Dear Friends,

What a rewarding year this has been for us at the Weigel Williamson Center! I hope you enjoy the first edition of our newsletter, the Visionary. I believe the word “visionary” captures the spirit of the foresight and imagination of many individuals who have been essential to the development of the Weigel Williamson Center, the first free-standing low vision house on a university medical center campus in the nation.

As 2008 comes to a close, it is humbling and exciting to reflect on our major accomplishments this year.

- **Grand opening.** In April, we celebrated our grand opening and began our mission of helping people with low vision maintain their independence and quality of life.

- **First clients seen at the Center.** In May, we met with our first clients. The response by community eye care providers who refer clients to our center has been tremendous — exceeding our expectations. As a result, we are planning for increased services next year to keep up with the demand.

- **Development of a low vision support group.** Support group meetings provide our clients opportunities to connect with others who are experiencing vision loss and to receive encouragement, especially as hints and ideas for coping are shared.

- **Development of UNMC ophthalmology resident rotation.** Starting in 2009, ophthalmology residents will gain first-hand experience in low vision testing and rehabilitation. This is important, as most ophthalmology residents receive minimal exposure to low vision rehabilitation during their training years.

- **Establishment of an endowment fund.** We want to express our great gratitude to Dr. and Mrs. Ed Malashock for spearheading efforts to grow our endowment fund. Providing low vision services is very time intensive with an average of three hours spent at the first visit with each client. This limits the number of clients that can be seen on any given day, which limits the revenue that can be generated to sustain operation. An endowment fund is needed in order to ensure our continued success in providing these valuable services to those who are living with low vision.

As I conclude my letter, I would like to ask you to remember the family of Dr. Howard Dinsdale. We are saddened by the death of this compassionate ophthalmologist and friend who was truly a visionary and who played a major role in the area of low vision rehabilitation at UNMC.

Our best wishes for a wonderful and prosperous New Year.

Sincerely,

John D. Shepherd, M.D.
A grand opening ceremony for the Weigel Williamson Center for Visual Rehabilitation took place April 15, 2008. The Center became the first free-standing low vision house on a university medical center campus in the country.

“When a patient’s vision can no longer be helped with glasses, contact lenses, medications, laser or surgery, his or her ophthalmologist can still offer hope by referring the patient for low vision rehabilitation services,” said Dr. Camras, Chairman of the UNMC Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences.

Lead gifts were made by Dr. Harry and Beth Weigel of Auburn, Calif., and Robert and Alice Williamson of Omaha. In addition to the Weigels and Williamsons, the principal benefactors for the Center include: Lions Club International Foundation; Nebraska Lions Club Foundation; Iowa Lions Club Foundation; Ethel S. Abbott Charitable Foundation; Gerald Christensen, M.D., and Mary Haven; Dr. C. Rex and Janet Latta; The Lozier Foundation; Adah and Leon Millard Foundation; Straws Charitable Foundation; Iowa West Foundation, University Hospital Auxiliary, and Dakota and Fred Sturges.

DONOR PROFILE: Dr. Malashock

For Dr. Edward and Sally Malashock, the Weigel Williamson Center was a cause that hit close to home. In 1997, Sally was diagnosed with macular degeneration, a disease that would alter her life forever. Because of her deteriorating eyesight, Sally was no longer able to participate in some of her favorite activities, including reading, working on miniature dioramas and volunteering.

“I became dependent on other people,” Mrs. Malashock said.

When the Malashock heard about the Center and its mission to help those affected by low vision, they knew they wanted to support it.

“I had to learn to adjust on my own,” Mrs. Malashock said. “This center will be a huge help to other people. It will show new patients that there is a lot of new technology and devices available. I wish I would have had something like this center when I was diagnosed.”

Dr. and Mrs. Malashock are among the lead donors giving to an endowment fund established at the University of Nebraska Foundation to benefit the Weigel Williams Center. The earnings from endowment gifts will help defray the Center’s annual expenses and allow it to continue helping patients like Mrs. Malashock live fuller, happier lives.
About three years ago, Joan Sackett of Columbus, Neb., began seeing black spots. Soon after, she was diagnosed with macular degeneration.

“When a person has low vision, they have to learn to use their eyes in a different way,” said Evy Katz, the in-house occupational therapist at the Center for Visual Rehabilitation. “I work with them on identifying ways they are able to see best with or without magnification to do their everyday activities.”

I’m doing a lot better,” said Sackett, who now practices reading 15 minutes in the morning and 15 minutes at night, along with doing the homework she receives from Katz.

Based on what clients are able to do and their goals, Katz assigns worksheets with words games that help with reading comprehension in a way that’s challenging, but fun.

With the help of Katz’s visual training exercises and some lighting adjustments at home, Sackett is now able to read normal size print with a magnifier. She also is back in the kitchen cooking meals for her husband of 58 years, Bud. At the suggestions of Katz, Bud placed raised markers on stove knobs so Sackett would have a frame of reference for 350 degrees and high and low. Her 23-year-old granddaughter even took the time to type up her grandmother’s favorite recipes and made her a large-print cookbook.

Have you given up doing things you enjoy because of vision loss?

Occupational Therapy (OT) can help you use lighting, contrast, object size and labeling to adapt your environment. An OT can train you to use your remaining vision with equipment so you can perform activities with less vision. Get the most from your vision and your life!

WHAT’S YOUR QUESTION?

Winter has always been a time to enjoy my crocheting; but my macular degeneration has gotten worse and I’m no longer able to crochet. Is there any way that I can be helped?

Yes! Depending upon the extent of your macular degeneration, there is a variety of hands-free magnifiers and video magnifiers that may help you see well enough to resume your crocheting. With the use of a low vision device and by working with me to learn visual skills, you should be able to enjoy crocheting again this winter.

Do you have a question to ask one of our staff? Email your question to www.unmc.edu/lowvision or call 402-559-2463.

Evy Katz
Occupational Therapist

Low Vision Store
Selling products such as talking watches, large print calendars, playing cards and much more.

STORE HOURS: Monday – Friday 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
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

Frank Graf, O.D.
Optometrist on Staff

Patti Fries, O.D.
Optometrist on Staff

Evy Katz, OTR/L
Low Vision Occupational Therapist

Kathy VonDollen, R.N.
Coordinator

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

The Weigel Williamson Center is a service of the UNMC Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences of which Dr. Carl Camras is the chairman.

Low Vision Rehab Works!

The Weigel Williamson Center for Visual Rehabilitation has now been in operation for eight months and here is what our clients are saying:

“I so appreciate you all. You have given me courage.”

“What happened here today was the first time that anything has given me hope.”

“I had high hopes they were going to help me and they have.”

“I can actually read again. I could just cry.”

If you are living with low vision, our vision rehabilitation program can help you regain your independence.

To set up an appointment, give us a call at 402-559-2463.

HOW TO MAKE A GIFT

If you would like to make a donation to the endowment fund of the Weigel Williamson Center, please return the enclosed envelope or 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.