



InSight

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Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment, Inc.

JASON BRYN – A MAN WITH TRUE VISION

When you confront an obstacle or face a tough decision, ask yourself two questions: what do I want, and how am I going to get it? That's Jason Bryn's philosophy. But, it wasn't always.

Jason was born with retinitis pigmentosa, a hereditary eye disease that affects three generations of his family -- his mother and one of his children also have it. In his early years, Jason could see well enough to play basketball through high school and college. When he experienced drastic vision loss shortly after, he lost his job. Along with that, he lost a sense of who he was, and he began to flounder and wallow in self-pity. It wasn't until he was confronted with the reality of losing his wife that he took control and faced the challenges of being visually impaired.

Jason went to law school and became a disability rights attorney. He worked in that field, including running his own law firm, for 15 years. During that time, he felt the desire to return to sports and to be an athlete again, and he found tandem cycling to fill that need. Jason and his sighted "pilot" participated in races around the world with the U. S. National Paralympics Cycling Team. His cycling career culminated with top placings at the 2004 Athens Olympics. Jason's cycling success gave him the confidence that he could manifest whatever he put his mind and energy to, despite the obstacles imposed by his vision loss. He changed careers and became an entrepreneur: a business consultant, a life coach, a motivational speaker, and an internet marketer.

Now, Jason is the new Workforce Development Director for National Industries for the Blind (NIB). In that position, he is working to reduce the 70% unemployment rate of blind Americans by helping them to realize their full potential. He has been working with A.V.R.E. Management and staff recently to assist in implementing a Quality Workforce Environment (QWE) initiative. (Read more about this in the President's Corner article on page 2.) Jason spent two days meeting with Senior Management staff, reviewing current practices and policies, and brainstorming ways to improve the work environment. He also spent a significant amount of his time talking with employees, getting feedback on what is important to them relative to the workplace, and asking how they confront obstacles imposed by their vision impairment. Bob Hanye, A.V.R.E. President & CEO, was so impressed with Jason's work with our staff that he asked him to return to Binghamton to be the keynote speaker at our annual Employee Recognition banquet on May 7th.

Jason's energy and enthusiasm are truly inspiring. When he spoke at the banquet, his heart-felt presentation brought a number of people to tears and everyone to their feet in a standing ovation! Jason says, "Through my life journey, I've discovered the power within that we all have – that who we are is shaped by what we want and what we do about it."

Jason has, indeed, found his true vision.



Jason Bryn, seated third from left, enjoying a lunchtime chat with A.V.R.E. employees.



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 PRESIDENT'S CORNER

I am extremely pleased to tell you that A.V.R.E. is the first agency serving people who are blind or visually impaired in the entire country to roll out a new initiative that will improve and enhance all aspects of employment, in and through the **AbilityOne** program. In fact, A.V.R.E. helped design this national Quality Work Environment (QWE) initiative and is the pilot location to test and try out how it will be implemented in other agencies across the nation. This is a tremendous honor for A.V.R.E. and is a special recognition of the value our Board and our employees place on the capacity and potential of people who are blind. We were selected because of many years of engaging and employing people who are blind at all levels of our organization, as well as our record of promotions and creating a wide range of employment options.

AbilityOne (formerly called JWOD for the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act) is the program under which we supply the government with products and services. Our manila file folders, pressboard binders, tab paper, much of our copy paper, and other items are **AbilityOne** products. Our Switchboard operations at the Hudson Valley and Bronx Veterans Administration hospitals are also **AbilityOne** contracts. A.V.R.E. has taken part in this program since WW II when we made pillowcases for the military. The program is overseen by the Committee For Purchase (CFP) appointed by the President of the United States. The idea of QWE started at the CFP as a way to bring all the participating agencies, 88 agencies for the blind and about 700 for the severely disabled, to the highest level in their employment practices.

I had the honor of serving as the Vice-Chair of a Steering Committee that identified best practices to which all agencies would strive. We looked at current agency practices, business practices, and those in the government sector to come up with a series of guidelines and benchmarks. QWE practice guidelines have been created in four areas: (1) Enhancing Wages by Increasing Productivity, (2) Creating Opportunities for Work of Choice, (3) Accessing services, support, and training for skill acquisition, and (4) Improving the physical environments of the facility and the individual workstation. Each area has examples, baseline practices, and stretch goals. Continuous improvement is always expected. National Industries for the Blind (NIB) will be providing each agency with a great deal of support and technical assistance.

A really exciting part of QWE is that a team of employees from all areas of A.V.R.E. will guide and implement improvements and measure our success as we move forward. Our team includes members from manufacturing, switchboards, quality assurance, human resources, placement, and maintenance. The team will work directly with all departments, A.V.R.E. management, and NIB as we want to have not just the best employment but also the best Quality Work Environment!

Robert K. Hanye, President & CEO



"CAPITOL" STEPS IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

By Kelly Storm

On April 29, 2010, A.V.R.E. certainly made steps in the right direction toward fulfilling our Mission. I had the opportunity to accompany A.V.R.E. President & CEO, Bob Hanye, and Development Director, Jenn Cubic, on a trip to Washington, D.C. to advocate on Capitol Hill about the needs of Americans who are blind or visually impaired. We were part of a contingent of agencies associated with VisionServe Alliance's 2010 Spring Executive Conference.

Before heading to Capitol Hill, we visited National Industries for the Blind (NIB) where Bob and Jenn took part in a presentation to Human Resource specialists about Quality Work Environment (QWE) by Jason Bryn, NIB's Workforce Development Director. As Bob mentioned in the President's Corner, A.V.R.E. is working with NIB to roll out a QWE program and action plan. It was an honor for A.V.R.E. representatives to be asked to comment to a larger group about their experiences thus far in the QWE process.

Next we ventured to Capitol Hill where Bob, Jenn and I met with staff from Senator Schumer's, Senator Gillibrand's, and Congressman Hinchey's offices. We were joined by Nancy Miller, CEO of VISIONS in New York, and Roxanne Mayros, CEO of VisionServe Alliance. Together we spoke about issues related to vision rehabilitation services and Medicare coverage, as well as the Blind Persons Return to Work Act that addresses the problems people face when they return to work and are confronted with losing some or all of their disability benefits. The regulations that dictate disability coverage run contrary to personal and economic independence for people who are blind or visually impaired. We believe people should not have to choose between becoming more independent and losing their healthcare coverage. Our message was well-received, and we will continue to advocate for improvements to current legislation. It was refreshing to learn that vision rehabilitation is taken seriously at the national level and that A.V.R.E. is well-respected among peer agencies.

I am truly fortunate and proud to have experienced the determination and perseverance A.V.R.E. demonstrates on behalf of those who are blind or visually impaired. Every step taken by A.V.R.E. representatives was with commitment to those we serve. As someone who has benefitted from vision rehabilitation, I was especially honored to speak about its value.

Editor's Note: Kelly Storm is the 1st Vice Chair of the A.V.R.E. Board of Directors, which is a volunteer position. She works for Mirabito Holdings, Inc. as the Vice President of Human Resources. Kelly is legally blind as a result of genetic macular degeneration and knows firsthand the challenges a vision impairment can create. She is a very valuable addition to our Board.



OUR 2010 EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR

Employees who are conscientious about their job and who are dedicated to doing their very best work can sometimes be difficult to find. But when you have an employee of Dolores Saunders' caliber, you know you have been successful in that quest. Dolores (Dee) has been that kind of employee at A.V.R.E. since 1983, and that's why she is the recipient of the 2010 Melvin L. Rosendale Employee of the Year award. And this is not her first time! She also received the award in 1996 and in 2000.

On the surface, Dee seems quiet, reserved, and somewhat shy. However, she is also quick to smile and laugh, and then her true, fun personality really comes out. She has shown tremendous personal and professional growth during her A.V.R.E. tenure.



Over the past 27 years, Dee has worked at many tasks in A.V.R.E.'s Manufacturing Business Division. From running a power sewing machine (sewing pillowcases and hemming sheets) to taping pressboard binders to packing manila file folders, Dee has done it all. Currently, she is our Pressboard Department Team Leader, and she guides and assists anywhere from 5 to 12 employees. In addition, she can be relied upon to fill in on just about any job in any department, as needed.

Although she was born with congenital cataracts, Dee has a fair amount of vision. But, getting to work has not always been easy for her. She lives in a community about 30 miles outside of Binghamton, and due to her vision impairment, she must rely on others to transport her to and from work. Even with the difficulties that can present, she is one of our most reliable employees.

Dee was nominated by her co-workers for this recognition because of the tremendous respect they have for her. To quote one of her colleagues, "She is an all-around employee, and as a Team Leader, treats her people very well. She is a joy to work with and very helpful to everyone."

Dee's award was presented to her at the 22nd Annual A.V.R.E. Employee Awards and Recognitions Banquet on May 7th. She has also been nominated for the 2010 Peter J. Salmon Award, to be presented by National Industries for the Blind in the fall. Dee has never won that one. Perhaps the 3rd time will be the charm!



MORE AWARDS

Kevin Springer was selected to receive the 2010 **Amy J. Lateer Citizen of the Year Award**. Kevin began working at A.V.R.E. in 2008 in our Industries Business Division. His primary job is running the collator machine in the carbonless paper department. However, he also floats to other departments and can run most of the small machines.

Kevin has retinitis pigmentosa, a condition that will worsen as he ages. Now, it is manifested in both tunnel vision and night blindness. But, he doesn't let his vision loss stop him. Kevin was chosen to win the Citizen of the Year Award because of his strong dedication to Scouting. For the past 6 years, he has been a Cub Scout Leader in his community, and it has become his passion. He has even brought "his boys" to work for a tour! Although he does not yet have any children, he became involved through a friend. For Kevin, the experience has been extremely rewarding, and he enjoys it immensely. He says, "It really makes me feel good to be directing young boys in a positive direction." We are very glad that you do, Kevin!

Jennifer O'Brien was presented with our **Outstanding Community Services Award** for 2010. Jen is the creator and Executive Director of the Magic Paintbrush Project, located in Johnson City, NY. As the mother of two young daughters with cerebral palsy, she understands how difficult it can be to overcome challenges imposed by any disability. She created the Magic Paintbrush Project so that children with disabilities and their families can come together to create magic through art.

Our agency's association with Jen began a couple of years ago when A.V.R.E. Flex Rehab Assistant Laure Griffis contacted her to find out what the Project could do for kids with a vision disability. A wonderful new partnership was born!

Find out more about the Magic Paintbrush Project by reading our article in the Winter 2009 issue of InSight, or visit www.magicpaintbrushproject.org.



THE PENFRIEND

The PenFriend Voice Labeling System, introduced in the fall of 2009, is a small device that allows blind or visually impaired users to voice record information onto special self-adhesive labels. It can be used for labeling just about anything, including medications and dosages, food items (including freezer food) with added cooking instructions, CDs and DVDs, books, clothing -- even items that are dry cleaned, bills that have arrived, and many more.

Shaped like a fat pen, and held like one, the PenFriend is about 6 inches long. On the top of the pen, there are 4 buttons arranged along its length which makes it easy for the user to access and identify. When the pen is held correctly, with the pointed tip end down, the On/Off button is closest to the rear, or top, of the pen. Moving toward the tip of the pen, the second button in line is the Volume up or down toggle. The third button is the Mode button, where different settings are accessed. The fourth button, and the one closest to the tip, is the Record button.



The Record button is used to record and store information. To begin, stick a small round label to the object to be labeled. Press and hold down the Record button, and with the pen in an upright position, briefly touch the label. A beep signals when to begin speaking to record the message. To listen to a recorded message, simply touch the pen tip to the label without pressing any buttons, and the message will be played.

The PenFriend uses 2 AAA batteries, with the battery compartment located on the underside of the device. Across from it, on the side of the pen at the top left, a compartment with a rubberized flap cover houses the external microphone, a USB computer connection port, and a connection for headphones. On the back of the pen, at the top, there is a nodule where the lanyard that comes with the pen can be attached.

The PenFriend comes with 127 specially-coded, self-adhesive labels in a mix of sizes and shapes. Additional labels are available for purchase, in packages of 380 each. The labels are coded by number, and each number is associated with a specific recorded message. There is no limitation on the length of each recorded message – they can be short or long, and the labels can be re-recorded. If you re-record a message onto a label, the previous message will automatically be deleted from the pen's memory. There are 70 hours of recording time available on a 1 GB internal memory.

The PenFriend sells for about \$140 plus tax, and is available to order through our ViewPoint store, with about a 2 week turn around. For more information, or to order a PenFriend, call us at 607-724-2428 and ask for Kim.

PENFRIEND -- AN ACTION REVIEW

By Ralph Gedeon,
A.V.R.E. Vision Rehabilitation Therapist

With PenFriend, the user always knows what to expect. It is light weight, pocket-sized, and is generally easy-to-use. The device always starts automatically on the Record setting when turned on. At this point, the user can either create new labels or play back recorded labels.

There are beeps and chimes that are associated with each function, such as powering on and off, and when paging through the different modes. In addition, the device emits other sounds that indicate when the battery is low, or when the device is automatically shutting off after 3 minutes of non-use.

PenFriend offers an added feature that will appeal to the younger generations: it has an MP3 (music) player. In the MP3 mode, users can listen to music, or even books, that have been downloaded from a computer to the pen via the USB port. The unit is so light and easy to carry that an individual can listen to music or reading material through a headphone, even in public places.

The next generation of the PenFriend may offer more features or setting options to its users. For instance, the Print setting that is introduced in the instruction manual does not yet have its full function capacity in this unit.

Users with a hearing impairment may have difficulty hearing the sharply-pitched beeps, and the small buttons may frustrate some users as they try to locate them. However, this is a very useful little device to have, and it will help individuals to organize and label items independently.



SPREADING THE WORD – ON WHEELS!

On Saturday, May 22nd, A.V.R.E. CEO Bob Hanye and three Senior Managers set out to Margaretville in Delaware County to take part in a 25-mile bike ride in support of the Central Catskills Chamber of Commerce. The event was the 2nd Annual Catskill Scenic Ride-N-Peak.

Margaretville may be 100 miles from our facility in Binghamton, but it is part of our nine New York county service territory, and we wanted to be sure a few more people in that area knew about A.V.R.E. Donning bright yellow jerseys with our Race For Sight logo on them, the foursome set out to ride around the scenic Pepacton Reservoir. The reservoir sits in the heart of the Catskill Mountains and serves as one of New York City's watersheds.

Not only was the ride enjoyable, but several people did indeed ask about A.V.R.E. and the Race for Sight. It presented a great opportunity to spread the word about A.V.R.E. and vision rehabilitation. Watch for those bright yellow jerseys, as the group does more educational bike rides throughout our territory! For more information about our own Race For Sight fundraising event that will be held on July 17, 2010, go to www.avreraceforsight.org.



*Senior Management Bike Team members taking a break at the Pepacton Reservoir.
Left to right: Vice President of Operations Ken Fernald, Director of Development Jenn Cubic, and Director of Program Services Rick McCarthy.*

A NEW APPROACH TO "FRIEND-RAISING"

By Jenn Cubic, Director of Development

Before the Invest in the Vision Capital Campaign that ended in 2008, A.V.R.E. relied on only a direct mail program for raising private contributions. For decades, a little booklet listing actual donors' names accompanied a short letter asking potential donors to help support our vision rehabilitation and employment programs. For many years, this approach worked to

raise money and some awareness throughout our 12-county service territory. However, times have changed and direct mail no longer appeals to most potential donors – it's just not an effective way to educate people about what we do and to get them interested in our mission. People now communicate electronically via e-mail, Facebook, and Twittering! Technology enables people to communicate frequently, interact in real-time, and to share stories using pictures and dynamic graphics. A.V.R.E. needs to change its approach to raising friends.

Our direct mail program included two semi-annual appeals – one in the spring and the other during the holidays. Neither appeal involved personal contact with donors. In order to get to know our donors better and to attract new supporters, we have decided to fold both appeals into one Annual Campaign, beginning just before the holidays and ending with the New Year. The Annual Campaign will include a written solicitation, but it will also include personalized outreach to our donors, as well as a public campaign to educate the community about vision rehabilitation services. It will include personal phone calls, invitations for tours and lunch, and a special art show as the Campaign's official kick-off event. After the Campaign, we will work harder to keep donors and supporters informed about what A.V.R.E. is doing and how their support has helped to continue and improve our services. We will keep them up to date on our Business Division, the new products we are offering, and the jobs we are creating. Private contributions are crucial to our ability to build our capacity in programming and job creation. Today's donors want to know how organizations are using their contributions – how they are making a difference in people's lives.

We have a lot of ground to cover – over 9,000 square miles! There are approximately 30,000 people in our catchment area who might benefit from vision rehabilitation services. There are even more people who know someone who might benefit. We need to reach those people. The InSight newsletter is one tool we will continue to use to educate people about what we are doing at A.V.R.E. If there are topics you would like to know more about, let us know. If there is a story about vision loss that you would like to share, let us know. Share your newsletter with others. Please help us fulfill our mission by spreading the word!



WOULD YOU LIKE TO HELP?

You may use the envelope enclosed in this newsletter to mail your check or to make a credit card donation.

Or...

Go to www.avreus.org
and click on "Donate Now."

COMPLETE STREETS WEEK

During the week of April 19th, AARP conducted pedestrian safety audits throughout New York State. Broome County was a targeted area, and through the analysis of accident reports involving cars and pedestrians, plus input from AARP members throughout the county, Binghamton neighborhood coalitions, and agency partners such as the Broome County Department of Aging, the Cancer Society, Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo's Office, NYS Department of Transportation, Binghamton Metropolitan Transportation Study, and A.V.R.E., almost 20 intersections in the Greater Binghamton area were identified as being potentially dangerous. According to the AARP, New York State ranks 3rd in the nation for pedestrian fatalities for people over the age of 65.

On April 21st, a press conference kicked off a series of on-site audits and pedestrian safety surveys that were taken at each of the identified intersections. In addition to the many agency partners, many members of the community arrived to offer their input and experience. Participants arrived at the various locations at specific times during the next couple of days, and observed and recorded the traffic and pedestrian flow as well as the physical layout of each intersection. Our own Orientation and Mobility Specialists, Erin Kavanagh and George Williams, took part.

Wearing bright red vests with the A.V.R.E. logo on

them and carrying clipboards, Erin and George set to work taking notes and filling out the survey. With the issue of the safety of visually impaired pedestrians in mind, they looked at a number of issues:

1. Does the intersection have properly marked cross walks?
2. Is there a pedestrian crossing signal, does it have a countdown, and does it allow enough time to get across the street?
3. Is the pedestrian signal an Audible Signal for people who can't see the signal across the street?
4. Are there curb cuts, or ramps, for wheelchairs and people who have difficulty walking?
5. Are there contrasting colored tactile squares (Detectable Warning Surfaces, or DWS) on the ramp to help blind people identify where the side walk ends and the road begins?

The results of the surveys will be sent to the NYS Legislature to demonstrate the great need for "Complete Streets" legislature. A bill of this nature would require planning and engineering agencies to take an approach to road design that considers the safety of pedestrians, bicyclists, people with disabilities, and public transportation users, not just motorists. For more information, go to www.completestreets.org.



FREE MATTER
FOR THE
BLIND

Association for Vision Rehabilitation
and Employment, Inc.
174 Court St.
Binghamton, NY 13901-3514



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174 Court St., Binghamton, NY 13901

607-724-2428 FAX: 607-771-8045

Email: avreinfo@avreus.org

www.avreus.org

Editor: Joyce Bucci

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!"