

NO LIMITS



Newsletter for the Earle Baum Center of the Blind

From the Center

Summer is a great time of the year at the EBC. Following the abundance of late rains, we are ready to take advantage of our beautiful outdoors under warm skies.

We have some staffing changes. Mali Lopez has decided to go back to graduate school. We wish Mali lots of luck. Cristobal Leon, a multi-talented man, will take over the outreach efforts. He is seen on our web site with Denise, our Rehabilitation Teacher, demonstrating the Salsa (their performance shocked many observers who did not know that blind dance partners could be so good). We are also very excited to announce that Jennifer Frazier has joined our staff as an Adaptive Technology Specialist. Jennifer comes with an outstanding track record and will teach both at the EBC and throughout the community. Jennifer's guide Jam will be among the many guide dogs who think of the EBC as an on leash dog park.

I also want to welcome our newest Board Member, Trish Gunty. Trish is a CPA with a diverse employment background. In addition to her keen business acumen, Trish is very enthusiastic and energetic. Trish will help the Board formalize medium and long term plans for the EBC and help raise funds.

On May 5, the EBC celebrated Cinco de Mayo with a large and spirited party. Entertainment included classical Latin guitar mu-

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sic, dance performances including a tap dance version of the Mexican Hat Dance, Salsa Dancing and a fantastic performance by the Danza Azteca de Sonoma of Sonoma State University. One of my particular highlights, besides the great Mexican food, was watching our Rehabilitation Teacher, Denise, tap dance with Maycie, a five year old blind girl who was inspired to learn tap while mentoring with Denise. It was nothing less than wonderful. And I believe that Maycie was the first person ever to wear down Denise.

Finally, three special thanks: David Gustafson and LeAnn Langeliers of the Organizational Development Masters program of Sonoma State University for process training to our staff; Yvonne Pacendini for helping our participants plant and maintain our vegetable and herb gardens; and Robin Clover, Mike Hufnagel and Christina Brenner for adding a great EBC movie clip and donation sight including online credit card donations to our web site as their University of San Francisco MBA community project. All of you have been great.

Lots more on the horizon including the need for new facilities that include training kitchens, meeting rooms, crafts, manual skills room and more. Is there some way you can help make it happen?

Allan Brenner, Executive Director

WHERE ARE ALL THE “PEOPLE LIKE ME” ?

by Jeanne Krause

After 2 years of weekly Laser treatments on both eyes for Diabetic Retinopathy, my Ophthalmologist told me he felt he had done all he could do.

Exhausted, I scraped myself off the floor, pulled myself together and took a long look at what was left. Gone was my peripheral vision.... All of it. I had black areas in my forward vision like pieces missing from a puzzle. Swimming throughout this odd picture were debris in the form of floaters and flashers which would further confuse my vision by moving and changing position. All in all, I felt very disoriented by what my eyes told me I was seeing. I didn't trust that this picture would not suddenly change and I would take a fall, knock something over or walk into a wall. My reality as I saw it through my eyesight was definitely not stable. This, in turn, eventually would cause me to doubt my own mental stability. Was everything an illusion of some sort?

Just as my reflection in the mirror had begun to fade, the person I had been also began to disappear. I stayed home where it was safe for me and the world was safe from me. I had to quit working because I was now “legally blind”. I couldn't relate to what was happening in other people's lives nor they to mine. I saw myself as diminished and subconsciously began to diminish in my physical presence until I weighed 93 lbs. I wanted to fold myself into a neat, small package. I didn't want anyone to notice me or to call attention to the problems I was having negotiating my every clumsy movement. I wanted to dis-

tance myself from my family because I felt like I had lost my value. I didn't want them to see me or know me like this: useless, hopeless. I was not the same person they had always known and depended upon.

I didn't see a purpose for living an un-sighted life. I would become a burden. I needed gentle training and mental adjustment to what was going to become my future. One day my energy can be up, the next day I can feel fatigued. I asked my doctors where people like me go to live normal lives. **WHERE WERE ALL THE PEOPLE LIKE ME WHO WERE UNABLE TO SEE???** The Eye Doctor works on the eye to save it, Thank God, but he doesn't provide therapy or lists of referrals for re-training.... Yet.

Finally, my Ophthalmologist did say he had just heard about a relatively new place called **The Earle Baum Center of the Blind** here in Santa Rosa. He suggested I check it out and get back to him if it appealed to me.

I held my breath and called. Immediately, I was welcomed with understanding and kindness. There was a certain anxiousness in the voice of the man to whom I spoke. An anxiousness for me to visit the center, to attend their next meeting of “Thursday Thinkers”, to get there and allow The Earle Baum Center to help me.

This is THE place to meet “people like us” who are coping with the shock, pain and the fear of living in the world without vision. Here are classes of “**Adjustment to Vision Loss**”, an introduction to information, techniques and equipment that make life manageable; safe, updated ideas for a 2003 world. I am learning mobility skills too... how to use public transportation and

not be held hostage by lack of vision. In a word: **INDEPENDENCE** ! Through the Technology class, I will have the opportunity to find adaptive equipment for my computer. Imagine my excitement at the thought of not having to give up my closest link with the outside world – the **WEB!**

My most favorite moments are during the “**Living with Vision Loss Class**”, our support group, which is held after class on Wednesdays. We are of all ages and both sexes. But for all our diverseness, we are immediately bonded by our loss and our need. We are struggling to get through each day with the loss of sight and we desperately need to share the bond of the support we receive from each other. It is a safe place to speak of your frustrations; discover that a certain thing that happened to you has happened to someone else and how they handled it; find yourself mirrored in someone else’s experience and that someone may be a person you have come to admire for their resilience and positive-ness. Each person has their own inspirational gift so you may end up by having a composite role model to keep with you in times of need. The person who makes these dynamics occur is **Dr. Susan Hirshfield**. She is a genuinely caring and certainly a guiding angelic person whose weekly presence is our Blessing. She encourages us to “step out of the box”, to try alternative methods of relaxation self care and self healing, and she urges us to become proactive. She helped me find **My Voice** again, but that’s another success story. She is so real and warm that she evokes

that same response from each of us. We don’t stay stuck in our difficulties. We seek solutions. We strive to be the best we are able to be because of the cautious fearlessness she teaches us.

If you can identify with any of these feelings of alienation, insecurity, loss of self, loss of way, I would urge you to call **The Earle Baum Center of the Blind** at (707) 523-3222. Don’t talk yourself out of it or procrastinate. There is much reading material about the classes available. Get an information package. You will find many opportunities to help you “get a life” again. Here, for the Blind or Visually Impaired, is a world of skill building, coping mechanisms, support groups, fun activities, and truly caring Instructors who love what they do. Perhaps you are where I was and have given up hope of ever feeling whole again. You can be put together again, even better and more enlightened than before. The people here are like people like us: hurting, but healing; useful, not useless; hopeful, no longer hopeless.

March 27, 2003

Please save **October 11, 2003** for the EBC’s first fundraising event. The **EBC Dog-a-thon, ‘A Walk for Independence’** will include a walk with your pet dog, guide or service dog, stuffed dog or pretend dog to the Earle Baum Center followed by a breakfast, dog games and fun. Participants will bring pledges or pay a fee to be included in the fundraiser. Please spread the word, plan to volunteer or participate.



EBC's Sewing Instructor is on the Mend

Mickie Dion has volunteered at the EBC since its opening back in October of 1999 and recently began training visually impaired persons to sew using adaptive techniques. Chances are that if you have called the EBC the voice you heard answering the phone was Mickie's. Mickie suffered a stroke in February of this year, which affected her speech & memory with generalized weakness on her right side. We are happy to announce that Mickie is on the 'Mend' and back to volunteering at the EBC with her guide dog, Blanche.

Upcoming Events:

Beep Baseball -Call to sign up!

Summer BBQ's

1st & 3rd Fridays 11:30-12:30

Tandem Bike Rides—

Call for details & to reserve a time

Friday Movie Day at EBC

Described Videos 9am—11am

October 11, 2003— Dog-a-Thon

'A Walk for Independence'

Fundraiser— Watch for Details

Contact information: www.earlebaum.org email: ebc@earlebaum.org

Tel: (707) 523-3222

Info line: (707) 636-2769

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**FREE MATTER
FOR THE BLIND**

**EARLE BAUM CENTER OF THE BLIND
4539 Occidental Road
Santa Rosa, CA 95401**

MISSION STATEMENT

The Earle Baum Center of the Blind was conceived and established by the blind to provide facilities and foster programs in such areas as education, technology, rehabilitation, health, fitness and recreation, to improve the personal, social and economic condition of the blind and vision impaired.