



# InSight

Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment, Inc.

## AVRE hosts 2<sup>nd</sup> Dining in the Dark

Our second Dining in the Dark event brought together family, friends, and community partners to raise funds for vision rehabilitation services and enlighten guests on the challenges faced by people who are blind by eating dinner blindfolded. After a successful inaugural event in 2018, we implemented new ideas and opportunities to share our mission with our community.

“Dining in the Dark has been a unique and effective way to raise awareness within our community about AVRE’s mission,” said Jaclyn Bombard, Director of Development and event coordinator. “Guests leave with a true appreciation of the challenges of eating a meal without sight, a task they might otherwise take for granted.”

The evening began with a cocktail hour featuring music from the Scott Freeman Band Trio. Guests were greeted by our wine wall, kayak raffle, and tastings from local breweries and distilleries. Our silent auction included over 20 donated items including VIP tickets to the Dick’s Sporting Goods Open, one-year memberships to local fitness facilities, cross country skis, and artwork from local artists.

Guests were welcomed by FVRE Chair Marena Gonz and AVRE Chair Steve Wayman before enjoying a three course meal while wearing blindfolds. Throughout the meal, Vision Rehabilitation Therapists and Orientation Mobility Specialists instructed guests how best to navigate a dinner plate. Our keynote speaker, Army Veteran and Chief Operating Officer of Bosma Enterprises, Jeff Mittman,



### *Our Mission:*

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

shared his unique story about overcoming his sudden loss of vision while serving in Afghanistan. Mittman lost most of his vision when he was hit by an IED during his deployment. He stressed the important role vision rehabilitation services played in his recovery.

The night would not have been possible without the support of our sponsors. With their help, we raised over \$45,000. All proceeds will be used toward vision rehabilitation services. More than 30 local companies contributed through sponsorship, ticket sales, and advertisements. Excellus BlueCross BlueShield and M&T Bank sponsored at the Gold Level for the second year. Harding Brooks Insurance Agency sponsored our wine wall, Bob Carr Printing 2.0 was our print sponsor, and Ophthalmic Associates was our 'Pay to Peak' sponsor.

Bombard concluded, "We are so grateful for the generosity of the community, individuals, and corporate sponsors who were a part of Dining in the Dark."

If you were unable to attend, we invite you to go to our website and view this year's photo gallery. Our hope is that we continue to grow events like Dining in the Dark to help advocate the importance of vision rehab services in our community!



## Ranked #4 in the Country as the "Best Nonprofit To Work For"

In 2018, we were honored to place 41st in the Top 50 'Best Nonprofits to Work For' in the nation by The NonProfit Times. We are proud to announce that AVRE ranked 4th in the country in 2019. Additionally, we placed 3rd for medium-sized companies nationwide and 2nd in New York State.

"This significant move from #41 in the top 50, to being ranked #4, demonstrates the continued positive shift in organizational culture and the level at which our employees have embraced these changes," said Ken Fernald. "Our employees have moved us from a good place to work to one of the best companies in the country."

Thank you to all of our employees for participating in the survey again this year. It is because of you that AVRE is a great place to work!

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## 2019 NIB Public Policy Symposium

In April, AVRE staff attended NIB's 2019 Public Policy Symposium in Washington DC. The conference includes a recognition and celebration of affiliated agency's Employees of the Year. The public policy aspect focuses on visiting elected representatives in their offices on Capitol Hill and asking them to support initiatives important to the AbilityOne Program. Employees of the Year are recognized at the annual banquet, after having enjoyed a few special events with their travel guests and colleagues from agencies across the country.

AVRE had two Employees of the Year. Troy Wackford, AVRE's Shipping Clerk, was nominated for the Melvin J. Samuelson Career Achievement Award for his professional accomplishments at AVRE. Team Lead Todd Gray was nominated for the Peter J. Salmon Award for his solid work ethic and commitment to teamwork in his department. Todd's wife, Nikki, joined us, too, and was able to enjoy some of the same special treatment as Troy and Todd. Congratulations to Troy and Todd for their outstanding performance!



President/CEO Ken Fernald and Chief Operating Officer Jenn Small took part in the Capitol Hill visits. Prior to their appointments, they participated in informational sessions detailing the points NIB wanted them to discuss on behalf of the AbilityOne Program. There were three topics. Perhaps the most important was asking Congressional leaders to support coexistence between the AbilityOne Program and the Veterans First Contracting Program. As it stands currently, the Veterans Administration gives priority to service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses, despite legislation that clearly states the AbilityOne Program priority.

As affiliated agencies, we also asked elected officials to support a utilization goal for the Department of Defense that would require they purchase 2% of their total purchases from AbilityOne agencies. The last request pertained to a growing practice among state vision rehab agencies that considers employment at an NIB affiliated agency "non-competitive and non-integrated." We know that jobs in our agencies are competitive and replete with good pay and comprehensive benefits. As a matter of choice, many working age people who are blind **want** to work in NIB agencies. We're asking state agencies to make their judgments on a case-by-case basis so that we can successfully place individuals who are blind into employment at all levels within our agencies.

Although our efforts are repeated each year and it often takes many years to realize results, we firmly believe it is our right – and duty - to talk with elected officials to convey our concerns and preferred outcomes. We will be back next year!

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**AVRE** serves visually impaired individuals of all ages who live in the New York counties of Broome, Chemung, Chenango, Cortland, Delaware, Otsego, Tioga, Tompkins and Schuyler.

AVRE is an Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity Employer.

If you would like more information about AVRE and its services, please feel free to contact us.



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