

**Division for the Visually Impaired
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**FREE
MATTER
for the
BLIND**

Vision Loss through the Eyes of a Veteran

Three years ago John Roman learned that he had developed Age Related Macular Degeneration (ARMD). The disease quickly progressed to where he recently learned he was legally blind. With the help of his family, the Delaware Division for the Visually Impaired (DVI) and the Veterans Administration (VA), John is now adapting to life with severe vision loss.



John Roman in military dress displaying commendations and white cane

- John's determination in life was acquired long before his (ARMD) diagnosis; in fact, he eloquently recalls every detail of the day he faced his first battle, D-Day. Originally from Perth Amboy, NJ, eighteen year old John was a long way from home when he arrived in England immediately after basic training. As a member of the 4th infantry, the army Private boarded a ship on the eve of D-Day having no idea where he was headed. John recalled attempting to anticipate what was ahead of him as he sat quietly seasick on the ship under the calm of nightfall. At this time he was unaware he would awake in the morning and storm Utah Beach in Normandy, France in liberating the country from German occupation.

Eighty-nine year old John may have lost a great bit of his vision but his cognitive acuity remains very sharp. He can recall all of the details of the D-Day invasion and his wartime experiences in France. He readily discussed the challenges of being hit with shrapnel for the first time or how he awoke in a British hospital after being shot in the side. As John continued to recount his journey of wartime experiences, he described how he

Congratulations Lions International!

March 24th was recognized by Delaware legislators as being Delaware State Lions Day to honor the Lion's club for their continuous work for people with visual impairments as well as people with disabilities, seniors and low income people. Founded in 1917, Lions Clubs International is best known for fighting blindness by conducting vision screenings, equipping hospitals and clinics, distributing medicine, and raising awareness of eye disease, and other laudable activities. They also have a reputation for helping their community in other ways, such as caring for the environment, feeding the hungry and aiding seniors and the disabled. The Lions have been active within Delaware since 1922 and consists of 35 active Lion's Clubs and over 1261 members.

DVI Views

Division for the Visually Impaired
Delaware Health and Social Services
Daniel Madrid, Director
Elisha Jenkins, Deputy Director



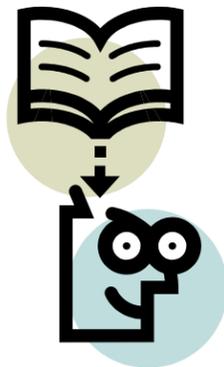
Legislative Corner

Blind and Visually Impaired Education Task Force

It certainly comes as no surprise students who are blind or visually impaired have complex learning needs. In addition to learning the academic core curriculum, most require specific interventions and specialized services to address their unique educational needs. It is not uncommon for students to have multiple vision-related services included in their Individualized Education Programs (IEP). Braille literacy, orientation/mobility training, independent living and assistive technology assessments are just a few of the services that are critical for students to achieve academic success.

Through a partnership with the Delaware Department of Education (DOE), the Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), the Division for the Visually Impaired (DVI) has had the honor of teaching Delaware students who are blind or have visual impairments for many decades. This intricate partnership has led to thousands of students achieving their academic goals and career dreams as they transitioned to adult life. However, changes in population,

state/federal laws, resources and other factors have brought challenges for a decades-old system that is in need of modernization. As a result, DE legislators approved a resolution that created a task force to study the current education system for students who are blind or visually impaired and make recommendations.



In order to properly provide all services for the students, DVI must employ several types of professional staff including Teachers for the Visually Impaired (TVI), Certified Orientation/Mobility Specialists and, Technology Trainers, Child Youth Counselors, Instructional Resource Material Specialists, Paraprofessionals, and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. The resolution acknowledges that DVI currently serves more students than the mandated student-teacher ratio of 28:1 and there are constraints on resources due to the current model design. Director of DVI and task force member, Daniel Madrid recognizes that the system is in need of enhancements in both design and resources. "DVI employs an array of dedicated, highly skilled related service professionals that provide the foundation for children with visual impairments – an im-

More DART

Recertification Efforts at DART

In order to help streamline the eligibility process, DART First State will begin a new process for recertification of paratransit customers.

- ◆ **Standard certification** (full medical verification & in-person interview) will now be for five (5) years, unless the nature of the disability is temporary. This will include new applicants, as well as those who are recertifying.
- ◆ DART recognizes that some paratransit applicants have disabilities that pose significant challenges regarding the independent use of fixed routes **AND** that those disabilities may never change. As such, a "**Simplified Recertification**" process has been developed that will eliminate the need for medical verification for some riders. Those who are eligible will receive a letter and forms by mail.

- DART will work with **community agencies** to streamline recertification processes.
- Rather than bringing individuals one by one into a DTC facility for an in person assessment, DTC staff will make arrangements to come to the agency to meet with riders.

Revised No Show Procedure Coming Soon

DART has been working to address concerns riders expressed regarding the way in which **No Shows** were handled. Established categories (**No Show, Cancel at door, Cancel late**) were assigned points and timeframes. The revised process is designed to be fair and identify those who show patterns of abusing the system as opposed to imposing consequences on those who make occasional mistakes or have circumstances that are beyond their control.

An accumulation of points, over designated timeframes, may lead to consequences ranging from a warning up to 30 days loss of service. DART will be neatly outlining the system explaining points and consequences. This information, along with several options for cancelling trips will be available on their website at in the coming weeks.

DVI Eligibility & Registry Info

If you have questions and would like to talk to an intake specialist, please call (302) 255-9800. **Eligibility** criteria for DVI services:

- **Totally Blind**- No Light Perception
- **Legally Blind**- 20 / 200 visual acuity in the better eye with correction; OR, has a field restriction limited to 20 degrees or less
- **Severely Visually Impaired**- 20/70 to 20/200 visual acuity in the better eye with correction

Statewide services are designed to assist people with visual impairments to function as independently as possible whether in school, work, the community or their home. Services are provided to three key groups of consumers:

Educational age (0 - 21)

Primary employment age (21-65)

Older Delawareans (55 +)

DVI Registry

- The Delaware Code directs **physicians** to report persons who are legally blind to DVI for inclusion on the state registry.
- All information on the registry is held in the strictest confidence.
- Being included on the registry does not mean services will be provided without consent.
- Being on the registry ensures more timely service if and when requested; and
- Helps DVI financially plan so we can continue to meet the needs of the state.

Currently there are nearly **3,000** people on our Registry. National data indicates that a state with Delaware's population might expect **6,000** persons to meet our eligibility criteria.

Task Force Cont'd

portant system that deserves statewide re-examination at least once every five years though has gone unexamined at this level for several decades" according to Director Madrid.

The task force, a cross-section that includes officials, educators, parents, members of the public, and others who can contribute valuable information, begins its journey in February and is to submit a thorough report by June 1, 2015. The aggressive timeframe requires the group to quickly analyze the current system, compensation, standards, funding, appropriate education model, assistive technology provisions, IEP and transition planning.

Dates and Locations for Upcoming Taskforce Public Meetings

Friday, April 24 from 10AM-12PM

Wednesday, May 6 from 6-8PM

Wednesday, May 20 from 6-8PM

Wednesday, May 27 from 6-8PM

"DVI is very excited to have the educational structure reviewed in such systematic approach and is looking forward to the participation of the public and its members." added Madrid. Between March and May, 2015, the State of Delaware is holding multiple meetings which can be found at <http://www.delaware.gov> then visiting the Public Meeting Calendar. The first meeting is scheduled for March 10th at 1:00 p.m. at Smyrna School District Administration building.



eventually made his way into a chemical outfit that was stationed in what is now known as Charleville-Mézières, France where he was assigned the task of removing detonators from shells. "That's when things started happening;" stated John, "not just with the war but with my life!" John proceeded to talk about one night in particular when his friends insisted that he join them at a café for a drink. While at the café John attempted to dance with a woman who turned him down upon first approach! Not easily discouraged John continued to ask the young woman repeatedly to dance. And, she turned him down...repeatedly. Before the night was through the persistence paid off when Jacqueline agreed to one dance. As John tells the story of the café it became evident that he knew his determination that night in France had paid off in ways he never would have imagined. That one dance with Jacqueline led to many other dances and nearly 69 years of a beautiful marriage. Together John and Jacqueline have six children, dozens of grandchildren, oodles of great-children and millions of memories.



John Roman using the electronic magnifier.

Throughout the years John continued to tackle adversities head-on including the barriers associated with vision loss. ARMD is an eye disease that blurs the central vision that is needed for activities such as driving or reading. John stated that he was shocked when his ophthalmologist informed him that he had in fact, progressed to the degree of legal blindness. His doctor initiated the process of helping John to obtain services. He admitted his skepticism and disbelief that he would receive services in a timely manner but much to his surprise, things happened quickly. Almost immediately, he was connected with DVI and the VA who worked together to help him adjust.

DVI offered Independent Living and Orientation/Mobility services to help John manage his daily activities. Roxann Williams, a DVI Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist (CVRT) taught John adaptive techniques such as using a signature guide and a pen that produces a bolder stroke. "He's such an amazing person" said Williams "he just keeps overcoming the obstacles that life puts in front of him." DVI and the VA worked together to

Community Partnerships



The DVI, **BlindSight Delaware (BSD)** and **Vision to Learn** will join forces to raise awareness during **Healthy Vision Month**. The three agencies will share an information booth on May 2, 2015 at the Dover Days Festival on Legislative Mall. Dover Days is one of the largest family festivals held each year, drawing nearly 50,000 visitors throughout the weekend event.

Formerly the **Delaware Association for the Blind**, BSD recently underwent an organizational restructuring that resulted in the name change. Their name may be different but BSD



the same organization that was designed specifically for people with visual impairments. BSD staff will be available on May 2nd to discuss their expansive 65 year history as well as the large menu of services that includes a low-vision product center, peer support, recording services, recreational programs and youth camps and more.



Founded in 2012 in California, Vision to Learn provides free vision screenings and eye glasses to school aged children. This relatively new initiative has grown quickly and was able to launch in DE in October 2014. Since opening in DE, Vision to Learn has examined over 500 kids and provided 450 pairs of glasses.

Finally, DVI will have staff available at the event, to discuss services and eligibility. Come out to visit us and have a free vision screening in the Vision to Learn Mobile Eye Clinic!



DART Update

Elderly & Disabled Transit Advisory Committee (EDTAC)

EDTAC is a working group that meets regularly to discuss current issues impacting individuals with disabilities that are utilizing DART paratransit services as well as fixed route bus services. The EDTAC is comprised of riders, DART First State staff, and representatives from agencies working with the aging and disability communities. If you would like to get involved, contact Bonnie Hitch at 302-760-2809 or bonnie.hitch@state.de.us.

Fare increase

- Effective January 18, 2015, the cash fare is \$1.75, \$0.70 cash reduced fare and daily pass is \$3.70.
- The cost for Para Transit rides will increase by

New Sussex County Routes

Are you aware of all of the recent DART changes? Sussex County now has three new 'flex' routes running on weekdays every hour from 6:00 AM until 7:00 PM.

- **901F Georgetown** - loops around Georgetown connecting to Route 206 to Lewes and Rehoboth; Route 212 to Bridgeville, Seaford, Laurel and Delmar; Route 303 to Milford and Dover; and new 902F Flex Route to Millsboro.
- **902F Georgetown-Millsboro** - provides new service between Georgetown and Millsboro with the same connections listed above.
- **903F Seaford** - loops around Seaford with connections to Route 212.

This new service provides regular bus service to designated bus stops AND has the flexibility to accommodate curbside pick-up/drop-off. With a reservation, the bus will go off-route up to one mile of the regular route. Reservations for off-route service must be made at least 2 hours prior to the trip; however, you can conveniently book your trip up to 2 days in advance as well. Call 1-800-652-3278 and select option 3 to book your reservation. Buses are equipped with seatbelts, bike racks, and are accessible to people who use wheelchairs. With the exception of reserving an off-route trip, fares for flex routes are the same as all regular routes. The cost for the reserved off-route option is \$1.00.

More DART on pg. 11

Vet Cont'd

help John obtain devices to assist him with daily living, such as an electronic magnifier, a white cane, a talking watch and book player in the home so that he was able to regain some of the control he lost. Although John misses reading, driving and television, he has learned that he can still enjoy pleasures in life with limited vision. For instance, he was introduced to the National Library Service for the Blind (NLS). NLS offers an entire library of books in alternate formats so people who have visual impairments can continue to enjoy literature. The service is free to eligible borrowers, offers both Braille and audio formats, and is circulated by postage-free mail. He really enjoys this service and the fact that he can continue to indulge in a good book as he had done so often throughout his life. John also learned that vision is not needed for some television shows such as the news or Jeopardy. John admitted that he occasionally still gets angry about his vision loss but his wife reminds him that things could be worse. Those words reassure him that the vision loss is just another bump in the road.

John and Jacqueline go back to France frequently. Although all of their trips are memorable, none were more awe-inspiring than their trip last year. John was shocked when he learned he was a recipient of the French Legion of Honor award dur-

ing the ceremonies commemorating the 70th anniversary of D-Day. France has long given this prestigious distinction to U.S. veterans who made particular contributions to freeing the country from German occupation. He added this to his already vast collection of commendations with honor and pride.

"A-Number One!" was John's reply when asked what he thought of the services he had experienced since DVI and the VA got involved. It's reassuring to see that John's country has been there when needed just as he was for his country.



DVI

Improving Perception

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The Healing Power of Pets

Submitted by Christina Motoyoshi
Office of Animal Welfare



James "Ty" Case is an administrative officer of the Business Enterprise Program for the Department of Health and Social Services' Division for the Visually Impaired. Assisting those who are blind or visually impaired is something he understands all too well. Ty has been blind for nearly twenty years after losing his eyesight to diabetes.

Lying next to his desk is Ty's "assistant", his loyal guide dog, Max. The handsome yellow Labrador Retriever has been Ty's guide dog and companion

for 18 months. "There are so many acts of daily living and working tasks that require sight", says Case. "With Max, I can travel more efficiently. I don't have to impose on another person to guide me and therefore I am more independent. A guide dog also makes an excellent companion." Ty rides from Dover each day with other state workers from Kent County to his office in New Castle. "When the van drops us off near our door, Max takes right over and guides me to the door, through the building and right to my office door. His precision with daily repeated routines is perfect", says Case. In non-routine situations, Ty can use commands such as "find the door", "find the elevator", or "follow Holly", his wife, and Max knows what to do. At home, Max guides Ty to the barn so that he can feed his horses.

Max came from the Guide Dog Foundation for the Blind, a nonprofit organization in Smithtown, New York that provides guide dogs free of charge to blind people seeking increased mobility, independence and companionship. They specifically matched Ty with Max, based on personality, lifestyle and physical needs, and the group provided extensive training.

Although Max and Ty make a great team, Ty says at home, Max seems to prefer the company of Ty's wife. It may be because Max's puppy raiser was a woman. "Here at work, he has a long list of lady friends that visit him nearly every day and he loves the attention," says Case. Not a bad day at the office.

News You Can Use Innovative Technology – Be My Eyes App

Danish inventor Hans Jorgen Wiberg, discovered a way to help people who are blind quickly access assistance for everyday tasks. Be My Eyes, launched in January 2015, is a new app that connects those with visual impairments with sighted people.

The iPhone has been perceived as one of the easiest and most accessible devices for assisting people who have visual impairments. The Be My Eyes app adds to the cache of accessible tools developed specifically for people with visual impairments. Using the app is very simple. The person requesting help



- makes a video call to the person providing assistance. They use the video feature to show the person on the other end the item they need identified.
- The 'helper' acts as their eyes and describes it to them. There is no cost to download the app and the 'helper' can refuse calls if they are busy.

It is widely known that people with vision loss learn to adapt in ways that sighted people could never comprehend; however, there are still barriers with everyday things that require a bit more assistance. For example, the ingredients in a food item or an email that is not compatible with their screen reader. These are the little things that sighted people take for granted but can cause headaches for those who have difficulties with vision. These are the little things of which Be My Eyes can assist.

Hans Jorgen Wiberg invented this app because he is a person with a visual impairment who realized that Be My Eyes can make a big difference in the everyday lives of people all over the world. The response has been overwhelming. According to the Be My Eyes website, more than 160,000 sighted people have provided nearly 55,000 assists to roughly 16,000 people. The app is currently only available in IOS but an Android version is in development. Visit www.bemyeyes.org for more information.