

Fore Sight

Fall 2023

A Publication of St. Louis Society for the Blind & Visually Impaired

2nd Annual Wike for Sight: Huge Success and a Lot of Fun!

On Friday, September 29, the brand-new Brentwood Park and Pavilion played host to SLSBVI's 2nd Annual Wike for Sight. For those who have not participated before, Wike is a combination of two words: Wine + Hike = Wike! An event created to combine Society's tradition of wine tasting events and an outdoor experience, the Wike for Sight includes activities for adults and families alike and aims to bring together our community to promote awareness and support for Society.



Rory James, Zoo DEIA Dir. (r.) and family play Jenga



Kimberly White Drost (l.) and husband Scott with a friend



Louie and Brenda King

The event ran from 5:00 to 8:00 pm and kicked off with an appearance by Louie, the St. Louis Blues Hockey mascot who provided plenty of photo ops and laughs. He mingled with everyone and even attempted to conduct the band providing

the entertainment.

And speaking of entertainment, Clan Jameson provided the soundtrack for the evening playing a wide variety of Irish melodies.

Wine tasting was once again provided by Mary and Mike Ward, and Anne and Dave Birkenmeier, longtime friends, and supporters of St. Louis Society for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Guests enjoyed charcuterie; snacks and a delectable ice cream treat from Sugarwitch. An elevated ice cream sandwich; it came in three exquisite flavors, and everyone raved about them. The sparkling new Brentwood Park and Pavilion provided a beautiful backdrop for the evening and we are excited to return to this venue next year.

There were games, including a life size version of Jenga, and other yard games, a kids' play area, and a blind wine toss. The challenge? Wear a blindfold and

toss a glow ring onto a bottle of wine. Every player was a winner! A silent auction offered up such things as a chauffeured trip to Missouri's wine country, camping gear and a mystery box of candy among other things. Cards and Candles for a Cause also raised funds and the 50/50 Glow Raffle offered participants a chance to win half of the proceeds collected with the other half going to support Society's services.

As the final super moon of 2023 rose in the sky, some took a walk around the lake with the fountain and others were scattered throughout the pavilion area on couches and at tables enjoying the evening and each other. That was the nicest of all to see; approximately 150 people gathered in one place because they believe in Society and the work we do. They came because they care about the many clients who come through our doors in search of an answer and in search of hope. Each client has a face and a name. They came in support of Ed Kottmeier who has needed our low vision exams and magnifiers. They came in support of Brenda King in St. Charles county and Jim Freeman in Jefferson county who remain safe in their homes because of our in-home Occupational Therapy services. They came in support of Diane Wilkins who now uses a white cane with confidence thanks to our Ori-



Alice Conway (center) and friends with Barbara Clover (left)

entation and Mobility training. They came in support of Ellen Mantz who at age 92, received Assistive Technology training for the Orcam MyEye wearable device and can continue to read the books she loves to read. They came in support of Wendy Zimet who uses our Transportation service and no longer has to rely on friends to get her to the places she needs to go. They came in support of so many others who use our Social Services and Support Groups.

So, thank you! Thank you to our Board of Directors for their continued support and direction. Thank you to the staff and the many volunteers from Delta Gamma Sorority who helped with set-up and the activities throughout the evening. We offer a huge shoutout of appreciation to our sponsors and most of all, we thank you for coming and supporting SLSBVI. We are already planning next year's event! This is how you Wike!

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A huge thank you to our Wike for Sight Sponsors!



Alice Conway - Drs. Nanci & James Bobrow - Mr. & Mrs. Michael McKinnis - David Morris & Joey Neal
Ann & Mark Shapiro - Lori & Paul Tesser - Kim & Scott Drost - Mary & Mike Ward - Anne & Dave Birkenmeier
Music provided by Clan Jameson

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Message From the President

Dear valued members of the SLSBVI community, We extend our heartfelt gratitude for your unwavering support as we continue to offer vital services to individuals living with vision loss. These services not only transform the lives of our clients but also positively impact their families. Your dedication, whether through the gift of time, talent, or financial contributions, has not only sustained us, but occasionally, one of you has led us to transformative funding opportunities.

We are thrilled to share some exciting news for the year 2024. Thanks to your support and a recent grant from state appropriations, we will be expanding our facilities to better serve our clients. In the coming year, we are proud to announce the addition of a second low vision exam lane in the Drews Low Vision Clinic and a significant expansion of the Sight Solutions Shop. These enhancements will provide our clients and visitors with a wider array of devices designed for the visually impaired.

The clinic remodel will include dedicated rooms for lighting and electronic magnification, further improving the quality of care we provide. Additionally, we are delighted to inform you that a new accessible van will soon be available for our transportation services, made possible through the same funding source.

Your kindness and generosity have made all this possible, and we are sincerely grateful for the positive impact you've had on our clients' lives in 2023. As we look ahead to 2024, we are excited to continue working together to empower those with vision loss in our community. With heartfelt thanks,

Laura Park-Leach
President & CEO

Celebrating 20 Years: The Bookworm Book Club

When Donna Neal became a client of Society, we were still located over on Big Bend Boulevard in Webster Groves. She made the move with us to Manchester & Brentwood and has watched Society grow through the years. "I don't know what I or so many other clients would do without Society," she said.



First Bookworm Book Club, 2009 photo

In October of 2003, she started the Bookworm Book Club because she wound up with an excess of audio books. A cousin's friend had passed away and loved to listen to audio books when she traveled. So the cousin gave them to Donna. This inspired her to share the wealth and start the club. After just one meeting, the holidays and winter came along, and it looked like it was going to fold as no one came back. But Donna and Society was patient. They were meeting on Thursdays and Donna jokingly said, "Thursdays were the kiss of death. I suggested to Society that we move it to the second Tuesday of each month, because on Tuesdays, there were more activities going on. That saved the book club!"



Current Bookworm Book Club, 2023

When the 4th meeting came in February, she started with six people, and they met in the ADL room on TV trays. More people started coming and word of mouth made the book club grow, so they started meeting in the multipurpose room.



Donna Neal, Coordinator

The very first book they read was "The Skull Beneath the Skin" by P. D. James. Donna stopped counting at 89, but she estimates they have read over 250 books in their 20 years. After 50 books, they made the move from audio cassettes to digital through the Wolfner Library. Wolfner informed Donna that they were the first Digital Book Club in the world!

"It's very much like a family," Donna said. "Everyone likes everyone. I always bring refreshments. It's a pleasure for me to provide refreshments. But people come for the books!"

On Saturday, November 4th, there will be a 20th celebration with cake and ice cream in the multipurpose room for the bookworms as they reminisce on their 20 years together. Members have come and gone, some have passed on and many more have joined just in recent months.

When asked what coordinating the Bookworm Book Club has meant to her, Donna was quiet for a moment, then she said, "For me, it's a family. Every time we meet—this sounds so silly—but I go home and cry, because I can't believe that these people sitting around that table keep coming back. I never thought it would last this long. There are people of all ages. They honor me more than I could ever honor them. Of all the things I've done in my life, this is the thing I want to be remembered for."

Jingle, Mingle & Make!
ST. LOUIS SOCIETY
FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

CLIENT HOLIDAY PARTY
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8, 11:00 AM TO 2:00 PM

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\$5 PER PERSON TO ATTEND
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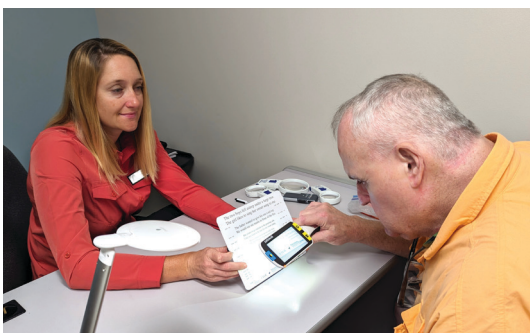
Society Partners with Premiere Eye Associates in Jefferson County



Dr. Humeyra Karacal and Jim Freeman

In September 2023, Society began a partnership with Premiere Eye Associates in Festus allowing one of Society's occupational therapy assistants to use their space to meet with clients. Michelle Harrell, Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant sees clients on the first and third Wednesday of each month. The office staff schedules the clients, and this allows her to bring in demo devices to show the clients, such as magnifiers, various filters (sunglasses), Max TV glasses, and one of Society's most popular selling items, the Halo Lamp.

The program was springboarded by Dr. Humeyra Karacal, one of Society's Board members and referring doctors at Premiere Eye Associates. Michelle said, "Dr. Karacal wanted us to come here a couple times a month. Basically, what we're hoping to do is let people who are visually impaired in Jefferson County know about available resources.



Michelle Harrell demos magnifiers with Jim

Each appointment is 30 minutes in length and Michelle then schedules other appointments/evaluations as appropriate. She also makes in-home visits and can help people with low vision find solutions for daily living activities such as dressing, cooking, operating microwaves, and telephones, reading and writing, home safety and fall prevention. Clients can purchase equipment, and have it shipped to them, or they can pick it up from Premiere Eye the next time Michelle is there.

The initial office visit is at no charge to the client; it is funded in part by the Jefferson Foundation. The clients are given information about Society services and resources they may need such as the Wolfner Library, MindsEye Radio and others. Michelle calls each client prior to a visit to determine what their needs are so that she can meet their unique needs.

This is the first time SLSBVI has operated within a practice, and we see it as a good expansion opportunity. Those in Jefferson County who are interested in the Society's services do not need to be a patient of Premiere Eye Associates, but any visit to the office needs to be made through the practice.

DEI Roundtable Meets with St. Louis Zoo to Discuss "Vision Awareness Day"



We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the St. Louis Zoo for graciously hosting the DEI Roundtable, a pivotal gathering of regional organizations committed to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion within the context of visual impairment. At the helm of this enlightening discussion was Mr. Rory James, the distinguished Director of DEAI at the St. Louis Zoo. Mr. James skillfully guided our group through profound conversations on accessibility, with a particular focus on improving the experiences of individuals who are blind or deaf-blind.

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We are zeroing in on May as a possibility for the Vision Awareness Day as so many awareness events are happening in May, including Healthy Vision Month, Ultraviolet Awareness Month and Global Accessibility Awareness Day which is on the third Thursday of May. We also talked about key experiences we want our guests to have. After the meeting, we were taken to the area where the giraffes are contained and each of us were given the opportunity to feed them with a small branch of leaves.



These discussions hold tremendous promise, as they pave the way for meaningful enhancements that will resonate with those facing visual challenges. Our collective efforts are driven by the anticipation of a momentous event: Vision Awareness Day at the Zoo in 2024. We eagerly anticipate the opportunity to share further developments and insights from our ongoing journey towards inclusivity and accessibility. Stay tuned for more updates!

Society Clients Enjoy Pottery Classes at Blaze STL Studio in Overland



Nicole Pruett, client

To see the joy on the face of Lynn Mendelsohn as her hands felt the clay moving on the potter's wheel or to see the wonder in Patsy Robinson's eyes as she dipped her clay bowl in a bucket of glaze tells the story of what working with pottery has meant to several of our clients. In mid-July through the first Friday of December, the Society has offered three separate sessions of Pottery Classes for 6 to 7 clients at Blaze STL Studio in Overland.



Coleen and Rob Miller, Blaze STL owners

The opportunity to provide the classes free of charge was through a Visions in Performance grant that was given to Society in 2019 and clients are excited to be a beneficiary of the gift.

Blaze is a pottery studio that offers activities for nonprofits. Rob Miller, the proprietor of Blaze, who has worked with all types of disabilities, including those with blindness and low vision, taught them how to create various types of pottery. Each session ran six Fridays in a row, with Society providing transportation through our own transportation program or with County/Yellow cab.



Patsy Robinson, client

Each week, the clients did something different and at the end of each session, after the pieces had been fired in the kiln, the clients proudly brought their pieces home with them. (Check out the photos below.) Rob's wife, Colleen, and one or two staff members from the Society helped out each week to ensure each client was able to complete their projects. For many, the classes were their first exposure to this craft.



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Jenetra Perry: A Valued Volunteer Dedicated to Making a Difference

It's heartwarming to come across individuals like Jenetra Perry, whose life is a testament to the power of selflessness and community service. Jenetra is not just a volunteer; she is a beacon of hope, a friendly face, and an inspiration to all who have the privilege of knowing her. Her life's journey of service has led her to become heavily involved in the Universal King Ministry, a program that reaches out to 16 different Missouri Veterans and Nursing homes.



Jenetra Perry, a dedicated volunteer at the Society, says the agency holds a special place in her heart. She believes that it takes volunteering to another level because it allows her to connect with others who are going through similar challenges. "When I volunteer with Society, I can let people know that they aren't alone because I am going through the same thing. We are all in the same boat together," she says.

If you attend any of Society's numerous events, you're likely to be greeted by Jenetra at the registration table. Her warm smile and welcoming demeanor make every guest feel right at home. It's a small gesture, but it speaks volumes about her dedication to ensuring that everyone feels valued and appreciated.

Jenetra doesn't limit her volunteering to in-person events alone; she also extends her kindness through phone calls. She regularly reaches out to another person in the community who is visually impaired, offering companionship, support, and friendship. These calls have a wide range of topics, from current events and politics to their shared love for old Bette Davis movies.

"We encourage each other," she shares. "She has become part of my family and my church family. I love volunteering and helping others."

Thank you, Jenetra, for making the world a better place through your kindness.

Botanical Garden Offers Audio Described Tour to Society Clients



As part of the Visions in Performance grant, Society arranged through the Missouri Botanical Garden to have an audio described tour for our clients. Mo Bot offers audio described tours for the visually impaired at various times throughout the year and they made a special arrangement for Society on Monday, October 9.

Volunteer drivers and staff drove the clients to the garden and arrived at approximately 10:45 am. The hour-long tour was hosted by Nicole Smith

and LeAnn Grush. LeAnn explained the historical aspects and Nicole gave the audio descriptions. For instance, LeAnn talked about the Chihuly piece at the entrance and the significance of the glass sculpture and then Nicole said, "This piece stands about 30 feet tall and looks a lot like a pineapple. It has many sharp, pointed glass pieces that are green and clear glass, and they point upward." Audio description is a lot like alternative text that is used under photos on social media and other media to describe the photos for the visually impaired.

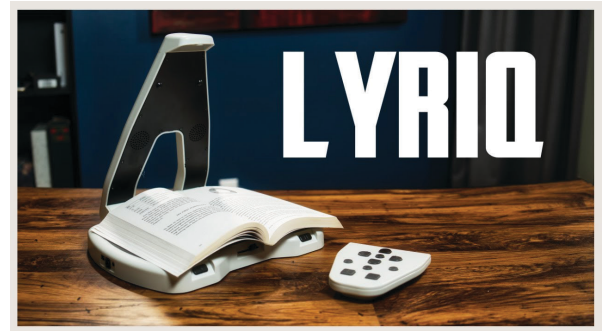
The tour continued past the original greenhouse, through the sensory garden, where clients had the opportunity to touch and smell the various flowers, and ended at the large reflecting pool where several Chihuly pieces were displayed in the water.

Afterwards, the clients were treated to box lunches from the garden's Sassafras Café. This gave everyone a chance to talk with each other and what they loved best about the garden. One client actually teared up as she talked about the garden and the opportunity to experience it in this way. A special thank you goes to Jennifer Sim Smith, the Public Programs Manager at the garden for arranging this special tour for Society. Another tour for Society clients will take place on Monday, November 6.



Laura Park-Leach, President and Diane Wilkins, client

Society Adds New Assistive Technology - Meet LyriQ!



You can now visit the Society to see The LyriQ Assistive Text-to-Speech Reader. It is a cutting-edge technology designed to empower individuals with visual impairments. This device utilizes advanced natural language processing and speech synthesis capabilities to convert written text into clear and natural-sounding audio. With its user-friendly interface, LyriQ allows users to easily access and interact with a wide range of digital content, including books, articles, websites, and documents.

LyriQ is equipped with customizable features, enabling users to adjust voice preferences, reading speed, and other settings to suit their unique needs and preferences. The device is 3 lbs. and measures 12" x 12" x 2" making it a portable design and versatile tool for on-the-go accessibility, ensuring that individuals can access information independently and efficiently, fostering inclusivity and independence. Scan the QR code to see a short video of how the device works.

And to get a hands on look at this device in person, call our main number at 314-968-9000 and set up an appointment today!



LeAnn Grush, Docent discusses Chihuly at the fountain

Donor Spotlight: Lindsey Brillo

Our theme this year at Society has been about family. After all, family and home is where the heart is and we see this so much among our donors. Lindsey Brillo is the granddaughter of Joan Musbach, one of Society's longstanding supporters. Her grandfather, Ken Musbach was a client of Society and Lindsey was very close to him. She knew how important Society was to Ken and how involved he and Joan had been with us over the years.

After he passed away in 2018, Lindsey began sending an annual donation to Society on his birthday in memory of him. As Joan told us last Spring, "Ken wanted to give back to Society, so we got very involved in the fundraising." His giving nature has been passed down to his loved ones.

Here's what Lindsey wrote to us:

"My Papa was truly one of a kind. His smile and eyes lit up the room. As his vision worsened, SLSBVI greatly helped prolong my Papa's eyesight so that he was able to continue to see later in life. By providing Papa with a CCTV to help enlarge fonts/pictures, he was able to enjoy seeing pictures of his great-granddaughter, who lives out of state. When Papa passed away, I knew that I wanted to honor him in a way that would also help pay it forward. Since Papa's passing in 2018, I have made an annual donation to the Society in his memory. It truly makes me happy to see the updates of all the Society does with their generous donations. It gives me great comfort in knowing others will benefit from all the services SLSBVI has to offer."

It's people like Lindsey Brillo who help keep the wheels turning at Society. Thank you, Lindsey!

A Gift that Lasts More than a Lifetime

Each year, millions of people contribute their time, talent, and treasure to charitable organizations. Legacy giving helps to ensure that Society's services will be available for many years to come. By supporting our services, you provide clients who are living with vision loss to achieve personal goals for independence and safety. When you generously include Society in your estate planning or other long-term finances, you are not just making a donation; you are leaving a legacy that ensures a future for those who are visually impaired or blind throughout the St. Louis area.

Leave a legacy by becoming a member of the Eilers' Guild. Named after our foundational Guild member (who served the Society for 50 years) and his wife, the Rey and Marli Eilers' Guild recognizes those who have included SLSBVI in their estate planning through a gift of \$5,000 or more. Each member is honored for their generosity and impact to the Society.

There are a variety of ways to plan for a legacy gift, making a difference in the lives of those served by the Society including: donor-advised funds, trusts and wills, life insurance beneficiary designations, stocks and securities, and real estate. Please contact **Megan Connelly, Director of Development** at **314-968-9000** if you wish to discuss planned giving or other giving opportunities.

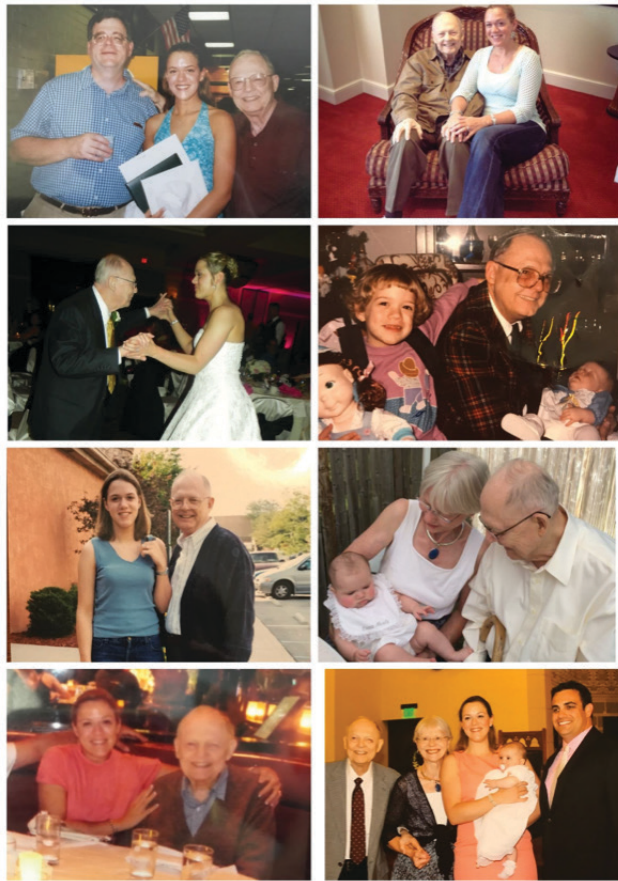


Estate Planning & Legacy Giving Lunch & Learn

Thursday, November 30, 2023 - 11:30 a.m.

Presented by Scott McKinnis
of Hockensmith McKinnis Hamill, P.C.

Light lunch provided,
please register to attend at 314-968-9000.



THANK YOU!

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2nd Annual Wike for Sight: Huge Success and a Lot of Fun!



Mike Ward and friend



Laura Park-Leach, Louie, and Wendy Hymes