



# InSight

Summer 2015

Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment, Inc.

## STAYING FIT: AVRE REMAINS ACTIVE IN COMMUNITY

At AVRE we pride ourselves on being team players. This spring the agency came together to participate in two local community events, helping spark team spirit and encourage physical fitness.

After a successful run last year, we very proudly had three runners representing AVRE in this year's Greater Binghamton Bridge Run. President/CEO **Kenny Fernald**, who ran for his second consecutive year with running guide Ken Howell, and Assistive Technology Instructor **John Ellzey**, who ran his very first time, both successfully completed the half marathon or 13.1 mile course. Production Supervisor **Luigi DiRusso** ran and completed the 5K. To help raise the overall excitement at this year's run, the AVRE staff came together to encourage all of the runners the morning of the race.

The agency was very fortunate to work with local radio personality Rich Birdsall of 98.1 The Hawk who helped AVRE's presence be seen and heard downtown. AVRE was also featured in four live radio spots on their station to enlighten listeners on the different rehabilitation services we provide in our surrounding communities. With several employees and our friends at Positive LifeForce on hand, we were able to bring smiling faces to all involved.

In June, a group of 13 employees participated in the Broome YMCA's largest annual fundraiser, the Corporate Challenge that was held at SUNY - Broome. 54 local companies and businesses came together to participate in the event, which was designed to promote camaraderie while creating general awareness of the businesses in our community. The fundraiser consisted of four different physical challenges including a 5K, a predicted mile, relay races and a mile exclusively for executive staff members. Luigi DiRusso and **Tom Garruto** represented the agency in the 5K, finishing the 3.2 mile run in 26 minutes and 21 seconds. Representatives from both of our manufacturing and rehabilitation department competed in the predicted mile, an event in which participants estimated how long it would take them to complete the mile ahead of time. The participant who finished closest to their estimated time, won. **Cassie Burgess** led the way for Team AVRE in the predicted mile with a difference of 22.09 seconds.

As an opportunity to get the agency's name out there, both of these events were a great bonding experience for all involved. Although AVRE did not place, it was certainly an enjoyable time for everyone and we look forward to raising the competition at both events next year!



*Above: Staff members come together to cheer on the Greater Binghamton Bridge Run participants in the AVRE front visitor parking lot.*



*Above: 13 employees pose for a team photo at the Broome YMCA's Corporate Challenge at Broome Community College.*

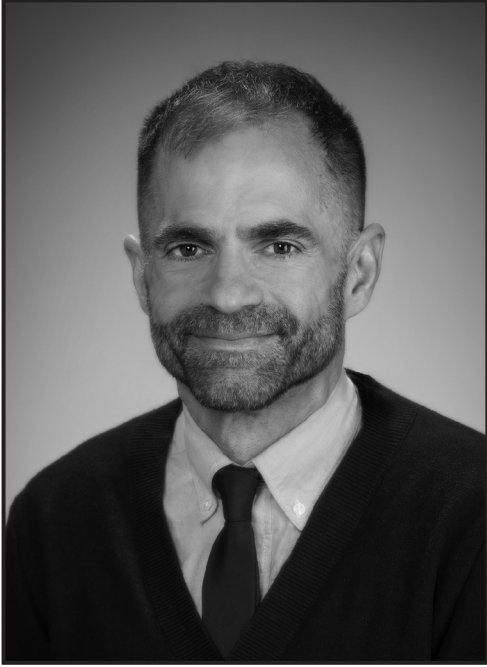
### ***Our Mission:***

**"To create opportunities for success and independence with people who have sustained vision loss."**

# WELCOME ALL, TO AVRE!

## THOMAS GARRUTO

Employment and Career Specialist



Thomas has over 15 years of experience and education in Human Services. Originally from Binghamton, NY, Thomas lived in San Francisco for 15 years where he began his career in Human Services supervising a team of volunteers who provided clean syringes and education to active users living on the streets of San Francisco. Thomas came to AVRE from Catholic Charities where he worked as a Job Placement/Coach for those living with Autism.

Some of Thomas' hobbies include: running, yoga, films, and theater. During the summer, he spends weekends hiking in the Catskills or visiting the Jersey Shore. When he is not taking a weekend road trip, he enjoys working in his perennial and vegetable gardens. Thomas is looking forward to helping the consumers of AVRE achieve independence and gain a sense of pride through employment.



Pat was born and raised in Binghamton, NY. After receiving her Associate Degree in Accounting from Broome Community College, she transferred to Binghamton University to pursue a career in Education and Human Development.

After college, Pat spent 33 years in the Accounts Payable Department at IBM before retiring. This year, Pat has come out of retirement to pursue new challenges and join the team at AVRE as our new front desk receptionist.

Pat is also a founding member of Widows to Widows, a support group that assists new widows get through difficult times.

In her free time she enjoys going to the beaches in Florida and traveling to Cayuga Lake with her family. She also can be found driving her 11 year old grandson to and from hockey practices in the winter.

## PATRICE LUMSDEN

Reception/Accounting



## TODD BIRCHARD

Rehabilitation Assistant



Todd grew up in Apalachin, NY and currently lives in Owego with his wife and two children. Todd holds a Bachelor's degree in History from Binghamton University and a Master's in Education from Elmira College. Todd worked for the Union-Endicott school district for the past seven years and the field of education for over ten years. Todd also has over twelve years of experience working with special needs children in Tioga County at a summer camp and yearly recreation program called Camp Ahwaga. At this camp, Todd worked with children of all ages and disabilities to learn, stay active, and have fun.

In the spring Todd will be attending Salus University in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania to become a certified Orientation and Mobility Instructor where his experience in education will be a valuable asset that transitions him into this new and exciting career. Todd is excited about beginning this new journey at AVRE and is excited to meet all of the wonderful people that work here along with all of the people that AVRE serves in our community.

## CONTINUING TRAINING

By John Ellzey

In the two most recent Business Management Training sessions, NIB (National Industries for the Blind) chose to have us focus primarily on data and innovation. We talked about how data alone doesn't paint a picture until we use the correct analysis for interpretation. One particular tool which stood out to me was the Value Curve Analysis, which is used to plot a company's strategic profile, a company's strengths and weaknesses. This was the most exciting tool to learn because my group members and I instantly found a use for this metric in our research paper which is due to Envision INC. by next session.

With regards to innovation, I took away two main points. The first is that innovation is as much a necessity as not making the same mistake twice. This point was made through some of our pre-session assigned readings which stated that only 13.4% of the Fortune 500 companies in 1955 were still on the list in 2011. Alternatively, think of sales for snowboards, which have skyrocketed in recent years but haven't been on the market for longer than 15 years. Second, innovation creation drives new products and processes for making existing products better. History shows us where we have been, and it enlightens us to the best path forward for the future.

It has been quite the honor traveling to Arlington, Virginia for these past four sessions. Every time I return to AVRE I'm fueled with more passion for our vision and mission.



## WAY TO GO, STEVE!



Join us in congratulating Orientation and Mobility Specialist **Steve Connors** on receiving a \$500 scholarship from the VisionServe alliance! The VisionServe alliance offers a scholarship to develop the next generation of professionals working in the field of blindness and vision rehabilitation.

Steve was awarded the scholarship in support of his decision to provide qualified services after passing the ACVREP exam in orientation and mobility. Congratulations, Steve!

## CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

Sunday, July 26th marked the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Act was signed by President George H.W. Bush in 1990 to help eliminate discrimination against people with disabilities, including but not limited to employment, public transportation and accommodations, and telecommunications.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo honored the anniversary by signing two pieces of legislation which strengthen state protections for people with disabilities. The first protects people who are disabled from being refused access to public places, while the second is designed to help military families who have relatives with disabilities.



*Photo: Property of USA TODAY, CJ Gunther, epa*

Although much has been done to protect the rights of people with disabilities, there is still much more to be done and improved on in the years to come. USA TODAY featured an article written by James Alan Fox, a member of the USA TODAY Board of Contributors and a professor at Northeastern University, in which he discussed the challenges of traveling through an airport for those who are blind and visually impaired, because he too was recently certified as legally blind. Whether it is the struggle of navigating through an airport terminal with a white cane and being unable to see low-lying luggage or having to ask a stranger about a flight change because the airport monitor is hung high and too small to see, there are clearly challenges people with sensory impairments still face today.

Blogger DeAnn Elliot recently had a piece published in The Wall Street Journal discussing how adaptive technology often struggles with internet accessibility. As the virtual world has now become a destination to browse, shop and pay bills, web accessibility has become as equally important as accessibility in the physical world.

With that said, everyone at AVRE is proud of the advancements that have been made for people with disabilities so far thanks to the ADA. And we, like many, aspire to live in a world where individuals who are blind or visually impaired can live, learn, and work independently.

## ADVOCATING FOR ABILITY ONE

Each year, staff from National Industries for the Blind (NIB) affiliated agencies across the country gather in Washington, DC to advocate for the AbilityOne Program. The AbilityOne Program makes it possible for agencies like ours to sell product and services into the federal market, thus enabling us to create good jobs for people who are blind.

AVRE has participated in the NIB Public Policy Forum since it began in 2007. The Forum offers the opportunity to gather with colleagues to learn about and discuss legislative issues that may impact the program. Agencies are encouraged to schedule visits with their US Senators and House Representatives to educate them about AbilityOne and any pertinent legislative issues.



*Above (left to right): Olmstead's Gary Wagner, AVRE's Stephen Comency, Kenny Fernald and Jenn Small, Alphapointe's Gina Gowin, NABA's Chris Burke*

The goal is to garner their support for the program and legislation that ensures its continuation.

An important lesson we've learned over the years is that connecting with your elected representatives makes an impact. They want to hear constituent's stories about how programs like AbilityOne improve people's lives. Of course, there is power in numbers and statistics do matter, but individual voices count, too.

We're fortunate in the Southern Tier to have representatives who listen. Senator Chuck Schumer and Congressman Richard Hanna advocate for our program, purchase our products, and have visited our facility. They meet with us personally when we visit the Capitol. They are truly AbilityOne Champions.

Our advice – if you have concerns, write to your representatives or visit them in Washington. And, be sure to vote! It counts!

Learn more about the AbilityOne Program at [www.abilityone.org](http://www.abilityone.org).

## MOVING ON UP!

AVRE prides itself on the longevity of its employees. We think it's fair to say that employee longevity says a lot of positive things about an organization. We have numerous employees who have been here over 20 years, including our CEO, Ken Fernald. Earlier this year we celebrated the retirements of two long-term employees – over 50 years between them! Many things contribute to this type of longevity, but recognizing a strong work ethic, commitment, and a job well done is fundamental. In that vein, we are pleased to announce two internal promotions of a couple of long-timers!

**Charles Gardner** has been with AVRE since 1992, most recently as Manager of Operations. He has held several positions over the years, wearing a multitude of hats. He's likely never spoken the words "it's not my job." He has always put in the extra effort to get the job done well and on time, including working weekends and coming in before sunrise. In 2009, he was recognized with the Amy J. Lateer Award for going well above and beyond what's expected. He's developed a keen sense of AVRE's business and has seen it through both challenges and growth. In his new position as Director of Manufacturing, Charles will oversee all day-to-day operations at the Downtown Binghamton facility.

**Jenn Small** has been with AVRE since 2006 (not quite as long as Charles!). For the first nine years, Jenn was the Director of Development and Communications. Similar to Charles, she's worn various hats over the years and has always been willing to take on new projects or help another department. Several years back she teamed up with Ken Fernald (VP of Operations at the time) to grow the commercial market for our copy paper. The initiative was quite successful and she discovered a solid interest in the business side of the organization. In her new position as Chief Operating Officer, Jenn will oversee Development, Marketing/Communications, and the Business Division, including new business development and the switchboard operations in the Bronx and mid-Hudson Valley.

### Stay Connected! Follow us on social media



Association for Vision Rehabilitation  
and Employment (AVRE)



@AVREBing

## THE SOLUTION IS THE PROBLEM

By Cassie Burgess

I remember when I found out that I needed eye glasses. I was in seventh grade and I was told that all those long nights in front of the television had blurred my vision. I immediately wanted to skip having glasses and wear eye contacts right away, but wasn't able to do so. But after two years of toughing it out with eye glasses, I was finally able to make the switch from glasses to contacts.

I have now been wearing soft lens eye contacts without any issues for ten years -- that is up until about a week ago when I woke up with the worst red eye I've ever had. Having learned more about eye conditions since working here at AVRE, I knew it wasn't a simple case of pink eye. With conditions worsening and being unsure of what exactly was going on, I went to see my primary care physician the next day. She examined my eye, confirmed it wasn't pink eye and sent me to see an ophthalmologist right away.

After a long ten minute car ride and wait in the ophthalmologist's office, I was finally examined by the doctor and diagnosed with a moderate corneal ulcer and infection, otherwise known as keratitis. I was told that a corneal ulcer is an open sore that forms on the cornea and is usually caused by infections. It is also a common diagnosis for contact lens wearers.

I was stumped. **How and why did this happen?**

After further discussion, my doctor asked me one simple question. "When was the last time you replaced your contact solution and case?" I admit that it had been some time since I had bought a new bottle of solution and that I had probably used the same lens case for years. All of which was possible because I was also guilty of making a habit out of sleeping in my contacts. As a result of my condition, I was given antibiotic eye drops and was stuck wearing my glasses for a week. Fortunately because I sought out my doctor right away, I would have no permanent damage and I would not suffer any vision loss.

This experience taught me a lot about eye health and how to properly care for your eyes. Most importantly, I learned three important lessons that I believe every contact lens wearers should exercise.

- 1. Utilize eye solution that contains hydrogen peroxide.** When you are at the store and unsure of what "kind" or brand of solution you should use to soak your contacts in when they are out, consider the solution that is 3% hydrogen peroxide. This almost guarantees you that all and any bacteria or germs on your lenses will be killed.
- 2. Replace your contact solution and case regularly.**
- 3. Do not sleep in your lenses!** This is the most important tip I have for all who wear contacts. Whether you forgot to bring your supplies with you on vacation or you are just too tired to take them out before bed, never allow yourself the excuse of sleeping with your

contacts in. By doing so, you prohibit your eyes from receiving the proper amount of oxygen they need to breathe and function efficiently.

Last but not least if you ever notice any changes in your vision, always consult with your doctor. They are there to help you, so utilize them as needed. It is always better to be safe than sorry!



## ANNUAL APPEAL

Although it's only summer, we are already gearing up for the holidays and the start of our 2015 Annual Appeal. Each fall we ask our donors to support the work we do throughout the year. Their generous contributions support our ongoing efforts to educate the community about vision rehabilitation services. Their gifts support senior vision services and recreation programs for young consumers. In so many ways, AVRE donors help people in our community who are blind and visually impaired achieve their goals.

We are committed to engaging our community in creative ways to connect more people with services that will help them remain independent and succeed at work and in school. We're glad you take the time to learn about what's new at AVRE by reading our quarterly newsletter. We also encourage you to visit our redesigned website at [www.avreus.org](http://www.avreus.org) to learn more about our services.

For the most current goings-on at AVRE, follow us on Facebook and Twitter. And, as you plan for your annual, year-end charitable giving, we ask that you again consider AVRE. You can make a contribution anytime through our website or via mail during the Annual Appeal. If you have specific questions about making a gift, call Cassie Burgess at our office at 607-724-2428. Help us make a difference in our community.



## COMING SOON...



Go to our website at [www.avreus.org](http://www.avreus.org) for more information regarding our upcoming Nine at Night golf tournament!

**AUGUST IS**

## **CHILDRENS' EYE HEALTH AND SAFETY MONTH!**

Did you know that 1 in 20 preschoolers have a vision problem or that eye injuries are one of the leading causes of vision loss in children? With kids heading back to school, it's crucial to remain prepared and aware of how to keep our youth's eyes healthy!

Here are some tips as we head into those Autumn months:

- Children should always play with age-appropriate toys and stray from toys with sharp objects.
- Parents should always be cautious of their child squinting or turning their head in an usual manner.
- Include vision screenings in every yearly check-up with the pediatrician.

For more information, please visit  
<http://www.preventblindness.org/>

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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,  
as well as the Pennsylvania counties of  
Bradford, Susquehanna and Tioga.

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