



## Newsletter for the Earle Baum Center

Serving People With Sight Loss  
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August 2011 Volume 11 Issue 3

### From the Center

Summer 2011 at the Earle Baum Center is stunning. All around our 17 acre rural property, the deep green foliage is now



offset by the dried, golden fields. The grasses are mowed low and one can explore every inch of the property and discover new things. On a hot day, it is a pleasure to sit on a bench under the dense canopy of one of our many live oak trees, which provides relief from the burning sun, each tree with its own micro-climate. The sound and moisture around the courtyard fountain also seems to have a cooling effect. The EBC is an idyllic place to spend summer days.

We are in the midst of our annual Barbecue Season, which has been a smashing success. These outdoor, bimonthly meals prepared by staff and volunteers have been a tradition since 2000. This year, coordinator Ahlia Warren and the crew of volunteers are terrific. The food is fresh, well planned, delicious, and satisfying. The serving staff has been spot on. We feel very fortunate to offer such a great meal and social opportunity to EBC constituents.

Equally important to the food is the camaraderie among the attendees. We generally have at least two board members in atten-

dance along with EBC staff and between 40 and 60 diners. The mood is fun and joyful and the meals are the best bargain in town. There is nothing better than breaking bread with our friends and family.

EarleFest 2011, our benefit concert of Roots and Americana Music takes place on Saturday, September 24. The lineup is once again stellar and the whole event is looking better than ever. We continue to seek sponsorships and donations in support of the event, as well as silent auction items. All proceeds are used to support the good work of the Earle Baum Center.

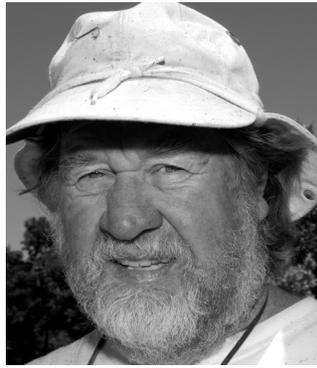
As for me, I will be attending a variety of meetings in the next few months requiring extensive travel to Southern California, Sacramento, and New York. In addition, the Earle Baum Center is working collaboratively with a group of Bay Area agencies, serving people with sight loss, to organize and host the fall, 2012 meeting of Vision-Serve Alliance, of which the EBC is a Founding Member. The organization brings CEOs together from around the country to learn, share ideas, build relationships, advocate, and improve the overall condition of services for people with sight loss. We are excited to be a co-host to share our amazing region of the Country.

Have a healthy and happy summer!

Allan Brenner, President/ CEO

## **New Staff Addition**

I am pleased to announce that long time volunteer, Ray Thompson, has joined the staff of the EBC. Ray is the Facilities Manager overseeing the grounds and buildings. As a volunteer, Ray was nearly singlehandedly responsible for converting our beautiful grounds from untended fields to a park like setting. Since the beginnings of EarleFest, Ray's enthusiasm, commitment, and work ethic made him our version of the Pied Piper. He brought together a great team of volunteers including, but not limited, to our late friend Dave Lewis, landscape expert, Bill Verran, and a large group of Petaluma Paddlers. Welcome Ray Thompson.



## **Spotlight: James Harris**



Desperation brought Jim Harris to the Earle Baum Center. He had been suffering from glaucoma for 40 years and was in denial about his condition for much of that time. Through

his challenging search for help, someone mentioned the Earle Baum Center. The Center he says, "has been a miracle," and he reports that his whole life has changed for the better. He's met wonderful people at the Center, both students and instructors, who help each other. "We've become family," states Jim. He has been working with the Department of Rehabilitation and has been receiving service at the Center since May 1st of this year.

Talking to Jim is like talking to a good friend, both interesting and enjoyable. This

quality has served him well over the years and largely the reason why he was so successful during the various stages of his career. As a young man, Jim spent many years as a buyer with Allied Department Stores which took him from Dallas to New York and finally out to the Emporium San Francisco. After a time he decided that he wanted to take a different direction and join the "single most important industry in San Francisco," the hotel and hospitality business. Jim accepted a position as a front desk clerk and he adds, "I had a blast!" Indeed. The San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau recognized Jim's outstanding abilities by giving him a prize and honoring him at an annual awards ceremony at the Carnelian Room. Next, Jim joined a wine country tour company as a guide leading groups. "I have to be out front... I love mixing with people," says Jim.

Years ago, not long after his diagnosis, Jim called his identical twin brother in Arkansas to tell him about the glaucoma and recommend that the kids get their eyes examined. His nephew answered the phone and much to his dismay reported that, "Uncle Jim, Dad can't see so well." On August 15<sup>th</sup>, the Harris twins will celebrate their birthday and this year Jim's brother will receive a care package with many of the adaptive items that Jim has learned about at the EBC such as bright tape to make certain household items more visible.

Jim's enthusiasm for EBC is infectious. "They're all saints in my mind and they all work together well." He chuckles, "The people at the EBC are all Ann Bancrofts!" (A reference to her role as Anne Sullivan in The Miracle Worker, the story of Helen Keller.) Jim has received a lot of training since May and feels he is getting more than he expected. He has worked

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with Susan Hirshfield, Lora Monemzadeh, Jeff Harrington, Denise Vancil, and Dale Godfrey. Such words and phrases as delightful, wonderful, fantastic, and no barriers flow easily from Jim as he describes the instructors and other folks at EBC with which he works and interacts. He describes Ahlia at the reception desk as his "telephone friend." Jim says he looks forward to going out to the EBC and does not look forward to the end of his classes.

In addition to enjoying his time at the EBC, Jim finds pleasure in everyday activities like grocery shopping and just getting out and about. "I went to a play the other evening for the first time in a long time. I'm doing pretty well." Jim's multiple interests also have him exploring the possibility of organizing special projects such as CPR training for those with sight loss and earthquake preparedness classes. "We need to know these things like anybody else," states Jim. In a sense, Jim's "hobby" is trying to figure out how to help others. He is especially interested in learning how to best reach out to underserved members of the community. Jim also feels strongly that the family members of those with sight loss get support and learn how to adjust as well.

Jim is philosophical about his sight loss, "We must accept our disability and move forward." Jim reflects on his time at the EBC, "I may have lost one thing, but I have gained so much more: more friends, more life, more self knowledge. You become more powerful." If asked what Jim would tell someone who is in denial about sight loss Jim replies, "You may not be able to see, but open your eyes! Come on buddy, let's go! Follow me to the Earle Baum Center!"

## Spotlight: Heather Cooke



By all accounts Heather Cooke is a very directed young woman. She came to the Earle Baum Center just over two months ago to receive some technology training with Jacques Law, as well as orientation and mobility training with Lora Monemzadeh. She

also underwent a low vision evaluation at the Center's Low Vision Clinic, the only such clinic in the North Bay region.

The training Heather receives at the EBC is in support of her educational and career objectives. When asked what she would tell someone about EBC Heather quickly replies, "They are friendly and they get things done."

Before deciding upon her career path, Heather, describes herself as having "itchy feet." She moved around a bit; she's lived in Berkeley, Concord, and San Francisco. She also spent time in Connecticut and Washington state. Heather now lives in Santa Rosa and attends Santa Rosa Junior College. She is enrolled in the child development certificate program and will attain her certificate in the spring of 2012. "The most challenging thing about attending SRJC is finding my way around campus" adds Heather. Ideally, after graduation, Heather will find her dream job at a small school working with pre-school aged children.

Heather has lived with sight loss from birth. She grew up on the Monterey Peninsula and was largely educated in the public school system attending the California School for the Blind in Fremont during her senior high school year. She explains that

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her existing vision is somewhere between a low and high partial. Early on, Heather used large print at school and started learning Braille at 9 years old. Today, Heather relies more heavily on technology, audio books, and occasionally a magnifier.

Stubborn and independent are two words Heather uses to refer to herself. She explains that over the years she has softened and is now more open to adaptation. For example, Heather refused the white cane up until she was 16 years and when she finally started using it, it was “a big deal.” Now a guide dog user, Heather is working with her third dog Golden Retriever, “Biff,” who is fast nearing retirement. Her next guide will be a German Shepherd dog from Guiding Eyes in New York. “I no longer view adaptations as NOT being independent. I am good at technology and have finally given into using speech on my phone and computer.”

Also over the years, Heather reveals that she has learned how to deal with other people’s reaction to her blindness. “I now react more calmly with a more educational approach. I ask questions. I clarify.” To illustrate her point, Heather recounts a recent experience in which she was refused access to a night club. The bouncer would not let her inside because of her guide dog. He even refused to get the manager, when she requested to speak to one. Heather called the next day, “Not because I wanted a confrontation. I wanted an apology and I wanted to let leadership know what happened and why it was not correct.” Heather especially enjoys educating children who encounter her guide dog Biff for the first time.

A priority of Heather’s is spending time with her family: two brothers, a foster brother, and her “little” sister, whom she speaks of so very proudly. “My little sister will be at-

tending college in Japan. She’s really smart.” Heather is busy but in her spare time she has varied interests: reading, video games, tandem bike riding, yoga, meditation practice, and spending time with her other housemates: Felines Pigen and Pippin. She also likes to hang out with friends and catch a movie now and then. Travel is also a passion. She’s visited Europe and she’s traveled widely across the US, mostly on her own. When asked if there is something she would like to share about herself, without hesitation, Heather states, “I can do anything and it’s just going to be different.”

### **Visitor / Volunteer Center**

The Visitor & Volunteer Center recently welcomed new volunteer, Toni Lopez. Toni recently completed classes with Denise Vancil and Susan Hirshfield, and is currently being trained to help out in the office at the Volunteer Center. Welcome aboard Toni!

A special “welcome back” goes to Erik Smiley! Erik is back working as busy as ever at the Volunteer Center. He has been recovering from an accident in March. It is great to have him back!

The library in the Visitor’s Center is constantly being updated with new selections. Most recent to the collection is a three disc book written by EBC community member Gaye Hogan entitled “*Until Further Notice.*” Also, now featured in the library, are new assorted educational courses on disc such as history, science, Greek tragedies, and Shakespeare. These are great mini-courses to help tune up the brain cells!

Please stop by and have a cup of coffee or tea and check out the new additions to our library. For further information about the Visitors and Volunteer Center, please call 707-636-0082.

## EarleFest Update

On Saturday, September 24<sup>th</sup>, the Earle Baum Center will magically transform into the venue for the **4<sup>th</sup> Annual EarleFest: A Celebration of Americana Music**. The everyday bucolic serenity of the Center will be supplanted with lively music, dancing, and the familiar summer-time aromas of BBQ and sunscreen. As with earlier EarleFests, the cars will stream through the EBC's gate filling the Center's manicured fields and orchards.

This year's EarleFest features another stellar lineup of local and internationally known musicians: The Flatlanders (Butch Hancock, Joe Ely, Jimmie Dale Gilmore), Paul Thorn Band, Chuck Prophet and the Mission Express, Audrey Auld, and our own lovable, local Jug Dealers. The lineup offers a delicious buffet of musicians within the Americana music spectrum with a promise of fun for everyone!

The Silent Auction will be bigger and better than ever with a plethora of outstanding items to bid on! Lagunitas Brewing returns this year with a refrigerated beer trailer featuring their delicious, frosty microbrews. Fine local wines will also be available. This year, we are delighted to have Larry Vito's Bar B Que Smokehouse Bistro (ribs, chicken and pulled pork), along with those Fabulous Frickle Brothers fried green tomatoes (have you ever tried a Pickle Chip?), Montgomery Village Lions Club will provide fruit kebobs and hot dogs, Sunshine Coffee will perk us up with hot and cold coffee drinks as well as Solar cookies! And, of course, the now traditional EarleFest Giant Paella will be available. Bring your appetites!

EarleFest is the brainchild of EBC's

President and CEO, Allan Brenner. Writing about the inaugural EarleFest in 2008, Gabe Meline said in the *Bohemian*: "...it's only going to get bigger as the years go by." Indeed. Last year was the event's watershed year when it more than doubled in size and very dramatically "grew its legs." In one year, the event morphed from a small affair to an event with a serious reputation on the music festival circuit. The EBC Community and the many who dedicate enormous amounts of time and energy to the event should be congratulated and feel a sense of pride in EarleFest's phenomenal success and the tandem benefit of increased awareness and appreciation of the Earle Baum Center's great work.

Please visit [www.earlefest.com](http://www.earlefest.com) for more information about EarleFest! The music will be from Noon to 7pm (Gates will open at 11am). Tickets may be purchased on the website, Last Record Store (Santa Rosa), Tall Toad Music (Petaluma), People's Music (Sebastopol), and Amazing Records (Cotati).

Looking forward to seeing you at EarleFest 2011!



SONOMA COUNTY  
**EARLE FEST**  
A CELEBRATION OF AMERICANA MUSIC

Great Music, Food, Drink, Vibes & A Great Cause  
**Saturday, September 24**  
Earle Baum Center of the Blind  
Noon - 7pm (Doors at 11am)

**THE FLATLANDERS  
PAUL THORN BAND  
CHUCK PROPHET &  
THE MISSION EXPRESS  
AUDREY AULD  
JUG DEALERS**

\$25 Advance/\$30 Day of (Under 10 Free)  
Tickets at Last Record Store, Tall Toad Music, Peoples Music,  
Amazing Records, Online [www.earlefest.com](http://www.earlefest.com)

Logos for sponsors: Krushi Pop, BOHEMIAN, SMOKEHOUSE, and others.

## **TECHNOLOGY UPDATE**

By now we all know that the pace of technology innovation is brisk; this is no different with the adaptive technologies that aid those with sight loss. Here at the EBC, our technology department does a pretty good job keeping at up with the latest, so that we may provide cutting edge solutions that suit the varying needs of our clients. The following technology aids are reasonably simple for the end-user and can help make everyday activities more efficient:

**Labeling Devices:** We have several new labeling systems that use a similar technology to help identify objects. An example of what this system can do, is to attach a system label to an object, then press a special recording pen to the label and record a descriptive voice tag. The next time you press the pen to that label it will read aloud the voice tag you created for it. These systems can be used to label literally hundreds of everyday household items including CD collections, groceries (including freezer items), medicines, and clothing.

**APH Talking Maps:** This is a software package that our Orientation & Mobility instructors, as well as our technology specialists, are using to help students become familiar with their surroundings. This software provides spoken and on-screen map data and millions of points of interest for U.S., its territories, and Canada. It is self-speaking and does not require additional assistive software to operate. It does not give information about a user's physical location like GPS, but you can place yourself virtually anywhere in North America and explore.

**“I” Devices from Apple, Inc.:** The EBC Technology Department is currently examin-

ing the array of “i” devices from Apple, Inc. and has recently obtained an iTouch 4<sup>th</sup> Generation. For those who are already familiar, the capability of this device is comparable to the iPhone and iPad. This is a hand held touch activated device with built-in accessibility. There are literally hundreds of 3<sup>rd</sup> party applications that can be installed onto the unit, and many of these applications can be very useful to a low vision person. For example, one can use an iTouch to take one's blood pressure, dictate emails, listen to turn by turn directions, identify money, and so much more.

Technology services are funded by the Department of Rehabilitation, Veterans Administration, private companies, and consumers. Please call for more details.

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## **Charles Bonnet Syndrome**

Charles Bonnet Syndrome is a condition that causes patients with visual loss to have complex visual hallucinations. People may experience a variety of hallucinations – from colored patterns to images of people followed by animals, plants, and inanimate objects. Roughly one third of patients with low vision may develop CBS, including those with age-related MD, cataracts, and diabetic retinopathy. Patients with CBS are more likely to have symptoms when the person is awake, alone, in dim light, or when they are physically inactive. If you or a family member has these symptoms, please contact your eye care professional.



**We thank our recent donors for their generosity**

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**Our apologies if we've omitted your name. If you should have been listed and were not, please contact the Earle Baum Center at 523-3222.**

**Thanks Eduardo!**

The Earle Baum Center would like to thank Summer intern Eduardo Mendez for his dedicated work this Summer at EBC. Eduardo has been working with Ray Thompson June through August as part of a special intern program. His hard work and "can do" attitude, as well as his great spirit, are a welcomed addition to the EBC campus this summer. We wish you all the best. We will miss you. Thank you and good luck Eduardo!



**They Are "OUT OF SIGHT"!**

Earle Baum Center has always been known for music. Here at Earle Baum Center one can always find a group of folks enjoying music in one form or another – from drumming to singing.

A new musical vocal group recently formed at EBC and is called "Out of Sight!" This talented group from EBC brings their harmonious voices together in a very entertaining format. This new musical group has been the talk of the campus.

**"Out of Sight!"** includes Erik Smiley, Nancy Turner, Gina Milton, Dan Shelley, and Karen Leger.



EARLE BAUM CENTER  
4539 Occidental Road  
Santa Rosa, CA 95401

FREE MATTER  
FOR THE BLIND

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

### MISSION STATEMENT

To provide opportunities  
for people who are blind  
or visually impaired to  
improve and enrich their  
personal, social and  
economic lives.

Contact us: email: [ebc@earlebaum.org](mailto:ebc@earlebaum.org) Telephone: (707) 523-3222  
Fax: (707) 636-2768 [www.earlebaum.org](http://www.earlebaum.org)

### **San Francisco Museum Offers Special Opening for the Disabled Community**

The San Francisco deYoung Museum is featuring a special exhibition of Picasso. The museum will close its doors to the general public on Monday, August 29<sup>th</sup> and will only be open to the disabled community. Admission is free for museum members and a guest, \$10 for non-members, and there are \$5 tickets available upon request. Regular prices for non-members are \$25 for this exhibit. Reservations are required.

Contact Tish Brown at 415-750-7645 (voice) or email [tbrown@famsf.org](mailto:tbrown@famsf.org). There are wheelchairs and folding stools available on a first-come-first-served basis.



**EarleFest 2011**  
**September 24<sup>th</sup>**  
**12 noon to 7 pm**  
[www.earlefest.com](http://www.earlefest.com)

**TGIF BBQ Dates**  
**August 19—September 2**