



LINKS

Learning • Innovation • Networking • Knowledge • Sharing

FAST TRACK TO THE TOP



There's a new generation of leaders entering the C-suite and they're bringing fresh ideas, talent, and experience to the job. GenX and millennial leaders might be little more than half the age of their peers, board members, staff or volunteers, but they're stepping up in big ways to meet some of the biggest challenges facing nonprofits today, including funding, changes in tax laws, technology, and more. They come at a time of important transition, as veteran CEOs step down from long-held executive positions. We talked with three young CEOs to find out how they're navigating their leadership roles.



Emily Smith

Emily was named the Executive Director at the Nevada Blind Children's Foundation at age 39, after 12 years working for another children's charity. At a very young age, she was a volunteer raising funds through events. While everyone else was worried about the color of table cloths, she was thinking bigger picture and invited the Executive Director

to lunch where she proposed being hired as its development director, promising to raise her salary in the first quarter or she would resign. She stayed there 10 years! Although she didn't have experience with blind children, she did have experience in capacity and capital building and was hired with the objective of building Nevada's first school for the blind from the ground up! Emily never thought about what she couldn't do, and doesn't subscribe to the saying, "You have to pay your dues." She believes a better way of saying it is simply, "You have to prepare," which is what she did through advanced education, seeking promotions, and learning on the job. So, after years of prep work, she never thought about whether she could do the Executive Director job well, but instead, "when and where she would do it." In her current role, Emily has not experienced age-related issues, but has had a few issues because of gender. She doesn't let it bother her, focusing instead on not letting it stop her and finding work arounds.

Emily's tips for future leaders: Three C's.

The **Companions** you choose are critical to your personal success and the success of the mission, so pick the right companions, respect them, invest in them, and make them a priority.

A great company **Culture** will make up for a lot of other things.

Continuing education – work smarter not harder – you'll reap dividends in return!

Chairman's Message

Mark G. Ackermann, Executive Vice President & Chief Operating Officer, Lighthouse Guild International

Change is in the Air!!

As the “dog days of summer” wind down, I hope everyone has had the chance to spend a little extra time with their loved ones over the past few months. I find the summer to be a great time to become renewed and refreshed.

In thinking about each of our vision organizations, it seems that the beginning of September marks the launching of another important portion of our year. So, in that spirit, I write this column with a renewed sense of purpose for VisionServe Alliance.

This fall and winter will bring about enormous change for our Alliance. As you are well aware, our beloved, long-time, CEO, Roxann Mayros, is scheduled to retire at the end of the year. The VisionServe Alliance CEO Search Committee has put in an enormous amount of time conducting the search for our new leader. They have reviewed over 200 resumes and conducted more than 60 interviews to date. The field of prospects was extraordinary and we are delighted to report that we have now narrowed the field to five candidates. Our goal is to have a finalist to present to the VisionServe Alliance Board meeting in October and to our entire membership at our fall conference.

Speaking of our fall conference, please consider this your personal invitation to join us at the VisionServe Alliance 30th Annual Executive Leadership Conference in Portland, Oregon, October 28 – 31, 2018. In my opinion, this meeting is one of the best conferences I attend each year. We will have extraordinary educational programs, plenty of social activities and perhaps most importantly, ample time to network with your colleagues from around the country. Wendy Hymes, our Director of Conferences & Communications, has assured me that this will be one of our best conferences ever. On top of it all, we will have the opportunity to enjoy the great Northwest, and the beautiful city of Portland. If you haven't visited this grand city in some time, you will be in for a treat. Wonderful restaurants, great entertainment and scenery that is hard to match anywhere. I look forward to seeing you at the conference in October.

In addition to all that typically happens at our conference we will be discussing some significant changes that may come about as we enter into 2019. For many years, the Board of Directors and CEO of VisionServe have sought ways to strengthen our advocacy efforts in Washington and beyond. Roxann Mayros and the board leadership have been working on a plan that may dramatically strengthen our advocacy efforts and the entire menu of offerings that VisionServe offers to its members. We anticipate that we will have some major announcements at the annual membership meeting that will significantly further enhance the value of your VisionServe Alliance membership.

More change is in the air!!! See you in Portland!



2018 Board of Directors

Chair: Mark Ackermann, Lighthouse Guild

Vice Chair: Bernadette Kappen, New York Institute for Special Education

Secretary: John Mitchell, Cincinnati Association f/t Blind and Visually Impaired

Treasurer: Steve Pouliot, Vermont Association f/t Blind and Visually Impaired

Immediate Past Chair: Miki Jordan, Wayfinder Family Services

Michael Bina, Maryland School for the Blind

Lauren Branch, NewView Oklahoma

Roxann Mayros, VisionServe Alliance

Mike McGowan, NOAH

David Morgan, Future In Sight

Thomas Panek, Guiding Eyes for the Blind

Erika Petach, Blind and Vision Rehab Services of Pittsburgh

Shari Roeseler, Society for the Blind-Sacramento

Dennis Steiner, VisionCorps

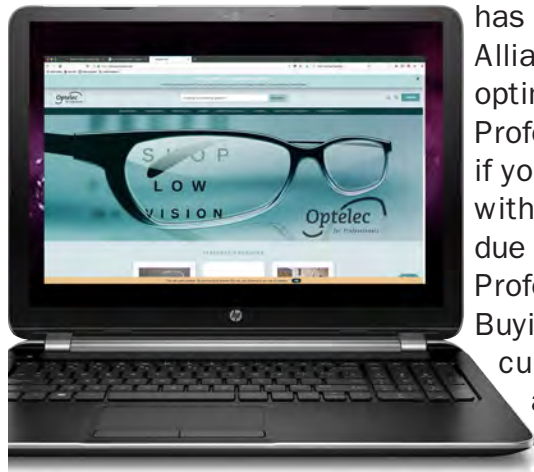
Renee Vidrine, Lighthouse Louisiana

NEW MEMBER Benefits

YOUR SUCCESS IS OUR BUSINESS

Optelec Buying Group

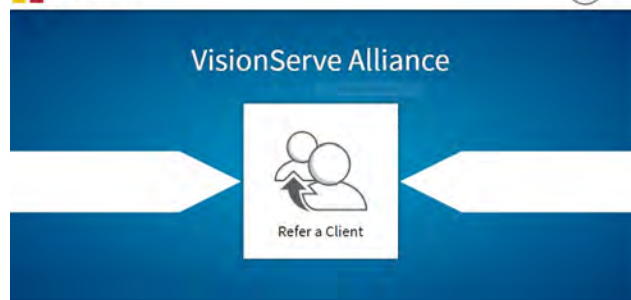
In partnership with Richard Tapping, VP North American Sales/Marketing, we are pleased to tell you that a special Buying Group has been created for VisionServe Alliance members, that will provide optimal discounts on Optelec Professional Products. Even if you already have an account



with Optelec, they will assure that every maximum discount is applied due to your membership in VisionServe Alliance. Simply call the Optelec Professional Accounts Team at 800-826-4200 today and reference, "VSA Buying Group," and they will set-up your new account, or apply to your current account, the deepest available discount. After setting up your account, order online at www.ShopLowVision.com.

VisionRefer!

We have previously told you about our development of a web-based app to be used by ophthalmologists to make the patient referral process to VisionServe Alliance members easy, fast, and HIPAA compliant. VisionRefer! will facilitate the exchange of patient information between physicians and vision rehab agencies, cutting the current referral process (if it is used at all) from nine steps to two. We are pleased to tell you that



VisionRefer! (developed by the tech team at Lighthouse Works, a subsidiary of

Lighthouse Central Florida) is ready to be piloted in Florida, led by Elly du Pre and 17 VisionServe members. We believe that this is the most exciting and future-looking tool ever developed in our field. We will provide a Demo and update on the pilot project at our Executive Leadership Conference in Portland, OR. Let Roxann know if you are interested in viewing the Demo or learning more about the app.

FAST TRACK TO THE TOP



Courtney Plotner

Even though Courtney hadn't planned to be an Executive Director, in 2016 at age 34, she was named one at ABVI-Charleston. She had previously served 3 years as its Director of Programs and six months as Assistant Executive Director, preparing to take over the leadership role. Courtney likes driving change, the accountability required in the leadership role, and "loves" working with her board at the strategic visionary level. She sees her leadership style as entrepreneurial (on the precipice of major growth) and collaborative/authentic as she and her staff are always learning and improving. Courtney received strong support from her board as she believes they wanted a young leader who was willing to challenge their current model. Courtney believes her drive and passion for their mission has helped to relieve any doubt about her ability to lead ABVI-Charleston into the future.

Courtney's tips for future leaders: Think BIG! Always keep the mission at heart. Do not be scared to make informed changes, and do NOT fall into the trap of doing things one way because that's how it's always been done.



Erika Petach

At a young age, Erika set a personal goal to be a nonprofit director by age 35. She took advantage of every possible experience, continued her education, and found a smart and difficult CEO mentor. When Erika became BVRS' leader at 31, she realized two things: she needed to learn a lot about vision rehabilitation, and the agency was losing money and would continue to without drastic changes. She immediately laid off 10 people and made other difficult decisions that caused people to question her intentions and ability to lead. She credits time and the support she received from her board, VisionServe members, and stakeholders for her success in turning the agency around. As a young leader she still experiences some resistance, crediting her membership in VisionServe Alliance and support from other CEO's in the business that helped her learn and to validate the direction she was moving her agency. Erika thinks of herself as a contemplative leader with entrepreneurial tendencies. She has learned to substantiate "big ideas" with good research and feedback, then to empower her staff and trust them to implement.

Erika's tips for future leaders: Surround yourself with really smart people because you learn a lot. And, be willing to do anything on your way to the top and even once you are there because if you are willing to do anything, so will those who follow you.

MEMBER AGENCY SPOTLIGHT

Chicago Lighthouse Public Art Project Sheds Light on People With Disabilities

The Chicago Lighthouse's public art display, "Lighthouses on the Mag Mile," was showcased to a national audience July 22 via a segment on CBS Sunday Morning. About half of the artists of the 51 lighthouses have disabilities. A phone app provides information on the works and the artists. The feature story not only illustrated what these individuals can do if given the chance but demonstrated the importance of civility and kindness in our country. The goal of the project was to help the artists feel empowered and to highlight Chicago as a city where individuals with disabilities can feel included according to the Chicago Lighthouse's CEO, Janet Szlyk. The Chicago Lighthouse already has a workforce that produces clocks for the home and office; and hundreds more work at call centers it runs, underlining the point that the disabled can be productive. Visit www.chicagolighthouse.org/about/whats-new.

Photo Credit: Rachel Bires



American Printing House for the Blind Recognized by FCC for Advancement in Accessibility

The Orbit Reader 20 leads industry push for affordable refreshable braille. Refreshable braille can cost thousands of dollars, which is why the American Printing House for the Blind (APH), together with the international Transforming Braille Group, embarked on a mission to create a more affordable option. In June, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) awarded APH the Chairman's 2018 Award for Advancement in Accessibility for its work with the Orbit Reader 20.



Refreshable braille devices produce mechanical braille generated by computer driven pins. For more than 30 years these devices have cost \$2,000 or more. APH helped lead an international group that took on the task of creating a device to be sold to users for less than \$500 dollars. The Orbit Reader 20 was developed in partnership with Orbit Research, the company that engineered and manufactures the product. **More information about the Orbit Reader 20 can be found at www.aph.org/orbit-reader-20.**

Guide Dogs for the Blind Releasing "Pick of the Litter," A Service Dogmentary, Nationally Aug. 31st

Guide Dogs for the Blind is the subject of an award-winning, feature-length documentary, titled "Pick of the Litter." The film had its world premiere in January, 2018 at the Slamdance Film Festival in Park City, Utah. Directed by Dana Nachman and Don Hardy, it follows a litter of GDB puppies from the moment they are born. The filmmakers received unprecedented access to raisers, staff, and clients in order to capture the puppies' journeys. The movie—which features audio description—was purchased by IFC Films/ Sundance Selects and will receive distribution in theaters and cable starting August 31st. Search "Pick Of The Litter" on Facebook for videos and links to buy tickets.



Photo courtesy of IFC Films

VisionServe Alliance 30th Annual Executive Leadership Conference



**REGISTRATION OPEN
UNTIL OCTOBER 5TH**

We're headed to the Northwest this fall...and you, your Chief Development, Program, and Financial officers, are all invited to benefit from high-end learning, discussion tables, and networking.



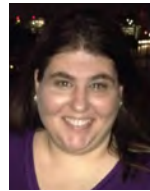
(Just Added!) Lily Trager (Executive Director and the Director of Investing with Impact, Morgan Stanley) – Making a Difference with Socially Responsible Impact Investing



Stephen Percy (Dean of the College and Urban Affairs, Portland State University) – Advancing Governing Board Effectiveness – Lessons from Board Member Experience



(Just Added!) Miki Akimoto (Senior Vice President, Practice Expert in Grantmaking for US Trust) – The Funder-Nonprofit Relationship: Improving the Dialog



Toni Mayros-Barkdoll (Director of Human Resources, Experience Education) – The Impact and Evolution of Gender and Lifestyle in the Professional Workspace



Lori L. Jacobwith (Founder, Ignited Fundraising) – “Harnessing Passion to Cause Action”



Adele Crudden (Head of Mississippi State’s National Research and Training Center on Blindness) – Best Practices in Older Blind Programs



Anna Liotta (Best-selling author, renowned speaker, Resultance Inc.) - “What Makes the Generations Tick, and What Ticks Them Off!”

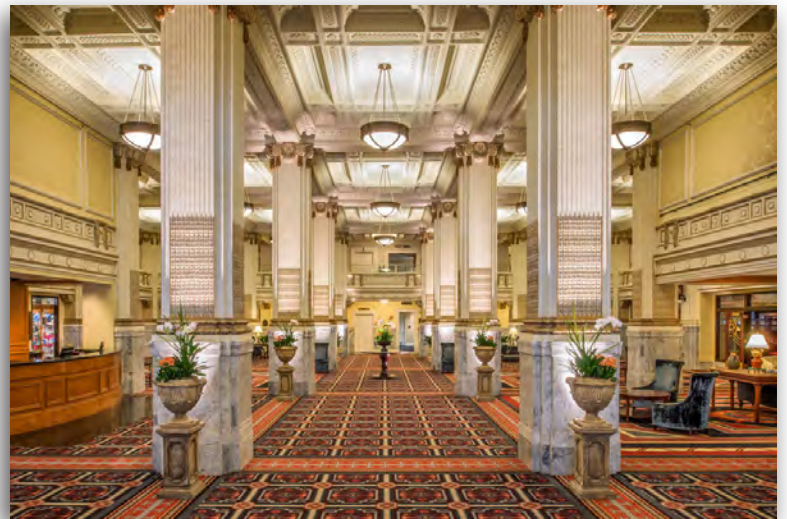


Jan Decker (Owner, Crisis Management Consulting) – Crisis Management for Nonprofits

To see the full agenda and register,
visit www.visionservealliance.org/conferences
Watch your inbox for instructions on downloading the conference app.



**Awards Night: Willamette River
Dinner Cruise Oct. 30**



**Conference Hotel: Embassy Suites
Downtown Portland**



**Optional Post-Conference
Brewery Bike Tour Oct. 31**



**Optional Post-
Conference
Columbia River
Gorge Tour and Hike
Oct. 31**

Welcoming New Members & Leaders

VisionServe Alliance would like to welcome new members and new leaders. To date, we have had 5 new agencies join, bringing our total to 112 members. We've also had 10 new leaders come on board

MEET OUR NEW MEMBERS



Blind Children's Center (Los Angeles, CA)
Sarah Orth – CEO
Focus: The education & development of children, birth through 2nd grade



Community Center for the Blind & Visually Impaired (Stockton, CA)
Michelle Galvan – Executive Director
Focus: youth and adult programs



Balance for Blind Adults (Toronto, Canada)
Deborah Gold – Executive Director
Focus: training adults who are blind or partially sighted in one-on-one training and group classes.



Council of Schools and Services for the Blind
Joy Harris – Executive Director
Focus: schools and agencies in Canada and the United States for students who are blind and visually impaired.



Chicago Lighthouse (Chicago, IL)
Janet Szlyk – CEO
Focus: vision rehabilitation services, education, employment opportunities and assistive technology for people of all ages.



Blindness Support Services, Inc. (Riverside, CA)
Peter Benavidez – President and CEO
Focus: providing services that promote the independence and self-reliance of individuals who are blind and visually impaired.

NEW LEADERS IN 2018



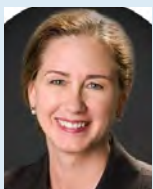
David Barnwell
(The Iris Network)



Joe Bogart
(Blinded Veterans Association)



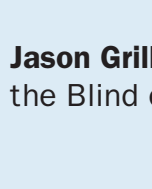
Scott Flagel
(Lighthouse of Collier)



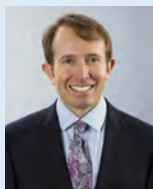
Caren Forsten
(Prevention of Blindness Society of Metropolitan Washington)



Joshua Gould
(Industries of the Blind)



Jason Grills (Independence for the Blind of W. Florida)



Rob Hair (The Maryland School for the Blind)



John Miller (Guide Dog Foundation for the Blinds, Inc.)



Molly Turner
(Children's Center for the Visually Impaired)



Toni Walls (Cabell-Wayne Association of the Blind, Inc.)



Be the First to Expand Our Possibilities



We are excited to announce new Associate Categories that will expand our conversations and knowledge and influence the future. The first members to recruit new Associates in each of the following categories, will receive a discount on their 2019 membership dues! Please join us in recruiting eye banks or universities as **Nonprofit Associates**; pharmaceutical companies or vendors as **For-Profit Associates**; or retirees, individual professionals, or students as **Individual Associates**. Associates will be non-voting, receive e-News and LINKS, involved in advocacy, and receive other specific benefits. We encourage all members to participate in growing our reach and influence by recruiting new Associates.

Details are on our website – www.visionservealliance.org/associates – or in a brochure we will be happy to send or you can download from the website.

RETIREMENTS IN 2018

2018 finds 8 of our leaders retiring. We thank them for their many contributions to the field, and wish them many happy years of retirement!

Mike Bina (The Maryland School for the Blind) (Sept '18)

Sage Advice: Listen. Learn. Commit. Care. Mentor. Coach. Did I mention 'listen'? Relate to those we serve, their families, and staff, at all levels, who do the real work. Support them with high expectations, accountability, and recognition.

Pam Brandin (Dec '18) Vista Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Sage Advice: You can't say "thank you" enough; always share the credit for success; a collaborative mindset will open the doors to new opportunities for you and your organization.

Michelle Hartlove (March '18) Prevention of Blindness Society of Metropolitan Washington

Nicola Haskett (August '18) Children's Center for the Visually Impaired

Robert Kelly (Oct '18) Conklin Center for the Blind

Paul Slone (Cabell-Wayne Association of the Blind)

Sage Advice: Communication and ethical parameters are keys to good leadership.

Lou Tutt (AER) (Dec '18)

Sage Advice:

- (1) Cooperation, Coordination, Collaboration, the Greatest of These, Collaboration;
- (2) Do It, Delegate It or Dump It;
- (3) Effective Communication

Elaine Welch (March '18) Pennsylvania Association for the Blind

Sage Advice: My leadership advice boils down very simply: Tell the truth and keep your word. People won't follow a person they don't trust.

Roxann Remembers

Conferences are such a big part of what we do here at VisionServe Alliance, so many of my best memories are from conferences that I attended as a member or organized as an employee. It is staggering to think that Portland will be the 53rd conference I've attended. Yikes – I guess this makes me officially old.

I have so many memories of amazing speakers where the lightbulbs went off and I immediately improved or changed something. I also have fond memories of the many members who co-hosted our conferences over the years. When we used to be called NCPABVI and I was the only employee, I couldn't have produced a 3-day conference without their help – so thank you!

I could also talk about the beautiful cities we have met in, but instead I'm going to tell you my memories about weather – yep, the weather, because you see, VisionServe conferences seem to generate blizzards, tornados, lightning, thunder, and buckets of rain. Don't get me wrong, we've also generated tons of sunny beautiful days and balmy nights, but I do recall our first conference in Colorado Springs, held in October, when half of our attendees were stranded in airports or on



Surprising snow in Colorado Springs in April 2016

highways due to a blizzard. So, the next time we met in Colorado Springs, we decided to do it in April (better chance of good weather Mark Lucas told me), and you guessed it, another blizzard that sent half of our attendees home early so they wouldn't be stranded. A dinner cruise on the Erie Canal had us all crowded into a very small room because no one could stand on deck due to sleet and ice pelting our faces. And then there was the dinner that was supposed to be amid the grapevines at a winery in San Diego, but instead, we huddled up with heaters and blankets under a tent as a river of water ran under our feet because a "once in a lifetime" thunder storm parked itself over La Jolla while we were there.



Determined golfers Michael Monteferrante, Reinhard Mabry, and Rudy DAmico

I could tell you about more weather-related trips, but I'll leave it here, because as you can see, we've created so many great memories together at VisionServe conferences, but the ones that bring a smile and create conversations, are when things don't go exactly as planned!

I look forward to seeing all of you in Portland, where we will be prepared for whatever the city brings us!



The
Power
Of
R
Campaign

Don't forget! Ads are due by 5:00pm
Friday, September 28. Details at:

**[visionservealliance.org/
uncategorized/power-of-r-campaign](https://visionservealliance.org/uncategorized/power-of-r-campaign)**

A full-page photograph of Shari Roeseler, a woman with short brown hair and glasses, wearing a light blue and white striped button-down shirt and dark blue trousers. She is smiling and holding a small orange bowl filled with various candies. In the background, a sign for the 'SOCIETY FOR THE BLIND' is visible, with the tagline 'More than what you see' partially obscured. The sign has the organization's name in large blue letters with green dots for the 'i' in 'SOCIETY' and 'F' in 'FOR'.

**Member Spotlight – Shari Roeseler,
Executive Director, Society for the Blind,
Sacramento, CA**

**What do you want
to be when you
grow up?**

*A referee in
the NFL*

**What is your best
guilty pleasure?**

*Candy – Aussie Red
Licorice or Tootsie
Rolls (I know, such
a sophisticated
palate!)*

**Tell us
about one item on
your bucket list**

*I would like to
volunteer at a baby
elephant rescue in
South Africa.*

**My best childhood
memory is**

*Getting a quarter from
my Grandma and buying
a bag full of penny
candies from Boyum's
General Store down the
block. (I'm dating myself
aren't I?)*

**What do you
do in your down time?**

*I like to work out at
the gym; cycling;
cooking; and reading.*

**What is your best thought about
your membership in VisionServe?**

*I have found membership to be
quite valuable. There is so much
expertise and support available.
I love the opportunity to learn
from my fellow VSA members and
to partner with one another. I am
very grateful to be a part
of VisionServe Alliance.*

**What are you reading,
watching and/or listening
to right now?**

*Most recently read the Red
Sparrow trilogy; What I'm
watching – Call the Midwife,
The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel,
and Sports – It's football
season! Go Badgers!, Go
Packers!*

2019 CEO Summit, Nashville, TN | May 5 - 8



2019 Fall Executive Leadership Conference Atlanta, GA | November 3 - 6



- MISSION:** To engage leaders in building a better world through services for people with vision loss.
- VISION:** To be a leader and a unified voice in the field of services for people with vision loss for advocacy, education, ethical management, professional growth, and enhanced services.
- PURPOSE:** To build and nurture a diverse core of future and current leaders within a healthy and vibrant network of private nonprofit organizations throughout the United States and Canada whose commitment is to enrich the lives of those living with vision loss and to remove the barriers to the pursuit of opportunities.



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