



InSight

Winter 2015

Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment, Inc.

MOVING FULL SPEED AHEAD!

After more than a year of planning, we are finally moving forward with our \$1.7 million equipment upgrade and modernization project at our Downtown Binghamton facility. This project is actually Phase II of a larger project that began with the purchase of a new ream wrapper in 2012. The current copy paper sheeting equipment is more than 50 years old, difficult to maintain and repair, and inhibits any growth in sales.

Not only will the new Pemco DigiCut Sheeter enable us to increase our copy paper capacity by 60%, it will significantly improve production efficiencies, safety, and enhance employee skills through more advanced assistive technology and accommodations. We have worked closely with Pemco to apply unique modifications to accommodate for a wide range in degrees and types of vision loss. The new modifications will include screen magnification on the primary computer control screen, specialized lighting, and color contrast.

Across all markets, copy paper sales have grown from \$208,000 in 2009 to \$3.3 million in 2014, making it AVRE's largest product in sales dollars. We're excited about the growth potential and look forward to doing more business with existing customers and cultivating new business relationships. Modernizing and upgrading equipment is one way AVRE can retain current and create new employment opportunities for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

Like most notable achievements, none of this would be possible without generous support from our community. In addition to support from our Boards and our Foundation for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment (FVRE), we secured funding from New York State's Regional Economic Development Initiative and grants from four local foundations – the Decker, Hoyt, Klee, and Mee Foundations.

We would also like to thank our customers. Whether they are with the federal or state governments or one of our loyal commercial customers, all of our customers deserve our appreciation for supporting our organization's business and helping to create employment opportunities for people who are blind or visually impaired.



Above: Production Supervisor Luigi DiRusso using a large touch screen control panel with touchable quadrants



Overall, the project is a win for AVRE and the City of Binghamton by preserving a sizable number of manufacturing jobs in Downtown. We're proud to give ourselves a "thumbs up"!

Left: The new Pemco DigiCut sheeter will include modifications such as safety guarding and inner-lock devices, voice output of faults and warning alerts, and additional emergency stop buttons/devices.

Our Mission:

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

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

A "State of the Agency" speech might be too much, but we thought a brief review of **Ken Fernald's** first year as President/CEO would provide a nice segue into what lies ahead in his second year. Let's begin with staffing.



From retirements to relocations, we said goodbye to several good friends and long-term staff members. And, no thanks to a serious shortage of vision rehabilitation professionals across the country, filling open positions has posed quite a challenge. The agency has responded with a new approach – a "Grown Our Own" initiative.

"Grow Our Own" is an agency commitment to financially supporting AVRE employees and other qualified individuals in our community who are interested in pursuing degrees or certifications in vision rehabilitation. In just one year, we have two staff members working toward additional certifications in our field! We also established a new Professional Development Fund so our professional staff could attend career development workshops and conferences.

We committed to offering more opportunities for employees to live healthier. Many of us participated in the United States Association of Blind Athlete's (USABA) National Fitness Challenge, as well as our own Fitness Fridays program. This past fall, a few brave individuals represented AVRE by running in the Army 10-Miler in Washington, DC.

We invested in improving AVRE's image across the board by installing new building signage, ramping up our social media presence, and redesigning our website. We hosted a press conference for US Senator Charles Schumer and honored him as an AbilityOne Champion for going to bat for the AbilityOne Program. And, we held our 1st Annual Nine at Night Glow Ball Golf Tournament to raise awareness about and programming support for AVRE.

Perhaps the most exciting achievement was securing funding for our new Pemco sheeter. The entire project will cost \$1.7 million. With support from our Foundation for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment (FVRE), the team secured additional funding from four local, private foundations and New York's Empire State Development fund. If all goes well, the new sheeter will be producing copy paper in July! This project is a "thumbs up" for AVRE and the Binghamton community. With 2015 well underway, the entire agency is healthier and ready to grow!



MEET CASSIE

"From the very first day that I walked into AVRE, I knew this place was special. Everyone was very kind, helpful and enthusiastic about the mission here to provide rehab services and employment for individuals that are blind and vision impaired. Although I have indirectly worked with AVRE in the past, it has been enjoyable learning about how the rehabilitation and manufacturing side both mold AVRE in a way that truly make it unique.

After receiving my Bachelors of Science degree at Ithaca College in 2013, I moved back to Binghamton to work for a local minor league sports team in their public relations and promotions department. This past January, I was fortunate enough to be hired at AVRE as the new Marketing and Business Development Specialist.



Having a professional background in marketing, I am excited about bringing a fresh new outlook to the agency and contributing new ideas about social media marketing. I am also very passionate about assisting others in the Southern Tier and continuing to raise awareness about how AVRE can help aid others and their businesses.

It has been such a pleasure getting to know everyone here and witness first hand all the amazing hard work that is put in by its employees, day in and day out. I'm excited to join the staff here at AVRE and look forward to what lies ahead!"

AN UPDATE ON JOHN...

We last heard from our Assistive Technology Instructor **John Ellzey** when we first announced that he had been chosen to participate in the National Industries for the Blind's (NIB) Business Management Training (BMT) last summer. Since, he has attended two of its sessions. The first focused primarily on becoming familiar with the training program and professional growth while the second covered aspects of accounting and finance.

All of the BMT sessions are being held at George Mason University in Arlington, Virginia and are taught by professors from the university. John noted that although the sessions taught are geared toward profitable businesses, discussions are held as to how the material applies to non-profit organizations.

In addition to the attended sessions, the BMT program also includes an extensive group project that focuses on one of agencies associated with NIB. John and his other BMT group members, are working directly with Envision, in Kansas City, Missouri. The groups' objective is to solve one of the agencies' existing challenges and offer alternative solutions. The project has served as a true opportunity for John to learn about NIB, the other BMT participants, and other organizations.

"It's nice getting to know what everyone does [at their organization]," John concluded, "I've really learned that we're all there for the same reasons and that AVRE is just a piece of the puzzle."

John's third session will begin March 16th and will cover marketing strategies.



STEPPING ON PROGRAM

AVRE is excited to host the Broome County Health Department's 'Stepping On Falls Prevention Program' on Wednesdays, May 20th through July 1st, 2015 from 10am to 12 noon.

The seven-week program focuses on empowering seniors to maintain their independence and is facilitated by Registered Nurses. Program participants will gain knowledge in home safety, medication use, vision, and footwear from community health professionals and will learn about strength and balance activities. AVRE's **Diane McMillan** will be teaching the session on vision on June 10th.

The fee for the program is \$35 and is open to all seniors. To register, call Diane at 607.757.0750 or Donna at 607.765.4180.



Stepping On

HATS OFF TO DAVE!



Join us in congratulating **Dave Ellsworth** on his recent and well-deserved promotion to Maintenance and Facilities Supervisor. Dave's been with AVRE since 2012 and has been an asset throughout his tenure. He continues to be our Operations Manager Chuck Gardner's "right hand," taking on anything asked of him, including painting on weekends! Dave is part of a team committed to ensuring that the building and grounds are safe and well-maintained, especially during this year's tough winter season. We look forward to many more years working alongside Dave. Congratulations!



PLANNING FOR AVRE'S FUTURE

For years now, our industry has faced a serious shortage of Vision Rehabilitation Therapists (VRT) and Orientation and Mobility (O & M) Specialists. Many factors contribute to this shortage, but the bottom line is it impacts our ability to provide timely, comprehensive services. Following the lead of several sister agencies, we've implemented a new initiative called "Grow Our Own." We're investing in our own professional staff or other qualified individuals in our community who are committed to advancing their education in our field and who want to live and work in our area.

AVRE Vision Rehabilitation Therapist, **Margaret Opalka**, has taken us up on the offer and is currently working to become dually certified as a VRT and an O & M Specialist. While the program is primarily done online through Salus University, Margaret will stay at the school in Philadelphia for ten weeks this summer to complete her hands-on teaching requirement. Margaret's tuition and related expenses will be covered by AVRE and a special education grant she received. Margaret is excited about her new certification and looks forward to being able to provide additional services for AVRE consumers. She is slated to complete her certification requirements in early 2016.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND

Since the Professional Development Fund was created, we have seen immense growth in the vision rehabilitation staff members' education and training.

The fund has allowed several of our professionals to attend state conferences like the NYS School for The Blind Vision Conference that was held in November. This particular conference hosted sessions that focused on teaching orientation and mobility skills to students of all ages. It also taught participants about Apple technology and accessibility and how to teach adaptive technology to blind and vision impaired adolescents.

Diane McMillan, AVRE's manager of the low vision clinic and children's services, attended the NYS Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired Conference last year which also featured professional insight into delivering quality service to blind and vision impaired children.

Other informative and helpful forums that our staff has been able to attend due to the fund include the "How Women Communication Seminar" and the 2014 Vision Rehabilitation & Employment Institute.

Many of these opportunities would not have been possible without the continued support of our donators. If you would like to make a donation to our Professional Development Fund, you may use the enclosed envelope to mail your check. Please write "Fund" on the memo notation line of your check. Or, you may go to our website, www.avreus.org, and click on the Donate button. Type "Fund" in the "Designate your donation to a specific program or fund" form field.

Thank you to all who have donated for helping us create more educational opportunities for our rehabilitation staff members!



DEFINE YOUR LEGACY

At AVRE, we understand that providing for your family is a priority. Many individuals also provide for charitable organizations that they trust and believe in. We are deeply grateful to individuals who include AVRE in their estate plans. These generous individuals help to ensure that we can continue to provide opportunities for success and independence for people with sustained vision loss for generations to come.

You can make a bequest for a specific dollar amount or for a percentage of your estate. You can designate your bequest for general use or you can restrict its use. Some individuals establish endowments that honor the memory of a family member or loved one. A will is an important legal document and you should seek your attorney's guidance regarding bequests. If you would like to learn more about how you can make a special gift to AVRE, contact Jenn Small, Director of Development, at (607)724-2428 or jsmall@avreus.org

REACHING OUT

AVRE is a unique organization. We provide comprehensive vision rehabilitation services to individuals across nine New York counties and we employ people who are visually impaired through our manufacturing and switchboard operations. But no matter what the focus, our mission is to create opportunities for success and independence for people with sustained vision loss. Unfortunately, not all who might benefit from our services even know about us! We're actually known by some as the "best kept secret in Binghamton"!

To fulfill our mission we need to connect with more people who are blind or visually impaired to educate them about vision rehabilitation services and employment opportunities. To that end, we are reasserting our outreach efforts with area eye and health care professionals to talk about how our services enhance what they offer for their patients. We're also connecting with senior living communities and senior centers so they can learn about how to live better and independently despite their vision loss.

We need your help! Covering nine counties poses some daunting geographic challenges. If you know someone who is having trouble with daily living tasks due to vision loss, tell them about AVRE.

Share this newsletter or direct them to our website at www.avreus.org. We boast a brand new website that offers details about services and how AVRE can help. You can even request more information via the website. Of course, we always welcome phone calls to 607-724-2428. Remember to first consult your eye care professional with any concerns about your vision and make annual eye exams a healthcare priority!

Stay Connected! Follow us on social media



Association for Vision Rehabilitation
and Employment (AVRE)



@AVREBing

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Navigating a city poses its own set of challenges, but imagine doing it without your eyesight. Brit Jennifer Warnick did just that in Reading Borough as part of a pilot for Microsoft's latest project involving 3D soundscape technology. The technology involves a bone-conducting headset that receives transmissions from sensor beacons that guide users through their environment via audio cues that come through the headset. The only thing you need in addition to the headset is an off-the-shelf smart phone. Warnick donned a blindfold and had a life-changing experience:

"As I took my first tentative steps, I noticed a second sound — a sort of sonar ping. Within a few strides the ping seemed to move to my left side (which it turns out was to let me know I was veering left toward the curb). As I corrected, the pinging sound moved back to center as the clip-clops continued to nudge me forward. Periodically, a voice offered turn-by-turn directions, nearby points of interest ("Chiropractor, about 10 meters"), transportation updates ("No. 9 bus is approaching") and even polite warnings ("Be aware: This is a main road"). Because the headphones didn't cover my actual ears, I could also listen for environmental noises. I'd never before had an audio experience like this — its richness helped me visualize the neighborhood around me while its immersiveness gave me more confidence with every step."



Microsoft designers worked closely with the Guide Dogs agency in England — its employees, mobility experts, and visually impaired users — to genuinely understand the challenges of traveling with vision loss. "In the UK, there are about 180,000 people who rarely if ever get out and about. That's a massive social issue in its own right," said Richard Leaman, CEO of Guide Dogs. Microsoft and Guide Dogs decided to produce a concept video as a vision statement for the partnership, something to show real-life scenarios and explore the possibilities of using mobile devices and 3D sound to help enhance the environment and experiences of a person with visual impairments. Introducing new services, like the use of technology, is a vital ingredient to change. "If our major cities...had sensor-enriched zones where this capability worked, I think it would be an incredible achievement...It's like an awakening."

Check out the entire story and some neat videos demonstrating the technology, visit [Microsoft.com](https://www.microsoft.com) and search for "Independence Day." You'll be amazed!

PUTTING THE APARTMENT TO WORK!

In the last issue of InSight we introduced our new Adaptive Living Apartment. On December 8th we officially unveiled the new apartment and now it's up and running! Vision rehabilitation therapists and consumers have been using the apartment to teach and learn daily living skills such as cooking, cleaning, and doing laundry. The kitchen, in particular, boasts simple adaptations like under cabinet lighting and bright, raised bumps that indicate the most commonly used settings on microwaves and stoves.

We also integrated contrasting countertops to demonstrate the benefits of using surfaces that highlight whatever items you're cooking or serving. Using dinnerware or pans that contrast with the countertop makes locating plates and bowls easier. And, we installed various types of lighting to accommodate individual needs and preferences.



Above: Margaret Opalka and Richard preparing a dish in the apartment kitchen

Recently, we joined Richard Bohland and Vision Rehabilitation Therapist, **Margaret Opalka**, for a cooking session. Richard was particularly interested in learning how to prepare steak and chicken. He learned how helpful a dual-colored cutting board can be. The black side made it easier to prepare the chicken while the white side worked best for the steak. Margaret also introduced a countertop grill. Without an open flame or red hot coil, the grill is safer to use and equally effective at cooking meats. When it came time for a cup of coffee, Margaret demonstrated a liquid level indicator that hangs on the side of your mug and beeps when it's full, reducing the risk of burned fingers!

Many of the items are common, everyday kitchen utensils or inexpensive aids and devices. Others are adaptations that may need to be installed by a professional, such as lighting or custom cabinetry. Having all of these things in one place offers consumers an opportunity to determine what works best for them. We would like to again thank the special donors that made the apartment possible — Nelson and Leona Fiske, Linda Rosendale Griffin, and Kristine Rosendale Valashinas. Without their generous support this valuable learning environment would not be available to AVRE consumers. We are extremely grateful that it's now a reality!

APRIL IS

SPORTS EYE SAFETY MONTH!

Did you know that an estimated 100,000 sports eye injuries occur every year? Of those injuries, the majority of victims are adolescents, many of whom suffer blindness or permanent visual impairment.

Here are some safety tips to avoid sport eye injuries:

- Always wear proper safety goggles (lensed polycarbonate protectors) for contact sports, specifically sports that include a racquet or basketball. Look for eye protectors that have been tested by American Society of Testing and Materials (ASTM).
- Use batting helmets with polycarbonate face shields or wire shields for sports like baseball, ice hockey and lacrosse.
- Remember that eyeglasses aren't always sufficient in protecting your eyes

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

FREE MATTER
FOR THE
BLIND

Association for Vision Rehabilitation
and Employment, Inc.
174 Court St.
Binghamton, NY 13901-3514

Address Service Requested



A.V.R.E.

AVRE ViewPoint Store Coupon

10% Off

TOTAL PURCHASES UP TO \$100

GOOD ON:
MANY LOW VISION AIDS
PRINTER & COPIER PAPER
MANILA FILE FOLDERS
JAWS CLEANING PRODUCTS
BATTERIES

One coupon per customer.
One time use for current purchase.

Store hours: Monday—Friday
8:00 AM—5:00 PM
607-724-2428



InSight is published quarterly by the
**Association for Vision Rehabilitation
and Employment, Inc.**

174 Court St., Binghamton, NY 13901
607-724-2428

Email: avreinfo@avreus.org
www.avreus.org

Editor: Cassie Burgess

InSight is available in the following formats:
Large Print (14 pt), Braille, emailed text,
Word document on disk or cd,
and regular audio cassette.

If you would like to receive InSight in a different
format, please call us.

A.V.R.E. 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.

A.V.R.E. is an Affirmative Action and
Equal Opportunity Employer.
If you would like more information about A.V.R.E.
and its services, please feel free to contact us.

