



lantern

Celebrating 75 Years of Hope, Confidence & Independence VOL. 28 NO. 1
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New Mission Statement Adopted by Board

The Miami Lighthouse Board of Directors voted unanimously at its December 12 meeting to adopt a new mission statement as recommended by the Board Planning and Program Development Committee. Director Dr. Charles Pappas presented to the Board the mission statement that appears at left.

“Our new mission statement reflects our broadening mission,” said Board Chairman William Roy, Ph.D. “Promoting eye wellness should lead to fewer people affected by vision impairment. Addressing the supply of highly trained professionals and encouraging new ways to provide vision rehabilitation will improve the vision rehabilitation experience for present and future clients. This is exactly what our founders had in mind.”

New Board members were welcomed at the meeting as well (see page 4).

MISSION STATEMENT

To provide vision rehabilitation and eye health services that promote independence, to educate professionals, and to conduct research in related fields.

“Share the Vision” Raises \$500,000

Friends of Miami Lighthouse for the Blind gathered November 12 at LaGorce Country Club for a “Share the Vision” luncheon, raising nearly \$500,000. Several clients shared their stories with an audience of about 200, and the Lighthouse musicians played. Heidys Hernandez, blind from birth, sang a selection from the latest Miami Lighthouse CD, “A Better Chance” (see page 3). The event was underwritten by Bessemer Trust and Health Ease.

Donors and friends also welcomed the Miami Lighthouse Board of Directors’ vision for a Center of Excellence in Low Vision and Vision Rehabilitation.



Virginia Jacko, Mayor Carlos Alvarez, Gloria Martin and State Rep. Luis Garcia at the “Share the Vision” luncheon.



In a first in its history, Miami Lighthouse has received a four-star overall ranking, the highest ranking, from Charity Navigator, the independent evaluator of not-for-profit organizations. “The four-star ranking reflects our status as a fiscally-strong and credible institution,” said CEO Virginia Jacko.

Gloria Martin: A Woman of Vision

Philanthropist Gloria Martin received the first Miami Lighthouse Woman of Vision award at the inaugural Miami Lighthouse Women of Vision luncheon, in recognition of her incentive matching gift of more than \$1.1 million to Miami Lighthouse in 2006.

The event took place October 24 at René Ruiz Couture in Coral Gables. Sponsors for the first Women of Vision luncheon were Rene Ruiz Couture, *Social Affairs* magazine, and BNY Mellon. “We plan to make Women of Vision an annual event,” said CEO Virginia A. Jacko, “in order to recognize the increasingly prominent role of female philanthropists.”



Miami Lighthouse has a fresh new look thanks to new interior and exterior paint, made possible by funding from Miami-Dade County and special consideration from The Continental Group, Inc. and Paintex.

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President's letter



Dear Friends of the Miami Lighthouse,

In this newsletter you will find a feature on an important milestone for our blind and visually impaired young musicians here at Miami Lighthouse; they have just completed a third CD full of great music they made together with sighted kids. On their new CD, "A Better Chance," the first one wholly produced here at Miami Lighthouse, they sing and perform together with music they composed and wrote lyrics for themselves. Thanks to the ACT Program of The Children's Trust, the philanthropy of Gloria Martin and the expertise of our talented staff, especially Harold and Antonio Cobo, these young musicians have achieved a major career milestone.

Having traveled the road of blindness as an adult and as an experienced executive, I know what it was like to have to learn new approaches and ways to use the skills that I already had as a sighted person. I am amazed and inspired to witness the way our students, visually impaired or born blind, learn their art and their profession as readily and at least as well as the sighted kids, and start confidently on paths that will lead them not just to independence, but to success.

It is only the beginning of an important change in the way blindness and low vision will affect people's lives. We have come a long way from the days when rehabilitation meant finding ways to keep the hands of the blind busy; and we are poised to move past the model of striving only for independence in daily living skills into an era when blindness and low vision do not prevent high achievement. The minds and abilities of our clients, especially the young people, are needed in this world, and at the Miami Lighthouse we want to help them achieve everything to which they aspire.

That is why we need to do more. With the acquisition of the Heiken Children's Vision Program, we serve over five thousand individuals per year, and many more clients need our help. We have found that thousands of low income school children are underserved with vision care. Braille literacy among blind children is at an all-time low, and on top of that there is a serious personnel shortage in the vision rehabilitation and education professions.

At the inaugural Women of Vision luncheon in October (see story on page 1) we introduced the Board's vision for a Center of Excellence, a concept aimed at addressing these problems and ensuring the best future possible for the blind and visually impaired in our community. The Miami Lighthouse is uniquely positioned to become a benchmark training and research center for professionals who work with the blind and visually impaired, and an emphasis on practice-based teaching will help shape the future of vision rehabilitation and education. We have strong working relationships with universities in our state, the public school system and Bascom Palmer Eye Institute; these will continue to grow. One of the steps toward expanding our mission was the acquisition of the Heiken Children's Vision Program, which means that children who fail the state-mandated vision exam will get a free optometric exam and glasses when needed.

We have a new mission statement, one that accurately reflects an overall vision for the future that will improve the lives of thousands (see story on page 1). There is a lot going on here at the Miami Lighthouse, and more to come, thanks to the generosity of our donors, and as always the Division of Blind Services.

I want to especially express our gratitude to The Children's Trust. Significant contributions from The Children's Trust enable us to do so much for our blind and visually impaired kids that we just wouldn't be able to do without their support; I hope that all of you who read this will take care to vote for reauthorization of these funds when the issue is on the ballot this fall.

I look forward to sharing our successes with you, and wish you all the best in 2008. We couldn't do it without you.

Sincerely,



Virginia A. Jacko
President and CEO



Children's Trust Program Leads to "A Better Chance"

Miami Lighthouse has its own song, and lots of kids have made wonderful music together, thanks to a program funded by The Children's Trust.

This summer blind and visually impaired students enrolled in the music program at Miami Lighthouse, along with sighted kids participating through ACT (All Children Together), funded by The Children's Trust, producing a new CD titled "A Better Chance." This CD is the third by Miami Lighthouse musicians and the first produced completely at the Lighthouse's new state-of-the-art Henry & Inez Stone Music & Sound Studio.

The talented teenagers received a standing ovation when they performed two tracks from "A Better Chance" live before one thousand community leaders at The Children's Trust Life Time Achievement Awards luncheon Nov. 9 honoring Alonzo and Tracy Mourning. Through the ACT program, the legendary Henry Stone and Miami Lighthouse instructors shared their knowledge about the business of music production, song writing and performance with students from Miami Springs, Coral Gables, South Miami, Miami Northwestern, American, Hialeah, Miami Lakes, and Michael Krop Senior High Schools.

The music studio, made possible by Gloria Martin, Arthur Hertz and Ronald McDonald House Charities, features an array of music production hardware and software that enables blind and visually impaired students to gain skills in composition and sound engineering. The new CD features rhythms and styles as diverse as the young musicians themselves, including pop, hip hop, reggaeton, new modern disco, rap, Brazilian rhythm, samba and merengue.

The title of the CD is taken from a song by Antonio "Tony" Cobo, who instructed the students throughout the process of performing, recording and mixing the CD.

"I like to think of 'A Better Chance' as the anthem of the Miami Lighthouse," said CEO Virginia Jacko. "The students who participated in our music program this past summer included blind, visually impaired and sighted young people, all singing in their own styles, making music together. How symbolic that is of our mission, creating opportunities for mainstream participation in which vision impairment simply doesn't have to get in the way of success."

Student participants, whether they are clients of Miami Lighthouse or not, were universally enthusiastic.

"This summer I've written a new song that sounds awesome," said Natalia Sulca, a blind teen vocalist who often performs at Miami Lighthouse events. "I made a few friends, too, and I talk to them regularly now." Sulca, a student at Michael Krop Senior High, is featured on the CD singing "Teach Me to Love."

Furrious Berrain, a student at Miami Northwestern Sr. High, said: "I really enjoyed the collaboration with other students because it demonstrates great interaction. We helped each other out with verses and choruses and collaborated on songwriting. The best experience was hearing how

my songs came out, in other words, the final product. It made me feel that I accomplished something worthwhile."



To purchase your copy of "A Better Chance," call the Solutions Store at Miami Lighthouse at 305-856-9100.

Other Summer Programs

The Children's Trust also funds other important summer programs for blind and visually impaired kids at Miami Lighthouse. The STAR I (ages 6-9) and STAR II (ages 10-13), in our new Little Lighthouse area on the Third Floor, enjoyed outings such as swimming, ice skating, bowling and golfing. For the older kids, Miami Lighthouse offers the SEE (Summer Employment Experience) Program (ages 14-20) which offers real life job experience and opportunities to improve travel skills, orientation and mobility, and the living skills needed to live and work independently.

These are not the only summer programs at Miami Lighthouse; thanks to funding from the Division of Blind Services, young people ages 14-20 in our Summer Transition program gain skills they need to transition from high school to postsecondary or vocational education.





Many fun outings for our young clients are made possible by The Children's Trust.

Miami Lighthouse Welcomes New Board Members

Miami Lighthouse welcomed four new Board members at its December meeting:

Attorney **Lorenzo Jackson, Jr., Esq.**, began a six-year term on the Board of Directors of Miami Lighthouse for the Blind & Visually Impaired in 2001, after which he accepted a one-year term on its honorary board in 2007. He was also a member of the Governance Task Force. Jackson's practice areas include civil litigation, family law, insurance defense, labor and employment law, personal injury and premises liability.

Shelley Daniel Rutherford is the daughter of Mrs. W. Sloan McCrea (née Eugenia DuPass) and the late Jim Beckwith, D.D.S. Her stepfather, Mr. W. Sloan McCrea, and his family have been avid supporters of the mission of Miami Lighthouse since its inception. Shelley and her husband J. Larry Rutherford are well known in the philanthropic community.

Michael A. Silva, Esq., Partner, Tax and ERISA practice, Hunton & Williams. Silva's practice focuses on international tax law with emphasis on U.S. investment structures, cross-border tax issues, tax treaty planning, withholding obligations of U.S. real property investments and U.S. activities of foreign banks. Silva is returning to the board.

John Zamora, CPA, Partner, Tourism, Hospitality & Leisure ("THL"), Deloitte. Zamora focuses on the THL industry sector and is also Deloitte's Global Industry Sector Leader for Cruise Lines. He has written many articles in industry publications, including *Hotels Magazine*, and Deloitte's *THL Executive Report* on the state and outlook of the cruise industry.

In Brief...

Former Miami Lighthouse client Harry Epstein writes:

"In little more than three months I learned to read Braille, use my computer again, walk independently with a cane, go places on my own and handle all of the common daily tasks in my life. My debt to Miami Lighthouse is not financial, since all of the services were provided at no cost, but my emotional and moral debt is great. May the Miami Lighthouse continue to flourish and increase and shine more brightly every day."

Honorary Director Don Marx presented to CEO Virginia Jacko a \$2,000 check from a golf outing in April, which was underwritten by the Dade Association of Health.

City of Miami District 3 Commissioner Joe Sanchez presented Agustin Arellano, Sr., with a commendation from the City of Miami this summer in recognition of his pro bono general contracting services for completion of the Third Floor Wing. At a luncheon gathering of Miami Lighthouse clients, supporters, staff and Board members, Commissioner Sanchez praised Arellano for "creating a better Miami and a better Miami Lighthouse."

A Great Team: A Teacher and Her Guide Dog, Working Together

Sarah Clark, Rehabilitation Teacher Assistant at Miami Lighthouse, and her black lab Polly share a close working relationship. Polly is Sarah's guide dog, helping her maneuver everyday places and situations. Polly guides Sarah according to Sarah's commands, allowing her to move more independently and confidently than she did when she used a cane.

Sarah became a client of the Miami Lighthouse through the Orientation Outreach Program when she moved to Miami from Indiana. Although she was proficient with her white cane, she never felt entirely comfortable, so she decided to begin the process for getting a guide dog. Krissy Andersen with Guiding Eyes for the Blind in New York, who worked as Polly's trainer, matched Polly with Sarah and helped train Sarah at her own home in Miami. The Miami Lighthouse Orientation and Mobility team facilitated the process so Sarah could have a smooth transition. Having a guide dog allows Sarah to lead a more independent life.

The challenges and responsibilities of owning a guide dog are very demanding—Sarah must use the appropriate commands and maintain a constant vigilance, knowing what she needs to do next so Polly can respond. The biggest challenge when working with a guide dog, Sarah says, is the people you encounter. "The dog seems approachable, but it is important to remember that distracting the dog by touching it puts both the dog and the owner in a potentially dangerous situation," she said. Other dogs can pose a serious threat to a guide dog team and should be kept away.

Guiding Eyes staff worked with Miami Lighthouse O&M staff recently in a day-long training seminar. "I learned how important it is to develop trust between the two members of the team," said Miami Lighthouse O&M specialist John Clapp, COMS. "The user must really trust the dog and respond to her movements. This was a very valuable experience." Guide dogs are carefully trained, but people who use guide dogs, only a small percentage of the blind, also receive intensive training; and they can receive some of that training at Miami Lighthouse. Successful completion of mobility training is a prerequisite for clients who wish to attend guide dog school.

Not everyone can have a guide dog. The client must be able to walk and groom the dog, and perform all necessary tasks for the animal's care. Only the blind person is permitted to feed and walk the dog, to firmly establish the working relationship; a guide dog is not a pet, but a working animal.



Sarah Clark and Polly

White Cane Day Features Celebration, Discussion

Hundreds gathered at the Miami Lighthouse October 15 to mark White Cane Day, a national event that recognizes the white cane as both a tool and a symbol of blindness. State Representative Luis Garcia was the Grand Marshall of the annual Walk-a-Thon. Miami Lighthouse musicians performed at the celebration, and local Burger King franchisee and Miami Lighthouse Board Director Al Cabrera provided four hundred hamburgers for lunch. Graduates of Miami Lighthouse vision rehabilitation programs, community leaders, friends, volunteers and members of the Blind Veterans Association also heard speakers on issues of importance to the blind and visually impaired.

There was something else to celebrate: newly-installed auditory pedestrian signals at Eighth Avenue and Seventh Street, which will enable clients of the Miami Lighthouse to walk to Walgreens and nearby cafés. The auditory signals were a joint project between state and county highway authorities.

Eric Bridges of the American Council of the Blind spoke about paper money, asking, "Why is it that the Euro has different size paper bills dependent upon the denomination? Yet, in the U.S. the blind do not have this capability to differentiate our money?" The American Council of the Blind (ACB) has filed a lawsuit concerning accessible currency and the judge ruled in ACB's favor, but the Department of the Treasury has appealed the decision.

"Eric's presentation helped the Miami blind community understand several national consumer and legislative issues," said Miami Lighthouse CEO Virginia Jacko. "There is more to come on this topic. As the legislative advocate in Washington, D.C., for the blind, Eric is following up on this legislation."

Bridges also discussed the upcoming digital television transition in February 2009 and its implications for the blind. Blind consumers with analog TVs will not be able to listen to TV unless they purchase a digital-to-analog converter box. "There are concerns with the overall accessibility of this box," Bridges said. "Because the federal government indicated to industry developers that accessibility is voluntary, this has created a serious concern for blind consumers."

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