



• EARLE  
• BAUM  
• CENTER

TRANSFORMING THE LIVES OF  
PEOPLE WITH SIGHT LOSS

# LIMITLESS

## Paying it Forward

When Nanette Owens learned she had diabetes, she had no idea that the disease could one day affect her vision. Thanks to the Earle Baum Center, she has learned new ways to live a full life. And now, she and her husband Charlie are paying it forward by helping others adjust to the challenges of living with vision loss.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, more than 100 million Americans are living with



*Nanette Owens navigating the Labyrinth.*

diabetes or prediabetes. But most people have never even heard of diabetic retinopathy.

Nanette had been managing her type II diabetes for years when she began having vision problems. She developed cataracts, and after having surgery, her retinas detached. Her doctors tried to re-attach them, but she was left with clouded vision.

EBC helped her deal with the emotional aspects of losing her vision. "I think the state of denial is the biggest part of it," Nanette said. "It's hard to come to grips with the things you can't do." Through EBC, she learned to use a white cane, as well as a host of other skills that help her maintain her independence and do daily tasks.

Now that she and Charlie are retired, they enjoy giving back to EBC by volunteering. "EBC is a good place to be," Nanette said. "It's a safe and comfortable place. Everyone is so encouraging. We feel like part of the family." She manages incoming phone calls. Her front desk computer is equipped with Zoomtext magnifying software, so she can see the screen.

Charlie greets visitors on tour and makes sure clients who are attending classes connect with their Paratransit buses.

The duo also cares for the EBC flower and vegetable garden. They planted giant water troughs and surrounding areas with tomatoes, string beans, peppers, raspberries, flowers, and a pomegranate tree. "Some things make it, and some don't! The tomatoes were doing fine before that heat spell we had," Nanette said. She also painted plant labels in black and yellow. Braille labels have been added to the edges of the troughs. She tells visitors and clients: "As you're walking back from the labyrinth, be sure to hang a right and check out the garden!"

Having first experienced EBC as a client, Nanette understands what it feels like to be losing vision. She and Charlie go out of their way to make sure people get a warm welcome. It is that very personal touch that makes EBC an inviting place where people who are losing their vision can get the help they need.

# Message from the CEO



Dear Friend,

If Earle Baum were alive today, we believe he would be very proud of his legacy! Earle and his sister were blind, yet they found ways to carve a fulfilling life through connection to nature and community. Today, decades after his death, Earle will continue to be remembered for his generosity in helping thousands of people in our community who are learning to live with vision loss.

Earle Baum Center celebrates its 20th anniversary this year, and we've come a long way. As with Earle, we are always looking ahead, finding new ways to improve the quality of life for people with sight loss.

Recently, Earle Baum Center leadership engaged in a strategic planning process to map our future. We enlisted input from employees, board members, volunteers and community stakeholders from both government and the nonprofit sector.

One of the outcomes of these meetings was a decision to redesign our logo. For the past 20 years, our logo, a green building, was fitting because we were engaged in growing a sense of place at EBC. Now, 20 years later, our new logo, with its varying shades of blue and teal, represents transformation and we are in the business of transforming the lives of people with sight loss.

The strategic planning process also gave us an opportunity to clarify our values. Taken together, shared values express a social contract that offers guidelines and inspires our actions and decisions. EBC's values are:

- **Communication:** Honest, open, patient, and timely communication is the key to our successful collaboration.
- **Respect:** Treat everyone with compassion, empathy, and courtesy, so everyone feels valued and unique.
- **Trust:** Develop mutual confidence through demonstrating our reliability, integrity, and faith in each other and ourselves.
- **Flexibility:** Adapt to the needs and circumstances of each person with grace and a generous spirit.
- **Accountability:** Do what we say we will do and take responsibility for our choices.
- **Fun:** Embrace and encourage an atmosphere where lighthearted moments bring balance and relief to the stresses of our day.

EBC enjoys strong community support, and wonderful volunteers. We have a comprehensive array of services taught by expert, dedicated, and caring staff. As you will see when you visit our campus, we have beautiful grounds and classrooms.

We are also facing a growing population of people with age-related vision loss. Many are low income and unable to afford the costs of training. Medicare and Medicaid don't cover these services, either. We will be looking to our community for help with funding, and with building partnerships so that we can meet these urgent needs.

In this issue of *Limitless*, we bring you more of our success stories. By volunteering in the garden, Nanette and Charlie Owens are continuing Earle Baum's legacy of connecting with nature. Laurie Ballard and Dale Chapman express the transformation that occurs when one learns to be resilient in the face of adversity. We hope you enjoy these stories and appreciate as we do, how your generosity is making an impact.

In closing, I'd like to remind you to be sure to mark your calendar for September 21st for our 20th Anniversary Open House Celebration. Our staff, students, and volunteers are eager to meet you and show you around. Come and see for yourself how you are helping to transform the lives of people with sight loss in our community. We look forward to seeing you there!

Warm Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bob Sonnenberg". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Bob Sonnenberg  
CEO

# Help for Family and Friends of People with Sight Loss



*“It’s like seeing through a kaleidoscope,” Laurie Ballard.*

Sudden and major changes in our health can have profound effects on our daily lives and the lives of our loved ones. This is certainly true when someone loses their vision. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, the Earle Baum Center is able to offer help and community through the EBC Family and Friends Support Group. The five-week program is led by EBC Independent Living Specialist, Susan Hirshfield, Ph.D. Her expert guidance was a life-saver for Laurie Ballard and Dale Chapman of Rohnert Park.

Laurie was a busy sales representative for grocery stores throughout the region when she was suddenly struck by a stroke in 2011. In addition to causing temporary motor function loss, which she has since regained, it scrambled her brain’s ability to make sense of information from her eyes. Her condition is known as “cortical blindness.” “Right now,

my vision is like looking through a kaleidoscope,” she said.

In addition to the physical challenges Laurie was facing, there were emotional challenges for both her and Dale. “My job was stressful at the time, but I was dealing with it. When I got the stroke, it was like a rug getting ripped out from under my feet! My life changed immediately. I was no longer doing the things I used to do. I was more dependent on Dale. I’m used to being independent. It was a big adjustment.”

Dale said, “I think acceptance is the first thing we had to deal with. We’ve both had to accept what was going on. I became over-concerned about her safety. There were certain things I wouldn’t let her do because I was afraid for her. But Susan helped us deal with our frustrations and fears. In the beginning, you’re pulling your hair out trying to figure out what you should do. But we learned to have patience and take one day at a time.”

In the first Family and Friends Support Group, Laurie, Dale, and 13 other people came together to offer each other understanding and support. “It’s a great format, because family and friends

can speak out about their own challenges,” Dale said. “They can vent. In the beginning, there can be tears and even anger – you have to learn how to adapt. That’s what Susan teaches you. You just learn to accept things. I’ve become a very patient person. We’ve learned so much about blindness and vision loss that we never were aware of. It’s opened up a world of new understanding for us.”

Laurie continues to improve by learning different ways to accomplish things. She’s learned to use a white cane to get around safely. EBC’s Director of Technology Jeff Harrington helped set up her iPhone to use voice-over commands. And she is learning to use screen-reading software on her home computer. She’s now actively looking for a job.

Both Laurie and Dale show their gratitude to EBC through volunteering – making calls and assisting at events. They are keenly aware that many people in the community are facing vision loss alone, and they are moved to help them.

“I don’t know where Laurie would be without EBC,” Dale said. “There are not enough words to show my gratitude. I’ll help in whatever way I can.” He strongly recommends that family and friends of people who are adjusting to vision loss attend the Family and Friends Support Group. Laurie agrees. “The best part of all of this is, I’ve met a lot of really great people at EBC; I really have. And I’m a lot better off now.”



*Dale Chapman and Laurie Ballard of Rohnert Park.*

# Do You Know About Charitable IRA's?

If you have been contributing to an Individual Retirement Account (IRA), here's some information you may not know. Distributions from your IRA at or after age 70½ are taxed as income, and may put you into a higher tax bracket or cause you to have to pay a higher premium for Medicare Part B.

Here's a better alternative: You can support the Earle Baum Center by transferring funds from your IRA directly to EBC. Your charitable gift will not count as income. You will not need to claim an income tax charitable deduction for the gift, even if you don't itemize your taxes. With a direct IRA transfer, you can make

a charitable gift to EBC of up to \$100,000 (or \$200,000 for a couple with separate IRAs) annually.

You may have been planning to leave the funds in your IRA to your heirs. When your heirs withdraw the funds, however, the money may be taxed as ordinary income. They also may be subject to state and/or federal estate taxes if left to someone other than your spouse.

Here's a better alternative: Don't let taxes eat up the funds in your IRA! Leave other assets to your heirs and use your IRA to transform the lives of people with sight loss.

Right now is the perfect time to be discussing these options with your financial advisor. If you plan to make a charitable gift to EBC from your IRA this year, it must be completed before December 31, so don't delay!

Thank you in advance for your generosity.



**EARLE BAUM CENTER**  
TRANSFORMING THE LIVES OF PEOPLE WITH SIGHT LOSS

### SOCIAL MEDIA

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## Earle Baum Center 20th Anniversary Open House

Bring your friends and family for an enjoyable afternoon

**SAVE THE DATE: SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 21ST FROM 10 AM – 3 PM.**



- **TEDx Speaker Hoby Wedler, featured in the July issue of NorthBayBiz Magazine**
- **Tandem bike presentations**
- **Enjoy nature: Labyrinth, trails, vernal pools**
- **Free lunch, ice cream, beer, and wine**
- **Demonstrations of programs and new technologies that are changing the world for people with vision loss**

We hope to see you there!



**Register your spot through Eventbrite: [shorturl.at/cfDG3](https://shorturl.at/cfDG3)**  
**Call us at (707) 523-3222 or visit [earlebaum.org](https://www.earlebaum.org) for more information.**