

Friends Newsletter



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

A Chance Interaction with Council Office Changes Path Forever

Dean Hekel, a minister based in Madison, served in the U.S. Navy for 35 years, until retiring in 1991. Dean also taught electrical engineering courses at UW-Madison for many years. In the late 1970s, a military eye exam revealed he had high pressure in his eyes. Daily eye drops helped relieve some of the pressure, and he stopped taking medication for about six months. Then Dean received stunning news while getting an eye exam shortly after his retirement from the Navy.



Dean Hekel poses for a photo while visiting the Sharper Vision Store. Hekel's life-changing interaction with the Council first happened in the early 1990's.

"I went to the Veterans Hospital in Madison to get my eyes checked and the ophthalmologist said, 'This is serious, your retina changed rapidly after you went off the medication,'" Dean said. "They told me they weren't sure what to do because of the rapidity of the change. They said I would be blind in six months if I didn't do something about it."

"When I heard the news I could lose my vision, I couldn't understand what was going on," Dean said.

In the late 1980s, Dean yearned for a closer relationship with God. He became a born-again Christian and started training to become a priest. He credits the deep devotion to his faith for helping him overcome this obstacle.

"I didn't understand where God was in my experience going blind. I was questioning God," he said.

While he was going through this experience, Dean read a small book titled, "Prison to Pray," which recounts the story of a prison inmate serving a 30-year sentence.

As an unruly inmate, the prisoner spent time in solitary confinement. Through a revelation, he developed a relationship with God and turned his life around. He started a ministry where he spreads positive messages about Christianity to inmates with little hope.

"Part of the message in the story is, no matter how bad it seems and what is going on, you give thanks to God. I didn't embrace that right away when dealing with my vision," Dean said. "Eventually, I told God, 'I don't understand this, but I trust you. If I go blind, it will be fine because you will take me through the process.'"

While trying to grasp the changes in his vision, Dean was driving through downtown Madison one morning. He came to a stop light and watched the light change from red to yellow and then green in a few short seconds. With his engineering background, he knew it was not an electrical malfunction. His retina problems were getting worse.

The Council staff showed Dean how to use visual aids to help him regain his confidence and level of independence.

Upcoming Council Events

Tuesday, March 7

The Big Share

Join us on Tuesday, March 7th for The Big Share! The Council, along with 65 other Community Shares of Wisconsin organizations, is participating in a 24 hour online giving day to support local nonprofits collectively working to build a safe, just and sustainable community where everyone can thrive. You can be a part of the excitement! Log into www.thebigshare.org to make a gift that will help people with vision loss remain independent and involved. Making your gift between noon — 1:00 pm on March 7th gives us a chance to have your gift matched with cash prizes from local businesses!



Tuesday, April 11

Legislative Day

The agenda will concentrate on five key legislative priorities. These are, in order of priority: transportation, employment, education, ADA and civil liberties, and healthcare. The purpose of a legislative day is to build relationships among lawmakers, government leaders and constituencies and also to share information and perspectives on pending and proposed legislation.

Thursday, May 4

Coulee Region Low Vision Fair, La Crosse

Featuring educational breakout sessions and vendor fair with products and services to help you learn how to have a more comfortable life while living with low vision.

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 Veterans Affairs Grant

On Tuesday, January 3, the Council was honored at the Wisconsin State Capitol with a \$4,300 grant from the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs. CEO/Executive Director Denise Jess (left) and Fund Development Director Lori Werbeckes (right) accepted this award on the Council's behalf.

This grant will provide local veterans experiencing vision loss a structured support group in which they can receive information, education, resources and support for living with vision loss. Council staff will provide participants with technology training on computers, tablets and smartphones; training on screen reader software; information on software and hardware solutions for computer users; practical ideas for living safely with vision loss; tips for medication management and an introduction to adaptive products that may improve quality of life. ■

Scholarship Application Now Available – Deadline March 31

The Council is now accepting applications for our scholarship program. Wisconsin residents who have a visual acuity of 20/70 or less in the better eye with the best conventional correction, or have a visual field of 20 degrees or less, are eligible. Individuals applying must be students in post-secondary institutions with a 3.0 GPA or higher. Ten scholarships will be awarded at \$2,000 each. Obtain a copy of the scholarship application by visiting the Council's website at www.wcblind.org, and click on the link to the application under the "Who We Are" tab. Applications should be printed out and mailed to the Council by March 31, 2017.

Core Values Guide Our Journey

By Denise Jess, CEO/Executive Director

Inclusivity, uncompromising respect and integrity represent the core values of the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired.

Core values guide our actions and support us in achieving our mission and vision. If we imagine that we're on board a bus together, the destination for the journey is striving for our mission and achieving our vision. How we interact with each other, with those getting on and off the bus and those we pass by is reflected in our core values. By going through a rigorous process in 2016 to identify, agree upon and make these values public, the Council continues to hold ourselves to a high standard for excellence in what we do.

I am so privileged to witness these values in action on an on-going basis.

- Our values live in how our vision services team, reception and store staff listen attentively and compassionately to client concerns and needs, seeking to find solutions that better their quality of life.
- Our values live in our board and staff discussions, as we consider multiple perspectives to make shared decisions that inform the Council's goals and direction.
- Our values live in our relationships with partnering organizations to find creative ways to utilize our unique talents and assets for the greater good.
- Our values live in how we hold a Culture of Philanthropy with deep gratitude for each person who makes a contribution to the Council.
- Our values live in our publications in striving to share the realities of people living with vision loss in authentic and heart-felt ways.

As our journey continues to promote the dignity and independence of the people of Wisconsin who are blind or visually impaired, we look forward to many opportunities to practice integrity, inclusivity and uncompromising respect with our fellow passengers for years to come.

To read the full values statement for the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired, please visit the "Who We Are" page of our website at <https://wcbblind.org/who-we-are>.



The Council is honored to present "Bright Sights: Six Ways of Seeing" in partnership with the McPherson Eye Research Institute, located at UW Madison. This special installation is currently on display at the Mandelbaum & Albert Family Vision Gallery. The installation features the works of six artists whose visual impairments inspire and enrich their art. Artists Angelynn Brown, Alison Fortney, Rosemare Fortney, Albert Schmiege, Dan Sullivan and Ron Wendt offer works in a variety of mediums including oil on canvas, photography, prints, woodworking and glass. The gallery will be on display until May and are available for purchase through contact with the artist directly. To learn more about the exhibit or to schedule a free tour, contact Gale Hellpap, Director of Community Relations and Marketing, at **608-237-8113** or ghellpap@wcbblind.org.

Low Vision Clinic Celebrates its Second Year

In February, our Low Vision Clinic celebrated a special milestone as it marked the two-year anniversary of helping clients with their low vision needs.

As it prepares for the future, the Clinic continues to welcome more clients, expand services, and provide new technology for low vision evaluations.

Since the Clinic opened in February 2015, Certified Low Vision Therapist Amy Wurf has provided more than 150 evaluations and follow-up visits. When Amy came to the Council at the beginning of 2015, she brought almost two decades of experience working with low vision clients, particularly veterans.

"I am pleased with the way our low vision clinic has developed and grown since I started," Amy said.

"I appreciate the support of the Council staff and the board to offer this service at our Council office."

In addition to being a certified low vision therapist, Amy is also a trained vision rehabilitation teacher, providing another level of service to clients.

"She doesn't just work from standard eye tests, but asks clients about their daily activities and incorporates suggestions for the use of lighting, contrast, color, and position to enhance the use of a person's remaining vision," said Jean Kalscheur, Education and Vision Services Director. "In addition to her work at the Clinic, Amy provided more than 100 in-home rehabilitation visits in 2016 to persons in Dane County."

The low-vision evaluation includes follow-up services either at the Clinic or in a client's home.

A client also has the option of taking an optical aid home for a week to determine if it fits well in their lifestyle and improves daily activities.

CEO/Executive Director Denise Jess said the Clinic offers an ideal opportunity for clients to receive vision services at our office.

"One of the things that is so heartbreaking to someone who is losing their vision is for someone in the medical field to say, 'There's nothing more we can do for you,' which has, up until recently, been a very common experience," Denise said. "Ophthalmology professionals are starting to recognize low vision and the importance of capitalizing on the vision someone has left to enhance the quality of their lives."

As the Clinic plans for the future, Amy is excited to expand services, and receive valuable expertise from other medical professionals.

Wurf plans to collaborate with Dr. Sanbrita Mondal, who is providing low vision optometry services at UW Health. Dr. Mondal has started recommending patients to the Clinic for low vision therapy and training with prescribed devices.

"My goal is to continue to explore new ways to provide the best service to our clients," Amy said.

"I would like to see the Clinic grow in numbers of people served." ■



Amy Wurf, Certified Low Vision Therapist, stands over the right shoulder of a seated patient while assisting in a low vision evaluation. In this part of the evaluation, an eye chart is being used.

The Clinic continues to welcome more clients, expand services, and provide new technology for low vision evaluations.

Featured Lions Club: Lake Wisconsin



The Lake Wisconsin Lions Club hosts “The Eskimo Open” golf outing each February. A participant lines up their neon yellow golf ball and starts their swing while standing on the snowy golf course. Neon orange arrows painted on the snow help give the golfer direction on where to aim.

The Lake Wisconsin Lions Club and the Council have been long-time friends. The relationship grew stronger when Neil Ford, a Lake Wisconsin Lions Club member, served on the WCBVI board. Neil established a Low Vision Support group in the Portage area and shared his first-hand experiences of using a white cane. Neil’s involvement resulted in the Lions Club financially supporting both the support group and the Council.

The Lake Wisconsin Lions Club actively serves the Lodi, Poynette and Lake Wisconsin areas. They donate between \$15,000 – \$18,000 annually to worthy organizations in their community.

The 50-member Club holds three fundraisers each year:

- the Eskimo Open (golfing on ice) in February
- a Super Raffle
- a food stand at the Dekorra Fireworks Festival in July

Most recently, members held a brat sale on White Cane Safety Day with proceeds benefiting the White Cane Fund at the Council.

The Club is involved in other vision related activities including Eye Bank cornea transports, children’s eye screenings, and eyeglass recycling.

Thank you to the Lake Wisconsin Lions Club for their continued support! ■

An Unexpected Gift

A surprise check from an anonymous donor brought smiles and gratitude to all of us at the Council in late December. Our sincere thanks to this generous person whose gift will change lives for those with vision loss. Thank you!

Legacy Circle Grows

Plan ahead. We hear that advice over and over as we grow in age and experience. The lesson is just as valuable after retirement, as we make decisions about how to manage our insurance and assets.

We recently welcomed two new members to the Council's Legacy Circle, our recognition club for those who have notified us of their intent to benefit the Council with a gift from their estate.

Preferring to remain anonymous, they made the decision to leave a bequest to the Council because of the assistance offered by staff, the knowledge they gained, and to ensure those same services will be available for future generations. Eye diseases are common in their family and the Council has been at their side as family members adjusted to life with low vision. This is their way of giving back and looking ahead.

You, too, can make a gift that will change lives for the better. For more information, contact Lori Werbeckes at **(608)237-8114** or visit the Council's website at <https://wcblind.org/how-you-can-help/legacy-giving>.

Legacy Circle Members

Helen Bewick
Kathy Brockman
Ray Cubberly
Anonymous
Loretta Himmelsbach
Anonymous
Steven Johnson
Ester Lovelace
Stan Nelson
Anonymous
Arnold and Alice Tucker
Scott and Beverly Verhage
Chris and Theresa Zenchenko

A Chance Interaction with Council Office Changes Path Forever

continued from page 1

Bewildered by the experience, Dean glanced to his right and noticed the Council's office, which was located on East Main Street at the time.

"I said to myself, 'Alright, Lord. I probably ought to go over to the Council and see what is going on with my vision,'" Dean said. "I went in and the people were absolutely wonderful with me. I didn't tell them my whole story, but I told them I may lose my vision because I have acute glaucoma."

Dean still supports our mission through donations and praises the Council's work.

The Council staff showed Dean how to use visual aids to help him regain his confidence and level of independence. He left the office with a sense of peace and believed God led him to the Council on that day. Not long after his visit to the Council, doctors told Dean he could undergo an operation to save his eyesight, though it would be risky.

"A specialist researched my situation and while the procedure was new, they wanted to try it to see if it would work. They tried it and it worked," he said. "That was about 25 years ago and I can still see fine today."

Dean became an ordained Episcopal minister in 1993 and also served as a chaplain for the VA Hospital in Madison. While at the VA, he helped develop programs for blinded veterans. Dean, now 78, is semi-retired, but still travels to churches across south-central Wisconsin to deliver sermons.

While many years have passed since the morning of his revelation, Dean still supports our mission through donations and praises the Council's work.

"The Council showed me it was okay to go through the process of losing my sight and the Lord led me to the Council to show me you can function well as a person in society, despite losing your vision," Hekel said. ■

Council Friends

We gratefully thank these generous individuals and Lions Clubs who gifted \$500 or more to the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired in 2016.

Carol Adams

Anonymous

Shirley Carlson

Richard Clark

Christopher Croasdale, MD

Marilyn Dahl

Gerald and Betty Fuller

Nona Graves and Dennis

Ameden

Loretta Himmelsbach

Rosemary Himmelsbach

Candice Koehn

Marvin Levy

Tom and Ann Merfeld

John Parker

Anonymous

Marvin Strehlow

Eunice Wagner

Lori and Mark Werbeckes

Margaret Williams

Barbra Winter

Mary Wrzesinski

Daniel Zacharias

Beth Ann Zellmer

Greenville Lioness Club

LaCrosse Lions Club

Lomira Lions Club

Meadow Woods Lioness Club

Plymouth Lions Club

These donors are a pillar of support to people with vision loss. Their contributions directly help people adapt to life with low vision through in-home rehabilitation visits, low vision evaluations, educational opportunities, and adaptive products.

Donors who give \$500 or more annually are welcomed as Friends of the Council. The amount can be given in a lump sum or spread throughout the year. Many of these generous people are monthly donors whose total exceeds \$500.

Friends of the Council are invited to our annual Awards luncheon where they meet board members and our newest scholarship recipients. For more information, contact Lori at **LWerbeckes@wcblind.org** or **www.wcblind.org**.

Consider joining us in 2017! ■



We enjoyed visiting our friends at Lodi Elementary School in late January! WCBVI program assistant Judith Rasmussen shared a presentation including history, Braille, tips and tricks, adaptive products and etiquette regarding people who are blind and visually impaired.

Do you know of a grade school or children's group in southern Wisconsin that might be interested in hosting a similar presentation? Contact Judith directly at **jrasmussen@wcblind.org** for more information.



Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired

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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, 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](https://twitter.com/TheCouncilWI)), and find many resources at www.wcblind.org.