



InSight

Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment, Inc.

Joyce's Story

By Joyce Holmes McAllister



I was born with normal vision and never knew how lucky I was until, at the age of fifty, I was told I had dry Macular Degeneration. Several years later, I was diagnosed with a disease called Fuchs Dystrophy where loss of vision was sudden and required a corneal transplant. Both dry and wet Macular Degeneration can impair vision greatly. For those who acquire wet Macular Degeneration, hemorrhages develop in the affected eye and are usually treated with shots in the eye in an effort to prevent the spread of the hemorrhage into the range of vision. In my own case, I lived with only the dry type of Macular Degeneration for many years, but with continuing vision loss.

Within the past few months, my dry Macular Degeneration changed to the wet type. I developed a hemorrhage in "my good" right eye and quickly lost much more vision. This meant that many activities I had been performing became very difficult. Using my computer, cooking food, doing the laundry, and performing other activities required more sight than I had. This presented a difficult problem for me. Since I am a published poet, the additional loss of sight made using the computer effectively much more difficult.

I was affected in other ways too. Chores that involved the necessities of everyday living became very difficult because I could no longer see the indicator lights or symbols on the stove, dishwasher, washing machine, and microwave. I could not use my stereo because I could no longer see the controls. Reading books on my Kindle became harder, and reading newspapers and magazines was a thing of the past, even with magnification.

The most important and vital source of help when I was faced with my vision loss, was AVRE. In the

Our Mission:

"To create opportunities for success and independence with people who are blind or visually impaired."

very beginning, a low vision specialist tested me for the degree of my vision loss. After that exam, I was given an appropriate magnifying glass to help me as much as possible. This was provided to me without charge.

A representative from AVRE came to my house and provided help in ways almost too numerous to mention. “Feeler” buttons, or bump dots, were put on my stove, dishwasher, washing machine, and my stereo. These “buttons” allowed me, after very little instruction, to use these appliances again, even with my loss of vision. I needed a cell phone. Of almost all of the cell phones on the market, none had buttons large enough for me to see. AVRE gave me the names of two brands of cell phones they felt sure I could use.

AVRE provided me with writing pens made with very dark ink. The first few of these pens were free to me, with more available to buy from their store. The “feeler” buttons for my appliances were also free as well as very bright flashlights and a special light I use to see inside my dishwasher. The representative from AVRE was a source of valuable advice and recommendations, allowing me to learn to cope with this sudden and frightening loss of sight.

AVRE is continuing to help me by researching and recommending resources to aid me in my quest to continue living my life to the fullest, despite sight loss. AVRE has researched and found a computer program for an Apple computer, which, I hope, will allow me to use my computer effectively, even with my low vision. I am a published writer, and as such, I am computer dependent for my writing activities. For anyone afflicted with sight loss, whether from disease or some other cause, the most important and immediate factor is learning how to cope with the loss by utilizing the resources available in order to pursue life and its activities in as meaningful a fashion as possible.

If, in losing sight, you do not make every effort to find the resources to help you pursue as meaningful a life as possible, then you have lost twice. You have lost the ability to continue the joy of living, and the pursuit of creative efforts that can be almost as meaningful to you, as sight itself!



Save The Date!

Our 2nd Annual Dining in the Dark event will be held Thursday, May 9, 2019 at the Holiday Inn Binghamton. The fundraiser includes a wine pull, beer tastings, a silent auction, and an unforgettable blindfolded dining experience.

Individual tickets are \$125, two or more tickets are \$110 each. Tickets can be purchased online or by calling the office at 607-724-2428. For more information, visit www.avreus.org.

A Year in Review

By Ken Fernald, AVRE President/CEO

As I think back on 2018, I could not be more proud of the work we do, the workplace culture we have developed, and the commitment to our mission that is present each day. From the highest one month sales we have ever experienced, to being selected as one of the top 50 non-profits to work for in the nation, to a successful inaugural Dining in the Dark fundraiser, Team AVRE continues to be a high performing organization keenly focused on our mission.

Creating opportunities for success and independence with individuals who are blind or visually impaired is why we come to work each day. Our team of vision rehabilitation professionals drive over 100,000 miles each year, covering nine counties in New York, ensuring the delivery of services like Orientation & Mobility instruction, vision rehabilitation training, functional low vision exams, and career/placement assistance to individuals of all ages. I am proud that AVRE's Health and Rehabilitation Services received very high ratings from the New York State Commission for the Blind during our five-year quality review in 2018.

Our Business Division continued to grow with increased sales and employment opportunities across each of our departments. All of our employees work hard to ensure the accurate and on-time delivery of quality products and services to all of our customers. This is increasingly important and our team strives to exceed expectations. We continue the work to become ISO-certified and anticipate reaching this goal at the end of May 2019.

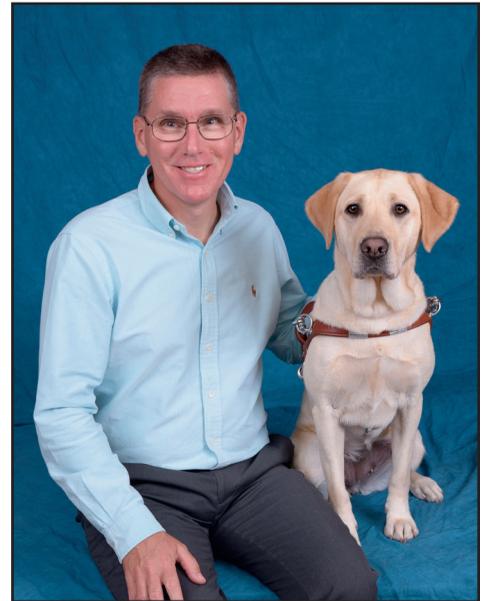
Thank you to the Decker, Mee, and Klee Foundations for support of our recent renovations to expand our production areas. Anticipated to be completed in the coming weeks, the new space will be efficient, modern, and comfortable.

Engagement with, and support from, our community is important to us. Last year, our employees gave back in many ways including donations over \$5,000 to different local charitable organizations. In 2018, AVRE employees bought holiday gifts for 28 children of disadvantaged families and also pitched in to ensure a happy holiday season for our temporary employees.

Our wellness committee kept us moving in the community with employees participating in the 2018 Binghamton Bridge Run and YMCA Corporate Challenge. Three employees who had never run before participated and completed the Bridge Run 5K. We even received some national attention by Runner's World Magazine, covering Winnie (my guide dog trained as a running guide) guiding me to the finish of the half marathon.

The highlight of the year was AVRE's "Fun Day." This was a celebration of being named as one of the "Best Non-Profits to Work For." Our employees and board members enjoyed an afternoon of food, fun, and music.

Thank you to each and every employee and board member for making AVRE an awesome organization. Together, we are an amazing team and I look forward to 2019.



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AVRE 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.

AVRE is an Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity Employer.

If you would like more information about AVRE and its services, please feel free to contact us.

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NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BINGHAMTON, NY
PERMIT No. 271

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

is published quarterly by the

Insight