



Newsletter for the Earle Baum Center

Serving People With Sight Loss
(707) 523-3222 ebc@earlebaum.org

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Tribute to Beryl Brown

By Chris Smith



Fortunate was the day in the late 1990s that a retired Air Force operating-room nurse and New England native named Beryl Brown moved to the city in

which a most unusual transformation was taking place on land long worked by a blind farmer.

Brown's eyesight was slipping away when she learned of the Earle Baum Center of the Blind. She checked it out when it was brand new in 1999 and she liked what she saw.

She told a Press Democrat reporter in 2003 that on her first day in a class at the Earle Baum Center she thought it was a joke when she was told that half of her classmates were off water skiing.

"But I've learned that's typical," Beryl said. "There's usually something interesting going on. People who lose their vision still want to do all sorts of things."

In short order, Beryl was doing all sorts of things at the Baum Center. After taking some classes she be-

came a volunteer, then the volunteer coordinator, a member of the board and a force active in virtually all aspects of the Center's classes and other services. Within a decade, Beryl – imposing, combative, perceptive, affectionate – was known throughout Sonoma County and beyond for her work advocating for the pedestrian safety and inclusion of the visually impaired.

She was the prime mover behind the Walkabouts that illuminated for people with disabilities and government officials the hazards that exist at many of the county's intersections and crosswalks. She was a vocal and engaged member of Santa Rosa's Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board and Paratransit Transition Committee, Sonoma County's Paratransit Coordinating Committee and the Redwood Empire Chapter of the California Council of the Blind.

Beryl lived at the Silvercrest high-rise apartments and rallied neighbors with limited vision to avail themselves of classes and services, and to stand up against being treated as second-class citizens.

A neighbor Silvercrest, James Harris, also served with Beryl on the board of the regional chapter of the state Council of the Blind. He loved to lock horns with

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Beryl, and often did.

“We argued all the time,” Harris said. “You never really won with Beryl, but she was a human being; she was alive and she made you feel alive when you were around her.

“Life is full of pluses and minuses,” he said. “My God, she was a plus.”

Beryl suffered a heart attack near the end of this past summer, but pulled through. The unstoppable advocate and steadfast friend was just 74 when died of congestive heart failure on Sept. 10.

Help Beryl continue to warm the coffee and be a powerhouse at EBC

EBC is in the process of getting quotes for our own solar power plant. Dedicating it to Beryl Brown would have made her happy. Her namesake will continue warming the coffee, keeping the phone calls going for birthday calls and activities, and lighting the way. Can you please help with a contribution in Beryl's name? With a matching grant expected, we need to raise at least \$50K from Beryl's friends and admirers. Help Beryl's memory be a beacon of hospitality for the next generation.

Annual Holiday Potluck



**December 13, 2012
11:00 am to 1:30 pm
RSVP 523-3222**

From the Center

Greetings from the Earle Baum Center. It's hard to believe this is the final newsletter of 2012 and that soon, we'll be celebrating the New Year. The EBC has had a good year overall regardless of the serious challenges we faced due to the economy and some unexpected facilities issues. The most unexpected issue was the collapse of the floors in our men's and women's restrooms due to construction flaws. The restrooms required a major construction effort to build new floors without destroying the rest of the building.



In the “good news category,” we expanded our services by bringing on an Orientation and Mobility and Independent Living Specialist, Brianna Pettit, to serve Lake and Mendocino Counties. We also welcomed Cathy Mulhern in new roles as Assistive Technology Training teacher and Low Vision Clinic Coordinator. And we were fortunate to bring on Dan Needham as our first Chief Operating Officer. We expanded our tractor garage and workshop and kicked off several new projects. With volunteers hard at work under the leadership of Facilities Manager Ray Thompson, our grounds are stunning and our orchards are producing great fruit.

We have served many new clients and it appears that the trend will continue as the baby boomers reach seniority. I can go on and on about all the good work of our staff and volunteers, including our Board of Directors, but the reality is that we serve some of the most wonderful people I have ever met. Our board has expanded with three new members and by the time you

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read this, we may be up to four. They include Linda Burille of Exchange Bank, Tim Webster, retired gemologist, and Tom Miller, who just retired as the Executive Director of the Blinded Veteran's Association of Washington, DC.

In 2012, it was difficult, at times, to make ends meet without sacrificing the quality of our services. I know I don't need to explain the negative impact the federal and state budgets had on us and other organizations like us. Equally impactful was the reduction in donations that forced us to tap into reserves. Please know that I'm focused fully on reversing the bleeding and putting the EBC back in the black.

So, if you're ready to help, we can certainly use it. Your investment in the EBC will produce a great return on your money. By placing the EBC in your long-term planned giving, or by donating intermittently in large or small amounts, you are offering seniors who face sight loss the chance to live fulfilling and independent lives. Your contribution further assures that students dealing with blindness will be able to level the playing field by receiving Independent Living training and assistive technologies that allow them to live in the same housing as sighted students and fulfill all school assignments required of all students. Newly diagnosed adults can access adjustment counseling and learn Braille, which makes labeling of clothes, medicines and food in the pantry possible. We rely on your generosity to sustain current programs and evolve new programming, as needed.

Yes, the times have been tough for many and we understand that not everyone can contribute. But if you believe in the work of the EBC and its life-changing impact on clients, please consider contributing.

I am happy that the EBC is a part of your life and you are a part of the EBC. Here's to a great New Year. Happy Holidays!

Allan Brenner, CEO

WELCOME BRIANNA PETTIT!

The Earle Baum Center is proud to introduce Brianna Pettit as its new Orientation and Mobility specialist and Independent Living Skills instructor. She is responsible for expanding services to individuals in Lake and Mendocino counties, and



is excited to be spreading the word about the Earle Baum Center. Brianna will be providing one-on-one instruction as well as group classes and support groups to adults and seniors with vision loss.

Brianna recently moved to Mendocino County from Los Angeles after obtaining a Masters degree in Orientation and Mobility (O&M) from Cal State Los Angeles.

Brianna completed her O&M internship at the new Veteran's Administration Blind Rehabilitation Center in Long Beach, CA. Before getting her degree in O&M, Brianna taught classes to seniors with sight loss at the Braille Institute of Santa Barbara and helped manage her parents' bed and breakfast. Brianna has a B.A. in psychology from UC Berkeley, where she actively participated in the Cal Triathlon and Cycling teams. Brianna is an outdoor enthusiast and loves to be able to encourage mobility as a profession.

Please welcome Brianna to the EBC!

Spotlight: Lucie Jensen

“Jensen, with an ‘e’” is how the inimitable Lucie Jensen made sure I’d get the spelling of her name right for this piece. It only goes to figure. Words are, after all, her thing. At the age of 98, Ms. Jensen has been a working newswoman most of her life. A reporter for the *Fresno Bee* when Pearl Harbor was bombed, she was assigned to cover the immigrant camps to see if local Japanese were being interned. These days, she works for *The Healdsburg Tribune* where she writes her own column “The View from Here” every three weeks.

Jensen lives in Healdsburg with her friendly cat Abigail and lives a busy life. A licensed driver, she voluntarily gave up most driving, but the one thing she won’t give up is driving the six blocks to her social hub, the Healdsburg Senior Center. On Monday, it’s Bridge. Wednesday is her current events class, and Friday is when the writers get together for a Life Stories class. Lucie’s working on her Memoirs “for fun and family,” she says.

So how does this powerhouse deal with macular degeneration? With help from the Earle Baum Center, of course. Just short of a year ago, Lucie was referred to the Center by her doctor and that’s when things started to get a whole lot easier in her life. In Lucie’s case, the magic came in the form of one Jacques Law. Jacques, an assistive technology teacher, visited Jensen in her home to set up her computer to help her work more easily. (As her sight diminished, it was slowing down her writing tremendously, which was a hardship for her.)

Jacques speeded things up considerably by modifying the keyboard so it was easier to view, magnifying screen settings, and showing Lucie some helpful tricks for moving through her work fluidly. He showed her an

easier way to run spell check, for example, and demonstrated how to insert pictures into her documents. He also printed out, in large type, instructions for downloading audio books from the Library of Congress’ website.

But it wasn’t just the cool “stuff” Jacques brought to the table, it was the way in which he did it. “I can’t praise him enough,” Lucie said. “He has the ability to show you how to do things. A lot of experts can’t do this. He does it in the most gracious way.” Imparting knowledge in a friendly and respectful way is something the Earle Baum Center and its employees have in spades. It’s an art, as Lucie pointed out, and it’s one of the things that distinguishes this organization from others.

Along with the computer, a few other items at the Jensen house were upgraded by the Center. Special lights were brought in to better illuminate reading areas. In the bedroom, a light with a magnifier on a hinged arm allows Lucie to draw it over her Kindle for easy reading. (Oh yeah, she has a Kindle.) When she’s not reading that, she’s listening to one of her audio books. Right now, it’s a book on the Roosevelts. With Jacques’ instructions, she downloads books from the computer onto a flash drive, which she plugs into the audio reader provided by the Center—a reader with brightly visible buttons for easy use.

There was another helpful gadget that was a new one to this writer: an audio calendar! In an impromptu kitchen demonstration, Lucie showed me how she pushes a big button with the month followed by the big date and records a reminder for herself. “October 17” she chooses and then pushes a large red Re-

cord button before saying, "Interview with Earle Baum lady at 2pm." Beep! It's done.

For a woman like Lucie with a sharp mind and zeal for life, the ability to stay plugged in—reading, writing, making appointments—is vitally important. She's leading a full life and, thanks to the assistance of the Earle Baum Center, she doesn't have to slow down to do it.

Sonoma Valley Rides

Vintage House Local Independent Mobility Options (LIMO) program is designed to provide Sonoma Valley seniors 60 years or over, who can no longer drive, with free door to door transportation rides to non-medical appointments and activities.

Rides are available within Sonoma Valley Monday through Friday between 9am and 5pm. Typical destinations include grocery shopping, hair dresser, post office, banks, library, Farmers Market, and of course, Vintage House.

Please call three working days in advance to arrange your ride at (707) 996-0311. This enables the coordinator to match rides with a volunteer driver.

For rides to medical appointments, please call FISH at (707) 996-0111.

LIMO depends on volunteer drivers to provide this service. Their volunteers make a significant difference in the quality of life of seniors who can no longer drive. Vintage House LIMO program needs new volunteer drivers to meet the growing number of seniors needing rides. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer driver for the LIMO program, please call (707) 996-0311.

More eye care professionals learn about the Earle Baum Center

Seven local ophthalmologists visited EBC on October 11th. At the invitation of Board Chair, Dr. Patrick Caskey, these eye care professionals learned about the services we can offer their patients suffering from vision loss.

They heard presentations about our Low Vision Clinic, Orientation and Mobility program, Adaptive Technology Training, Adjustment to Vision Loss classes, Independent Living Skills classes, support groups, and other activities. An EBC client, Jan Seeley, also spoke about how she benefitted from EBC training and services when she felt overwhelmed by her sight loss. She urged the eye care providers to connect patients with EBC early in their vision loss progression.

The doctors toured the classrooms and had questions answered by EBC instructors, Jeff Harrington and Denise Vancil. Several spoke about sending their staff to learn about EBC. We are hoping these presentations and tours become a frequent event!

We'd like to thank the visiting doctors for attending and learning about other training, services, and tools for their patients. The doctors visiting were Mark Schluter, David Lightfoot, Scott Siegner, Christinge Ku, Bill Bartlett, Dan Ahn, and Denise Kayser. And special thanks go to Denise Vancil and Dr. Patrick Caskey for initiating the event.

EBC will be CLOSED

Nov. 19 to Nov. 23

&

Dec 17th to Jan 1st

No Classes or Services

SONOMA COUNTY
**EARLE
 FEST**
 A CELEBRATION
 OF AMERICANA MUSIC
September 22, 2012



Photo: George Zastrow



Photo: Daryl Weisser



Photo: George Zastrow



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**The
 5th
 Annual -
 Another
 Great
 Success!**



Photo: Daryl Weisser



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YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT IS MUCH APPRECIATED**

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We appreciate your service!



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 Telephone: (707) 523-3222
Fax: (707) 636-2768 www.earlebaum.org

Vehicle Donation Needed

EBC could use another vehicle for our instructors to reach clients. Since safety and reliability are priorities, the ideal vehicle would be less than 5 years old with 50,000 or fewer miles.

Do any of our kind readers have one that's not used? It can be a tax deductible donation, and we'd be very thankful.

Petaluma Paratransit User Group Mtg
Petaluma Senior Center
Wednesday, January 9th, 2013

\$6000 Scholarships available for full-time CSU students with sight loss.

Undergraduate or graduate students with any major are eligible with a minimum GPA of 2.8. The estate of Dale M. Schoettler, a successful businessman who was blind, funds these scholarships. See Financial Aid office on your campus for details or go to these links.

[http://www.calstate.edu/foundation/
Scholarship.shtml](http://www.calstate.edu/foundation/Scholarship.shtml) or

SSU students: Sara Golightly @
sara.golightly@sonoma.edu