

LINKS

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Take-Aways From the ELC in Atlanta



181 leaders in the blindness and low vision field attended VisionServe's Executive Leadership Conference in Atlanta, Georgia this past November. This figure sets a record high attendance for any of our conferences and included representatives from 75 VisionServe member organizations (61% of VisionServe's total membership).

Attendees came to hear about the latest developments, participate in discussions, and network with other leaders in the field. Admittedly, some were initially both skeptical and curious about the new format for this year's event which was held as an Open Space Technology meeting. But judging from attendees' feedback, the unanimous response was that people felt tremendously engaged by the opportunity for their voice to be heard as opposed to being "talked to."

"There needs to be greater focus on coming together with a unified message," said one post-conference survey respondent. "This will help us with soliciting support from donors and legislators. We need to

standardize services in the collection of information to show outcomes. We need more opportunities like this for the entire alphabet soup to come to the same table and discuss issues so we can move forward as one united front."

Having a diverse blend of representatives (the "alphabet soup") from the multitude of organizations serving the blind and visually impaired brought a lot of excitement to the conference's break-out discussions. Attendees included representatives from agencies providing direct services, dog guide schools, state agencies, schools for the Blind (including higher ed institutions that train future personnel), foundations funding initiatives in the field, and vendors specializing in technologies to improve everyday life for people living with blindness and low vision. Funding from The Gibney Family Foundation allowed leaders from an additional 15 non-member organizations to attend the conference. This was all part of VisionServe's plan to ensure that all voices in our field would be represented.

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Chairman's Message

John Mitchell, President/CEO of Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

john.mitchell@cincyblind.org

What a great conference we had in Atlanta! I've heard many positive comments about the Open Space Technology format and the opportunities the conference provided us to share ideas and focus on important issues. Special thanks to David Morgan for leading the effort. His experience was invaluable in developing the Conference process. Steps are in the works to develop actionable plans to bring about the opportunities identified which will be shared in the coming months.



I hope each of you are enjoying the New Year. I look forward to working with you to continue our progress and future collaborations. I am honored to serve as your Board Chair and look forward to leading VSA, with my fellow Board members, to embrace new opportunities to grow and strengthen our extensive Alliance of services for people who live with vision loss.

This is a very exciting time for VSA with Lee Nasehi as our President/CEO, with 2020 being a year of increasing partnerships to continue our Vision and Purpose of "Facilitating executive leadership development and strategic networking leadership opportunities in order to strengthen capacity and impact in the field of blindness and low vision." Under Lee's leadership VSA will continue to support the important work of each of our member organizations.

See you in Albuquerque for our CEO Summit!

CEO Corner

Lee Nasehi, President & CEO, VisionServe Alliance, St. Louis, MO. leen@visionservealliance.org

Like many involved in the planning of the Fall ELC, I was initially nervous about the new format and approach. Thanks to your participation, it all came together and has recharged our networking leadership journey.



I am an optimistic person. We face many challenges specific to our missions and some of these are decades old. Nevertheless, I remain convinced that we can make positive changes. I am hopeful. Hope is believing that tomorrow can be better than today. I believe that "together we can do so much," and that we are better positioned to do even more together than we were yesterday, or in October, or in 2015. Why?

First, we know each other better. We have spent time together eating, drinking (☺), listening to each other, and sharing our dreams and concerns. We have started working together towards shared goals that are improving opportunities for other people we care about. We have created solutions that began as one person's idea, were passed along to develop, grow, and benefit from the ideas of many. Through it all, our relationships have increased and strengthened.

We have tremendous opportunity to do more together through the tomorrows of the new year. 2020 can be our Year of Collaboration. Let's make it so. I invite you to read an important Harvard Business Review article about collaboration by HBS professor, Francesca Gino. hbr.org/2019/11/cracking-the-code-of-sustained-collaboration.

We ARE stronger together. Let's begin with the end in mind and make the very most of our VisionServe Alliance in 2020.

2019 Board of Directors

Chair: John Mitchell, Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired

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Erika Petach, Blind and Vision Rehab Services of Pittsburgh

Shari Roeseler, Society for the Blind-Sacramento

Dennis Steiner, VisionCorps

Renee Vidrine, Lighthouse Louisiana

Ken Warkentin, Valley Center for the Blind

Many thanks to outgoing Board Member, Thomas Panek, President & CEO, Guiding Eyes for the Blind.

Updates on VisionServe Alliance Programs

AVLNC Update

This year, VisionServe Alliance assumed the role of coordinating the Aging and Vision Loss National Coalition to continue the work in the aging and vision loss area. Representatives from over 20 organizations active in the field met in person and via teleconference this year. Accomplishments by the AVLNC in 2019 included the following:

- Developed a 1-page awareness flyer that will be customizable for all member organizations. (see insert)
- Created an additional impact statement for VisionServe Alliance and opportunities for VSA members
- Provided a platform to standardize and improve our reporting outcomes and more use of the disability index
- Engaged the aging community by expanding to new entities
- Strategized the formation of “legislative champions” to build data from each legislative district
- Created a meeting calendar and an online presence for the AVLNC on the VSA website
- Brought together key leaders beginning at the Atlanta conference to strengthen us, with plans in the works to continue meeting at upcoming conferences such as AER, AFB and others.
- Established goals for 2020 for each of the three committees: Awareness, Funding and Personnel

Read more at: visionservealliance.org/avlnc/



“Attending the 2019 VSA leadership conference has offered me the opportunity to meet some great leaders and has given me the confidence to assist and guide the low vision and blind community to become all that they can be.”

– Elsie Hirata

Your donations support programs like our Conference Scholarship program. Make a tax-deductible donation today at visionservealliance.org/donate/

VisionRefer Update

We have exceeded nearly all of the first year targets for VisionRefer! With the help of all our participating providers, we have increased our reach to 16 states. We have nearly 70 doctors, and other referring accounts using VisionRefer, and over 280 referrals processed so far. Thank you to everyone that is working diligently to share this resource with your local practices. In 2020, we plan to add a series of short videos on features of the site such as, How It Works, Account Management, and Updating Referrals, to make training easier for our providers, as well as assist in sharing VisionRefer with your local practices.

If you would like to learn more about VisionRefer, visit the website www.visionrefer.org or contact Ben Leigh at vr@visionservealliance.org.


Atlanta Conference Scholarship Recipients:

1) Elsie Hirata, Director of Client Services, Community Center for the Blind & Visually Impaired, Stockton, CA

2) Joy Harris, Executive Director, Council of Schools and Services for the Blind, Mableton, GA




Elsie with Michelle Galvan of CCBVI and Ronita Jones of NewView OK.


VisionRefer

- ◆ Easy to Use
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- ◆ HIPAA Compliant

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Creating Shared Vision at the 2019 Executive Leadership Conference in Atlanta



Here's a snapshot of the excitement from this year's ELC
(continued from p 1)

Discussion topics were wide-ranging from public policy, distance learning, braille literacy, AT equipment, accreditation and certification, early intervention, employment opportunities and challenges, outcome measurement and service data collection, blinded veterans, nonprofit sustainability and transportation issues. VisionServe Alliance was also featured in a story by WABE, the local NPR affiliate, who interviewed several attendees about using technology to improve their lives living with blindness and low vision. Sharon Giovinazzo, President of World Services for the Blind in Arkansas, modeled several pieces of technology to the radio show host, including: her OrCam MyEye device recognizing

faces; an app on her phone audibly reading the text on a business card; and her digital braille reader.

Some attendees noted that they were surprised to connect with leaders from other states dealing with similar problems. And they took things a step further, coming up with key action items and contacts at other agencies willing to work with them on these issues. "The key is solidarity on all issues. Nationally we are all dealing with the same problems," remarked one participant.

Thank you to everyone who came to this "tremendous opportunity to network and learn on a professional and personal level."



Erika Arbogast and Mark Lucas.



Everyone (dogs included) enjoyed the welcome reception



Neva Fairchild tries the variable braille display reader during the Tech Tools session.

"As agencies, there's more that we agree on regarding priorities than we disagree on and if we align on key topics issues, we can be a very strong collective force." – feedback from a survey respondent



Lee Nasehi organizes discussion sessions at the News Wall.



Discussion group in process.



Pete Benavidez of Blindness Support Services speaking.



Morning Meeting with facilitator, David Morgan.



This year's Dine Around went digital! Always a fun time.



VisionServe's name in lights on the FOX Theatre marquis!



VisionServe's Board of Directors meeting



Lou Moneymaker accepting the Lifetime Achievement Award.



Bryan Bashin receiving the Excellence in Leadership Award, with nominator by Sassy Outwater-Wright.

**If you didn't join us, we hope to see you at our next conference:
5th Annual CEO Summit, Albuquerque, NM April 26 – 29, 2020.
Go to visionservealliance.org/conferences/ for more information.**

Annual Award Night Recap

Several annual awards were presented at our annual awards night dinner in Atlanta, GA. We celebrate all of our awardees!

Inspiration Foundation Assistive Technology Funding Recipients:

The Inspiration Foundation in partnership with VisionServe Alliance created a new fund to help VisionServe members purchase assistive technology equipment for classrooms at small member organizations. Grants to the following member organizations were announced in Atlanta:

- 1) **Florida Center for the Blind** (Anissa Pieriboni) - \$1,500 for software, JAWS and Zoom text Fusion
- 2) **Valley Center for the Blind** (Ken Warkentin) - \$1,500 for laptop
- 3) **Alaska Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired** (Regan Mattingly) - \$1,500 for desktop
- 4) **Community Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired** (Michelle Galvan) - \$1,500 for Freedom Scientific Focus 14 Braille display Generation
- 5) **Ensign Skills Center** (Denise Moyer) - \$1,500 for laptop and tablet
- 6) **In-Sight** (Chris Butler) \$995 –Brailiant BI 14 Braille Display
- 7) **Savannah Assoc. for the Blind** (Lois Modell) – \$1,500 for 2 Visolux Digital XL FHD portable video magnifies for classroom training

TOTAL: \$9,995

Thank you to CEO Isaac Shapiro for these grants as well as for the beautiful Brands with Braille gift bags that all conference attendees received. If any member would like more information on receiving a donated gift basket from Clean Logic, please contact Isaac at ishapiro@imstradingusa.com

Cathy Holden Excellence in Managerial Leadership Award:

Rod Hanline, Chief Programs & Services Officer, Leader Dogs for the Blind

Excellence in Leadership Awards:

Mike Gilliam, CEO, San Antonio Lighthouse

Bryan Bashin, CEO, LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Roxann Mayros Organizational Champion Award:

Sharon Giovinazzo, President/CEO, World Services for the Blind

Lifetime Achievement Awards:

David Ekin, President (retired), St. Louis Society for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Lou Moneymaker, President & CEO (retired), Bosma Enterprises



Lois Modell of the Savannah Assoc. f/t Blind accepting her award

Special thanks to Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired who helped produce the brailled awards for this year's honorees.

Sharon Giovinazzo was the first recipient of a new award, the Roxann Mayros Organizational Champion Award, given to celebrate a leader who founded, turned around, or significantly expanded an organization.



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Glenn Hoagland – President & CEO of The Seeing Eye in Morristown, NJ. | www.SeeingEye.org

What do you do in your down time?

I am a jazz drummer, so I enjoy playing in combos at jazz clubs, and in a community jazz ensemble that promotes jazz education, performance and culture.

Tell us about one item on your bucket list.

To travel to Australia and New Zealand and the Great Barrier Reef.

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

Range: Why Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World, by David Epstein, The Other Wes Moore, by Wes Moore, and Fighting Blind: A Green Beret's Story of Extraordinary Courage, by Major Ivan Castro with Jim DeFelice.

The best advice I ever got...

Before going on any stage, take a deep breath and turn performance anxiety into performance energy.

What is your best guilty pleasure?

Any dessert prepared by our amazing Seeing Eye Food Service Staff at our campus in Morristown, NJ!

What do you want to be when you grow up?

I always wanted to be either a ship captain or a bus driver, which is analogous to running a nonprofit organization and keeping it and its "passengers" moving forward safely and securely every day.

My best childhood memory is...

My mom pushing me behind my tricycle around the block when I was age 4. I was her eyes (she was blind) and she was the engine of our adventurous journeys.

FUTURE CONFERENCES – SAVE THE DATES!

5th Annual CEO Summit | Albuquerque, NM | April 26 – 29, 2020
Venue: Hotel Chaco



Photo credit: www.kipmalone.com

32nd Annual Executive Leadership Conference | Tampa, FL
Nov. 1 – 4, 2020 | Venue: Westin Tampa Waterside Hotel



Photo credit: Visit Tampa Bay

For conference details, visit our conference page online:
www.visionservealliance.org/conferences/



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