



Earle Baum Center
Transforming the Lives
of People with Sight Loss

LIMITLESS



It's from the Heart

"I called to say thank you! I'm not asking you for anything today. I just want to thank you for what you've already done."

Bob Cuneo's favorite volunteer job is when he gets to call and thank donors for their generosity to the Earle Baum Center. "It's from the heart," he said. "I really look forward to it. It doesn't matter how much or who did what. I tell them, 'Whatever you give is what you give. But I want to personally say, as someone who is getting the help, Thank you.'"



Bob arrives to volunteer at EBC.

Bob has retinitis pigmentosa, and has been gradually losing his vision throughout his life. Back in '96, he happened to be riding a Paratransit van and former EBC CEO Allan Brenner was on board. The two struck up a conversation. "Allan started telling me all the things I needed to do, but I wasn't ready to hear it," Bob said.

It wasn't until 2001, when Bob and his wife Gornice attended EBC's Dog-a-thon fundraiser, that his resistance began to melt away. "We brought our new Sheltie puppy to the event. We couldn't even put her on the ground yet; she was so small. We carried her the two-thirds mile walk to the Center and had a really nice time. I met some people with low vision there, and I thought, 'My eyes are getting a little worse, maybe I should look into this.'"

And the rest, as they say, is history.

One thing led to another. An independent living specialist dispelled a lot of his personal fears about going blind. "She told me, 'If you can't stop it, you might as well embrace it.' She helped me a lot," Bob said.

He found it impossible to continue feeling sorry for himself. "Here were all these people who couldn't see a lick, and yet they were smiling, laughing, and happy. I said to myself, 'What the hell am I complaining about?' They were even giving me directions to get to classrooms! They could recognize me by the sound of my walk! At that point, I just surrendered myself over to the program."

But he didn't stop there. He started volunteering. "From then 'til today, it's been EBC first; everything else second," Bob said. He runs a low-vision support group for EBC once a month in Petaluma. And on campus, he enjoys meeting visitors and helping newcomers feel comfortable with the program. "I tell them, 'Don't worry. I've been there and done that. You're going to get through it. It will be something you'll wind up being proud of. It'll be fun.'"

"EBC is a great place to be," Bob said. "The staff is the best. There's a real nice feeling here. It's really an amazing adventure. Every day I go to EBC is like turning a page in a great book! I get more out of it than I give."

Message from the CEO



So much is happening at the Earle Baum Center! We invite you to our Community Open House. It is on Saturday, September 22, 2018 from 10am to 3pm. It's called: Your Vision, Our Focus. It is an opportunity to learn more about the excellent training and activities offered at the Earle Baum Center to give confidence, independence, and joy to those with sight loss. There will be fun activities, demonstrations, and a great speaker at noon. If you or someone you know is dealing with sight loss, please come to explore possibilities. Learn how we transform the lives of people with sight loss.

Also, our art program will be featured at the Sebastopol Center for the Arts from June 22 to July 29. Come see the work of a variety of artists who happen to be blind at the show called "In Touch with Art". The show runs concurrently with Claire Spector's showing of new contemporary textile art, sewn by feel, called Blind Stitching™.

In this issue of our newsletter, we introduce you to three very different men: Bob Cuneo, George Mickle, and George Altamura. They share in common the challenges of adapting to vision loss. While they may have taken different paths in life, they've been successful in finding ways to continue to contribute their talents to our community. With help from the Earle Baum Center, each is now equipped with the tools, training, and skills needed to retain their sense of independence.

I am always amazed to hear these stories. I learn and get inspiration from their formative experiences, accomplishments, challenges, life lessons, attributes, and attitudes. I know you will be inspired as well. Please use that inspiration. Support our programs. And most importantly, introduce us to people with sight loss in our

SAVE THE DATE More to Come!

Your Vision, Our Focus. A Community Open House.

Are you dealing with sight loss and have questions?

Come and explore the possibilities

Saturday, September 22, 2018
10am – 3pm

Lunch and brief presentation at noon

Earle Baum Center



Transforming the Lives of People with Sight Loss

community so we can show them why our motto is Dream, Dare, Do, No Limits!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Dan".

Dan Needham

Please join our Legacy Society!

Become a member! Help the Earle Baum Center continue serving people with sight loss by including us in your will and estate plan. Gifts may include cash, stocks, IRAs, real estate, life insurance, charitable trusts and automobiles—all may become the means to help others in the way you or your loved ones have received assistance. Please call Bob Sonnenberg at **707-284-1088**, or email sonnenberg@earlebaum.org for more information or questions. Thank you in advance for your thoughtful consideration.



Why I Give: George Mickle

If you call the Earle Baum Center on a Monday, the soothing, friendly voice you hear is likely to be George Mickle's. George enjoys volunteering at EBC because he loves helping people. He's a donor, and a willing ambassador for the program, grateful for the help he's personally received.

"I give to EBC because I know my donations might be used to help cover travel or training costs for someone in need who's losing their vision," he said. "I know first-hand what a difference it's going to make in their lives!"

George began losing his vision 25 years ago. "I have diabetic retinopathy, and glaucoma," he explained. "And I've had several eye surgeries."

Around 15 years ago, George began to wonder what his future would be like if his vision continued to deteriorate. He likes to be prepared. "I went out to EBC to see what they could offer me," he said. "It was interesting. And it motivated me to make some changes in my house to compensate for my diminishing vision."

George learned how to walk with a white support cane which he folds up and keeps on his hip in a holster. But a big part of his adjustment to vision loss involved changing his attitude. "When you're losing your vision, it's easy to feel sorry for yourself. You think it's just you." Attending EBC's support group made him



George mans the front desk at EBC on Mondays.

realize he was not alone. And being at EBC gave him hope. "When you go to EBC, and the guy who's teaching technology is blind and has a guide dog, you realize that you're going to be able to do this, too!"

"The instructor who taught me braille also teaches homemaking and other classes. She's blind and has a mobility dog," he said. "She tells the class about travelling overseas with a friend who's also blind. They go scuba diving. It made me realize that blindness shouldn't keep me from doing anything I want to do!" It inspired him to try downhill skiing.

New skills and wonderful mentors made it easier for George to hang up his car keys. "I sold my car on a Friday, and rode the bus home," he said. "On

Saturday, my approval letter for Paratransit came in the mail!" Sometimes it takes a little longer to get to his destinations, but he's learned to pad travel time, and if he arrives early, he listens to audiobooks on his cell phone.

George was a Sergeant in the Air Force, and enjoyed a professional career as a County social worker. After he retired, he started volunteering at EBC. He loves being part of the EBC community, and wants to help get the word out about the services available – especially to doctors who could make referrals for their patients right here in the North Bay, who are losing their sight. And he hopes that others will follow his lead and support EBC in any way they can.

“It’s Like I’ve Got My Vision Back”



Just another day at the office for George.

Napa real estate developer George Altamura lost the vision in his left eye due to macular degeneration around 10 years ago. He gets a shot every two months in his right eye to prevent further deterioration of his sight. At 86, he no longer drives, but he still works every day as well as a few hours on Saturday mornings. He has many employees, and at first, depended on his secretary to read business contracts to him.

But it wasn't the same as reading them for himself. "It's really important to be able to read

and digest a 4-5-page contract at your own speed," he said. His eye doctor spoke highly of the Earle Baum Center, so he decided to make an appointment.

"I wish I'd gone a couple of years sooner," George said. He had researched magnifying devices such as the video magnifier online. But he really appreciated the personalized attention he received from the staff at EBC. They helped him find a device that was just right for his needs.

"Having someone explain it to me was very positive. I ended up buying one that is magnificent. It magnifies 2-5 times. When I've got it set just right, I don't even have to have my glasses on to see the print. I have a special room here that's nice and quiet. I go there to read contracts and I read beautifully – it's like I've got my vision back. And if I end up losing my vision in my right eye, this device will read the print aloud to me. I hope it never comes to that, but I'm prepared."

George used to read three newspapers cover-to-cover every day, but now, he is content to watch the news on TV. "My wife will sometimes read some of the paper to me – just the headlines and a few sentences – once in a while.

Although many people with macular degeneration struggle with their changing vision, George is pragmatic. "It's just like ABC for me. I'm here every day. I've got one eye, but I can see perfect. I can get around without glasses. It hasn't affected me whatsoever."

But he understands how others may feel. "If I was 40, it might be different. I might wonder, 'Why me?' or get frustrated," he said. "But I've had a full life. I've enjoyed myself. I'm ready for anything. I thank God all the time for where I'm at."

There are many giving options to explore. You might enjoy the convenience of setting up automatic monthly donations. You may realize tax savings by giving to EBC through IRA disbursements, or from the sale of appreciated stocks or securities. Consider leaving a legacy of kindness and light for someone in need of our training and care by including EBC in your estate plans.