

Meet Jim Keeler: 2017 Employee of the Year

Jim Keeler used to believe that he was incapable of working because of his vision loss. When his friends suggested that he get a job, he'd reply, "I can't do anything because I am blind."

After developing Leber Hereditary Optic Neuropathy (LHON), an eye condition that results in a quick loss of central vision, Jim was unsure of the next step. He had no idea what it was he was looking for other than assistance due to his sudden change in vision.



(Above) Jim smiles in front of AVRE's National Industries' for the Blind sign.



(Above) Jim alters the speed of the Will-Pemco paper sheeter to prepare for a paper roll change.

In 2002, Jim discovered AVRE and called on a whim. After meeting with Vision Rehabilitation Therapist Annie van der Wal and learning about AVRE's job opportunities, Jim started work immediately. After ten years with the agency, Jim left AVRE for a few years. He returned in 2014 and trained to become a machine operator.

According to Production Manager, Luigi DiRusso, "It was great to have him back as he is an asset to the production crew and overall AVRE family. I can depend on Jim whenever I need something completed."

Jim's day-to-day responsibilities are made easier and more effective because he works on a machine that has accessible features and assistive technology built into it. The machine incorporates large print touch screens, high color contrast, and voice output. Jim points out that the voice output helps because it tells him and his teammates how fast the machine is running and where problems occur. He acknowledges, "Although it's chaotic, it's a lot of fun."

Jim takes pride in his work and recognizes that the organization has provided him with an opportunity to grow professionally and personally over the last several years. As AVRE's 2017 Employee of the Year, he is honored that his peers recognize his dedication and hard work.

"It's nice to be appreciated," Jim admitted. "I've changed a lot since I first left AVRE."

When he is not working, Jim enjoys reading, crossword puzzles and caring for his beloved dog, Faydra. Jim aspires to write a novel based on The Beatles song "Cry Baby Cry" and looks forward to settling down and getting married. He also looks forward to improving himself as a person and continuing down the path he is on.

"I think it's a good one," Jim smiled.

Our Mission:

"To create opportunities for success and independence with people who are blind or visually impaired."

Growing Our Rehabilitation Team

Ronda Girardi, Vision Rehabilitation Therapist



Ronda is excited to work as a Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist at AVRE. Ronda graduated from Western Michigan University with her Masters Degree in Vision Rehabilitation Therapy and has worked in Ohio for the last four years.

As a recipient of the Costello Scholarship Award through AVRE in both 2007 and 2008, Ronda shares her gratitude for having the opportunity to work at a place that supported her in her educational aspirations.

In her free time, Ronda enjoys listening to audio books, singing for fun, and spending time with youth, especially her granddaughter.

Beth Jurco, Orientation and Mobility Specialist

Beth joins AVRE as our new Orientation and Mobility Specialist. Originally from Anchorage, Alaska, Beth obtained a Masters Degree from Western Michigan University. Her past work experience includes interning for Palo Alto VA Hospital in California. More recently she spent nine years with the Seattle Lighthouse for the Blind as an Orientation and Mobility Specialist.

In her free time, Beth enjoys the outdoors, traveling, and scuba diving. She looks forward to exploring everything New York State has to offer and is excited about her new adventure here at AVRE.



We'll Miss You, Laure!



AVRE said goodbye to Vision Rehab Assistant Laure Griffis in December, wishing her farewell into retirement. Laure had been a dedicated member of the healthy and rehabilitation staff for ten years, mentoring and working with young children and teens throughout her tenure at AVRE.

We would personally like to thank Laure for all that she has done for AVRE's children's program, her consumers and the hard work she put in day in and day out! We will miss you!

**DID YOU
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All About UV Shields (Sun Filters)

By Shawna Armstrong, Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist

Glare is recognized as the number one problem for people who are blind or visually impaired. So, what is glare and how does it affect individuals with low vision?

Glare is the reflected or uncontrolled light that shines directly into your eyes and can be experienced by an individual with low vision in a variety of ways:

Discomfort glare occurs when different levels of brightness exists at the same time within the eyes visual field.

Dazzling glare, also known as photophobia, strikes when individuals experience extreme visual sensitivity to light.

Veiling glare, also known as disabling glare, is stray light interferes with visual resolution. This type of glare reduces contrast.

Although glare is a very bright light, it doesn't help an individual see better. The light produced by glare can cause visual discomfort, interfere with physical safety, and independent performance of everyday activities. Many of the consumers we work with at AVRE are experiencing some form of glare. UV shields filter ultraviolet radiation (UV, A, B and C), reduce glare and heighten contrast. UV shields come in a variety of different color filters from light to dark and have an important top and side shield protection. The method of trial and error with various filter colors helps the rehab staff determine what color filter works best for an individual. Below are UV shield filters often recommended based on eye condition:



Diabetic Retinopathy - green, green/grey and amber filters.

(Above) A pair of orange UV shield glasses

Glaucoma - Yellow, Amber, plum, grey, grey/green.

Macular Degeneration - Yellow, Orange, red, red/orange, amber and plum.

Our Vision Rehabilitation staff can complete an indoor and outdoor glare assessment if appropriate. UV shields will be recommended for our consumers to optimize vision and increase comfort. A variety of UV Shields are available for purchase at our ViewPoint store. If you have any questions about which UV shield may be best for you, feel free to give us a call at 607-724-2428. For more information on UV Shields, go to www.noir-medical.com.

Classmates to Co-Workers

Patti Casciotti first met Luigi DiRusso in 1963. They were first grade students in their school's sight-saving program.

The school district designed the program so that individuals who are blind or visually impaired can mainstream through the public school system by making available large print, visual aids, and adaptive equipment. Luigi recalls, "I not only had a language barrier [being born in Italy], but I had a visual barrier as well. If it wasn't for the program I would have really struggled."



(Above) Luigi DiRusso and Patti Casciotti stand together in front of AVRE's AbilityOne Program sign.

After going separate ways after grade school, Patti and Luigi found themselves sharing a bus last year. "When I recognized him on the bus I thought, 'I know that guy!'" Patti laughed, "I think we went to school together."

The two started talking about work. Luigi told Patti about his job at AVRE and about the employment opportunities for people who are blind and visually impaired. Patti was looking for a change and asked Luigi about any openings. It wasn't long before Luigi offered Patti a tour of our facility and she quickly signed on to work in our manufacturing department. Patti truly believes that the sight-saving program back in 1963 and the recent bus ride brought everything together.

According to Patti, "Everything happens for a reason!"



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Delaware, Otsego, Tioga, Tompkins and Schuyler.

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