

Friends Newsletter



∴ **Wisconsin Council of the
Blind & Visually Impaired**

Council Recognizes 65th Anniversary with Open House and Grand Reopening of Sharper Vision Store

The Council is celebrating its 65th anniversary! While the names and faces of our leadership have changed over the years, the issues we face and the needs we advocate for has remained steadfast. Below are stories from various Council board and staff members who have been involved with our organization and have watched the Council grow in size and impact. They also reflect on how the Council has touched each of them, personally.

Chris Richmond, Council Board Chair:

"I have been involved with the Council since 2012. Having gone to Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped in Janesville, I have known about the Council since I was a child. I think the Council has made the greatest impact probably in the area of legislation, but the Council makes a great deal of impact on the lives of individuals every day.

"Being a part of the 65th anniversary celebration was an especially touching event."

– Chris Richmond



Sharper Vision Store Manager Brent Perzentka (center) and CEO/Executive Director Denise Jess (right) each use large, over-sized scissors for the official ribbon cutting ceremony marking the Grand Reopening of the store. A crowd of onlookers stands behind the pair, many taking photos to mark the occasion.

I've been impacted, personally, by working with a dedicated and passionate board of directors as well as a knowledgeable and caring staff. Being a part of the 65th anniversary celebration was an especially touching event."

Denise Jess, CEO/Executive Director:

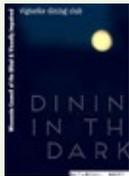
"I found out about the Council when my optometrist asked how familiar I was with the organization, and suggested I pick up a monocular from the Sharper Vision Store in order to read and identify the buses. I've known about the Council for more than 20 years. I became more interested after the Council's name change in 2006, to include the words "Visually Impaired." Because that was added, I felt like my identity as a person with a visual impairment

continued on page 6

Upcoming Council Events

Saturday, September 30

Dining in the Dark



Join the Council as we partner once again with Vignette Dining Club for Dining in the Dark! Plan to arrive on time in order to settle in, chat with fellow diners, and grab a nibble.

Dinner begins promptly at 6:30 p.m.

Your seat includes a fabulous 4-course meal, coffee, water, and unsweetened iced tea. We invite you to experience this meal without your sense of sight, allowing your other senses to enhance your meal.

The cost is \$47.50 per person and will take place at a secret location in Fitchburg. Attendees will receive an e-mail with instructions and address of the secret location the night before the event.

To register for Dining in the Dark and to learn more about Vignette Dining Club, go to:
<http://vignettedining.com/the-menu.html>.

Wednesday, October 4

Webinar: Providing Health and Social Services to Persons with Blindness or Low Vision

Respect and inclusivity, two of WCBVI's core values, will frame a discussion about providing health and social services to persons with vision impairment. Strategies to use in everyday interactions will be presented with emphasis on giving information, getting around, and orienting to surroundings. Join Jean Kalscheur, Director of Education and Vision Services at WCBVI, and three consumers of health services in this free 1-hour webinar.

For more details and to register go to www.wcblind.org.

Friday, October 6

Fall Gallery Night

Mark your calendars and join us for Fall Gallery Night on Friday evening, October 6, as we proudly showcase work from artists who have vision loss. This event is in partnership with the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art (MMoCA).

Participating artists will display and discuss their work during the opening reception at the Council office. Attendees are welcome to browse the artwork, enjoy refreshments and talk to the artists. Artwork will be for sale for those interested in purchasing.

Wednesday, November 15

Webinar: Learning Environments in the Sharper Vision Store

Connect with Sharper Vision Store Manager Brent Presentka as he shares more details regarding the recent addition of five learning environments to join our Store. These environments include adaptive products for testing in real-life situations for both home and office prior to purchase.

For more details, go to www.wcblind.org.

For more information on these activities and events, check the events tab on our website, Facebook and Twitter or call 1-800-783-5213.



Council Accepts Alliant Energy Grant

Thank you to the Alliant Energy Foundation for awarding the Council a Hometown Safety Grant! This generous \$1,300 gift will allow the Council to purchase an automated external defibrillator (AED), as well as provide training for all staff.

Adam Erdmann (right), Alliant Energy Foundation Community Affairs Program Manager, presents Council Fund Development Director Lori Werbeckes (left) and CEO/Executive Director Denise Jess (center) with an oversized check for \$1,300. The three stand side by side, smiling, in the Council reception area.

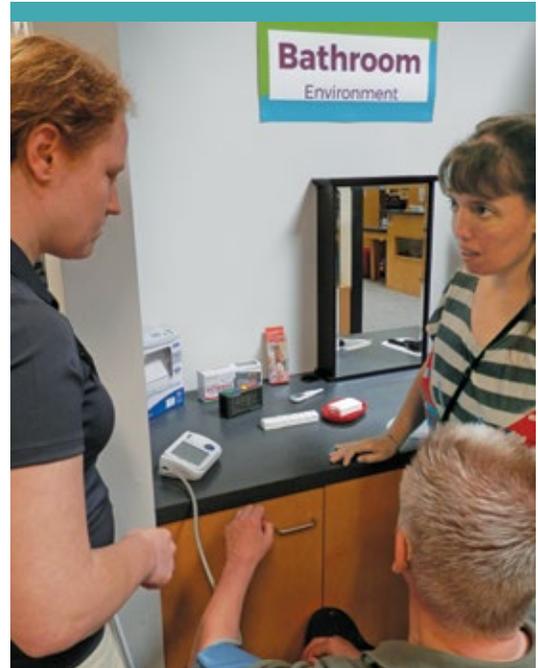


Grand Re-Opening Event

The Council celebrated its 65th Anniversary and Grand Reopening on July 13. Over 50 guests joined us to celebrate, including State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Evers, who spoke eloquently about the Council's dedication to legislative action, citing us, along with the WI Library Association, for our many years of devotion. Guests enjoyed learning about our new Sharper Vision Store "Environments" and catching up with friends.



Over 50 attendees united with Council staff and board to mark the special occasion, include State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Evers (third from right).



Katherine Corbett, Council Communication Coordinator, assists two attendees with products in the "Bathroom Environment."



Council Program Assistant Judith Rasmussen (far right) explains the makeup of a braille cell by using a muffin pan and brightly colored tennis balls to two onlookers and Council Staff Driver Sue Small.



Council volunteers Karen Lee Weidig and Margaret Somers smile for the camera after slicing the cake for all to enjoy!

Sharper Vision Store Creates “Environments” for Testing Products

Imagine being able to walk through a store, testing the products before purchasing them. This is one of the perks of visiting the newly-renovated Sharper Vision Store at the Council office. These enhancements were unveiled at the Council’s 65th Anniversary celebration.

The remodeled store features areas set up as kitchen, bathroom basin, sewing table, living room and office simulations. Adaptive products have been taken out of their boxes, making

them available for demonstration and customer use. Store Manager Brent Perzentka, Certified Low Vision Therapist Amy Wurf, and Director of Education and Vision Services Jean Kalschauer collaborated to put together these interactive experience stations.

“The process of putting everything together went really smoothly,” says Brent.

“Most decisions about which stations we would put together were based on the products we carry,

which were already sorted into sections by environment: kitchen, bathroom, living room, and office. Once we had the stations decided, it was a matter of looking at the products and deciding which ones we would feature in each environment.”

Amy and Jean put together large print tip sheets of educational information at each station to give customers ideas about how to adapt their homes to make products more effective. For example, in the bathroom station, a sheet describes how using items that have color contrasts can help objects be more easily seen. In the living room station, tips are provided about how to make the TV easier to see.

“The plan is to have more informational pieces available,” says Jean. “It’s not just about selling a product. It’s about helping people adapt to their low vision. Adjusting lighting and other aspects can often be as helpful as the products themselves.”

At each station during the Open House event, Jean says she focused on featuring products to demonstrate that would take ten minutes or less and that people would find interesting. Some examples included demonstrations of a

The remodeled store features areas set up as kitchen, bathroom basin, sewing table, living room and office simulations.



Store Manager Brent Perzentka guides guest Todd Barnett of Barnett Architects, LLC on how to use the new OrCam OCR glasses. Todd and his team created the build-out plans for our new reception area.

continued on page 5

Online Auction Set to Take Place this November

It's just about that time of year! You can support the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired by bidding on items during our online auction from November 9 to 15. This year, the money we raise from the auction will be used to purchase a braille embosser. There's no event to attend, no transportation to arrange, no babysitter to pay — just spend a few minutes in the comfort of your home, browsing a variety of items at www.biddingforgood.com/wcbvi.

Don't miss this opportunity to win great products and experiences while you support the Council's work at the same time.

If you know someone who might be interested in contributing an auction item, please contact Fund Development Director Lori Werbeckes at lwerbeckes@wcbblind.org. Your generosity makes this auction a fun and fund-filled event!

Auction Volunteer Needed!

VOLUNTEER NEEDED: We try to add new items to the auction every year to keep our bidders interested and to grow our proceeds. Could you spend a few hours searching online for businesses that are willing to donate items? Many restaurants and shops have donation request forms online and are very happy to give. We just need to find them! You can do this searching at home on your own computer, or at the Council office. Your help is needed between now and October 10th. For details, call Lori at (608)237-8114 or email LWerbeckes@wcbblind.org.

continued from page 4

talking blood pressure monitor at the bathroom station, and a talking scale used to weigh flour at the kitchen station.

"The new setup was easier to navigate," says Open House attendee Sue Koester. "I liked seeing how to apply and use the aides. I liked being able to try out the equipment and the larger print was easier to read."

"It was truly a special experience," says Board First Vice-President, Annika Konrad, who also attended. "It was really special for me to see such energy and joy in the new space and made me feel so grateful to be a part of this community."

"My feeling after all this, besides being very happy that it turned out so well, is gratitude,"

says Brent. "I'm grateful to have been given the opportunity from Denise and the Council Board to be more creative and to have the freedom to do something out of the box. I'm especially grateful to Amy and Jean for their help. Without them, putting the stations together would have been much more daunting. Adding their different viewpoints and knowledge was invaluable. They made it easy."

Special thanks to Industries for the Blind for their generous grant which allowed us to furnish the office environment.

Feel free to stop by The Sharper Vision Store from Monday-Friday, anytime between 8 A.M. and 4:30 P.M., to experience the new changes for yourself. ■

Council Recognizes 65th Anniversary with Open House and Grand Reopening of Sharper Vision Store

continued from page 1

was recognized. I became more actively involved with the Council in 2015, when I joined the Board of Directors.

I'm often so touched by peoples' individual stories about the ways the Council has helped them continue to do the things they love as they've lost vision. It's powerful to be at the front desk as someone is leaving from a low vision appointment or browsing the store — you can hear in their voice a sense of liberation and freedom. The legislative work that we have done and continue to do, even if we don't get a bill passed, makes an impact. Having conversations with legislators and watching them make connections about why our lives matter as residents of the state is powerful. For me personally, it has been so remarkable to spend my days meeting and working with other people who are blind and visually impaired who are so dedicated. For a long time, I felt like I was the only person around who was visually impaired, and that was an isolating experience. To have the daily experience of working with other BVI folks is very empowering. I also love it when folks who are sighted serve as allies, stepping forward in powerful ways to help further the Council's mission."

It's powerful to be at the front desk as someone is leaving from a low vision appointment or browsing the store — you can hear in their voice a sense of liberation and freedom.

— Denise Jess

continued on page 7

Workplaces in the Giving Spirit

Workplace giving is a simple and convenient way for employees to make tax-deductible donations to local charities through payroll deductions. Workplace giving is easy and efficient, and allows a company and its employees to work together to benefit the charities that are important to them.

If you are employed at a company that offers workplace giving through Community Shares of Wisconsin, you can choose from 65 local organizations to receive your gift. Here's the best part — every penny of your gift goes directly to the charity you choose! So if you decide to give \$20 per month to the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired for a year, we will receive the full \$240 from Community Shares of Wisconsin!

Another way workplaces are encouraging charitable giving is through matching gifts. Check with your employer to see if they

offer a matching gift program. Many match donations dollar for dollar (you contribute \$50 and they match the amount), and some even double the match!

Giving through payroll deduction and matching gifts are philanthropic efforts by employers to encourage giving while allowing their employees to choose the charities that are important to them. You can learn more about Community Shares at www.communityshares.com or you can give directly to the Council at www.wcblind.org.



continued from page 6

Brent Perzentka, Sharper Vision Store Manager:

"I first learned about the Council when I was five years old. Both my parents (Karen and Richard Perzentka) were board members for the Council, and board members volunteered at the Council's information table at the Wisconsin State Fair. My sister and I went with them each summer, from when I was five until about twelve or so. When I was fourteen, my mom worked for the Council as an Administrative Assistant.

The Council has also helped me realize my unique situation as a child with parents who were both blind. Nobody else I knew growing up had two parents who were blind, so being involved with the Council has helped me appreciate my unique experience as a child. I can share that with others and help them in their lives if they're struggling with losing their vision, or are living with a visual impairment.

Because both my parents have served on the Board for more than 30 years, they have known all the executive directors. Knowing how much the Council has grown since it started, I'm happy to be a bridge to keep the Council climbing to greater things. Being able to see where it's come from and how it's grown, I can be a small part of carrying the work of the Council on into the future.

When I started working at the Council fourteen years ago, I didn't think it would be a career job. When the time came to make decisions about my career direction, however, I realized that I enjoyed my work at the Council so much that I ended up switching the focus of my career. If I was going to continue studying Special Education, I would have had to leave my job at the Council. I decided I didn't want to do that, so I made the decision to change career direction and go into Vision Rehabilitation instead." ■

"Knowing how much the Council has grown since it started, I'm happy to be a bridge to keep the Council climbing to greater things."

— Brent Perzentka

Disability Pride

"On Saturday, July 30, the Council joined dozens of disability-focused organizations and several hundred visitors at the fifth annual Disability Pride Madison Festival. The only event of its kind throughout the state, the festival was rich with opportunities for people with differing disabilities to learn about each other's experiences, bridge our commonalities, foster our relationships, and embrace pride in who we are as people with disabilities. Thank you to the Disability Pride Madison organizers for their extraordinary work."

—Denise Jess, CEO/Executive Director



Council Board Member Sharon Knauf, long-time Council friend Sally Zenchenko and Council Administrative Program Manager Justin Lemke sit behind a table at the Disability Pride Festival. The table is draped in a blue WCBVI tablecloth and filled with numerous reading materials for participants to learn more about our organization.



Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired

754 Williamson Street
Madison, WI 53703

608-255-1166 • 800-783-5213
www.wcblind.org

NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATION
US POSTAGE
PAID
MADISON WI
PERMIT #2082

Speaking about Changing Vision

Are you looking for an experienced, outgoing speaker who can talk about issues related to changing vision? The Council organizes a Speakers Bureau which consists of staff, board members, and friends of the Council who can speak about a variety of subjects related to vision.

You can explore the list of topics on our website at www.wcblind.org/speakersbureau.

Contact Jean Kalscheur, our Director of Education and Vision Services, at **608-237-8106** or via email at jkalscheur@wcblind.org to learn more about our talented speakers and what they can offer you or your organization.



Stay Connected

Would you like to keep up with the Council's events, news, and current trends related to blindness or vision loss? We would love to send you "On Sight," our free, twice monthly e-newsletter. Please send an email to Justin Lemke at jlemke@wcblind.org or call **608-237-8119** to join our mailing list. You can also follow us on Facebook, Twitter (@**TheCouncilWI**), and find many resources at www.wcblind.org.