

EyePower Summer 2006

News and Information from the Low Vision Center

EyeView

*by Bill Rolle, Executive Director
Low Vision Center*

The summer travel season is upon us so we thought that it might prove useful to offer some travel hints and tips for those "on the go" this year. We also came upon some disturbing news that second hand smoke can negatively impact one's vision and hopefully have clarified the meaning of "legally blind" for those who were not sure.

This will be my last newsletter as I move on to help my son manage two MaggieMoo's Ice Cream & Treateries in Frederick, Maryland. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time at the Low Vision Center and wish each and every one of you success and good health. Terry Eason will become the new executive director and will continue to do her excellent job of addressing the clients' needs. I know that we can count on you to give her your continued support.



Secondhand Smoke Threatens Vision

Cambridge University (UK) researchers have studied the impact of smoking on macular degeneration (AMD). They discovered that living with a smoker for five years doubles the risk of developing AMD and being a smoker triples it. Research has already shown that smoking increases AMD risk. However, this is the first study to show similar risks from passive "secondhand" smoke. Co-author Professor John Yates says there is a clear association. He adds: "this research suggests that long, regular exposure to 'smoke filled rooms' may be as damaging as aging." The researchers suggest that people not only stop smoking, but also avoid places where they might regularly encounter other people's cigarette smoke.

Travel Hints for Those on the Go This Summer

Extra planning may be required for those with vision impairment who are planning pleasure trips this summer. Lighthouse International highlighted some helpful recommendations in a past summer issue. They encourage one to inform his or her travel agent or carrier about the specific help one might require. The request could make your trip smoother and allow you to relax and enjoy your journey.

By Air: Courtesy vehicles can get you to the gate quickly and safely. Ask to be pre-boarded and oriented to the plane's facilities and exit locations. If you're traveling with a guide dog, notify the airline for appropriate seating. Try to take non-stop or direct flights to avoid the hassle when there are delays.

By Train: Amtrak recommends that you book your travel with a reservation agent rather than online. This ensures that your requests are documented. Ask to speak with a customer service agent if you don't get answers to your questions. Train personnel can also assist you in getting to the dining car and help you board or detrain at your destination.

By Bus: Greyhound offers assistance with boarding and deboarding, luggage, transfers, stowage and retrieval of mobility devices and destination announcements. However, you need to advise their personnel of your travel needs in advance.

Plan Ahead: Tourist attractions may offer discounts and specific accommodations for people with vision impairment. These may be available only with advance reservations. Theaters may supply headsets that describe the action on stage. Museums may offer audio or hands-on tours. It's always best to ask

ahead of time if you have special requests. Some people use travel agencies that cater to people with vision loss. Some of those agencies only offer information, while others provide assistance in travel planning or organize special cruises or sightseeing tours with sighted guides. You may access a list of these agencies by clicking on the "Travel" section of www.visionconnection.org (enter "Travel Agencies" in the Search box on the web site) or call (800) 829-0500 to request the Lighthouse International "Tour & Travel Agencies" fact sheet.



Travel Tips

► Use a white cane. It makes others aware that you are visually impaired and may aid you in getting help when needed.

► Carry a phone card or cell phone with tactile markings. You can store important numbers on your phone. Or you can record them and bring a portable tape recorder, with which you can also listen to music or books on tape.

► Organize essential items like paper currency, keys, tickets and personal ID using a money belt or hip pack. Also keep handy your itinerary, destination, addresses and flight numbers in a format that's accessible to you.

▶ Separate smaller bills for tips and snacks in a special pocket or wallet. If you're traveling in Europe, the new Euro currency can be distinguished by size, color and tactile characteristics.

▶ Bring a list of medications, including dosages and an emergency contact.

▶ Carry a signature guide. Also keep your flashlight, magnifiers or other low vision devices in an easily accessible place.

▶ Once in your room, have the hotel staff show you the nearest fire exit...even if you're traveling with a companion. You may be alone when an emergency occurs.

▶ Ask where the TV remote and telephone are, how to adjust heat or air conditioning, how to request a wake-up call or anything else that's important to you.

▶ Ask hotel staff for help, such as orientation to restaurants, gift shops or fitness centers.

▶ Be organized when packing. Consider using plastic bags to separate outfits.

▶ Invest in brightly colored luggage with long handles and wheels. Or use high-contrast tape or ribbons on your baggage to make them easier to identify.

▶ If traveling with a guide dog, bring all documentation, such as health certificate with proof of vaccinations and notify carriers and hotels in advance.



Focus Group Participants for Cell Phone Design

Drs. T.L. Smith-Jackson and Ira Jhangiani of The Grado Department of Industrial and Systems Engineering at Virginia Tech are looking for participants in a focus group on cell phone design. A participant must be a resident of the United States, 19-45 years of age, have used a mobile phone within the last year (but not own a phone now), and have a visual impairment, such as legal blindness. Qualified participants will be asked their opinions about different aspects of cell phones. The focus group will last about two hours and each participant will be compensated \$10.00 per hour. The group will meet somewhere in Bethesda, Maryland. Please call Terry at the Low Vision Center, 301-951-4444, if you would like to participate.

NIH Recent Survey on Vision

The National Institutes of Health recently completed a national survey on vision. The survey found that most Americans have good vision, but close to 14 million are visually impaired. Of those, more than 11 million have uncorrected visual impairment, such as nearsightedness. They need eyeglasses or contact lenses to improve their vision. The good news is that now the Federal government has information on the extent of visual impairment in the United States. This will be available to policy makers as they seek to address health care issues at the local, state and national levels.

Legally Blind Clarified

Many people read the word "blind" and instantly think "darkness". "Darkness" is actually total blindness. However, many people classified as "legally blind" can still see light, identify colors and detect motion. Others may actually have enough functional vision to read large print or get about. Legal blindness is merely a definition used to qualify individuals for certain benefits. In the U.S. one is legally blind when your best-corrected acuity is 20/200 or less. You may also be legally blind if your field of vision is very narrow.

Blue Rose Videos

Blue Rose Videos with a Voice is a unique video rental service designed especially for people with visual impairments. They currently stock over 200 commercial video titles, all complete with narratives that describe what other people can see on the screen, like costumes, facial expressions and actions. Each rental costs \$3.00. Videos are delivered to your door. For further info, click on <http://www.blurosevideos.com/index.html> or call 415-492-1885.

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**LOW VISION
CENTER**

*Winning Ideas for
Failing Sight*

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Free Matter for
the Blind
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