recorded material
- Scholarships
- Grants from the White Cane Fund
- Community education and awareness
- Legislative and program advocacy
- Investigation of alleged discrimination
- Support of other organizations serving people who are blind and visually impaired
- Support for eye research

The Council brings the Sharper Vision Store to Oshkosh for the seminar "Coping with Age-related Vision Loss."



## RESOURCES

In addition to the direct services described earlier, it is important to us at the Council to provide excellent resource assistance to individuals who are blind and visually impaired and their families. These include:

- printed information on eye diseases
- materials on coping with vision loss
- marketing programs to improve community education and awareness.

### **The Council also:**

- coordinates a speaker's bureau that makes more than 125 presentations a year to community organizations
- maintains a listing of all low vision support activity and connects individuals with local groups
- supports and sponsors local seminars around the state on subjects of vision loss, age-related eye diseases, pedestrian safety, and blindness.

### **For more information:**

The Council has produced an informational DVD that presents a vivid picture of our organization. Please call our offices at 608-255-1166 or toll-free at 800-783-5213 to obtain a free copy.



**Above:** Jack Malin, past Council Executive Secretary (1985-97) and current Executive Director Karen V. Majkrzak share past history and future plans for the Council.



**Below:** Molly Butz talks about recreation and fitness at our Oshkosh Senior Center Program, October 2006.



Sharper Vision staff members Kate, Sarah, Brent (back) and Ann (front) help customers in-person, via telephone and online.

## THE SHARPER VISION STORE: STRIVING TO MEET THE CUSTOMER NEEDS OF THE FUTURE

During the past three years, the Council has undergone a major “make-over” of our technology and adaptive products program. Emerging from this consumer-driven planning and re-visioning process is our new service properly—and proudly—titled “The Sharper Vision Store.”

Our recent efforts for improved customer service include: new accessible display racks, improved Braille and large-print signs and labels, a redesigned white cane display, new easy-to-find item categories, additional lighting, and designated areas for specialty equipment such as CCTVs and magnifiers.

Along with creating a new name and image for the bricks-and-mortar store, we now offer the Sharper Vision Store online at [www.wcblind.org](http://www.wcblind.org). We began by featuring our most popular items. Now, more and more of our products are available on our accessible website each month, so consumers can browse, click, and pay online. Of course, products can still be ordered over the phone, and visitors to our store in Madison will find themselves in good hands with our knowledgeable and friendly staff. It’s all part of our commitment to being a statewide organization available to our consumers in person, over the phone, and online.

These exciting innovations were accomplished with one goal in mind: to provide the services necessary to meet future needs. We are pleased to welcome you to the Sharper Vision Store.



The Sharper Vision Store is open Monday-Friday from 8:00 am until 4:30 pm. Call direct at 608-273-8100 or toll-free 1-800-783-5213.

# BY-THE-NUMBERS:

## AN ANALYSIS OF OUR 2006 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Specifically created as a statewide organization, the Council annually commits substantial resources to ensure service to Wisconsin residents in every county. We call this page of our Annual Report a by-the-numbers analysis of our activities for the year.

- 41:** The number of newspaper, radio, and TV interviews given by Council members and staff on the subject of blindness and vision loss
- 55:** The number of groups with whom we collaborated to ensure quality services to people who are blind and visually impaired
- 131:** The number of presentations made at schools, hospitals, independent living centers, civic groups, clubs, symposia, and corporations
- 152:** The number of low vision evaluations
- 247:** The number of in-home living skills visits
- 813:** The number of white canes provided to state residents at no charge
- 866:** The number of people statewide who attended Council seminars
- 910:** The number of professional technology consultations
- 3,528:** The number of transactions in our Sharper Vision Store
- 12,500:** The amount, in dollars, of scholarships provided to college, technical, and Business Enterprise Program students
- 69,000:** The number of miles logged on Wisconsin roads by WCB&VI staff, council members, and volunteers
- 146,000:** The amount, in dollars, of assistive devices and adaptive technology provided to Wisconsin residents who are blind and visually impaired
- 1,073,119:** The number of hits on our website



**Above:** Margaret Ramos uses a CCTV to read mail. Margaret is one of the many Wisconsin residents helped by our Adaptive Technology program.

**Below:** Roberto Torres, pictured here with his family at our 2006 Annual Dinner, was one of eight students to receive a scholarship from the Council last year.

# FINANCIAL POSITION STATEMENT

JANUARY 1, 2006 TO DECEMBER 31, 2006

## ASSETS

### CURRENT ASSETS

Cash and cash equivalents	\$1,126,413
Accounts receivable	\$16,720
Bequests receivable	\$30,000
Assistive devices inventory	\$106,163
Prepaid expenses	<u>\$467</u>

**Total current assets** **\$1,279,763**

### PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT

Land	\$186,591
Building and improvements	\$1,305,825
Furniture and equipment	\$312,841
Vehicles	<u>\$60,369</u>
Property and equipment	\$1,865,626
Less accumulated depreciation	<u>\$483,672</u>

**Property and equipment - net** **\$1,381,954**

### OTHER ASSETS

Investments	\$6,238,890
Loans receivable less allowance for doubtful accounts of \$115,000	<u>\$70,111</u>

**Total other assets** **\$6,309,001**

### TOTAL ASSETS

\$8,970,718

## LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

### CURRENT LIABILITIES

**Accrued expenses** **\$32,386**

### NET ASSETS

#### Unrestricted

Undesignated	\$8,599,575
Board designated	<u>\$25,000</u>
Total unrestricted	\$8,624,575
Temporarily restricted	<u>\$313,757</u>

**Total net assets** **\$8,938,332**

### TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

**\$8,970,718**

Karen Perzentka, past president, member, and long-time friend of the Council, enjoys a stroll with a white cane for improved mobility.



## WHITE CANE FUND 2006

In addition to providing for the hundreds of free white canes the Council distributes each year to legally blind citizens of Wisconsin, the annual White Cane Fund Drive plays a crucial role in connecting the Council with other organizations that assist the blind and visually impaired. We have established many successful partnerships through the distribution of these annual funds. This organizational interaction improves communication and promotes efficiency in resource allocation.

These programs and organizations received proceeds from the 2006 White Cane Fund:

- Alumni Association of the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped
- Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired–Wisconsin chapter (WAER)
- Barron County Library
- Blindskills, Inc.
- Center for Blind and Visually Impaired Children
- Center for Deaf-Blind Persons, Inc.
- Dog Guide Users of Badger Association of the Blind and Visually Impaired
- Midwest Association for the Blind
- Office for the Blind and Visually Impaired–Rehabilitation Teachers
- St. William’s Parish, Janesville–Boy Scouts Program
- Volunteer Services for the Visually Handicapped, Inc.
- Wisconsin Association of Blind Athletes
- Wisconsin Blind Bowling Association

A gift to the Council’s Annual White Cane Fund helps us provide powerful tools for independence, and it is tax deductible to the full extent of the law. Donate online at [www.wcblind.org](http://www.wcblind.org).



Governor Doyle shakes hands with Karen V. Majkrzak after signing Senate Bills 181 and 157. These bills provide disabled persons using dog guides access to public places and provide penalties for harassment, theft, or injury to a service dog.

## LEGISLATIVE AND ISSUE ADVOCACY

One primary reason for the Council's origination was to amplify the collective voice of people throughout Wisconsin who are blind and visually impaired. In 1952, our founders crafted a system of membership on the Council that included seats for representatives from a number of dynamic and well-respected organizations of the blind and visually impaired. Working together, these representatives (all of whom, along with the at-large members, are blind or visually impaired) bring credibility, dedication, and strength in numbers to our legislative priorities. Today, the Council continues its commitment to active participation in the legislative process.

2006 was a particularly successful year in terms of legislation. The highlight was the public bill-signing ceremony held at the Council's office in Madison when Governor Doyle signed SB181 and SB157 into law. This legislation ensures legal protection for disabled persons accompanied in public by service dogs, and provides penalties for harassment, theft, or injury to a service dog. With these new laws, Wisconsin now boasts the best legal protection nationwide for service dogs and their owners.



**Above:** Governor Doyle with Council members, staff, and other community members.

**Below:** SB181 and 157 are popularly referred to as "Casey's Law," after a service dog who was attacked and killed by another dog while working.

# SEMINARS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

To us at the Council, the term "internet" is not limited to an electronic information system. We value the series of person-to-person interactions and connections as a kind of "inter-net" as well.

We feel very proud that more than 850 individuals attended Council-sponsored seminars this year. Connecting people to one another, and to ideas and solutions, through programs like ours is not only imperative, but also invigorating for all involved. Council members, staff, volunteers, and friends are glad to share their experiences, offer their expertise, and extend their compassion at these events.

We welcome the ideas, advice, sponsorship, and contributions that help us expand our person-to-person "inter-net" in the years ahead. Thank you for sharing the journey with us!



In December, our Open House & Art Exhibit showed works for and by people who are blind and visually impaired. Above is a tactile painting by Jamie Landolt, one of the artists featured at the event.

## A SPECIAL THANKS TO THE O'CONNOR FAMILY

The O'Connor family believes that living a successful life is never measured by what you lack. Lasting satisfaction and fulfillment come from the joy you experience when you give of yourself to others.

Jim O'Connor ("JB") inspired his wife, seven sons, and their families to live by giving. He lost his vision at 41, and while others might have treated this as a handicap, Jim considered it an opportunity. It's an outlook and attitude that has guided the O'Connor clan through the years.

For several years, son Tom has hosted an annual golf outing named for his father at his course in Valders. The event benefits Council programs and services. The other six brothers generate items for the silent auction and raffle, as well as recruit golfers to fill the course. Younger brothers John and Pat spearheaded "Golf in the Fall," an annual Madison golf outing held to benefit the Council's macular degeneration programming. The rest of the family, including wives and even the next generation of O'Connors, are there, too, supporting this important work.



Therese O'Connor with sons Pat and John

# THANK YOU

## **A heartfelt thank you to every contributor**

Without the funds contributed by generous individuals, businesses and foundations, thousands of blind and visually impaired people would have gone without helpful information or assistance from the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired.

## **A heartfelt thank you to our many volunteers**

Without the countless volunteer hours of so many friends and supporters throughout the year, our program delivery, community awareness and education would be less effective and wide-ranging. Valued volunteers include the Council members shown in the photo below.



### **2006 Members of the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired**

Back row, left to right: Jeff Scott, Richard Johnson, Rod Burris, Karen V. Majkrzak\*, Kathy Hudziak, Chris Zenchenko, Rhonda Staats, Ed Weiss, Bruce Parkinson, Bob Hueller, Steve Heesen, Arnold Tucker.

Front row, left to right: Amy Snow, Caroline Congdon, Nona Graves, Becky Williams\*\*, Kay Malmquist, Scott Hegle

Absent from photo: Kathy Brockman and Katherine Schneider

*\*Executive Director of the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired*

*\*\*Becky completed term of Paul Schroeder, who resigned during 2006*

## 2007 Council Members

Kathleen Brockman, Milwaukee  
Rod Burris, Janesville  
Caroline Congdon, Milwaukee  
Neil M. Ford, Lodi  
Nona Graves, West Allis  
Sarah Heesen, West Allis  
Scott Hegle, Waukesha  
Richard Johnson, Janesville  
Kay Malmquist, Janesville  
Bruce Parkinson, Two Rivers  
Jeff Scott, Madison  
Dan Sippl, Eau Claire  
Amy Snow, Janesville  
Rhonda Staats, La Crosse  
Gary M. Traynor, Eau Claire  
Arnold Tucker, Park Falls  
Ed Weiss, Waukesha  
Becky Williams, Milwaukee  
Chris Zenchenko, Evansville

## Staff Members

Sarah Covington  
Virginia DeBlaey  
Marshall Flax  
Gary R. Goyke  
Betsy Gruba  
Kate Hollander  
Kathi Koegle  
Nicky Lehming  
Deda Oatsvall  
Brent Perzentka  
Nancy Prussing  
Ann Schroeder  
Maura Taggart

## Executive Director

Karen V. Majkrzak

## Auditors

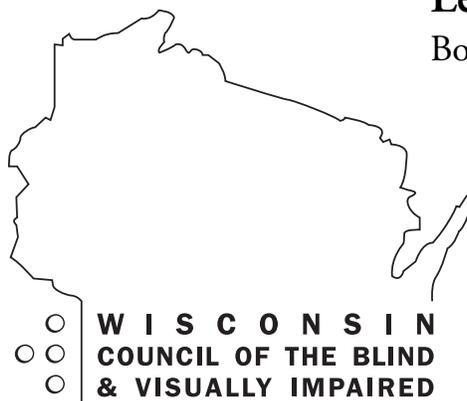
Wegner LLP, CPAs & Consultants

## Investments

Associated Wealth Management

## Legal Counsel

Boardman, Suhr, Curry & Field SC



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info@wcblind.org www.wcblind.org

**The Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization.**

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To view online, visit the Council's website: [www.wcblind.org](http://www.wcblind.org)*