

Insight

MARCH 2026

PUBLISHED BY ASSOCIATION FOR VISION REHABILITATION AND EMPLOYMENT, INC. VOL. 100

AVRE ENTERS 100 YEARS OF SERVICE! by Kenny Fernald

As AVRE celebrates our 100th year, we have been reflecting on the significance of this milestone. From very humble beginnings, to a now thriving provider of vision rehabilitation services and

employment opportunities for individuals who are blind or visually impaired, AVRE has and continues to make an impact in our community. Our mission “to create opportunities for success and independence with

people who are blind or visually impaired”, while modified over our first 100 years, continues to drive our focus and business strategies.

Since our establishment in 1926,

we have seen tremendous growth in both our business and our vision rehabilitation services.

In 2025 we completed phase 1 of our manufacturing expansion project by adding additional roll stands onto our paper sheeter, allowing us the opportunity to nearly double our capacity in our copy paper production department, create new jobs and bring in new business to the Southern Tier. In 2026, we will complete phase 2 of this expansion with the addition of a new warehouse. As one of downtown Binghamton’s last manufacturing facilities, we pride ourselves on delivering quality products with a meaningful mission for our federal, state and local

and adaptive aids to deliver the best instruction possible. In our century of operations, AVRE has served many thousands of individuals with vision loss throughout the Southern Tier.



Workers at the Broome County Association of the Blind in 1929.

customers. We’ve also grown our services offered to individuals with vision loss free of charge throughout nine counties in the Southern Tier. Our vision rehabilitation team works hard to stay up to date on the latest technology

We are thankful for our community for the support they have provided us over our first 100 years.

We are thankful for our employees, our board members, and the consumers who participate in our vision rehabilitation services.

We are proud of our past, excited about our future and looking forward to what the next 100 years will bring to AVRE.

Kenny Fernald, President & CEO



Kenny and his guide dog Pauly.

THE EVOLUTION OF O&M by Allyson Hedlund



Luigi DiRusso testing Ray-ban Meta Glasses.

The world of Blindness and Low Vision is changing, and Orientation and Mobility is being impacted by the technological boom as much as any other discipline. However, while we are living in a time of amazing innovation, it is important to remember your foundation. Tools like the Smart Cane 2, the Meta Glasses, and Lazarillo can be incredibly beneficial, but as a complement to your skills, not as a primary means of travel. Learning the basics gives you

the chance to embrace all of these amazing developments! Knowing how to travel and problem solve without technology first means that when you do want to try incorporating some new device, you won't be lost if there's a glitch. So, remember to practice your cane techniques and to keep calm and listen for parallel traffic!

CONSUMER SPOTLIGHT by Christopher Dean

My name is Christopher Dean and I have a genetic, retinal degenerative “disease” called Choroideremia and was declared legally blind in 2006 due to it. I currently have less than five (5) degrees in my field of vision, which anyone with low-vision will attest isn't much, but I don't let it stop me. Since being declared legally blind I have obtained my Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing, finishing with a 4.0 GPA, and written five published books, adapted one book to a TV series I am trying to sell and have three books currently

waiting for review before publishing. The book that was the hardest for me to write is called “A Tunnel of Vision: My struggles with vision loss” and is about my experiences from childhood to about 2021 dealing with the progressive loss of my vision and how it has impacted not only my life but the lives of those closest to me.

The greatest thing to come from writing that book was the mother of a 12-year-old boy who had recently been diagnosed with my condition reading it and reaching out to thank

me for sharing my experience because it helps her to understand what her son will be going through and how she may help him. I have also been blessed to connect with an incredible organization called the Choroideremia Research Foundation that is seeking a cure for Choroideremia; the support group there has helped illustrate that even though we may be blind we still have a lot to offer people, and we can't let our inability slow us down or stop us from doing the things that truly matter to us.



MEET THE TEAM by Alyssa Sorrell

Alyssa Sorrell recently joined the AVRE team in February 2026 as an Employment and Career Specialist. Previously, she worked as an Admissions Counselor for Oneonta Job Corps and as a Caseworker Trainee for the Broome County Department of Social Services. Alyssa holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration (Marketing concentration) from SUNY Binghamton. She was born in Newfield New York and grew up in the Southern Tier region. Outside of work, Alyssa is passionate about art, crochet and exploring new areas to hike. Alyssa has no children but has a rescue cat she treats like her first-born child named Boba.

100th Anniversary Celebration



PLEASE SCAN TO PURCHASE TICKETS OR MAKE DONATION

FREEDOM ON THE HORIZON by Jenn King

AVRE launched our newest paper product, Freedom Copy Paper, which is a multi-purpose 10 ream carton in support of the AbilityOne Base Supply Centers (BSCs). The team deserves all of the credit for quickly developing a brand and design which reflects a patriotic red, white, and blue carton and ream. From working with our suppliers to ensure a reliable supply chain, to designing a new carton away from our traditional kraft look, to production, the team pushed



hard to ship the first truckload to Arizona Industries for the Blind. This project reflects a strategic partnership AVRE has targeted for years to support the BSC operators nationally with the potential to grow blind employment. Congratulations to the team!



AVRE MANUFACTURING EXPANSION by Mallory Evans



New rollstand phase 1 of our manufacturing expansion project.

Phase 2 of this expansion project will begin this spring with the construction of a new 10,000 square foot warehouse space at our downtown Binghamton location. We are excited to grow our business as well as our services and create more employment opportunities for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

In 2025, AVRE embarked on a multi-phase \$2.4 million expansion project to our copy paper department. Thanks to generous funding from The Decker Foundation, Empire State Development, The Klee Foundation, The Mee Foundation, National Industries for the Blind, The Tioga Downs Regional Community Foundation and Assembly woman Lupardo, AVRE was able to complete phase one of the expansion project. Phase 1 included the completion of facility modifications to accommodate the installation of a new roll stand for our paper sheeter. This new roll stand has given us the capabilities to double our capacity which will enable AVRE to bring in more business to better fund our vision rehabilitation services.



EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT, MONIQUE WALKER

by John Ellzey

Monique has been an operator with the Veterans Administration, serving at AVRE, Castle Point, and Montrose VA Hospitals, since July 2016, totaling eleven years of dedicated service. She takes pride in being a strong resource for Veterans and her team, often wearing many hats to support daily operations. One of the most fulfilling

parts of her role is providing solutions to challenging issues that arise for her and her co-workers throughout the day. Outside of work, Monique enjoys traveling, attending events, and cooking meals with love. This year, she looks forward to maintaining good health and continuing to be an asset to both Veterans and her coworkers. She is also focused on advancing her career, and sharpening her professional skills.

ALLYSON COMPLETED ACVREP CERTIFICATION

By Allyson Hedlund

Allyson Hedlund, who joined AVRE in Fall 2024 as a Rehabilitation Assistant, will be graduating this semester with her Master's Degree in Orientation and Mobility from Drexel University. She passed the ACVREP certification exam and is excited to continue working in a new capacity with clients. Allyson had previously won a prestigious RAD full-ride scholarship to Drexel, and will graduate again in six more months with her Master's in Vision Rehabilitation Therapy!

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VOICES WITH VISION, A 'FIRESIDE CHAT' by Ian Barrett-Sargent with Jim Keeler

Q: What is your job title and how long have you been working at AVRE?

A: Machine Operator and it's been 11 years. There is really nothing else out there for a blind person, even many times when I have had the qualifications to do the job, but would never be selected because I am blind.

Q: What are some of the challenges of working in the manufacturing department?

A: Finding good people and keeping them employed. Often people who are blind have additional disabilities that can impose limitations on which

jobs they can perform. Working with the sheeter is a fast paced on your feet all day type of environment. Working in the copy paper department; it is chaotic, it is frenetic, it is satisfying.

Q: If you could switch jobs with anyone for a day, who would it be?

A: CEO for a day. Wouldn't change a thing. It would be interesting to know what it's like to run this organization like AVRE, especially for Kenny.

Q: What's one skill everyone in your field should have?

A: Patience. Things will go wrong, people and machinery. Patience will see you through to the other side

of any conflict or challenge. The amazing thing about time is it keeps going. Just keep focusing on the next right step and you will make it through. When everyone is working together it's like a grand slam in a doubleheader - everything clicks, and the momentum just keeps going. Find something you are good at and then find a place to do it.

Q: Do you have any advice for people out there that are unemployed and blind or visually impaired?

A: Keep trying. Find what you are good at then find a place to do it.



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AND EMPLOYMENT, INC.

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