

# NO LIMITS



## Newsletter for the Earle Baum Center

Serving the Blind and Visually Impaired

### From the Center

I was asked to comment on the changes of the EBC from the late 1990's to today. This is a topic that is always a pleasure to broach since it is so close to my heart.

In 1997, the Earle Baum Center was a dream and a field. The old house of Earle and a broken down garage was all that was on the property excepting remnants of the farm. We tripped over downed fences, chunks of concrete that were part of the old barn and house and barbed wire strewn over the ground. Weeds were four feet tall and trees overgrown, some completely covered with poison oak.

When the community effort to build the EBC began in earnest, it took about two years of construction before we were issued a use permit although we were incorporated as a 501(c)3 several years earlier. Our first Board of Directors of Larry Swenson and myself was soon joined by dignitaries in our field including Catherine Skivers, Jim Willows, Aerial Gilbert and Betty della Santina. The list of supporters is long and the many stories of the development seem endless. It soon became clear that the foundation of the EBC is the heart and soul of many, along with concrete and perspiration.

In 1999, with our first vision rehabilitation specialist, Denise Vancil, on board, we began teaching independent living. Support groups were formed including the Thursday Thinkers. A computer user group was

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### President's Message

2006 started out on a high note for the board, with a spectacular orientation presented by all of the staff at the EBC. Although we all had a general knowledge of the great work done here, it was enlightening to learn the background of each staff member and their individual roles and responsibilities. Everyone attending left with a deeper understanding of the fine work that is being done every day at the EBC by each of these very special individuals. At the end of the day, I went away feeling very proud to say that I am a board member of such an outstanding organization. I know I am not alone in extending kudos to the staff for a job well done!

I have been on the board since before the center broke ground, and it has been exciting to observe the evolution of the center. On several occasions recently, I have heard the EBC name come up in conversation, being complimented on the professional quality and the extent of the services that it is providing to a large population living in the Northern California area. This is a great testimony to the staff and volunteers at the EBC. Thank you for all that you do to make this possible.

**Aerial Gilbert**  
**EBC Board President**

formed with the help of Jeff Harrington, our current Manager of Technology Services. The energy and enthusiasm was so powerful we felt that the possibilities were endless.

Before long, we employed more teachers and staff and in six short years, we now have 13 staff and 20 itinerant teachers who work throughout 7 counties. A lot has changed in six years, although sometimes it feels like I have been here much of my life. I am thrilled to say that the growth has continued with the model of heart and soul.

So, what is the latest?

On February 1, Phil Swetin began as our Development Director. The job search and hiring process was handled carefully and slowly because we wanted to be very sure we brought the right person on board. I am very happy that Phil joined the EBC and feel confident that we will benefit greatly from his efforts.

Further, the construction of our office building is progressing nicely. The building is closed in (thanks to great weather) and the interior work is beginning. If all goes well and we can raise the remaining money, we may be able to move in by May or June. The sooner, the better. It is both disruptive and a tease to know it is close but still not functional. We have been very fortunate to have great contractors on the job who are quite generous to us. Remember that we are keeping current photos of the progress on our web site: [www.earlebaum.org](http://www.earlebaum.org) We are also updating our site regularly for content and points of interest. Check it out and let us know if you have any suggestions. Have a great spring and come visit the EBC.

**Allan Brenner**  
**Executive Director**

## Tandem Bicycling Program at EBC

The Earle Baum Center tandem bicycling program is gearing up for the spring riding season. We currently have a group of talented and willing pilots and are looking for young blind or visually impaired riders who want to train for competitive cycling. No experience is necessary, but a strong commitment to training is required. In addition to riders, the EBC is asking for help in obtaining additional professional quality tandem bikes to augment the program. If you or someone you know is interested in participating in this high level athletic experience, call the EBC today. This special program is being offered in addition to the center's continuing quarterly ride program.

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## Lake County Technology Instructor

The Technology Department is excited to announce the expansion of services into Lake and Mendocino Counties. With the hiring of Colleen Alexander as our newest Assistive Technology Specialist, we will now be able to provide training in this underserved community.

Colleen, a resident of Nice since 1976, was born and raised in Northern California and is a Graduate of Upper Lake High School and Mendocino College. Her first experience with visually impaired and blind persons was as a puppy raiser for Guide Dogs for the Blind. She recently became involved with Discovery Blind Sports as a downhill skiing guide. Colleen is currently teaching at Mendocino College and the Lake County Office of Education where she works with a diverse group of students including inmates at the county jail, children at juvenile hall, senior citizens and persons with disabilities.

If you or someone you know needs technology training in the Lake County area, give the EBC a call.

## New Developments

After almost two decades of working with non-profits in Sonoma County, my confidence was sorely shaken on my first visit to the Earle Baum Center. It seemed like a sacrilege to be so blissfully ignorant of one of the true treasures of our community.

The purpose of my visit was to meet with Allan and discuss the recently created position of Development Director. As amazed as I was by this fabulous facility, I was awestruck by the quantity and quality of the programs and services that were being provided. How could I not have known?

And that has become my starting point. As the newly hired Development Director for the EBC, it will be my pleasure as well as my responsibility to carry the word to all of Northern California. **The Earle Baum Center is here for you.**

Having spent most of my working life telling stories, first as a documentary producer and then producing advertising and marketing campaigns, I look forward to bringing **real** stories to our friends and neighbors of how people's lives have been changed in a very real and very positive way. I know that my integration into this special community will be a lengthy process, but with the warmth and openness of the staff here, it will be a thoroughly enjoyable one.

As the months go by, we hope to raise the profile of the work done here at the EBC significantly. From press coverage of the great events and programs here, to improved communication with our supporters and clients, the days are laboring unnoticed in this quiet corner of the county are numbered.

Most importantly, I will need your help. Tell me your stories. Give me your ideas. And remember that each one of us is an ambassador of the EBC to the community.

I look forward to the months and years ahead as the Earle Baum Center touches more and more lives and all of Northern California gets the opportunity to appreciate the true bounty of compassion and dedication to improving lives that is the real legacy of Earl Baum.

In fellowship,

**Phil Swetin**  
**Development Director**

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## Volunteer Class B Driver Wanted

If you are a Licensed Class B driver with a valid license in good standing, with proof of insurance etc., and are interested in volunteering to drive our 14-passenger bus on occasion for outings, please call the center at 523-3222 to talk to us further.

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## Can we get your help?

We are in the process of updating our database. If you are not interested in receiving a printed copy of the newsletter, or would like to receive it in email, an alternate format (braille or tape), or if you have moved, changed phone numbers, etc., please contact the EBC office to make corrections.

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## Volunteer Mower Needed

The Earle Baum Center is looking for volunteers to mow the orchards around our campus on our sit-down mower. We have a landscape maintenance service that takes care of the lawns and landscaping but not the fields. Depending on the rain and weather conditions, the grasses need to be cut as frequently as every other week beginning in the spring.

The mowing schedule is flexible and work can be shared.

If you are able to help, please call the EBC and ask for Pat Jefferson (707) 523-3222.

## Moving Forward

Where would I be if I didn't take that first step to the EBC? I know this much. I would not have met the great people that I know now and I would not have been able to learn the skills that I needed to get back on my feet and be able to travel again.

I still remember the first lesson I had at the EBC with Jeff Harrington in the tech department. As cool and calm as I act, I was overwhelmed. The technology that is out there to assist us in gaining employment is amazing; talking computers, cell phones, watches, scales, thermometers, and Glucometers. Thanks to the advocacy of our community we can utilize so many things to make our lives easier. I have had nothing short of a great experience with tech department at the EBC. Thank you Jeff, Jennifer, Barb, and Jacques.

Now onto something that is so important to me, mobility. I don't want to have a sighted guide everywhere I go (well, that depends on who is my guide). I believe that without the proper stick or cane usage, we would be held back and truly be disabled. With all the life changes that I have gone through in just the last 3 months alone, I would not be able to do the things that I do without the Orientation and Mobility training. With Leslie Bailiff's guidance, I have grown tremendously as a person with the confidence of a new born baby. I might be a little complicated at times but look what I have gained in such a short amount of time, especially DuPont, a beautiful 27.5 inch tall coated Shepherd. It is such a great feeling to feel that smile from Leslie as DuPont and I travel together. Believe me when I say that I love the EBC staff as my own family.

Another very important root that is crucial in becoming independent is Braille. Thanks to the hard work of Denise Vancil, I have just about completed Grade 2 Braille in just about a year. Braille is such a great tool for labeling your household items and clothes. There is something about getting to a certain point when you start seeing dots instead of letters. It really makes you feel like you are changing as a person. You are growing and learning a new language. It is really fun and exciting.

It only took 6 months of urging from Denise, but I finally strapped on some tap shoes and enjoyed it. What great exercise. I never had so much fun making noise. I encourage anybody interested in tapping to come out and give it a try. You'll have a blast.

With all the great friendships that I have developed here, I think that one in particular will stick out. From teasing to bickering, from working together to enjoying a sip or two, Lisa Gerhardt, the EBC's bookkeeper/administrative assistant, is like a mother to me. Thanks you "Gearhead" for keeping me out of trouble...most of the time. Love ya like a sister.

Now that I am starting school soon, I wish I could be around as much as I have to help out. Volunteering at the EBC has probably been the most rewarding experience that I have had with since losing my sight (DuPont, be quiet). It has been such a pleasure for me being able to see people come and go, learning rehab and the skills needed to move on. I almost feel like a Veteran saying that, but its time for me to move on with thanks to everyone here at the EBC.

Thank you,  
**Sean Ryan**

# EBC Administration Offices Construction Update

**November 2005**

Wow, from not much to...



**February 2006**

What a difference!

**Move-in date  
May 2006 ??**

Offices, not a converted  
bedroom!



**A Hearty Thanks to the construction crews!  
You guys are awesome!**

How has the Earle Baum Center made a difference in your life?  
Drop us a line, we would love to pass your story along.

If you have contacted us for information in the past, did you get what you needed?  
If you are still in need of service, or your situation had changed, call us to discuss  
the options you have to make your life as fulfilling and independent as possible.  
We are here to help.



Louise Zhang presents her oil pastel portrait of Earle Baum to EBC Executive Director Allan Brenner

## Upcoming Events

**Santa Rosa Rose Parade  
May 20, 2006**

**TGIF BBQ's  
1st & 3rd Fridays  
Beginning May 19th  
(Weather Permitting)**

**DogATHon  
October 14, 2006  
Save the Date!!**

**Contact information: [www.earlebaum.org](http://www.earlebaum.org) email: [ebc@earlebaum.org](mailto:ebc@earlebaum.org)**

**Tel: (707) 523-3222**

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**FREE MATTER  
FOR THE BLIND**



**EARLE BAUM CENTER  
4539 Occidental Road  
Santa Rosa, CA 95401**

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

**The Earle Baum Center was conceived and established by the blind to provide facilities and foster programs in such areas as education, technology, rehabilitation, health, fitness and recreation, to improve the personal, social and economic condition of the blind and vision impaired.**