You Are Truly Amazing!

Reflecting on My First Conference
Carolyn Lloyd
Executive Director/VisionServe Alliance

The weather in San Antonio was steamy, even for November. Tucked quietly below street level, just outside our hotel, the winding River Walk created a serene and pleasant way to explore the romantic city. But more importantly, this special spot provided VisionServe Alliance members with a magical place to network, strengthen each other and learn.

I anticipated the San Antonio Fall Conference for months. It would be my first. I pored over the list of registrants so many times I lost count. I longed to put a face with each name and organization. Finally, I had the chance.

Throughout the days that followed, I was able to greet CEO’s and ED’s and meet some of their most important, critical, executive staff. It was remarkable to watch everyone gather together both in small groups and collectively. The strength and synergy in the room was undeniable, the laughter and smiles almost constant. Since I began at VisionServe last May, Roxann shared with me many times what a warm and wonderful group of leaders we have in our ranks. Boy, was she was right!

To those that attended the Fall Conference in San Antonio - Thank You! Thanks for sharing your thoughts and expertise with the group. You are truly amazing. For those of you that were unable to attend, we all missed you and hope you will join us next year!

I am humbled and honored to join forces with every member of VisionServe Alliance. As we strive to fulfill our mission of engaging leaders to build a better world for people with vision loss, there is no place I would rather be.
As one year comes to a close and a new year is about to begin, I always take time to reflect. I reflect on my personal blessings, but also on my professional blessings of which there are many - 104 to be exact. One hundred and four members who trust me to lead our national leadership alliance, who challenge me with new ideas and projects, and who provide support beyond dues. I am always impressed by those members who provide in-kind support, add a gift to their dues and/or make a personal donation. Each time we open an envelope with these special gifts, I smile knowing that so many of our members understand that we cannot accomplish VisionServe’s mission on membership dues alone. Speaking of mission, I hope you will read about our many accomplishments on your behalf in our 2016 Report to Members. It was presented during our 2016 Annual Meeting in San Antonio, and links will be on the home page of our website and in the December issue of eNews. Thank you one and all for your membership, your support, and your friendship.

Message from the Board Chair

I can’t believe how quickly the last four years have flown by. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve such an amazing organization and such an esteemed group of leaders in their own right. We have faced challenges but have seen them through together and, as a result, grown in size, strength and spirit. I owe a debt of gratitude to those who have served as Chair before me for their wisdom, perseverance, and enduring legacy of commitment and service. I have learned so much and hope that I may continue to be a resource in this august organization. Congratulations to Mark Ackermann, the incoming Chair, I know he will do an amazing job. Roxann, thank you for all your support and advice these four years. You are a rock.

VisionServe Alliance is such an incredible organization. As the new CEO of Junior Blind of America, I was amazed and grateful for the wealth of information and advice so generously shared with me and I am happy to know that this tradition continues to this day. I can’t wait to see everyone at the CEO Summit in Charleston next spring.

Wishing everyone the happiest of holiday seasons – may you and your loved ones find joy and comfort in the coming days.

VisionServe Alliance’s 2016 and 2017 Boards of Directors
Thank you for your time, energy, and expertise in leading VisionServe Alliance’s 2016 Board of Directors. An especially heartfelt thank you to Miki Jordan for her leadership as Board Chair (since January 2013), to Pam Brandin for completing Allan Brenner’s term as Immediate Past Chair, and to those members who will serve again in 2017.
Educating Babies To Seniors:
Creating Independence

In 2015, the Miami-Dade County Beacon Council honored Miami Lighthouse with its Distinguished Industry Award for outstanding contributions to education. Education is an essential component of our rehabilitation programs, and at Miami Lighthouse we teach that “It’s possible to see without sight™”. This motto encompasses traditional vision rehabilitation programs, and two new innovative programs.

Lighthouse Learning Center for Children™
Our Lighthouse Learning Center for Children™ will provide five classrooms for children from birth through age five, including a pre-kindergarten for three- and four-year-old visually impaired children and their sighted peers.

As part of this new project, this fall we piloted our Pre-K Inclusion Program for students who are blind or visually impaired and their sighted peers in existing instructional spaces in collaboration with Miami-Dade County Public Schools and the Early Learning Coalition. Our program uses the research-based and child-focused High Scope Curriculum, which helps young children excel in language, cognitive learning, and promotes independence and fundamental skills for the future. Said one mother regarding the program’s impacts on her daughter, “I see so much progress in her learning. I wish you could hear her sing along to the songs on her iPad and watch her as she learns the sounds of the alphabet letters...You are making a big difference in my daughter’s life.”

Capital funding of $8 million came from a one-for-one matching challenge by a major donor. Our new pre-kindergarten is partially funded by Miami-Dade County Public Schools and the Early Learning Coalition. Additional funding for our early intervention Blind Babies Program is provided by The Children’s Trust of Miami-Dade County and the Florida Division of Blind Services.

Miami Lighthouse: Leading the Way in Adult Education
Designed to help teenagers and adults achieve gainful employment, our innovative GED program is offered in collaboration with Miami-Dade County Public Schools. Our Adult Basic Education (ABE)/GED is a program for adults who did not graduate high school and have not been enrolled in school for an extended time. Academic classes are held four days each week, and for those students whose first language is Spanish or Creole, English as a Second Language is also offered. In the past academic year, 62 clients were served in these programs, ranging in age from 18 to 80.

An example of the wide-reaching effect of this innovative education program is our client, Clinton who is 78 years old, and began losing the central portion of his eyesight in 1993. Now retired, he spends four days a week in classes for reading, writing, computer technology, and individual tutoring. He will tell you he never thought school was possible when he dropped out in the 7th grade. “I have a way to go for my GED, but every day our teacher, Miss Charles, helps me to make progress,” he says, “It really means a lot to me.

Ongoing funding comes from Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) through their Adult Literacy Grant Program. M-DCPS provides certified teachers for the program who work in concert with Miami Lighthouse instructors and tutors, utilizing the latest technology to help students access the curriculum. Miami Lighthouse also provides transportation for our students.
Bob Garrett, Ham Radio Call: K3UL
North Central Sight Services

At the age of 14, while attending the Overbrook School for the Blind, I discovered an amazing hobby that has been a part of my life for fifty years. Amateur Radio, also known as Ham Radio, and from the beginning, it was a true equalizer for me as a person who is blind. The premise of Ham Radio is to set up your own radio and antenna or antennas and contact other fellow Hams in your town or on the other side of the world. There are many communication options including voice, Morse code, and now, digital modes using the computer.

We were lucky at Overbrook to have a teacher who was a “Ham”. He formed a radio club and at its peak we had 20 students attending club meetings. Many of us passed the license test and obtained our own personal call signs, which allowed us to be in the “ham shack” radio room to talk to people all over the country and the world.

I became an avid operator with a small transmitter, WWII military surplus receiver and a small wire antenna on the roof of my parents’ row house in north Philadelphia. As a kid, I spent many hours listening and talking to other “Hams”. It was never an issue that I was blind. I could send Morse code with the best of them and had no problem working the equipment.

As kids, my friend Bill and I would sit for hours talking about having bigger radios and antennas when we grew up. Bill later joined the Navy, married a New Zealand woman, and has lived there for more than thirty years. We still communicate via Ham radio. Between 1966 and 1969, Sid, a fellow “Ham,” volunteered at Overbrook. To this day, Sid and I talk every day or two via our Ham radios. He is truly a lifetime friend and like me, an avid operator.

For me, Ham Radio has been the one constant in my life. I have received many awards for my Ham activities, even talking about my Ham career at the “Hamvention” in 2012. I continue to chase rare places that come on the air, and over the years I’ve made hundreds of radio friends and approximately 120,000 contacts. This hobby helps me maintain my sanity and is a diversion from my busy professional life. Dennis Steiner of VisionCorps says, “Bob is world-class – he climbs his own towers, fixes and wires his radios, and he can pull anything apart and put it back together again.”

Scenes from the 2016 VSA Conference
Excellence in Leadership

Choosing the recipient of VisionServe Alliance’s most treasured award for Excellence in Leadership is an extremely difficult task, made even more difficult by the number and quality of nominations. This prestigious award honors a member who has made outstanding contributions at the local, regional or national level to services for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Award recipients are listed on a print/Braille plaque in the Hall of Fame – Leaders and Legends in the Blindness Field located at APH.

The 2016 recipient of VisionServe’s Excellence in Leadership Award is Miki Jordan of Junior Blind in Los Angeles. In her letter of nomination, Bernadette Kappen (NY Institute for Special Education) wrote, “When one thinks of a leader, they think of someone who is able to get others to join in and be actively engaged in moving a group to a higher level of excellence. Miki Jordan has demonstrated this as Chair of VisionServe’s Board.” Many letters in support of Miki’s nomination were received, including one from Bob Scheffel (Metrolina) who wrote, “During 5 years on VisionServe’s Board, I witnessed and admired how Miki’s leadership style engaged others into the mainstream issues facing the organization. She communicates effectively and she values everyone’s ideas and opinions.” Don Ouimet, program officer at Junior Blind, wrote that “Miki is a visionary leader who … thinks and plans strategically, which has enabled Junior Blind to successfully navigate a period of significant growth.”

Congratulations Miki Jordan, recipient of the VisionServe Alliance 2016 Excellence in Leadership Award!

Scenes from the 2016 VSA Conference
What do you do in your down time?
I just moved into a new home, so this summer has been close to home – reading, some outdoor activities, and yard work.

What are you reading, watching and/or listening to?
Right now I’m actually listening to an Audible download book called “The Blue Zones,” about living longer and better. I’m interested in learning how to improve the lives of seniors we serve with sight loss. Also just finishing Angela Duckworth’s book, “Grit,” that talks about emerging research on the power of passion and perseverance to positively impact achievement – especially student achievement.

What is your best guilty pleasure?
As always, ice cream hits the spot. Lately it’s Purple Cow Frozen Yogurt at Beech Hill Farm in Hillsborough, NH.

Tell us about one item on your bucket list.
A June vacation in France to watch the Le Tour de France in person.

If I didn’t work in this field, I would have …
I would complete my doctorate in education and seek an opportunity to lead a small college or university.

The best advice I ever got was…
For a very long time I kept this quotation in a frame on my desk to remind me of the challenges of implementing change.

“It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out nor more doubtful of success nor more dangerous to handle than to initiate a new order of things; for the reformer has enemies in all those who profit by the old order, and only lukewarm defenders in all those who would profit by the new…” (Nicolo Machiavelli, 1469 – 1527)

My best childhood memory is…
Growing up in New Hampshire - hiking in the mountains and swimming in streams along the Kancamagus Highway in the White Mountains, and playing pond hockey at White Park in Concord, NH.
Today is my first day back in the office after the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind meeting in San Diego. This explains the stack of receipts on my desk blotter. To the right of that stack is my notebook, and on top of that is a notecard that I’m sending to our Illinois State Representative, thanking her for attending one of Hadley’s events. As much as we rely on email, I’m becoming old-school again. There is something so satisfying about writing and receiving a handwritten message.

To the left of my blotter is the book, *Yes, And*. This book was required reading for my leadership team when I joined Hadley because it describes how the elements that make Improv successful can be applied to build teamwork and creativity in the workplace. We engaged the entire staff in a half-day retreat built around this theme and it was a fantastic success.

I can’t tell you what’s in my Inbox because I haven’t gone through it yet! In front of the plant is a terra cotta Native American Story Teller. As not-for-profit leaders, we know the power of storytelling. The plant itself is a survivor, apparently, because I can extinguish just about any form of flora in no time. The force is strong with this one.

The sign on my desk reads, “I have flying monkeys and I’m not afraid to use them!” It was a gift from the Chair of the Board at my last organization. I can’t imagine what she was implying here.

To the right of my Hadley coffee mug (Starbucks in the morning, tea in the afternoon) is a box of Cracker Jacks and Bubble Gum. Because, hey, the Cubs won the World Series.

Finally, I have a wonderful blanket from my alma mater, Kellogg. It reminds me of the importance of lifelong learning and the need to continually build our skills as leaders in this very important field.

I am thrilled to be your colleague. Thank you for letting me share!
VisionServe Alliance CEO Summit
Charleston, SC | May 7-10, 2017
Southern Charm and the Historic City

VisionServe Alliance CEO Summit
New Orleans, LA | Fall 2017

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