



Newsletter for the Earle Baum Center

Serving People With Sight Loss
(707) 523-3222 ebc@earlebaum.org

November 2011 Volume 11 Issue 4

From the Center

One would think I'd be used to it by now, but once again, I am stunned that another year is coming to a close.



The Earle Baum Center has just celebrated its 12th anniversary and what a decade plus two years it has been! Time flies by and yet, when looking back over each year, I am reminded (and at times astonished) by just how much we have taken on and by how much we have accomplished.

Over the past dozen years, the influences of many stakeholders have contributed to the evolution of the Center's unique and special qualities. Some who were around at the beginning are still regular fixtures here and, sadly, many are no longer with us. As I reflect on current and former clients whose lives progress beyond the disruptive and overwhelming aspects of sight loss, I am heartened. Lives change on a daily basis here at the EBC. In this issue you can read about the lives of two such vision rehabilitation clients, both remarkable yet ordinary. Co-incidentally, both had early careers in main frame computer programming. Their stories are compelling but not unique at the Earle Baum Center. As encouraging as our daily work is at the

EBC, we face many challenges now and into the future. In fact, our mission has been fraught with obstacles since the beginning: Just months after opening our doors in 1999, unknown and unproven as a service provider, we faced our first economic recession. According to the economists, it lasted throughout most of 2001. Then, throughout most of the 2000s, the State of California struggled with budgetary issues and cut fee for service rates as well as services. We are presently paid the same rates as we received in 1999. In 2008, a much more serious recession hit that lasted nearly two years. Now, although it may not be a recession in the formal sense, we face extraordinarily serious economic challenges with high rates of unemployment and overall weak conditions.

When considering the stresses of keeping our non-profit healthy, it is no surprise that emphasis must be placed on raising money to offset the huge losses. Traditionally, non-profits have been able to attract significant donations along with the support of the systems that make it feasible to operate. As everyone knows, our systems are in bad shape; Federal, State and local governments are scrambling just to make ends meet. All non-profits are dealing with cuts in funding and donations. Some organizations have been around long enough to establish endowments through planned-giving and this allows them to maintain and

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even expand services. But organizations like the EBC that do not have a guaranteed funding stream must turn over every rock to keep things moving ahead. Thus, our challenges are great.

And yet, the *quality* of our service has not suffered and in many ways has improved and grown. For example, our Low Vision Clinic, which opened on March 23, 2010, added a medical model of service to our existing rehabilitation model. We now offer many classes and services throughout six northern California counties. And we have expanded the “community center” aspect of our organization offering expanded (and very popular) social and recreational activities to our clients. In addition, the EBC offers its facilities to other local non-profits with fewer resources so that they can use the Center as their base.

We also use our beautiful 17 acre property with its groomed lawns and trimmed orchards to present EarleFest, our annual signature fundraising event. This amazing music festival, supported by a myriad of sponsors, volunteers, and concert-goers, and now in its fifth year, has given the community its first major “roots” music event while bringing greater awareness of the EBC to thousands.

Perhaps it is the fall season which has me waxing nostalgic but it is very satisfying for all of us at the EBC to realize how far we have come and how transformational our services are to Northern Californian’s with sight loss. As we approach the traditional season of giving, I ask for your support. Our life-changing vision rehabilitation programs and services are made possible in large part by charitable donations and we welcome your support in small or in large.

Please do not hesitate to call upon us for more information about how your support

can influence the good work of the EBC. Planned giving, cash donations, and the tree of life are only a few ways one can support the Center.

Thank you for being a part of the EBC. We look forward to many more years of ensuring the dream of the late Earle Baum and our shared commitment to the mission of the Earle Baum Center.

Happy Holidays and Wishing You a Healthy, Happy and Prosperous 2012.

Sincerely,

Allan Brenner, CEO

Spotlight: Kat Aby

One day back in the fall of 1999, Kat Aby was making her way from Santa Rosa to her home in Petaluma on a Sonoma County Transit bus. On the bus was a man with a guide dog. She struck up a conversation with him and they talked as they rode about blindness and retinitis pigmentosa, two things they had in common. The man, Allan Brenner, also told her about a new Center in Santa Rosa that was about to open. The Earle Baum Center offered programs and services to those with sight loss. He said she should come by and take a look. Kat recalls her first thoughts at that suggestion, “That’s cool, that’s fine. I wasn’t sure I wanted to be around other blind people.”



Kat Aby has retinitis pigmentosa, a disease characterized by degeneration of the rods and cones of the retina. She was diagnosed at age 19 shortly after commencing

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studies in architecture at Santa Rosa Junior College. With this shocking news, she dashed her plans in architecture and worked with counselors at the JC to determine other career paths. Although she settled on pursuing a degree in psychology, it was financially impossible for Kat to continue her formal education. In 1969 she fell in love, married and then entered the work force.

At the time of this chance meeting, Kat, now a single mother, was on medical leave from her job as a computer programmer with Fireman's Fund Insurance in Novato. A 25 year employee with the company, Kat found it increasingly difficult to use the computer which was the single most important instrument of her work. She could no longer perform her job according to her job description and her performance evaluations were declining. She felt her job was in jeopardy. Kat states, "I was in a very poor emotional state. I didn't know what to do. The company never offered me adaptive technology to help me do my work. I didn't know to ask for it." After a brief medical leave, she decided to go on long term disability to protect her income stream and ensure financial support for her son and herself.

The decision to go on long term disability was difficult for Kat. Her professional history was one of accomplishment: Mutual Fund Trader, Insurance Rater, main frame and then PC Computer Programmer. Throughout, her vision in constant decline, Kat attempted to figure things out on her own without adaptive training. Although she received some white cane training through the Department of Rehabilitation in 1996, her true adaptive training began once she joined the EBC nearly 4 years later.

Ultimately, after that fateful day on the bus, Kat decided she was ready to "spend time around other blind people." Once again, working with the California Department of Rehabilitation, services were established in 2000 for Kat. As a result, Kat is one of the few "first timers" of the Center. An unofficial doyenne, Kat was at the Center's inaugural ceremony. She attended Susan Hirschfield's very first Adjusting to Blindness class. She worked with Denise Vancil covering Independent Living Skills and Braille. And Kat refined her Orientation & Mobility skills with the late Michele Kurn. Kat continues to receive training in what she describes as "developing of her foundation skills."

Today, Kat Aby wants to "give back" not just to the Earle Baum Center but to the Center's clients who are experiencing the same range of feelings that she experienced as she adjusted to sight loss. Kat, a certified Life Coach, is in a unique position to do so, and to relate and assist others who are going through this complicated and confounding experience.

When thinking back on her first thoughts of the Earle Baum Center and that chance encounter with Allan Brenner on the Sonoma County bus she says, "I told myself then, I don't need that place. But now I feel I am blessed to have met him."

ACCESSIBLE GIFT IDEAS

The holidays are upon us. It is time to make a list and find out who has been naughty or nice. Shopping for that special friend or relative can often be a challenge, and what happens if that person also happens to have sight loss. See our website for links to great gift ideas!

<http://earlebaum.org/accessible-gifts-ideas/>

Here's a crockpot recipe for those cold days when you want to have something yummy and ready when you get home:

Maple-Orange Chicken with Acorn Squash & Sweet Potatoes

- 1 small to medium acorn squash, peeled, seeded, and cut into 2-inch pieces
- 2 sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into 2-inch pieces
- 2 leeks, rinsed and chopped
- 5 (5-ounce) skinless chicken breast halves (with or without bone)
- Salt and ground black pepper
- 1 cup orange marmalade
- 1/2 cup reduced-sodium chicken broth
- 1/2 cup orange juice
- 1 tablespoon hoisin sauce
- 1 tablespoon maple syrup

For the garnish:

- 1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley leaves
- 1 to 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh rosemary leaves

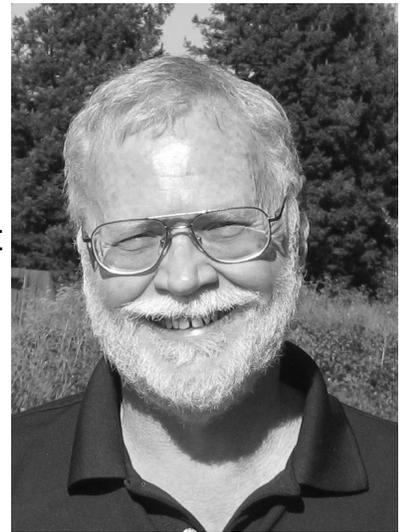
Directions

Place squash and sweet potatoes and leeks in the slow cooker. Season chicken all over with salt and black pepper and place on top of vegetables in slow cooker. In a medium bowl, combine orange marmalade and remaining ingredients. Pour mixture over chicken and vegetables. Cover and cook on LOW for 6 to 8 hours or on HIGH for 3 to 4 hours.

Serve 4 of the chicken breast halves with squash and potatoes on the side and extra sauce spooned over top (reserve remaining chicken for another meal). Top with parsley and rosemary just before serving.

Spotlight: Paul Phillips

What does Paul Phillips, a self-described 60s rocker and former sailboat racer want folks to know about the Earle Baum Center? Paul explains, "They understand sight loss and blindness very well. They have a lot of information to make lives better. There are a lot of people struggling with sight loss who remain unproductive. Training at the Earle Baum Center let's these people realize their potential and contribute to society. They help us figure it out." Paul continues, "The instructors understand and know what it is like to see and then not to see. You know, even the instructors are blind." At this point, Paul refers to Living Skills instructor, Denise Vancil, and recounts that she was sighted until thirteen years old. Clearly, an instructor's firsthand experience with the complex matters of sight loss is immeasurable and allows for a deeper connection with students who are going through the same. Such are the machinations of the Earle Baum Center.



Paul first learned about the EBC nearly eleven years ago from his ophthalmologist. At the time he was very unhappy with his job; partly because of his increasingly poor vision but that was not all of it. Paul has ROP, Retinopathy of Prematurity a condition caused by exposure to high levels of oxygen as a new born. As a result, Paul's sight has degraded throughout his life since childhood. He's been legally blind for at least 20 years. Even as Paul

struggled with sight loss, he has enjoyed a long career working with computers. He cut his teeth doing main frame programming in the early years. Today he works from home providing technical support for a Texas-based company called Insperity. In any event, Paul never did make it out the Center when he first learned of EBC, thinking transportation might be a problem but there was more to it than that.

Fast forward to March earlier this year and another visit to the ophthalmologist. After years of compensating for his sight loss and after much thought, this accomplished software support engineer (who ended up loving his job and still does) decides he wants to start using the white cane. His doctor recommends the EBC once again. When asked why he waited so long, Paul replies, "I thought the cane would slow me down because I walk fast. Of course that's not true. I didn't know." The decision to use the white cane is often a milestone in the life of someone with sight loss. Perhaps it signals a greater level of acceptance. Paul adds, "I wanted to use the cane for safety reasons too. I wanted to convey that I am blind."

Once Paul made his decision, he signed on with the California Department of Rehabilitation to begin receiving services. Things moved quickly after that. In addition to the Orientation and Mobility training he initially sought, Paul has worked with Adaptive Technology instructors Jacques Law and Jeff Harrington, as well as Living Skills instructor Denise Vancil.

Paul continues to work with Lora Monemzadeh on his white cane skills. Paul shares an example from one of his Low Vision Intro classes to illustrate his

delight, "Take the talking watch, a simple thing. Been around for years. I wouldn't have known where to get one if it weren't for that class!"

Paul explains his hopes for his current training, "To feel more comfortable and not be so dependent. My vision has gradually deteriorated and my quality of life has gone with it. With vision rehabilitation, my quality of life gets better. I want to be able to do things by myself."

Paul's easy, positive attitude is infectious. "The Earle Baum Center has made a difference in my life. I feel different about myself, feel like a different person. In fact, Paul is considering taking up sailing again. A different person, indeed."

EBC is Sinking!

Sad, but true, EBC is literally sinking - the men's and women's restroom floors that is. Due to natural elements, it suddenly became noticeable that the floor in the restrooms was sinking. Upon formal review and examination, it has been determined that the floors need to be replaced. It is expected it will take three months and \$30,000 to repair and replace the damaged floors. Those clients needing restroom facilities will be directed to other campus restrooms.

We fully understand the inconvenience this creates for our clients and appreciate your patience and understanding during the repair process.

If you would like to contribute to the "Repair Fund", any and all contributions will be greatly appreciated.



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Bigger and Better

Shortly after Ray Thompson became an official member of the EBC staff as Facility Manager, it was determined that we needed more storage area for our maintenance tools and tractor as well as more efficient storage in general for our classroom supplies. We had outgrown the current maintenance storage area.

Thanks to the generous support of Redwood Lions Memorial Foundation and the pro bono work services by Ken Coker, architect, and Ron Marchand, contractor, EBC now has a new and enlarged maintenance shed to house our tractor and all of our



maintenance equipment. Completed in late October, Ray excitedly shares that this will enable EBC to make more efficient use of all of its storage areas.



EARLE BAUM CENTER
4539 Occidental Road
Santa Rosa, CA 95401

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FOR THE BLIND

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

MISSION STATEMENT

To provide opportunities
for people who are blind
or visually impaired to
improve and enrich their
personal, social and
economic lives.

Contact us: email: ebc@earlebaum.org Telephone: (707) 523-3222
Fax: (707) 636-2768 www.earlebaum.org

Annual Holiday Party

**Please join us for our
Holiday Potluck!**



**December 15, 2011
11:00 am to 1:30 pm**

RSVP 523-3222

**Happy Holidays
from
Earle Baum Center
EBC will be closed
Nov. 21st to Nov. 25th
and
Dec 19th to Dec 31st
No Classes or Services**