

VIST INSIGHT: FALL 2016

***Welcome to the Fall 2016 issue of the VIST INSIGHT
Newsletter, a publication of the Visual Impairment Services
Team.***

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White Cane Safety Day

NY Harbor VA Healthcare System will be hosting White Cane Safety Day in October.

St. Albans: Tuesday, October 18th, 2nd Floor Recreation Room; 9:30 AM – 11:30 AM

New York: Wednesday, October 19th; Main Lobby, 10:00AM – 2:00 PM

Brooklyn: Wednesday, October 26th; 1st Floor Atrium, 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM

The event is open to Veterans, VA employees, and the public. Literature will be available. There will be demonstrations on accessible equipment used by visually impaired individuals to help them remain safe and independent at home, at work, and in the community. Please stop by and get involved in educating hospital staff and the public about vision loss.

VIST Assessments

Some VIST patients have not been seen in a very long time! Please contact your VIST Coordinator to schedule an appointment to do so. The assessment includes a review of blind rehabilitation services, training and benefits and begins the referral process for other medical and specialty clinics. A current VIST Assessment is REQUIRED in order to receive access to the continuum of care of low vision and blind rehabilitation services and training.

Advanced Low Vision Clinic Welcomes Irma Martinez, MA, COM, as their New Low Vision Therapist

Ms. Martinez graduated from Hunter College with a M.A. in Special Education, and has certifications in Vision Rehabilitation Therapy and Orientation and Mobility. Ms. Martinez earned a B.S in psychology and a minor in Occupational Therapy. She brings with her 25 years of professional experiences from Vision Services for the Blind; Catholic Guild for the Blind; Lighthouse of South West Florida and the New York State Commission for the Blind. She is honored to be on the VA Team and brings her enthusiasm and many years of vision

training experiences to address the needs of the men and women who have served our country.

Influenza, Commonly Known As The Flu, Is A Contagious Lung Infection.

- It can make you miserable, with fever, cough, sore throat and muscle aches, causing you to miss work or family time.
- It can lead to serious health problems, like pneumonia, ear and sinus infections and dehydration.
- It can worsen existing health problems, like congestive heart failure, asthma and diabetes.
- Each year, thousands of New Yorkers are hospitalized and/or can die so don't put yourself at risk.

Protect your family from influenza.

1. Get the vaccine

- Everyone aged 6 months and older should get the vaccine.
- Get vaccinated every year. The vaccine is updated every influenza season to protect you against new viruses.
- Don't wait until peak influenza season (January to March) to get the vaccine. Get it in late summer or early fall. Still, a late vaccine is much better than no vaccine.

2. Don't spread germs

- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.
- Use a tissue or the inside of your elbow — not your hand.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

GET VACCINATED TODAY! The flu vaccine is available in all clinics and the Diagnostic Lab. Inquire with the Information Booth at all campuses.

Blinded Veterans Association (BVA)

BVA New York Regional Group: Spring Meeting

The Spring Meeting took place on Friday, May 13, 2016, on the 2nd Floor North Conference Room at the NY Harbor VA Medical Center's Manhattan Campus. The newly elected officers include:

President: Warner Murray

Vice President: Miguel Davis-Dacio

Secretary: Richard Jones, Jr.

Treasurer: Dennis O'Connell

Congratulations to the Blind Veterans Association New York Regional Group Executive Board Members!

BVA National Convention Summer 2016

As we expected, the 71st BVA National Convention in Milwaukee in August was a spectacular event. Among the

dignitaries during that week were Scott Walker, Governor of Wisconsin, and Robert McDonald, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Veterans, family members, and VA blind rehabilitation staff had the opportunity to meet with over fifty vision loss exhibitors, experience the latest in new vision technology, and attend encouraging ophthalmology presentations from our nation's leading vision care specialists. There was an introduction by David J. Schulkin, MD, Under Secretary for Health, VHA. As most of you know, a cornerstone of the BVA is, *Blinded Veterans helping blinded Veterans*. In keeping that tradition, BVA members taught several educational sessions to their fellow members. After business hours the program included a popular visit to the Harley Davidson Museum and cheering on the Milwaukee Brewers where they hosted the Pittsburgh Pirates. Three NY Regional Group Members attended. The BVA hopes that you will join them next year for the 72nd. Your VIST coordinator will let you know the details as soon as the information becomes available.

BVA Temporarily Reduces Life Membership Dues

Delegates appointed by their respective regional groups to the 71st National Convention of the Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) voted August 26 overwhelmingly in favor of adopting a bylaw amendment offering life membership to all blinded veterans at a discounted rate of \$20. "Our organization needs to think outside the box and figure out a way to provide an immediate incentive to make it easier to get blind veterans to join as Life or Associate Life Members," the proposed bylaw

change justification stated. “It is evident more now than ever that BVA needs to come up with some real incentives for blind veterans to join BVA.”

For more information about the bylaw amendment or BVA membership, please contact Membership Coordinator Cecilia Montenegro at the organization’s National Headquarters, 202-371-8880, Ext. 315, or cmontenegro@bva.org.

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LEGAL ADVICE OVER COFFEE

Veterans seeking free help applying for Social Security Disability Benefits and brief legal advice on related issues are invited to call 212.735.2366 to discuss eligibility. This Military Clinic was created by Marsh & McLennan Companies together with LS-NYC, law firm Skadden Arps and Goldman Sachs.

VISOR REUNION

This article was posted to New York Harbor VA Medical Center's Facebook page on July 28, 2016. Over 50 blinded Veterans and family members participated in the Visual Impairment Services Outpatient Rehabilitation (VISOR) Alumni Reunion last month at VA's NJ Lyons Campus. The group included seven Veterans who receive health care services at VA NY Harbor Healthcare System.



The VISOR program offers Low Vision Optometry, Low Vision Therapy, Vision Rehabilitation Therapy for living skills, Orientation and Mobility, Computer training and Social Work on either an out-patient basis or through the 10-day Hop-tel program.

The day's festivities included live music, great food, renewing friendships, and updating the VISOR Team of their ongoing progress. Since 2010 the VISOR Program has provided

comprehensive adjustment training services for visually impaired Veterans and their families.

Photo: (Left to Right) Warner Murray, Kenneth Killiebrew, Louis Ferron, Donald Penny, John Morrall, Luther Richardson, and Ronald White.

EASTERN BLIND REHAB CENTER REUNION

The New Haven Register published an article on June 23, 2016. regarding this year's Eastern Blind Rehabilitation Center Alumni Reunion. One of our very own, Miguel Davis-Dacio, was featured.

Blind veterans from West Haven center celebrate 10 years with Take a Vet Fishing in Branford

After losing his sight to glaucoma, veteran Miguel Davis-Dacio never thought he would be able to fish again.

“It was like the world had come to an end. I couldn't think straight. It's like the world had stopped,” he said.

At the age of 19, he survived two years as a member of the U.S. Air Force. But the challenge of learning how to cope without his sight made him question his hope, he said. Slowly, Davis-Dacio said he began to accept his fate. Rather than letting it become a hindrance, he learned how to rebuild his life without his sight.

“I was pretty determined about things. I had to write my own story, and that was one way of doing it,” he said.

This year, Davis-Dacio was just one of 70 veterans and volunteers who participated in the Take a Vet Fishing program at Killam's Point. The program, which started in 2007, was founded by Jeff Buggee and Ray Luhn as part of the First Congregational Church of Branford's Veteran's Outreach Mission.

After seeing other states help veterans through Take a Vet Fishing, Buggee decided to start his own chapter in Connecticut. During its first year, 12 veterans from the [West Haven Veterans Affairs Eastern Blind Rehabilitation Center](#) participated in the program. Fast-forward to 2016 and Take a Vet Fishing has served more than 4,600 people since 2007, Luhn said.

Now, every year through Take a Vet Fishing, volunteers hold 12 events across the state that veterans from different VA chapters can participate in. This year marked the 10th year that those treated at the Eastern Blind Rehabilitation Center — which serves veterans residing on the East Coast stretching from Maine to Virginia — participated in the program.

“We place more limitations on them than they do,” Buggee said.

But for Davis-Dacio, he didn't want his vision loss to limit him, rather, he had to find a new way to live life.

It wasn't until one of his friends at the VA introduced him to an acronym for the word "blind" that he started to view his disability differently.

"Beginning Life In a New Dimension — it is something I always remember," he said. "For us to be here together, talking and supporting one another about new things that we have learned, and sharing and exchanging, you begin to find that you are not alone."

For former U.S. Navy Seabee veteran Jim Pedone, it wasn't until he lost his sight to a 30-year battle with diabetes that he began to look at his life in a new dimension. At the age of 19, he enlisted in the Navy's Seabees where he was stationed in Vietnam for 16 months.

"We went to war as young men and we came home adults because you learned really quick to grow up," Pedone said.

But even after serving nearly two years in the military, Pedone said he thought he was invincible to potential health problems.

"I always said it's not going to happen to me, then things started getting blurry," he said. But through Take a Vet Fishing, Pedone said he is not only able to surround himself with veterans who face the same challenges, but he is able to recall some of his favorite memories of being out on the water.

"Just being here and smelling the ocean is refreshing," he said.

For Rich Green, who served in the U.S. Army for two years, Take a Vet Fishing not only helps him to relive a lifetime of memories spent fishing in Canada, but it allows him to connect with other veterans who share the same types of experiences. Thirteen years ago at the age of 55, Green said he began to gradually lose his eyesight after his retina slowly started to deteriorate. But Take a Vet Fishing showed him he could still make new memories fishing without any limitations.

For U.S. Army veteran Tom Bove, by being provided the resources needed to live a life without his vision, he is able to pursue a life of advocacy for the blind.

“Being a veteran, you are so lucky you can get any kind of tool that you need as long as you have a good use for it,” said Bove, who was diagnosed with Leber hereditary optic neuropathy.

By coming to terms with his disease, Bove said he was able to help other veterans not only learn how to cope, but learn how to accomplish daily tasks without their sight.

“Coming out here, being with other vets, you speak the same language, you have the same common experience,” Luhn said. “They are in a familiar environment among other vets. They could tell a tall tale and it’s so therapeutic (for them).”

And for veteran Ron Biglin, losing his sight wouldn’t prevent him from pursuing his love of cooking, fishing or kayaking. Rather Biglin, who served four years in the U.S. Air Force, used his disability as a way to challenge himself.

“I look at it as a challenge to learn stuff you did before, but learn it in a different way. It gives you that self-confidence again,” he said.

To learn more about Take a Vet Fishing, visit <https://www.facebook.com/TakeAVetFishing/> or contact Jeff Buggee at 203-488-7201. To make a donation to Take a Vet Fishing, checks may be sent to First Congregational Church 1009 Main St., Branford, CT 06405. Make payable to: FCCB Memo: TAVF.

This article was also featured on New York Harbor VA Medical Center’s Facebook Page on July 8, 2016.

Exciting Adaptive Sports Activities

The 6th Annual VISN3 Adaptive Sports Program took place on Wednesday, June 17, 2015, at the Northport VA Medical Center.

Many NY Harbor veterans and staff participated in the VISN-3 Adaptive Sports Program and enjoyed Tandem Biking, Tandem Kayaking/Paddle Boarding, Scuba (in pool), Bowling, Goalball, Archery, Bocce Ball, Fencing, Fly Fishing/Tying, Wheelchair Basketball, Volleyball and much more. Northport DAV Transportation Network graciously provided free roundtrip transportation to this full-day clinic. A good day was had by all.

Heroes on the Hudson

Heroes on the Hudson took place at Pier 66 on the Hudson River on Friday, August 5, 2016. It was sponsored by VISN3 and Wounded Warrior Project™. Ten legally blind veterans from the NY Campus participated in this adaptive kayaking and sailing all day event.

VIST Support Group News:

The New York Harbor VA Medical Center facilitates support groups for veterans with visual impairments. Adaptive ways of managing vision loss are a prevalent theme of each group along with education regarding the numerous health services available through the VA and services available community-wide. It is also an opportunity for veterans to socialize with peers who are dealing with similar emotions and experiences due to vision loss. Here are some updates on our group members.

Brooklyn and St. Albans Campus:

- Brooklyn VIST Support Group meets weekly on Wednesdays from 9am-10am.
- St. Albans VIST Support Group meets on the 3rd Tuesday of each month from 9am-11:30am.

New York Campus:

- Manhattan VIST Support Group meets weekly on Fridays from 10am-11:30am.

- Special thanks to John M. who continues to volunteer to ensure coffee and refreshments are available to all members of the group.
- This past spring, a representative from the NYC Office of Emergency Management spoke to the group about the importance of communication and transportation and planning ahead for an emergency event whether it be one of natural causes or otherwise.

Andrew Heiskell Library Computer Support Clinic:

Andrew Heiskell Library offers a Computer Support Clinic at their Manhattan branch at 40 West 20th Street. The clinic offers assistance to new computer users and experienced users to brush up on different skills. Some examples of the support offered include, but are not limited to the following: email, blogging, downloading audio books, learning accessible computer games, using the internet, configuring and using accessibility software, help with computer literacy, tutoring and/or help with accessibility software. To ensure someone will be available to help with a specific question, please make an appointment with Chancey Fleet by calling 347-632-8383.

Got Fried Eggplant? by Joe P.

Joe P. is a veteran who is legally blind and owned two restaurants in Brooklyn and loves to cook. Joe completed training at the Eastern Blind Rehabilitation Center at West Haven VA Medical Center in Connecticut, has met with BROS and maintains follow up as needed with the Advanced Low Vision Clinic. And every year he gives away dozens of tomatoes from his Staten Island garden to members of the Brooklyn Blind Support Group. Thanks Joe!

Here's another one of his favorite recipes:

Fried Eggplant

1 eggplant

1 large frying pan

½ cup of Canola oil

1 egg beaten

2 cups of prepared bread crumbs, flavor of your choice

Salt

Kitchen knife, cutting board, spatula, 2 forks, dinner plate

2 shallow bowls for the eggs and bread crumbs

Paper Towels – 8 sheets

Serving platter

Buy a regular size eggplant from your favorite produce store. Lightly wash the eggplant with a small dab of dishwashing soap and rinse and dry it. Cut the ends off the eggplant and peel the skin off with a vegetable peeler. Place the eggplant on a cutting board and carefully begin to slice it into $\frac{1}{4}$ pieces, about 10 slices total. Double two papers towels and place them on your counter and put the slices onto the paper towels. Then lightly sprinkle salt on the top of each eggplant slice and wait $\frac{1}{2}$ hour.

After the $\frac{1}{2}$ hour wait, gently rinse water over each eggplant slice, discard the paper towels and place the rinsed slices onto two double sheets of paper towels. Double two more paper towels to cover the eggplant slices and place a dinner plate on top to blot out the excess water. Pour two cups of bread crumbs into a shallow bowl. Break the egg into another shallow bowl and mix with a fork. Pour just enough oil to coat the frying pan and place the pan on the stove and turn the burner on low. Begin to gradually heat the oil. You want the oil just sizzling hot but not boiling or smoking. Then take an eggplant slice and dip both sides into the egg and then place the slice into the bread crumbs and turn it over so both sides are coated with the bread crumbs. Carefully place the slice into the hot oil in the pan and repeat this process with the eggplant slices until you have 6 to 8 eggplant slices in the pan depending upon the size of each slice. Cook each slice for about 2 minutes on each side and use the spatula and 2nd fork to turn them over. Gently add more oil to the frying pan as needed, but not too much. Remove the cooked slices with the spatula and fork and place them on top of two doubled paper towels to blot out

the excess oil. When they are cool to touch place the fried eggplant onto a serving platter. Enjoy!

Special note from Joe: When buying an eggplant hold each eggplant in your hand to get a rough estimate on the weight of the eggplant you plan to purchase. Choose the lighter eggplant since it has less seeds and will taste better. This eggplant dish goes great with spaghetti and sauce.

Important Phone Numbers

VA Eye Clinics

Manhattan (212) 686-7500 x3730

Brooklyn (718) 836-6600 x3703

St. Albans (718) 526-1000 x2150

Advanced Low Vision Clinic: 718-836-6600

Lourdes Pena x8912

Irma Martinez x3869

Dr. Lisa Chan-O'Connell x 8093

Deborah Kraut (BROS): (212) 686-7500 x 4885

Centralized Scheduling: (877) 877-9267

NY Harbor Nursing Helpline: (866) 940-2877

Pharmacy Refills & Medication Questions: (888) 207-2004

Suicide Prevention/Veterans Crisis Line (24 hours): (800) 273-TALK (8255)

Homeless Veterans Hotline (24 hours): (877) 424-3838

NY Veterans Benefits Administration Regional Office:
(800) 827-1000

NY State Blind Annuity Unit:(518) 486-3602

Access-A-Ride: (877) 337-2017

Blinded Veterans Association Field Service Program
Resource Center: (844) 250-5180