



InSight

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Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment, Inc.

THE 2010 A.V.R.E. RACE FOR SIGHT -- ANOTHER GREAT RACE!

By Jenn Cubic, Director of Development

Once again, we had a picture-perfect day for the A.V.R.E. Race for Sight. Forty-five volunteers, 120 riders, and dozens of spectators came together to make the 2010 Race for Sight a great success. Each year we work to make the race bigger and better, and this year was no exception. In an effort to attract more participants and raise awareness about vision loss and A.V.R.E.'s programs, we introduced some new features this year that will help us more effectively market the race for next year.

Earlier this year, we uploaded a new website dedicated to the Race for Sight. The website offers information about the race, links to interactive maps, registration information, race results, and pictures from the 2009 race. The website gives riders an opportunity to get more details about the race than they would get from a flyer. It also enables us to quickly update information about sponsors and any changes that impact race day. In the days leading up to the race, the website had over 200 new visitors! That's encouraging data as we work to grow next year's race. We invite you to visit the race website at www.avreraceforsight.org.

Another new feature we offered this year was chip timing. In the past, we had to station several people at the finish line and pull paper tags off rider's backs, keeping them in the correct order so we could post results. We were only able to time the first three racers across the finish line; the others had to keep track of their own time. The chip timing uses a barcoded tag system to read and record the time for each racer as they cross the finish line and quickly uploads results to a computer. The chips generate accurate times for racers and greatly reduce the chaos at the finish line and the results board! Check out the website for this year's results.

We also hired a videographer to tape segments of the race. We have always taken pictures, but the video gives spectators a chance to see racers up close and get a feel for the energy they generate. The video will be a great marketing tool when we promote next year's race. You can view the video on YouTube by following the link on the race website or by searching for "Race for Sight" at www.YouTube.com.

Technology has certainly helped to generate more interest in the Race for Sight. Ultimately, it works to raise awareness about vision loss and how people can receive vision rehabilitation services.

We want to thank all of our terrific sponsors who gave cash donations toward our vision programs, as well as prizes, food and beverages for our participants. A special thanks goes to the Binghamton and Windsor Lions Clubs and to Joe and Kurt from the Tioga Velo Club for their support and hours of volunteering to help make the race such a success. Technology helps, but people make things happen!



***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."**

NO EXCUSES!

Why Orientation & Mobility Training is Essential

The rationale for refusing or discontinuing orientation and mobility (O&M) training is as varied as the people who could benefit from this invaluable skill. For some, it may be the weather, especially for those living in extremely hot or cold environments. For others, fear, embarrassment or misperceptions are the root of their reluctance.

Whether blind since birth or from recent vision loss, it is essential to realize that life must, and does, go on. Therefore, it is essential that the person living with vision loss invest the necessary time and effort into learning the skills that will help him or her remain independent and lead a fulfilling life. O&M enables an individual to use a long white cane to navigate safely and efficiently through different environments. Unfortunately, convincing someone that they need these skills can be quite challenging. In this article, we will address some of the most common excuses people give for refusing training and follow with an explanation of why the training is so essential.

Sample excuse: "I can see just fine right now, except... (insert condition here). I don't need a cane or any training. I get around just fine using the vision I have left." (Conditions might include a change in lighting, color and contrast, weather conditions, or health-related issues.)

For many, it is tough to come to grips with losing vision, and some feel that using a long white cane will just draw unwanted attention. It is important to truly understand why someone feels this way. Explaining how the use of a cane can be beneficial when residual vision is not sufficient is key to changing someone's perspective regarding O&M training. After a person has experienced some difficulties because their residual vision has failed them, that person often begins to avoid similar scenarios. Eventually, this results in a loss of independence and limits their activities. Through O&M training, confidence builds, and a person who is visually impaired can come and go as they please, regardless of eye and/or lighting conditions.

Sample excuse: "I'll never go anywhere by myself. My family and friends will take me where I need to go."

Initially, this may sound reasonable. However, after some serious O&M training, the confidence to travel independently will come. O&M instructors are highly trained professionals, and they empathize with their students. Instructors help their students understand that vision loss does not equate to loss of independence or that life as they knew it is over. One of the best ways to help someone understand the importance of O&M training is to ask: "What happens when you want or need to go somewhere and no one is available to take you? What will you do then?" Instructors often find themselves not only teaching

skills, but also reshaping a person's self-perception and addressing misperceptions and fears about blindness.

Sample excuse: "I live in a small rural town. Why do I need to know how to travel on a bus or cross a busy street?"

Even if a person who is blind or visually impaired lives in a small town, it is still very important to learn how to safely cross streets and ride buses. Even if someone does feel entirely comfortable in his or her home environment, it is best to be prepared should negotiating unfamiliar surroundings become necessary.

All of these excuses can often mask the real reasons for not wanting O&M training. Although it is natural to feel that way, it should never stand in the way of keeping, gaining or regaining your independence.

Original article written by Herman Lee Jones, II and Alana Manrow for Focus Newsletter, and printed with permission from the South Texas Lighthouse for the Blind.

IN HER OWN WORDS -- My Thoughts About O&M

By Michele LaComb



"I don't need my cane for my walks in my familiar and quiet neighborhood." That was one of my excuses. What are yours? Most of us with a visual impairment share similar reasons why we choose not to use tools that would enable us to have a more independent lifestyle. Orientation and Mobility (O&M) training changed the way I perceive my situation. I now realize that using the skills I learned is the beginning of a more fulfilling life.

I was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa, and because I am also hearing impaired, it is called Usher Syndrome. In the beginning, with slow and gradual loss, the seriousness of my visual impairment was

minor. At first, it seemed unnecessary to learn the skills needed for safe mobility. After all, I still had a lot of vision left. Also, I began avoiding certain situations that I was not comfortable with, for example, going alone to downtown Binghamton. And I would choose more familiar paths for my daily walks.

I love going for walks! I go for walks mostly for relaxation, and it is an exercise I enjoy. My neighborhood is quiet, peaceful and familiar. I know all the side streets, driveways, and even the holes in the road, and I didn't really need my cane. It was my "freedom." Just recently, however, I am finding that cars are popping into my vision, and now I feel I need to use my cane more. My husband, who has gently and firmly encouraged me to use it, wants me to continue what I have enjoyed for many years. But he wants me to be safe, too.

I do not argue with the need for my cane, but I guess I am sad about it. It was my one independent thing I had left that I really enjoyed. I should be used to the cane by now, but it is probably a vanity thing. I am now using my cane for my walks, but I still want to rebel. I am angry that I, yet again, have to make adjustments. But that is the nature of retinitis pigmentosa – as I lose more of my vision, things I can do today I may not be able to do next month. It is like dealing with a new loss each time.

On my walks, I find that using the cane is tiring, and I need to stop and rest my wrist. My walking pace has changed, as the cane slows me down because I am concentrating. The roughness of the road can slow me down, as well. But after some modifications and continual use of the cane, I am starting to enjoy my walks again. And although it is not the same and I still prefer not to use the cane, I need to be safe. I will keep on walking and learn a new way to enjoy it, even with my cane.

Receiving O&M training has helped me to navigate with more confidence. I communicate my intentions better to others, and I gain more respect. I feel that I can be safer with the skills I learned, and I can still enjoy my walks.



MANAGING BILL DENOMINATIONS

By Ralph Gedeon, Vision Rehabilitation Therapist

Some people who are experiencing vision loss have difficulty managing and identifying their money independently. They are so afraid of making mistakes that they often relinquish this responsibility to others. The following statements highlight the problems and the lack of self-confidence they exhibit in handling money:

- "I sometimes give a \$10 for a \$1, or vice versa."
- "In the grocery store, I just hand my wallet to the person behind me, or to the cashier, to take the money out."
- "I drop my money and I don't know what bill it is."
- "It takes me too long to identify my money."

It is never a good idea to simply hand one's wallet to a stranger! Managing bill denominations can still be an easy task to accomplish, in spite of the lack of adequate vision. Applying the following tips can boost the confidence level to use cash again as a method of payment. When holding the bills lengthwise, these folding methods can be applied:

- A \$1 bill stays unmarked.
- The whole right or left side of a \$5 bill is folded over a quarter of the way, depending on which hand is used to take money out of the wallet.
- Fold over the top right or top left corner of a \$10 bill.
- Fold over the alternate top corner of a \$20 bill.
- Fold a \$50 bill in half.

This folding method can be used efficiently with a 3-slot wallet. The bills for each denomination can be placed individually into a designated compartment. Each bill needs to be arranged in the upright position, with the folds facing toward the front of the wallet. When ready to remove a bill, the person should take out the last bill in that compartment. One should always check the corners at both ends of a \$10 or \$20 bill before pulling it out of the wallet, and should have the free hand over the wallet to prevent other bills from falling out.

With this method, bill denominations are easier to identify and quicker to access and will eliminate the necessity of relying upon strangers for assistance.



The men's 3-slot, folding wallet pictured is available in our ViewPoint retail store. We also carry a clutch-style, 3-slot ladies' wallet. Both styles sell for \$22.95, plus tax.

ViewPoint Retail Store

is open:

Monday ~ Friday

8:00 AM ~ 5:00 PM

A.V.R.E. IS GOING GREEN... WITH BATTERIES!

In this age of a renewed and invigorated awareness of, caring for, and protection of our environment, more and more individuals, businesses and government agencies are "going green." From hybrid cars that use far less gasoline to light bulbs that use less electricity to products that are more biodegradable, much-needed changes are being made.

One major concern is the amount of non-biodegradable and even toxic materials that are going into our landfills. Did you know that over 3 billion batteries are sold in the U.S. each year? And where do most of them end up? In our landfills. It takes over 100 years for an alkaline battery to decompose, and when it does, the metals it contains – lead, mercury, zinc, and cadmium – go into the soil and the water table and eventually make their way into our waterways.



A.V.R.E. has recently added both a new production line to our Industries manufacturing department and a new product for sale in our ViewPoint retail store: Go Green batteries. These batteries contain 0% lead, mercury, and cadmium and are virtually leak-proof due to a special sealing method. They are also packaged in recycled material. But the best part is that they are completely recyclable through a free mail-back recycling program offered through www.irecycled.com. Complete, easy instructions are on their website.

A.V.R.E. purchases the batteries in bulk from PerfPower Corporation. They are then repackaged into smaller quantities in our Business Manufacturing Division and sold to various agencies within New York State, such as the NYC Housing Authority, the NYSDEC, and various school districts.

In addition, we now offer them for sale in our own ViewPoint retail store. The batteries are in stock and come in the usual sizes: AA, AAA, C, D, and 9v. Prices are generally lower than other major brands: a 4-pack of AA batteries sells for \$2.45 plus tax, and a 9v sells for \$1.75 plus tax.

We hope that you will join with us and help improve and protect our environment by Going Green – with Go Green Batteries! And remember to recycle!

A.V.R.E. HELPS SUSTAIN OUR FORESTS

Another growing concern with regard to our environment is what is happening to the forests, not only in the U.S., but across the world. Irresponsible forestry practices, such as the clear-cutting of vast areas of forest used in logging operations in the U.S. and the "slashing and burning" of the rain forests in South America, are leading to devastating results for our environment and for all who live in it. A.V.R.E. is hoping to help change that.

Because we produce paper goods, such as manila file folders, pressboard binders, and computer and copier paper, we are directly involved with what happens in our forests. Because we care about our forests, we have now begun the process to ensure that all of the bulk roll-stock we purchase comes from forests that are properly managed. We want to make certain that the raw materials we purchase do not come from old-growth or rain forests and that the forests used are managed in environmentally sound ways.

We are very pleased to announce that A.V.R.E. has been certified to Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Chain-of-Custody standards. This FSC Certification verifies that A.V.R.E. adheres to international standards and best practices set by the Council and other organizations regarding the raw materials purchased and the manufacturing of our paper products. The certification was given by the SmartWood Program, a division of the Rainforest Alliance. More information about this program can be found at their website, www.rainforest-alliance.org.



The certification process took about 6 months and involved on-site audits of our manufacturing procedures on the floor, as well as audits of our purchasing and selling paper-trail. The auditors wanted to make sure that what we claim we purchase and sell as FSC certified materials, really is! The certification is good for 5 years, during which time we will be audited annually. At the end of 5 years, we will need to go through the re-certification process.

Our first FSC certified product is a specialty paper that is sold back to one of our suppliers. However, we will soon be selling FSC certified manila file folders, and the plan is to eventually have every paper product we sell be FSC certified. It's a noble goal, and we are proud that we are on our way to helping sustain our forests!



OTHER WAYS WE ARE HELPING OUR ENVIRONMENT



With Cleaning Products

Our JAWS Cleaning Products line was featured in a previous issue of InSight. JAWS stands for Just Add Water System. We carry 6 items in this line: a Multi-Purpose Cleaner and Degreaser, a Tile, Grout and Bathroom Cleaner and Deodorizer, a Glass and Hard-Surface Cleaner, a Disinfectant Cleaner and Degreaser, a Food Service Sanitizer, and a Malodor Counteractant. The first three items listed carry the Green Seal of approval.

The Green Seal means that the cleaners are non-toxic to humans, non-irritating to skin and eyes, non-flammable, non-toxic to marine life, contain no known carcinogens, and that they are at least 80% biodegradable.

Our 3 Green Seal approved JAWS items are sold to school districts. Isn't it great to know that we are helping to keep kids healthy and safe from toxic chemicals? If you would like to use these safe products in your home, come on in to our ViewPoint retail store where they can be purchased.

With Recycled Paper Products

Another way we can all help our landfills is to recycle as much as possible. Paper is one of the easiest things to recycle, as most counties have recycling programs that take paper of many kinds, from newspapers to cardboard. Here at A.V.R.E., we strongly encourage all employees to recycle office paper, cardboard boxes, printer and toner cartridges, and plastic and glass containers.

But more than that, all of the manila file folders A.V.R.E. manufactures are produced from roll-stock that contains 30% post-consumer, or recycled, paper material. You can also purchase our file folders in our store. In addition, much of the computer and copier paper we produce is also made from 30% recycled paper. Most of that is sold to the Federal government.

Here at A.V.R.E., we are making good strides toward being environmentally responsible and good stewards of our earth.



THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Robert K. Hanye, President & CEO

A New Way to Communicate

At an agency-wide meeting this morning I asked the question, "How many of you are on Facebook?" About twenty people (half of those in the room) raised their hands.

When I arrived at A.V.R.E. (then it was the Blind Work Association) in early 1999, we had four computers in the whole agency. One was an IBM System 36, one was a personal computer for the Executive Assistant, one was in the quality assurance lab, and one was in fundraising to track donations. The Executive Assistant was the only person with access to the internet, and it was through an old dial-up system. Just about all of our communications were through the US Postal Service or over a land line telephone.

Now we have about 40 desktop computers that are networked through a server, and almost all of these computers have internet access. We have many laptops, a computer training lab, smart phones, and our own web sites. We can access our work computers from home and stay on top of emails and schedules through our cell phones. We receive a large number of orders for products over the internet through something called Electronic Data Interchange (EDI). Reports on consumers for the New York State Commission are completed on a computer and transferred electronically over the internet in a similar way. Boy, have we come a long way!

The point of this history lesson is not the equip-

ment. It is the way we communicate and the speed in which we do it. If we did not have the ability to take orders over the internet through EDI, there is a good chance we would lose that business, and people who are blind could lose their jobs and their paychecks. We communicate almost in real-time with customers, consumers, suppliers, and each other. Even this newsletter was uploaded electronically to the printing company's website! We have to change with the times and the way people communicate with each other.

This also applies to the way we tell our A.V.R.E. story, inform people about the value of vision rehabilitation, and even raise funds to support our services. A decade ago we asked: "Who has a computer?" Now we ask: "Who is on Facebook?" The fact is that more and more people are communicating with friends and relatives, sharing information, identifying likes and dislikes, and learning through social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, blogs and others. We have taken our first step into this world of social media. A.V.R.E. now has its own Facebook page. You can find it by searching on Facebook for A.V.R.E. (don't forget the periods!).

We are now in our first ever Annual Appeal to raise funds and awareness. We expect that Facebook will help us connect with new donors in ways we have not done before. We also expect that Facebook will help us connect with people who need to know about vision rehabilitation, employment opportunities, and all of our services for people of all ages. So check out our Facebook page, share it with your friends, and be sure to "like" us!

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!"