



## Expanding Vision Services to Serve Aging Population, Veterans and Rural Areas

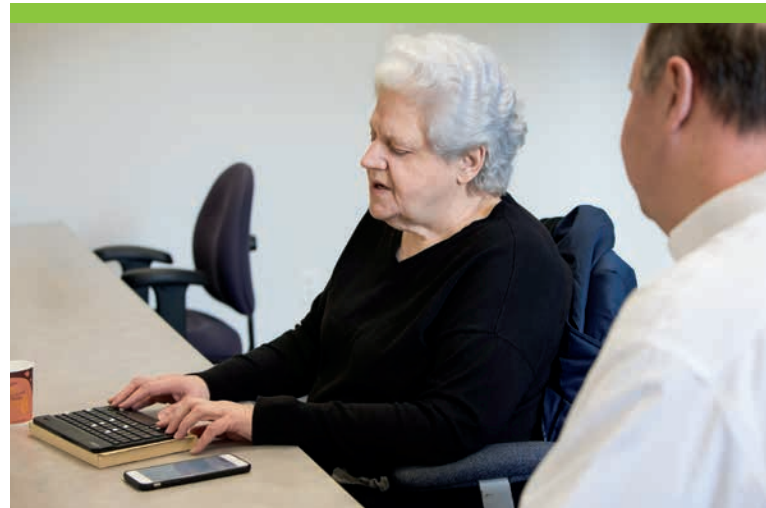
According to the American Foundation for the Blind, by 2030, the population of people experiencing vision loss is expected to double. To serve a growing number of people experiencing vision loss, the Council is increasing the availability of vision services for rural and underserved populations.

Given these changes, the Council will focus on education and outreach to new audiences, including rural communities, veterans and people living in southern Wisconsin counties. This involves increased staff time to provide education about vision changes and services, increased assistive technology offerings and a new working agreement with the community care program of the Veterans Administration (VA).

"The additional allotment of staff time and resources will help vision services best serve the people they work with now and in the future," says Denise Jess, Council CEO/Executive Director. Funding for a portion of these expanded services is covered by a grant from a generous local foundation.

Amy Wurf, Certified Low Vision Therapist, has accepted the position of Education and Vision Services Director. Amy will continue to offer low vision evaluations, speak at the vision-oriented portions of the Stepping On program, and perform other public education duties.

"This is a wonderful opportunity and a great group of people to be working with," says Amy. "I am looking forward to building on what Jean (Kalscheur) has done as director and furthering the Council's mission."



Client Evelyn Becker explores assistive technology with AT Specialist Jim Denham.

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Jean Kalscheur has transitioned to part-time Education Specialist after many dedicated years as Education and Vision Services Director. She will field speaker requests from outside organizations, and work more closely with low vision support groups throughout the state to facilitate continued learning for the members. Jean will continue to play a role in identifying the Council's outreach activities to multiple audiences such as eye care professionals, students and the aging population.

**“We want to empower people to reach their potential and improve their quality of life.”**

**— Denise Jess**

Jean is looking forward to identifying ways in which the Council can best educate the blind and visually impaired community, as well as other groups in Wisconsin.

“I am eager to think about what is within the Council's mission that will also work to spread the word out to more rural areas.”

Brent Perzentka received his master's degree from Western Michigan University in vision rehabilitation therapy. Brent covers southwestern Wisconsin counties through an agreement with the Office for the Blind and Visually Impaired (OBVI). He will work with people one-on-one in their homes to teach adaptive techniques.

“I am excited to work with people on more of a personal level,” says Brent. “I want to spend more time with people learning about who they are and what their goals are. I want to help them maintain their independence.”

Brent will also do outreach within counties the Council serves, including health fairs and presentations.

Jim Denham, Assistive Technology Specialist, increased his hours to full-time as of this month. This will give him more time for one-on-one trainings and group classes, as well as presenting at the Stepping On workshops.

These organizational changes will ensure more people in Wisconsin receive access to the vision services they need.

“We want to focus on more than just the pragmatics of how to adapt to vision loss,” says Denise Jess, Council CEO/Executive Director. “We want to empower people to reach their potential and improve their quality of life.”

Call Amy Wurf at (608) 237-8107 or email her at [awurf@wcblind.org](mailto:awurf@wcblind.org) to find out which vision service will help you achieve your goals. Read Vision Services staff bios at [WCBlind.org/who-we-are/staff-board](http://WCBlind.org/who-we-are/staff-board).

# Council Visionaries: Generously Laying the Foundation for the Future

The Council Visionaries program recognizes all donors who have given \$20,000 or more over their lifetime. This group of twenty-three organizations and individuals demonstrates their dedication to the Council through many gifts. All of these people or organizations contributed over the course of multiple years. Some included the Council in their will.

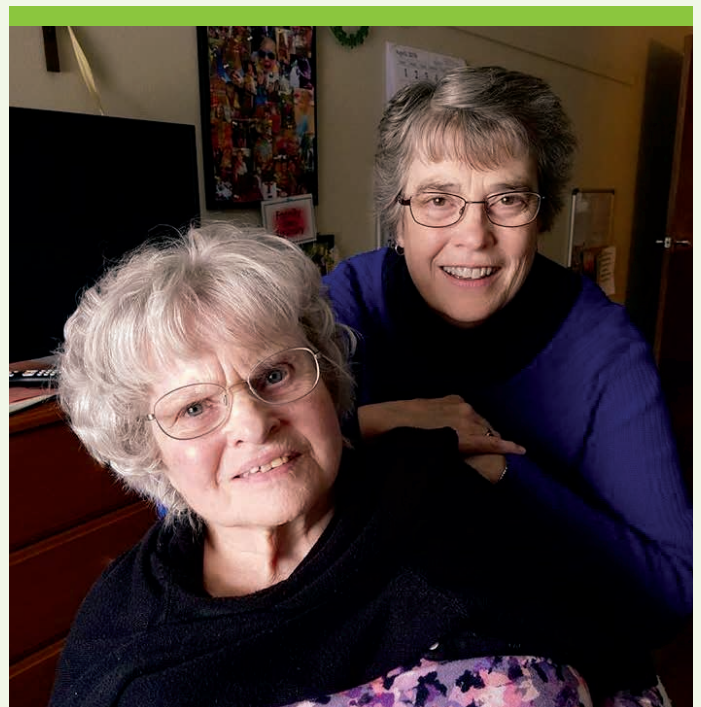
Two of these visionaries are Rosemary Himmelsbach and her daughter Loretta. Rosemary frequently makes her contributions in the form of stock gifts. Loretta, former Council Executive Director, continues to wholeheartedly believe in the work the Council does. She serves on the Council's scholarship and legislative committees, in addition to making multiple gifts to the Council each year.

"Over the years, I got to know the Council and what they do to advocate for people who are blind and visually impaired. I give because I believe in the Council's core values and mission; overall I believe in the people. That is why I give."

Each donor gives for a different reason—whether that's a family member, personal journey or a desire to contribute to services that help people maintain their dignity.

"Regardless of how or when the gifts are made, the Council is grateful for every Visionary's generous spirit," says Lori Werbeckes, Fund Development Director. "In providing the financial support needed to continue the Council's work, these individuals and organizations have promoted empowerment for people who are blind or visually impaired throughout Wisconsin."

Recognition as a Council Visionary is open to anyone who contributes \$20,000 or more over their lifetime. If you're curious about the total amount you have given, email [LWerbeckes@WCBlind.org](mailto:LWerbeckes@WCBlind.org).



Rosemary and Loretta Himmelsbach

# Get to Know Mitch Brey and Kris Johannsen



Mitch Brey



Kris Johannsen

Community Living Connections as a case manager for adults with developmental disabilities for three years. Next, I worked with Focus on Energy providing energy assessments, then worked on the Repower Madison Campaign to accelerate Madison's transition to renewable energy and to give everyday citizens more of a voice in energy planning.

In January 2019, two new staff members joined the Council. Mitch Brey was hired as Planning Coordinator, and Kris Johannsen became the Sharper Vision Store Manager. Katherine Corbett, Council Writer, caught up with Mitch and Kris to learn more about who they are and what inspires them.

## **Katherine Corbett: What are the highlights of your professional background?**

**Mitch Brey:** I mostly have a nonprofit background. I studied biochemistry at UW-Madison, but realized that research wasn't the thing for me. I wanted more hands-on work to improve peoples' lives. I wanted to work with adults with disabilities, do environmental and political advocacy, and work in renewable energy. I worked at

**Kris Johannsen:** I started college at UW-Oshkosh, then finished through Colorado State University, earning a Bachelor's of Science in Communication. I have had managerial experience, and worked at CreateAbility Wisconsin as a digital media mentor. In this role, I spent time working with children and adults with autism, teaching them video and film techniques, so they could learn and to give them employable skills. It was a lot of fun because I love film.

## **Katherine: How did you find out about the Council?**

**Mitch:** I've gone past the building countless times on Williamson Street. During my work with Repower Madison, I partnered with the

Sierra Club, which is in the same building as the Council. I became more familiar with the Council by coming to meetings at the office.

**Kris:** I first found out about the Council through my fiancée, who works at the Lions Eye Bank of Wisconsin. I attended the Council's Gallery Night last October. While there, I saw the Sharper Vision Store for the first time. I love technology and helping people with disabilities, and I appreciated the range of products in the store. When a position opened up for the Store Manager, I thought it sounded like a great job, so I applied, and here we are.

**Katherine: What unique skills do you bring to this position?**

**Mitch:** I bring a wide range of experience from various nonprofits and campaigns. I have done work where I have been the only employee; I have done work where I have been part of a very large team and have supervised staff. I have worked with organizations who had a lot of resources as well as those who needed me to problem-solve to get the resources and funding necessary to do the work. I think I can look at a situation from a lot of different angles, and that is definitely a strength.

**Kris:** I have a very outgoing personality, and enjoy talking with people and learning about them. I like being witty and fun and making jokes. I have a personable attitude and take customer service seriously.

**Katherine: What makes you excited about your new role at the Council?**

**Mitch:** The people here are great. I love the environment and getting to know the work the Council does has been exciting. On a personal note, my grandpa lost his sight about a year ago. As I've watched that happen and how hard it is for him, it makes me happy to be in work as meaningful as this. I am happy to have an impact on peoples' lives and their families.

**Kris:** I have the ability to own my role and the store is a place where I can learn and grow. I am excited to use my skills to improve the store in different ways. I love technology and have an interest in serving people with disabilities. Working at the Council will be an exciting opportunity.

**Katherine: What are your hobbies?**

**Mitch:** Running, gardening, playing cards and board games are a few of my hobbies. Playing with my daughter and showing her new things outside is a joy. Going to big community events and festivals is especially fun, and to the farmers' market.

**Kris:** I love to hike and travel. Zion National Forest in Utah blew my mind; I proposed to my fiancée there at Angel's Landing. Dungeons and Dragons, music, videogames and football are also enjoyable pastimes for me.

# Volunteer Spotlight:

## Get to know the volunteers who bring audio version



Margaret Sommers

We appreciate the two volunteers, Margaret Sommers and Monica Wahlberg, who read each issue of the *On Sight* e-newsletter and *Courier* print newsletter to make them available in audio format. Get to know the voices who read our content.

Margaret lives in Madison, Wisconsin, and began volunteering with the Council in 2007. She was invited by her friend, Kathi Koegle, who had recently been hired as Outreach and Development Manager at the Council. In addition to reading *Courier* and *On Sight* content to create the audio versions of these newsletters, Margaret

has worked as a greeter at Council events, read items to help with the Council's archive project, and assembled packets for the Council's Legislative Day event.

"Volunteering at the Council has shown me all of the options and resources available for people whose vision is changing," says Margaret. "I want to do what I can to support the Council's work, and I hope everyone in Wisconsin has the opportunity to learn about the services the Council offers."

## s of our newsletters to you

Monica lives in Madison, and started volunteering to read *Courier* and *On Sight* in 2013. She previously worked for the Council in a paid capacity as a driver in 2011, and Events & Volunteer Coordinator in 2012, planning the Council's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. She became involved with the Council because of how the organization helped her family.

"My uncle's mother got magnifiers from the Council as she was losing her vision," Monica says. "These helped her correspond via mail with her grandchildren. I enjoy being part of an organization that gives people back the ability to do something they thought they could no longer do."

The Council appreciates the time and effort these women put in each month.

"It's wonderful that Monica and Margaret have been reading and recording Council publications for many years," says Lori Werbeckes, Fund Development Director. "Their voices are familiar to our readers and they articulate the Council's message well. We are so grateful to have these dedicated volunteers lend their voices each month to ensure Council publications are accessible."



Monica Wahlberg

# Customize Your New Sunglasses at the Sharper Vision Store

When choosing a new pair of sunglasses, there are a lot of options to consider. Does the frame look good on me? Which filter color works best for my eyes? How can I pick the best option among many? The Council's Sharper Vision Store makes buying new sunglasses easy with new products and a person-friendly display.

Customers can try glasses on indoors, or step outside to see what the color would be like to use in their everyday lives.

The sunglasses area consists of a board, where filters are grouped by color family. First, customers can hold a filter up to their eye to see what color will work best for their vision. Second, the customer can try on a variety of frame styles to assess them for comfort and look. Some frames are designed to

fit over glasses and others can be worn without glasses. And of course there is a mirror so you can check how you look in each frame.



The sunglass display at the Council's Sharper Vision Store.

"The new display has been excellent in helping us as vision services staff understand that each person reacts differently to each lens," says Amy Wurf, Education and Vision Services Director and Certified Low Vision Therapist. "For example, there is a filter that has instructions



saying it is great for people who suffer migraines. While it has been helpful for some, not everyone gets relief from using it. It's important to try all the filters, because you never know what will work for you."

Customers can try glasses on indoors, or step outside to see what the color would be like to use in their everyday lives. Amy can assist in finding the filter and frame that works best for you.

"It was very easy for me to pick out the right sunglasses," says Jamada Norris, who recently visited the Sharper Vision Store. "I could

try them both indoors and outdoors, and the best news is, they look cool. I'm excited to wear them. Being able to try so many colors gave me the confidence that I picked the right lenses for me."

Thanks to the extensive selection from NoIr, there is a wider array of colors available than ever before. The Sharper Vision Store still carries many colors for immediate purchase, though the specialty filter colors provided by NoIr need to be ordered. Expect two weeks for delivery. New NoIr sunglasses will be shipped directly to the customer's home.

To find your next pair of sunglasses, visit the Sharper Vision Store at the Council's office, 754 Williamson Street, in Madison. Our hours are Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and Thursday from 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. When you arrive, ask for either Kris Johannsen (Sharper Vision Store Manager) or Amy Wurf (Education and Vision Services Director and Certified Low Vision Therapist) and they will assist you in finding the pair of sunglasses that is just right for you in Madison or online at [WCBlind.org/store](http://WCBlind.org/store).



Close-up of sunglass frame and filter options on display at the Council's Sharper Vision Store.

# Farewell to Steve Johnson

It is with very heavy hearts that Council board and staff share the news of the passing of board member, Steve Johnson, on March 14, 2019.

Steve first joined the Council board in 2012. He recently served as Second Vice President, and on several committees, including the executive, awards, legislative and human resources committees. He contributed his expertise to each committee and lived experience as a guide dog handler in the service dog work group.

As a member of the Executive Committee, Steve was a dedicated supporter of changing the wording of the Council's mission in 2017, replacing the word "independence" with "empowerment." Steve truly understood interdependence, that only by working together and encouraging each other to live our lives to the fullest can we move forward.

In one of Steve's final Facebook posts, he asked us all to, "try to understand what is really important in life. Don't be too proud to ask for help. We all want to be independent, but let's strive for interdependence, as we may all need each other at some point in our lives."

Steve will be remembered for his positivity, friendliness, thoughtful questions, a willingness to do whatever he could to make a difference, and a passion for the outdoors. He enjoyed working in his garden, and each year decided on a theme or color scheme to choose the plants he wished to grow. Steve's passion was hunting and fishing.

"He was an amazing human being whose compassion for persons with disabilities was eclipsed only by his own zest for life and adventure," says Chris Richmond, Council board chair. "A true outdoorsman, Steve demonstrated blindness need not be a limitation but an alternate vehicle for the way in which we experience the world. Steve's passion for advocacy will be greatly missed."

We offer sincerest condolences to Steve's family and friends, and we are grateful for all the ways in which Steve served people across Wisconsin who are blind or visually impaired.

Read Steve's obituary by visiting [obituaries.lacrossetribune.com/obituary/steven-johnson-1963-1073374479](http://obituaries.lacrossetribune.com/obituary/steven-johnson-1963-1073374479).



Steve Johnson

# 2019 Council Events

Put the following events on your calendar and check [WCBlind.org/events](http://WCBlind.org/events) for more information.

## **Extended Store Hours on Thursdays**

**Thursdays, 8:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.**

Need to get products for yourself or a loved one, but can never make it to the Council's Sharper Vision Store in Madison during business hours? For the convenience of our customers, the store will be open for extended hours on Thursdays from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m.

As always, our helpful staff will help you try products and find the right item for your needs. Store products are also available by calling 608-255-1166 during business hours and online anytime at [WCBlind.org](http://WCBlind.org).

## **Birding by Ear**

**Indoor component (choose 1): May 30, 6 - 8 p.m. or June 1, 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. AND Outdoor component (choose 1): June 6, 6 - 8 p.m. or June 8, 8 - 10 a.m.**

Just as unique as their coloration and shape, bird songs come in all tunes and pitches. Identifying birds by their song is an exciting activity and skill, and any experienced bird watcher will tell you that most birding is done without actually seeing the bird, but by hearing it. This event is co-organized by the Madison Audubon Society.

## **Webinar**

**June 19 at 10 a.m.**

Details TBA

## **Low Vision Fair**

**Friday, August 9, 2019**

Eau Claire

Compare and try adaptive products, learn new techniques at informational breakout sessions and meet Council Vision Services staff and vendors. Network and share experiences with other people experiencing vision loss. The event is free. No registration is required.



## Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired

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## Low Vision Fair

Save the Date for the Council's Low Vision Fair on August 9, 2019 in the Eau Claire area! More information available at [WCBlind.org/events](http://WCBlind.org/events).

## Stay Connected

Stay up to date on events, legislation, news and technology related to blindness or vision loss by subscribing to one of the weekly Council emails. *Council Courier* is available in large print, braille and CD. To request an alternative format, email Mitch at [mbrey@WCBlind.org](mailto:mbrey@WCBlind.org) or call **608-237-8119**.

