



InSight

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Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment, Inc.

TOUCHABLE ART SHOW A GREAT DRAW!

Michele LaComb had an idea. As a talented, visually impaired artist who loves what she does, she wanted to put together a truly different sort of art show. She envisioned a show that could be enjoyed by everyone, but especially by people who are blind or visually impaired. Because of her vision loss, Michele is sensitive to the assumption that art is appreciated through sight alone. When was the last time you went to an art gallery and were asked to touch the display? Michele's vision was realized when on November 6th and 7th, A.V.R.E. hosted the "Touchable Art!" Show.

Michele and the Fine Arts Society of the Southern Tier (FASST) were awarded a grant from the Chenango County and New York State Councils on the Arts to help them sponsor the show. They just needed a place to hold it. When Michele approached A.V.R.E. about hosting the event, President and CEO Bob Hanye was thrilled! What a perfect connection to make – a touchable art show and an agency committed to improving the quality of life for people who are visually impaired.

A wide variety of artists submitted a total of 45 pieces for judging. Awards and recognitions were given to seven artists. Some of the best pieces, though, were not judged. A group of A.V.R.E. kids, working with Vision Rehab Therapist Laure Griffis, took part in an art session held at the Magic Paintbrush Project. With help from family and friends, the kids created art by painting onto quilted canvases and piling up loads of tissue paper and glue. The Magic Paintbrush Project is a small local organization that is committed to providing a fun, creative outlet to special-needs kids and their families. The results were spectacular – and very touchable!

Another special exhibit was provided by Hornell resident, Don Williams. Don has been creating touchable, three-dimensional art for 30 years. A.V.R.E. came to know him through their sister agency, ABVI – Goodwill, in Rochester. When Don was asked to drive his exhibit to Binghamton, he was delighted that he could share his work with more people who are visually impaired. Don uses crushed blue and green glass, sawdust from different kinds of wood, rocks, tiny pieces of wood, twigs, sand and other natural materials to create beautiful land and sea-scapes. Some are created on large panels of glass and are lighted from behind to enhance the scenes. Visitors to the show were fortunate to have Don available to explain each piece and to help visually impaired visitors to navigate through the exhibit.



Some of Don Williams' artistic creations line the Conference Room walls.



A child explores a felt-wool portrait with her fingers.

But, the best part of the show were the over 150 people who came to enjoy the art through their sense of touch – or sight! The show was such a huge success, FASST and A.V.R.E. have committed to making it an annual event. Keep your eyes and ears open for information about next year's show. You won't want to miss it!



Our Mission: "To assist people who have a vision disability enhance life quality through attaining or maintaining personal and economic independence, and help remove obstacles imposed by vision disabilities."

THE COMPETITION

The Touchable Art! Show was also a competition. All art creations were brought to A.V.R.E. a week ahead of the show so that judging could take place. Judges Nancy Lee, of Whitney Point, New York, and Douglas Vitarius, of Windsor, New York, wanted to handle this judging differently than they had ever done before. They asked to be blindfolded!

After being taken to our large Conference Room, they donned blindfolds, and the art pieces were brought to them one-by-one. They judged each piece first by feel, then removed their blindfolds and judged each one visually.

The winners of the 2009 Touchable Art! Show and Competition are:

Best of Show – “Cattails and Sumac” by Louise Tiemann. Quilted and appliquéd textiles, utilizing textures such as velvet, corduroy, crocheted laces, metallic threads, beads, and buttons.

1st Place – “Textures of Remembrance” by Rae-Doyle Freeman. A collage of mixed items, such as paint, fabric, chenille yarn, ribbons, and buttons.

2nd Place – “Evolve” by Ann Marie Graham. A large, 3-dimensional wall-hanging, made of copper tubing covered with orange tissue paper and hardened with glue, lighted from inside.

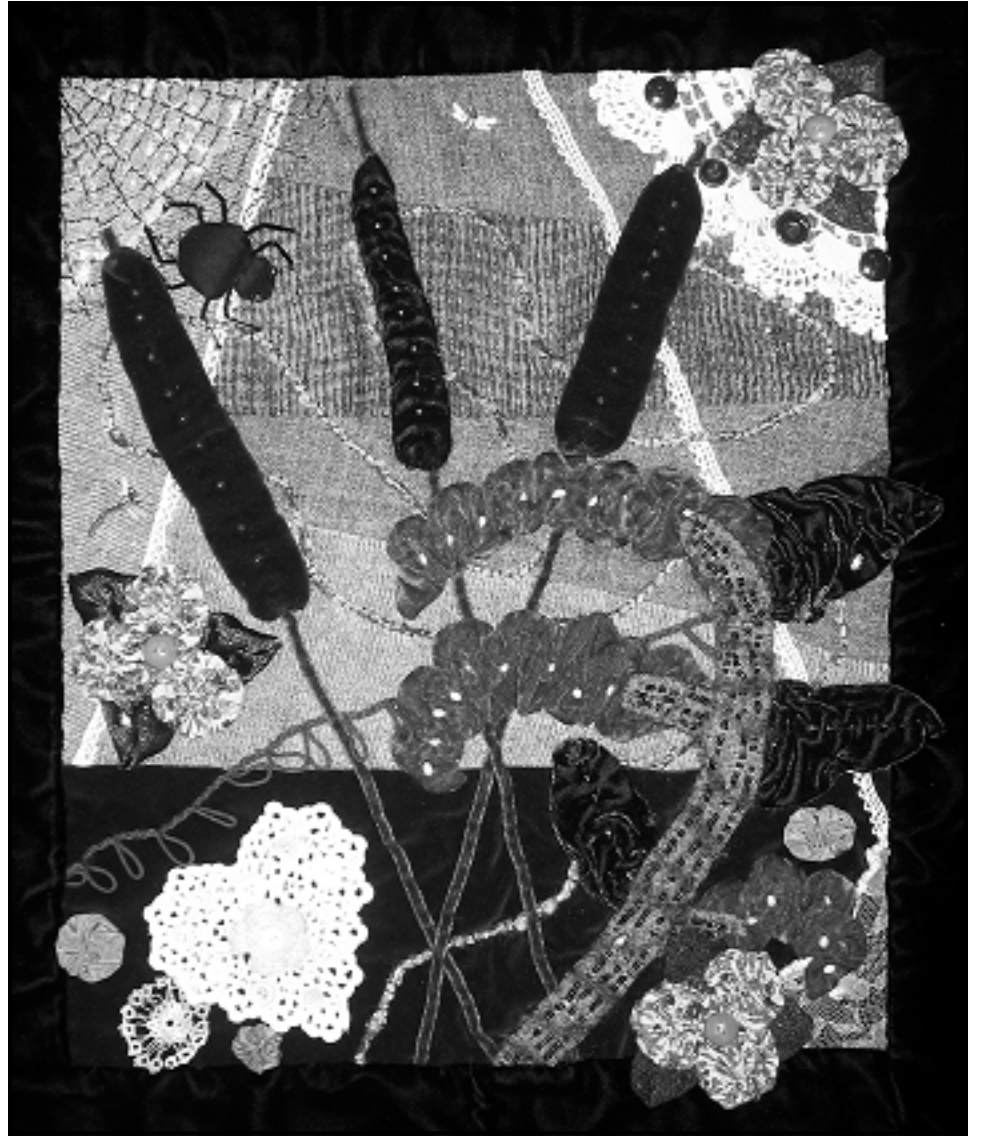
3rd Place – “In My Mind’s Eye” by Judy Zurenda. A 3-dimensional and colorful portrait of a woman’s face, created with needle-felted wool and embellished with eye-glasses, earrings and necklace.

Honorable Mentions –

“Momma Squirrel Feeding Her Young” by Betty Calkins.

“The Drowning” by Sara Doane.

“Rock Sandwich” by Vivian Perkins.



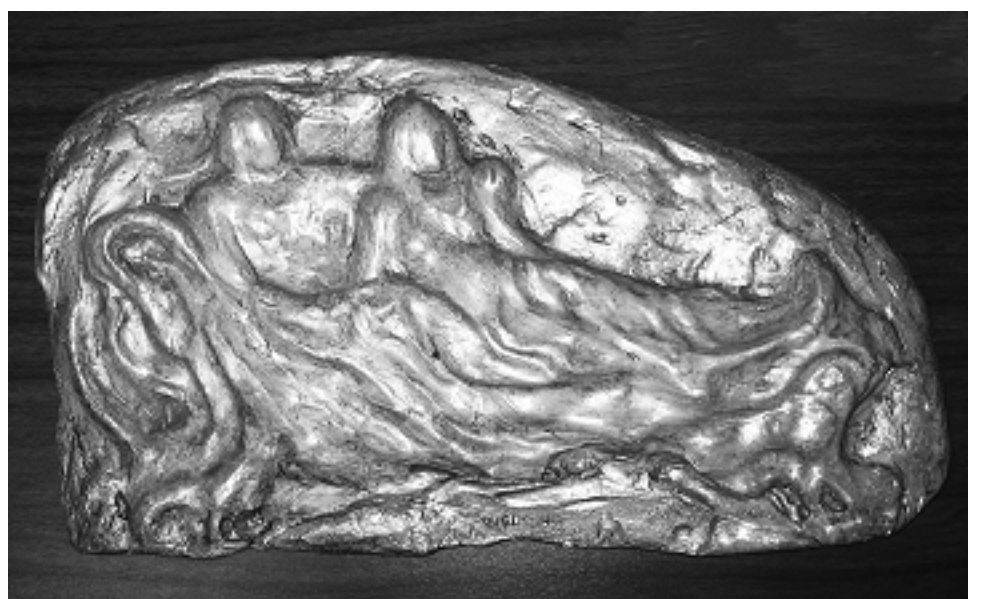
*“Cattails and Sumac” by Louise Tiemann.
Winner of Best of Show.*



Don Williams (left) helps Candie Stiles identify the parts of his creation titled “Gazebo and Bridge.”



*“Together” by Zachary Strom.
Paint on quilted canvas.
Magic Paintbrush Project.*



*“Couple On Waves” by Cyrena Summers.
Small painted sculpture.*



A.V.R.E. CEO TO SERVE ON COMMITTEE

A.V.R.E. President and CEO Robert (Bob) Hanye has been selected to serve as the Vice Chair of the Quality Work Environment Initiative Steering Committee.

As a combined effort of three groups (National Industries for the Blind, NISH, and the Federal Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled), the Quality Work Environment initiative was created for the purpose of establishing a set of "Best Practices" for the employment of people with disabilities. Assuring a work environment of good quality addresses everything -- from wages paid, to on-the-job safety, to personal comfort and convenience, to amenities like employee storage lockers.

Special emphasis is placed on employment opportunities that are available through the AbilityOne Program. Formerly called JWOD, the AbilityOne Program orchestrates Government purchases of products and services that are provided by nonprofit agencies employing people who are blind or have other severe disabilities. A.V.R.E. has participated in this program since its beginnings in 1938.

On the Steering Committee, Mr. Hanye will be representing the agencies for the blind, like A.V.R.E., who are involved with the AbilityOne Program.

A.V.R.E. LANDS NEW CONTRACT

A.V.R.E. was recently awarded a new contract to take over the management of the switchboard call center at the James J. Peters Veterans Administration Medical Center in the Bronx.

A.V.R.E. has been responsible for the operation of the switchboards at two campuses of the Mid-Hudson Veterans Administration Medical Center for about ten years. The outstanding services we have provided and our excellent reputation led to the awarding of this new contract.

The Bronx VAMC call center is being staffed with nine employees, most of whom are legally blind, helping to fulfill our mission of providing good jobs for people with severe vision impairments. Operators at the switchboards answer and process hundreds of incoming calls each day, making certain that the caller's connections are accurately and courteously completed. In addition, operators must also monitor the alarm systems within the hospital, calling in the appropriate response teams.

It can be a daunting job for anyone, but our award-winning operators handle it with ease and confidence. "Our operators take great pride in providing the highest level of service for our veterans who have selflessly defended our country," said A.V.R.E.'s Vice President of Operations Ken Fernald.

Visually impaired operators are fully trained by A.V.R.E. to make use of a variety of adaptive technology equipment and software programs ranging from the simple to the complex.

This new contract will boost A.V.R.E.'s annual sales figure by \$565,000.

FAREWELL TO A FRIEND

G. Peter Keyes came "on board" as a member of the A.V.R.E. Board of Directors in 2004. He passed away unexpectedly in August of this year.

Pete was born in Brooklyn, New York. He attended the University of Notre Dame and Columbia University Law School. He practiced law at Levene, Gouldin & Thompson law firm in Binghamton for 43 years. He loved music, theater, movies, history, and family, and he was an avid runner who competed in many races and marathons in his younger days.

During his short time with us, we came to know Pete as a caring individual who was dedicated to serving people with a vision disability. He will be greatly missed.



THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Robert K. Hanye, President and CEO

Pedestrian Safety -- How does our community rank?

A.V.R.E. has more than a passing interest in the safety of pedestrians in our communities. One of the basic components of vision rehabilitation is teaching people who are blind or have vision loss how to travel safely and negotiate their way through many varying environments. This generally means learning the proper techniques for using a Long Cane (White Cane) and becoming familiar with environmental cues. These cues include things like knowing which way traffic is flowing by sound, or identifying a hallway by different air pressure, or knowing your location by the smell of the bakery.

A.V.R.E. has trained, certified Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Specialists who work with our consumers, usually one-on-one, to help individuals master safe travel skills that meet their needs and desires. O&M Specialists must have either a Bachelors or a Masters level degree in this specialty. A.V.R.E. also requires professional certification for its O&M Specialists, and we are actively working to make licensure available to the profession. It is fair to say that A.V.R.E. invests a great deal in making sure that our consumers have the best training available to them so they can become the best independent travelers they can be.

However, even the best trained and most competent blind traveler is still dependent on the condition of the traveling environment for his or her safety. A web article (at www.t4America.org) titled "Dangerous by Design" ranks metropolitan areas across the country using a Pedestrian Danger Index (PDI). The five most dangerous cities in the country are Orlando, Tampa, Miami, Jacksonville and Memphis. No New York State cities are in the top group of most dangerous cities. However, in rankings just for New York State, the Binghamton metro area is the second most dangerous! Buffalo is the first. Elmira comes in at number 10 and Ithaca at 11.

The safest cities have some priorities and solutions in common. According to the article "many communities have succeeded at making walking safer through investments in pedestrian infrastructure. Cities, regions, and states across the U.S. have adopted policies and design guidelines that prioritize walking and bicycling."

A.V.R.E. has been instrumental in having Accessible Pedestrian Crossing Signals installed in three Binghamton locations. Ithaca has numerous Audible Crossing Signals, and other communities have some as well. We do know that many communities in our nine New York and three Pennsylvania counties are including pedestrian and bicycle safety in their transportation and downtown redesign efforts. We strongly urge that safe pedestrian travel be a design priority. It is good for the health of all our residents and the economic health of our communities. A.V.R.E. will help whenever we can.



PEDESTRIAN SAFETY LAWS

While some drivers do not follow the laws of yielding to pedestrians in certain circumstances, it is not always the driver who is at fault when pedestrians are struck. Just like motorists, pedestrians are expected to follow certain rules of the road.

Here is what New York State Pedestrian Laws say:

- ◆ Pedestrians are to use sidewalks whenever they are safely available.
- ◆ When sidewalks are unavailable, pedestrians must walk facing traffic, as far to the left as possible.
- ◆ Pedestrians must obey traffic signals and traffic officers. Although many people do it, it is technically illegal to cross "against" a traffic light.
- ◆ At crosswalks where there is neither a traffic signal nor traffic officer, pedestrians have the right-of-way.
- ◆ On sidewalks when crossing a driveway or alleyway, pedestrians have the right of way over vehicles exiting or entering.
- ◆ If there are no crosswalks, signs, or signals, the pedestrian must yield the right-of-way to all vehicles.
- ◆ Regardless of the right-of-way, the driver is required by law to take great care to avoid hitting pedestrians.

NYS Law is quite specific when it comes to pedestrians who are blind or visually impaired:

"Notwithstanding the foregoing provisions,... every driver of a vehicle approaching an intersection or crosswalk shall yield the right-of-way to a pedestrian crossing, or attempting to cross, the roadway when such pedestrian is accompanied by a guide dog or using a cane which is metallic or white in color or white with a red tip."

Until all drivers understand how important it is to follow the laws and rules of the road, pedestrians must continue to Walk Defensively. Be careful! Your life depends upon it!





ON THE BULLETIN BOARD



WANTED -- YOUR STORIES!

We are creating a new webpage for our website that is all about... you! We are looking for stories from those of you who have received vision rehabilitation and/or employment services from our agency that may be of interest and encouragement to our website readers.

For example: How did you lose your vision? How have we helped you to adjust? What training have we provided for you? Do you have any interesting anecdotes about your experiences with learning how to adjust to your vision loss? Your anonymity will be preserved, if you wish.

If you would like to share your story with us, call A.V.R.E. Development Director Jenn Cubic at 607-724-2428.

MORE ON THE NEW DIGITAL TALKING BOOKS

In the Winter 2008 edition of InSight, we told you all about the transition to a new Talking Book format. Taking place now, and for the next 3 years, the New York State Talking Book & Braille Library is changing from the traditional tape machines to new digital machines.

It is important to understand that if you are currently a user of the Talking Book library, you will not automatically receive a new digital machine. You must call the library and register to receive one. You may call the library at 1-800-342-3688.



TECHNOLOGY NEWS

A.V.R.E. recently held a "Lunch-n-Learn" session for employees who were interested in learning about a new adaptive technology device. A.V.R.E. Vice President of Operations Ken Fernald introduced the new FarView by Optelec.

The FarView is a small, portable video magnifier that offers both real time viewing and snapshot viewing. FarView's main benefits can be described in five points:

1. **Capture and Store.** In Document Read Mode, a user can take pictures of a complete document or pages of a book and store them in the memory. The images can be opened later and read.
2. **Zoom.** In Distance Viewing Mode, a user can point the FarView at signs, wall menus, airline flight information boards, etc. Capture the image and zoom in to read it.
3. **Real Time Close-up.** In this mode, users can hold the FarView over reading material, magnify it on-screen, and read. This is excellent for reading labels on food items while grocery shopping.
4. **Enhancements.** Images that are captured and stored can be viewed using a variety of adjustment options: contrast and brightness adjustment; black on white, or white on black; color adjustment; advanced options like skewing, rotation and auto-scrolling.
5. **High Quality Imagery.** Always-In-Focus technology ensures a crisp, clear focus on every image, with high magnification from 2X up to 90X.



The FarView has a built-in rechargeable battery that lasts up to 4 hours between charges. It features USB and VGA ports for connection to a computer or external monitor. It is sleek and compact, measuring 6 X 3 inches, with a depth of 1.3 inches. It weighs 10 ounces. The FarView costs about \$1500.

For more information about the Optelec FarView portable video magnifier and to try it out in our ACCESS-Tech Center, you may call A.V.R.E. Director of Program Services Rick McCarthy, at 607-724-2428.



MARCHING TO THEIR OWN MUSIC



On New Year's Day of 2010, a "first" will happen, and it's an exciting one! The nation's only blind marching band will march and play in the Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena, California.

The marching band of the Ohio State School for the Blind was invited over

a year ago to participate in the 2010 parade. The entire student body of 120 kids went into the school's gym to sing The Star-Spangled Banner for a video recording. When Music Director Carol Agler's cell phone rang, everyone grew quiet. As she held her phone to the microphone, they heard a man's voice, calling from California, inviting the school's band to march in the parade. Pandemonium broke loose!

The 35-member band will be the first blind marching band ever to participate in the parade. It will also be the smallest band that has ever participated. It will seem a lot larger, though, as about the same number of sighted assistants will be marching, as well.

Over the past year, the band has increased in size, from 17 to its current 35 members, and has been

working to whip into shape, both musically and physically. The parade route is 6 miles long and takes about 2 hours to march. That's quite a haul for a group of teens who have to carry their instruments, play music that is entirely memorized, keep in time, and march in step... all without being able to see what they are doing.

The band was formed in 2005, and played its first full season with about 20 members in 2006. Its uniforms are castoffs from another high school that purchased new ones. The trip to Pasadena from Ohio will cost about \$1500 per person, and all money is being raised to pay for it.

Twenty-one bands from across the country have been booked for the parade. Bands are chosen using several criteria, including marching and musical ability, overall talent, and uniqueness. A blind marching band is pretty unique!



HAPPY HOLIDAYS



FROM OUR HOUSE TO YOURS!

FREE MATTER
FOR THE
BLIND

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A.V.R.E. serves visually impaired individuals of all ages who live in the New York counties of Broome, Chemung, Chenango, Cortland, Delaware, Otsego, Tioga, Tompkins and Schuyler, as well as the Pennsylvania counties of Bradford, Susquehanna and Tioga.

A.V.R.E. is an Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity Employer.

If you would like more information about **A.V.R.E.** or its services, please feel free to contact us.

Our vision is to be the first in choice and quality with respect to vision rehabilitation and employment services in the Twin Tiers, and to be a model for the broader community in understanding vision disability.

"Seeing Things Differently!"

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