LOW VISION SUCCESS STORY

The idea of retirement for most people is exciting and a little scary at the same time. Transitioning from a hectic 40-hour work week to zero can be intimidating. Now take away the ability to see. That was the daunting prospect that weighed heavily on Patrick Decker.

Diagnosed with macular degeneration in 2005, Decker was worried what his life would be like once he retired. “I was really down and remember thinking, ‘What will I do, what is my future going to be?’” said the former Lincoln Public Schools administrator.

Then, in 2010 Decker’s ophthalmologist referred him to the Weigel Williamson Center for Visual Rehabilitation. “That was a turning point in my life,” he said.

Decker, who no longer drives, but lives in an area situated close to the grocery store, his doctor and dentist’s offices, learned how to safely navigate his neighborhood streets independently. “Evy, the occupational therapist at the Weigel Williamson Center, taught me how to use a

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Painting Workshop Gets Creative Juices Flowing Once Again

As a costume designer for several performing arts groups in Omaha, Kenda Slavin would sketch her designs with pencil and paper. She enjoyed the work and the creative outlet it gave her. That was until six years ago when she lost vision in her left eye and could no longer see well enough to do her job.

Last spring, Slavin joined a group of nine other clients of the Weigel Williamson Center for Visual Rehabilitation to learn how to paint using the remaining vision they do have. The opportunity to get her creative juices flowing again inspired Slavin.

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Dear Friends,

2014 was our busiest year ever! With our increasing number of satellite clinics, we cared for 20 percent more patients than in any previous year. With a rise in patient demand, you can expect to see some new professional faces in the Center to assist in patient care. Speaking of new faces, we are pleased to welcome Linda Chilcott to our staff. She brings with her experience as both a certified ophthalmic assistant and a rehab counselor for individuals with low vision.

With such growth, I encourage you to consider supporting the work of the Center with a gift to the Dinsdale Endowment Fund. Such funds assist us in our efforts to ensure that these important low vision services are available to individuals all across Nebraska and western Iowa.

We remain committed to continually grow and improve our services to patients with irreversible vision loss. I hope that you enjoy this edition of the Visionary. I welcome comments and questions.

John D. Shepherd, M.D., Director

LOW VISION SUCCESS STORY

Monocular telescope for distance viewing by literally walking with me outside and showing me how to spot obstacles in my path, or oncoming cars or people walking by,” Decker said.

Now he says he can walk safely in his neighborhood and doesn’t have to rely on his wife or others to take him to the grocery store or medical appointments.

Decker also learned about other tools he could use to enhance his remaining vision and still be able to pursue his love of cooking, reading and bird-watching.

By wearing telescopic glasses, Decker can see the vast variety of birds that congregate on any one of the numerous bird feeders in his back yard.

Magnifiers, large print measuring cups and a dual black/white cutting board help Decker easily prepare his family’s favorite meals. And with an iPad, a hand-held video magnifier and the use of a CCTV, Decker is able to read, write letters and address envelopes with ease.

“I feel very fortunate to be able to enjoy my retirement in more ways than I imagined I ever would be able to when I was first diagnosed with macular degeneration, thanks to the Weigel Williamson Center,” Decker said.

Painting Workshop

“I just love it,” she said, as she sat next to a canvas filled with bright yellow, orange and red paint.

For four weeks, Slavin and eight other women and one man filled canvases with colorful paintings of flowers, elements of color and contrast or just about anything that came to their imagination under the instruction of local Omaha artist, Julie Thorsen.

“The class is very therapeutic in many ways,” said Evy Katz, an occupational therapist with the Weigel Williamson Center who organized the workshop.

“As an occupational therapist, Katz teaches clients how to adapt their homes to better meet their visual needs, as well as how to use their remaining vision. Often those same clients will ask Katz how to adapt to their vision so they can continue with their hobbies, such as sewing, painting or crocheting.

The workshop, Katz said, teaches people that anyone can be creative no matter what challenges they face.

“I hope they all continue to use this as a creative outlet,” Katz said.

The paintings can be viewed on the Weigel Williamson Center website: www.unmc.edu/lowvision.
Low Vision Apps for Smartphones and iPhones

Evelyn Katz, OTR/L

Technology is opening a whole new world for smartphone and iPhone users of all ages. Many of my patients have purchased an iPhone or Android smart phone. I have used both the Samsung Galaxy 3 smart phone and the iPhone 5. Both can initially be a challenge for users with low vision, but there are apps (software applications) that can make them more accessible and easier to use. From reading phone numbers in your contact list, to viewing calendar dates and time, to identifying objects, colors and currency, there’s an app for that!

Here are the top 10 apps I have gleaned from my own personal experience, as well as from the American Foundation for the Blind and from other sources:

1. **Low Vision by Creative Glance Technologies** for Android and iPhone: Includes a customizable large print contact list, clock and calendar. It is free to download, and it can be upgraded to the Clearsight Low Vision kit that also includes a calculator and magnifier.

2. **MapQuest** for Android and iPhone: Provides voice-guided directions and tells the driver where to turn. If you make a wrong turn, it reroutes you.

3. **LookTel Money Reader by Ipplex** for iPhone: Identifies currency.

4. **Ideal Currency Identifier** for Android: Identifies currency.

5. **Color ID Free** by Green Car Studios for iPhone: Point the iPhone camera at any item and it will announce the color for you.

6. **Google Goggles by Google, Inc.** for Android and iPhone: Identify a picture or object, barcode or famous landmark by taking a picture of it. If Google has it in its database, it will identify it for you.

7. **Magnify** for Android and iPhone: Allows you to use your smart phone as a magnifying device, with the ability to adjust magnification, brightness and contrast.

8. **Voice Brief by Dong Baik** for iPhone: Reads your emails, weather, stock prices and Facebook feeds. The cost is $3.99 or try the free lite version.

9. **Alarmed-Reminders, Timers, Alarm Clock by Yoctoville** for iPhone: Free app that gives you a choice of alarm sounds, and it has a snooze feature and even a flashlight. It works with Voice Over.

10. **Glucose Buddy-Diabetes Helper 3.5.5w/ BP+WT Tracking by oneAppOneCause** for iPhone: Allows you to manually enter numbers pertaining to exercise and food consumption into a log that can be uploaded to a private account at GlucoseBuddy.com. It features an A1C estimator.

This is just a sample of all the apps that are available. Find a tech savvy young person to help you out.

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**OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST CORNER**

**Low Vision Apps for Smartphones and iPhones**

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**ASK DR. SHEPHERD**

**Question:**

My friend with macular degeneration enjoys reading with a Kindle. How does this help her to be able to read?

**Answer:**

The Kindle is an e-reader, which is a hand-held device on which electronic versions of books, newspapers and magazines can be read. E-readers are a great option for individuals with low vision because the size of the print can be enlarged, and some e-readers have built-in lighting which can enhance contrast. Some also offer the text-to-speech feature. With this feature, books, newspapers and magazines can be read out loud. Patients are given the opportunity to explore what it is like to use an e-reader as part of the low vision evaluation at the Weigel Williamson Center.

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**RESEARCH INNOVATIONS**

New research for treatment of macular degeneration is underway at the Truhlsen Eye Institute:

- Combination drug therapy for wet macular degeneration
- Drug treatment for advanced dry macular degeneration
- Stem-cell therapy for advanced dry macular degeneration

(Tentative start date—July 2015)

For additional information, contact Pat Jones, R.N., B.A.N. at 402.559.7904.
A Place for Renewed Hope and Help for Those with Low Vision

THE STAFF OF THE WEIGEL WILLIAMSON CENTER FOR VISUAL REHABILITATION

John D. Shepherd, M.D.,
Director of the Weigel Williamson Center

Evy Katz, OTR/L
Low Vision Occupational Therapist

Linda Chilcott, M.Ed., COA
Ophthalmic Associate

Pat Jones, R.N., B.A.N.,
Coordinator

The Weigel Williamson Center is a service of the Stanley M. Truhlsen Eye Institute. It relies on the generosity of donor support in order to fulfill its mission of hope and help for those with low vision.

DONOR PROFILE: Mary & Jack Barnhart

Mary and Jack Barnhart’s first experience as patients at the University of Nebraska Medical Center dates back to the early 1980s and what they thought would be routine eye exams.

Mary’s appointment went smoothly. Then Jack’s followed. Mary waited for him in the waiting area. And waited. Nearly three hours later, Jack hadn’t returned. “I thought the university had swallowed him up,” Mary quipped.

Fortunately, Jack was still in the exam room meeting with a UNMC ophthalmologist who had discovered a subtle sign of glaucoma—one that could easily have been missed. But thanks to the physician’s thoroughness, Jack left campus that day with an early diagnosis and tremendous gratitude for UNMC.

Today, Mary and Jack have an even deeper appreciation for the care they continue to receive at UNMC, especially with the opening of the Weigel Williamson Center six years ago.

“The Center offers so many things that make life easier for those who can’t see very well,” Jack said.

He knows firsthand. Through working with the Center’s staff, Jack now uses a lighted stand magnifier to help read his mail. At the grocery store, he uses special glasses that diminish the impact of bright fluorescent lights on his vision. Jack also uses dishes that contrast in color—a white cup, for example, when pouring a cup of black coffee.

The Barnharts are pleased the Weigel Williamson Center also offers services in Lincoln and Hastings, so more people can benefit from its services. But they want even more people to have this opportunity. It’s one reason they’ve supported the Center through private gifts and by sharing their story with others.

“There are a lot of great things happening in eye care at UNMC,” Jack said. “We enjoy supporting the Weigel Williamson Center and want to make sure it’s always here.”

HOW TO MAKE A GIFT

To make a donation to the endowment fund of the Weigel Williamson Center, contact Karen Levin at the University of Nebraska Foundation 402.502.4921, or klevin@nufoundation.org.

Gifts may also be made at www.unmc.edu/lowvision