A century of sight leads to a future of InSights

One hundred years ago, in 1911, four individuals came together in support of a common cause – to empower adults who are blind.

The collective vision and passion of these four men – Jacob Frank, Jess Southworth, James Cowley and Harry Dudley – provided the spark for what is today, 100 years later, a $32 million social enterprise recognized nationally for its world class vision rehabilitation programs serving more than 4,000 people annually and employing over 500 people, one-quarter of whom are blind or visually impaired.

As we take time this year to celebrate our rich history, we’re also planning the next stage of our development. Through this letter I’m extending an invitation to you, our good friend, to read more about the important mission-focused work ABVI provides on each page of InSights, our new philanthropically-focused publication.

The insight that we’ve gained throughout our century-long journey of providing vital services to our community has provided a vision for the future. It is a vision born out of our core belief that the sky truly is the limit for what people who are blind or visually impaired can accomplish. It is a clear vision that will position us as leaders in the vision rehabilitation field. It is a vision that is inclusive and will allow all of us – those we serve and their families, our generous donors and our outstanding employees – to see great things. And finally, it is a vision that will come to life on the pages of our newest publication – InSights.

Thank you for your continued support. I look forward to hearing your feedback about InSights.
In May, ABVI publicly announced a major new expansion for the organization and the kick-off of a capital campaign to help fund its construction.

At a well-attended press event, President and CEO Gidget Hopf told of the plans to expand ABVI’s operations through the construction of a new three-story building that will adjoin to the current facility, ultimately creating an anticipated 60 new jobs.

To raise funding needed for this facility, she said that ABVI is initiating the public phase of the capital campaign. During the public phase, the goal is to raise $3 million to complete the project.

For the past 100 years, ABVI has provided services to individuals who are blind or visually impaired in Rochester. In 2010, ABVI provided comprehensive vision rehabilitation and support services to more than 3,400 people in Monroe County and the surrounding five-county area – a 20 percent increase from 2009. With the population of aging baby boomers increasing in the Greater Rochester area, individuals in need of the services provided at ABVI is also growing.

“Over the years, we have completely maximized our available space to accommodate the growing population of individuals in our community with visual impairments,” Gidget said. “As we enter our second century of service, we know that meeting the increasing need for our services, support and training means that we must expand. The new facility will help us provide service excellence, increase accessibility, and offer continuous improvements to those we serve.”

The new facility will include a larger and enhanced adaptive technology and career training center, space for skill-building with technology, a new Vision Rehabilitation Center, a larger InSight Shop, an expanded Optical Shop and additional examination rooms. Additionally, the new facility will help ABVI provide opportunities and enhanced services for the thousands who are blind or visually impaired throughout our region.
At ABVI Summer is all about kids!

By Kristen O’Connell, Development Manager

Oh, the sweet freedom of summer – when you’re a kid, nothing embodies that freedom more than summer programs and camps. It’s a chance to break away from routine, make new friends, reconnect with old ones and have a lot of fun.

Children with vision loss often do not receive the same opportunities for summer recreation or socialization as their sighted peers. To address this need, ABVI hosts two developmental summer programs: Summer Sizzle and Project LifeSkillz.

Summer Sizzle is a week-long day camp, where children can sharpen social skills and learn how to carry out everyday activities with a visual impairment. There are opportunities to interact with the community through field trips with a special emphasis on physical activity and having fun.

ABVI’s Project LifeSkillz is a week-long program open to children between 13 and 17, and offers a sneak-peek into life after high school. Housed in Nazareth College dorms, participants take part in career exploration, skills training and recreation.

These unique programs are made possible by private funding, including generous grants from the Webster Lion’s Club Camp Smile, Rochester Female Charitable Society, M&T Bank, and many 2010 Annual Celebration attendees who contributed to the fund.

To discover how you can help support these critical opportunities for children, please call the Development office at (585) 697-5713.

An Update from Betty ...

Betty might be familiar to many of you because she was featured in a November mailing and also in the last Beacon.

Due to Sarcoidosis, a condition that caused her to see the world as if she were under water, Betty is legally blind. At first she thought she had pink eye, but after visiting 13 different doctors, she finally received her life-changing diagnosis.

“It was a nightmare,” says Betty. “But now here I am at 422 South Clinton Avenue and I feel blessed.”

A few years ago Betty reached out to ABVI for vision services and emotional support. She decided to pursue a career at ABVI and has made many friends along the way.

“I decided to make ABVI my family,” says Betty smiling. Betty is currently working in ABVI’s Contact Center. She aspires, however, to one day open her own coffee cart business. She’d like to operate this small business in ABVI’s lobby so she can work with her family.

To learn more about her dream and to hear Betty’s personal account of her journey, or to donate, please visit www.SeeGreatThings.com/WaysToHelp/MyABVistory.aspx
On a beautiful spring day in late May, Goodwill of the Finger Lakes (of which ABVI is an affiliate) launched its latest retail venture – Blue, a Goodwill boutique – to much fanfare. Located at 3350 Monroe Ave., Pittsford, Blue offers new and gently used, donated one-of-a-kind designer apparel, shoes and home décor in an inviting and eclectic setting. Blue combines classic elegance with a modern flare to provide customers an exciting one-of-a-kind shopping experience.

As with the other nine Goodwill retail outlets in Greater Rochester, ABVI will utilize funds derived from the sale of items at Blue to provide a full array of social, rehabilitative, employment, training and housing services to people of all ages with vision loss.

It isn’t just that revenues derived from the boutique fund ABVI programs and services, however. Blue, like all of the Goodwill stores in the area, is an accessible work environment utilizing adaptive technology that empowers people with significant vision loss to be self-sufficient and be contributing members of their families and the community.

“As Blue takes off, we’re continuing to work with staff members in vision rehabilitation and workforce development to integrate mission elements with training elements and the overall operation of the store,” says Darcy Coddington, Director of Retail. “We’re very excited about the possibilities this integration presents as we work to continually achieve our mission.”

As the Goodwill management team continues to integrate more and more mission within the total operation of Blue, the boutique is also envisioning a fresh take how donations are talked about that not only emphasizes the impact the donation makes in the lives of the people ABVI serves, but also about the impact the donation is making on the environment.

Just as funding derived from sales at the boutique provide funding for the programs that serve individuals who are blind, visually impaired or have other obstacles to work rebuild their lives, it is also the place where all of the little black dresses, skinny jeans, slub-knit sweaters or dolman-sleeved blouses that were never worn, worn only once, or just won’t be worn any longer will get a new beginning instead of a landfill ending.

“We want our customers to feel good from the inside out, so we encourage each person to cleanse their closet,” says Sondra McFarlane, VP of Marketing. “Every time they bring those gorgeous threads and house wares to Blue, they’re not just replenishing our boutique and helping our community, they’re saving these items from the local landfill.”

Fashionistas in the Greater Rochester area are rejoicing as they shop again and again, doing their part as members of the blue revival.

For more information about Blue, a Goodwill boutique, check out Facebook.com/bluerevival and follow the boutique on Twitter @blue_revival, or call (585) 385-9663.
Our Wish List

In honor of ABVI’s 100th anniversary, we are hosting a Centennial Celebration Gala on October 15, 2011! It will be a grand affair featuring black-tie attire, open bar, live music, dining and dancing – and of course, some unique and valuable auction items. We are looking for new goods or services to feature in our silent and live auctions. Please take a look at the list of suggestions below – and thank you in advance for your generosity and support.

- Event tickets – ballet, theater, sporting events, concerts
- New or Antique Fine Jewelry
- Gift Certificates – shopping, dining, spa services
- Travel opportunities – plane tickets, cruise reservations, hotel or condo stays
- Limo trips
- Rare or collectible bottles of wine
- Catering services
- Signed sports or entertainment memorabilia

... And so much more!

To coordinate a donation, or for more information, please contact Kristen O’Connell at (585) 697-5711.

An additional wish ...
BrailleNote Apex: $6,000.

This is a note taking device with a built-in Braille display. It allows the user to access the internet, email, calendar, word processing, and calculator functions in a compact, portable device. The Adaptive Technology Center would love to have one to be able to demonstrate this device to the people we serve.

A Game to Remember

By Belinda Brasley, Executive Assistant to the President

A dream come true.

ABVI’s Marcos Rios experienced this recently. The organization partnered with the Rochester Red Wings to host “See Great Things” night at Frontier Field in June. The team wore special jerseys which were auctioned off to support ABVI. One of the children who receives services at ABVI was the honorary manager. An employee sang “Take Me Out To The Ballgame.” And the most special part of the night for Marcos was that he threw out the first pitch of the game, a life-long dream.

Marcos did not stop talking about this opportunity and about how excited he was to have this great chance. This was not something he was taking for granted.

I think that seeing Marcos at the ball game that night, in his special jersey matching the players’ jerseys, made everyone from ABVI extremely happy. When the announcer called his name, a huge roar of cheering arose from the stands. Marcos did himself, and all of us, proud by throwing a perfect pitch. He had the hugest smile on his face when the ball smacked into the catcher’s mitt. It was one of the best moments of a great, great night.

It was a night to remember. I am so proud to be part of an organization that empowers people and makes dreams come true.
For us, caring for others starts at home.

More than anything else, ESL is a family that believes in our community. Those of us who work here support Goodwill’s Scouting for Food and Clothing Drive because we also believe in caring for our kids, grandkids, nieces, nephews, friends, and neighbors.