

A Publication of the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired

FOCUS

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NIB GRANT PROVIDES UPWARD MOBILITY

CABVI Promotes Employees who
are Blind to Operate Wipe Wheel

FOCUS

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Rudy D'Amico
President and CEO

At the end of 2018, we had much to celebrate. We held several successful events, construction started on our new Vision Health and Wellness Center, we increased employment, and expanded services to more regions in New York State.

I want to wish you and your family, a healthy, prosperous, and happy new year. I would also like to thank the board of directors, the employees, and volunteers for their hard work and dedication to this agency.

This year, we will complete amazing projects that will serve this area and beyond for many generations to come. Let's enjoy this special time of growth together as CABVI begins another great year!

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A Reflection on 2018 Promotions

When CABVI creates a new position, or needs to hire someone for an existing, unoccupied position, they encourage current employees to apply for the job. Upward mobility within the agency is one of the number one goals for CABVI.

Hiring within the agency makes a team stronger, and it allows that person to hit the ground running, opposed to spending months training someone. However, promotions are not handed out, and the candidate sits through intense interviews, just as anyone else would.

The three individuals featured for this article, pictured left to right, are Betsy Harvey-Minutti, Director of Rehabilitation Clinical Services, Kimberly Scerbo, Manager of Children Services, and Michael Marrone, Public Relations and Events Manager.

Betsy started with CABVI 21 years ago, and her first job title was case manager. Her most recent position, Senior Manager of Rehabilitation Clinical Services, lasted for one year before being promoted to her current position as director.

During Kim's time with the agency, she held several positions. She started in 2004 as a Vision Rehabilitation Teaching Assistant in 2004, and was in her most recent position as Coordinator of Children's Services before being promoted.

Michael is still a rookie to the agency. He started in mid-2017 as a Marketing and Design Associate and was promoted earlier in 2018.

Additional promotions include - Al Boulerville, Lead Warehouse Driver; Sharice Moon, DMV Team Lead; Kirsten Parker, Purchasing Assistant; Ron Baron, Machine Operator; Christine Klucznik, Senior Help Desk Technician; Ben Gelfuso, Warehouse Worker II; Ben Rodriguez, Machine Operator; and Michael Edia, Machine Operator.



CABVI Welcomes Dr. Kimberly Wadas

CABVI's low vision staff welcomes Dr. Kimberly Wadas, OD, as their newest addition to the department. After passing her low vision examination in October, she was eager to start treating individuals who suffer from acute to severe vision loss.

Coming from a family of optometrists, she is no stranger to the causes and symptoms of vision loss. Her father, Theodore Wadas, OD, and mother, Nancy Bulas, OD, have been in practice for more than 30 years. Her brother, Matthew Wadas, and his wife, Amanda Scalise, OD, joined the family practice recently, and her brother, Ben Wadas, is currently attending graduate school in Worcester, MA.

Dr. Wadas received her undergraduate degree in psychology from Utica College in 2012. She went on to receive her graduate degree from Massachusetts College of Pharmacy & Health Sciences (MCPHS) in Worcester, MA in 2017. Before making the commitment to CABVI, she volunteered for the members of the curling team and, from that moment, she knew she wanted to work for the agency that specialized in vision loss.



"I was very inspired when I volunteered with CABVI and met so many of its consumers," said Dr. Wadas. "It really proves how much people can do when they don't let obstacles or limitations stand in their way."

Dr. Wadas is state-licensed and examines, diagnoses, treats, and manages diseases, injuries, and disorders of the visual system. Every Wednesday, Dr. Wadas will be on-site to handle all patients. When she is not assisting consumers at CABVI, she is practicing at her family's business, located at 408 Main St. in New York Mills.



Thank You
for choosing us
as business of the year



Success Goes Beyond the Office

Success does not come easily. You have to work hard, work often, and work without limits. Leta Laukaitis, CABVI's Executive Assistant to the CEO, was one of three recipients to receive the Rotary's Pride of Workmanship Award.

According to Norma Montagnino-Gemza, chairperson of the Pride of Workmanship committee, the awards are made to those nominees who demonstrate outstanding competence, a commitment to excellence, professionalism, and a willingness to go above and beyond the job description.

"Leta never lets the ball drop," said Rudy D'Amico, CABVI's President and CEO. "She is amazing. She is sharp, smart, and is fully dedicated to the mission of CABVI, and is the embodiment of Rotary's four-way test."

In addition to Leta's award, Amos Ackerman, e-commerce sales and business development associate, recently completed the eight-week course from the Dale Carnegie Skills for Success.

The course, which took place from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. every Tuesday, focused on how to strengthen interpersonal relations, manage stress, and handle fast-changing

workplace conditions. It also directed the class on how to communicate more confidently, to have an enthusiastic attitude, identify major successes, and commit to continuous improvement.

"I received a lot of professional skills, public speaking strategies, and met some great people that I still stay in contact with," said Amos. "I am grateful for the opportunity because it will help me move forward within the organization and help me build lifelong relationships."

During each class, the students gave a speech on topics they were focusing on. During the last class, Amos was voted for most outstanding performance during his speech.

"I am beyond thrilled that we had the opportunity to send Amos to this course," said Scott McGregor, Amos' supervisors and the director of BSC operations and e-commerce administrator. "He will be interacting more with customers in the near future, so the skills he learned will have a great impact on his sales performance."



Utica Council of the Blind and CABVI Host White Cane Day

Once a year, the white cane is recognized nationally to educate the public on what it means to be blind and visually impaired. On October 6, 1964, a joint resolution of Congress was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson proclaiming October 15 of each year as "White Cane Safety Day."

In October, the Utica Council of the Blind (UCB) and CABVI partnered with Mohawk Valley Community College's Office of Accessibility Resources to host White Cane Day at MVCC's Utica Campus.

This one-day event was for members of the college community, and the public, in an effort to educate them on how an individual who is blind or visually impaired utilizes adaptive equipment, such as the white cane, to navigate through their day.

During the event, attendees had the opportunity to be blindfolded so they could experience what it is like to have a visual impairment or vision loss. CABVI had certified orientation of mobility instructors on hand to provide demonstrations and answer questions.



"Events like this are very educational and rewarding," said Maria Gage, president of UCB, and pictured above with the City of Utica's Mayor, Robert Palmeri. "It helped the MVCC student body engage with their visually impaired fellow students and vice versa."

"I had no idea what White Cane Day was," said Drew Harrigan, MVCC student, after leading Carl Ward, who is blind, around the front part of the Alumni College Center. "It's interesting to see how an individual who is blind has the ability to live an independent life."

NYS Department of Health Awards Contract for Reusable Bag

Pictured top right, Chris Cox, production worker, places cardboard fillers into bags. Pictured bottom right, Adam King, machine operator, places the bags into boxes

A few months ago, CABVI secured a contract from the NYS Department of Health for 350,000 reusable imprinted poly tote bags. This is one of the largest, single item contracts received by CABVI in their 89-year history.

CABVI relies heavily on government contracts to provide work for their employees. Without these contracts, workers could be laid off and find it difficult to survive financially.

“We are very fortunate to win such a large contract from the NYS Department of Health,” said Joe Madia, senior expeditor. “Maintaining jobs for the blind and visually impaired is our top priority, so winning large bids like this gives us the ability to keep jobs, and create new ones.”

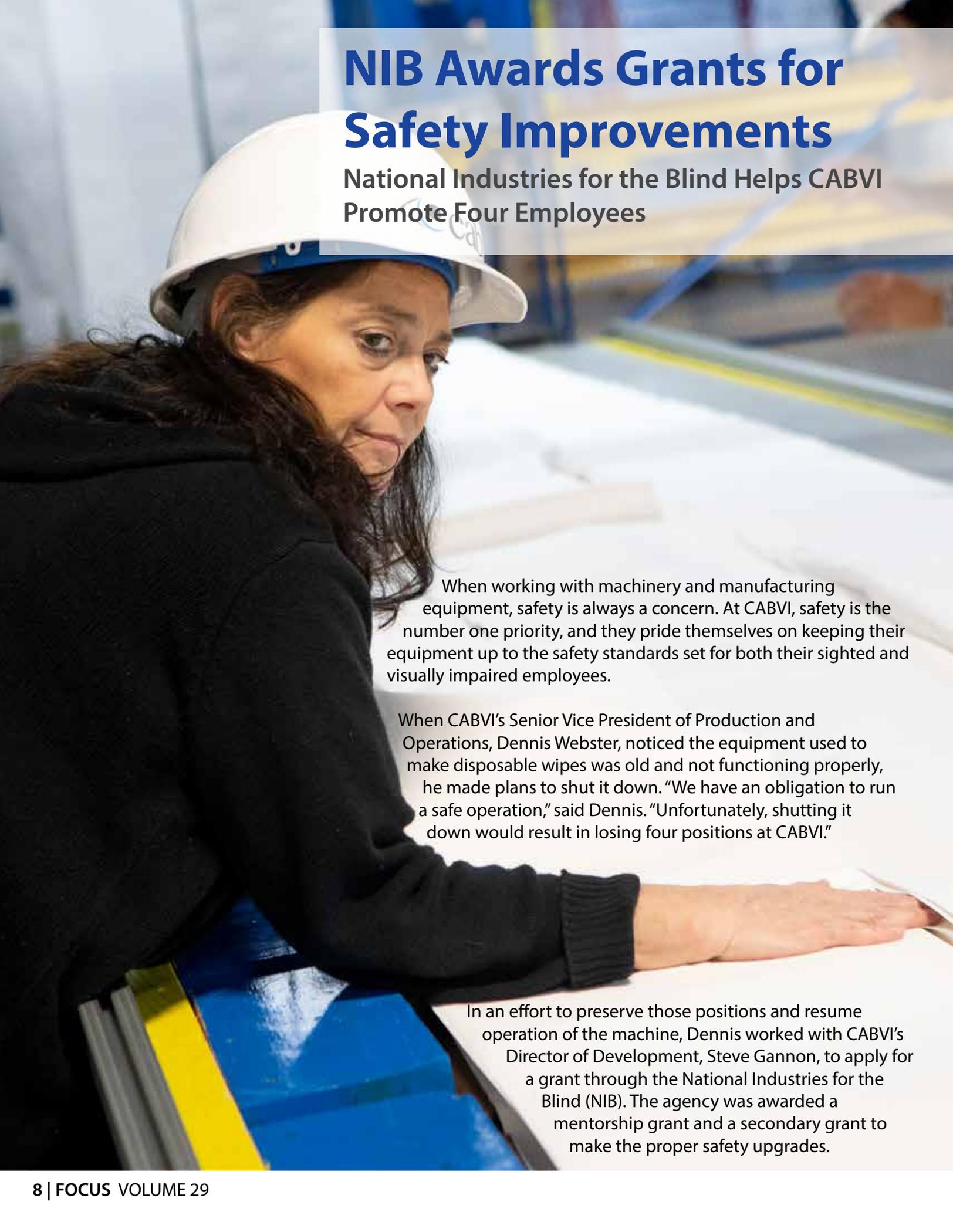
CABVI has supplied customers for over 15 years with can liners, poly zip bags, and biohazard bags. They offer environmentally friendly products, such as the tote bag, that provide solutions to meet current market trends.

The NYS Department of Health has entrusted CABVI with this unique imprinted bag, and it provided employment for eight people.

CABVI employees are committed and focused, and continually meet the needs of their customers to exceed expectations. As a result, the agency looks forward to working with commercial customers, such as Lowe's and Walmart, to stock these bags at their stores.

Contracts like this provide much needed sustainability for CABVI. With their employment numbers at an all time high, government departments, like the NYS Department of Health, make a large impact on the employees day-to-day lives.





NIB Awards Grants for Safety Improvements

National Industries for the Blind Helps CABVI Promote Four Employees

When working with machinery and manufacturing equipment, safety is always a concern. At CABVI, safety is the number one priority, and they pride themselves on keeping their equipment up to the safety standards set for both their sighted and visually impaired employees.

When CABVI's Senior Vice President of Production and Operations, Dennis Webster, noticed the equipment used to make disposable wipes was old and not functioning properly, he made plans to shut it down. "We have an obligation to run a safe operation," said Dennis. "Unfortunately, shutting it down would result in losing four positions at CABVI."

In an effort to preserve those positions and resume operation of the machine, Dennis worked with CABVI's Director of Development, Steve Gannon, to apply for a grant through the National Industries for the Blind (NIB). The agency was awarded a mentorship grant and a secondary grant to make the proper safety upgrades.

Both grants would be a prominent part in converting jobs from being available to sighted individuals only, to being accessible to visually impaired workers as well.

As part of the mentorship grant, NIB sent two CABVI employees, Joe Madia, senior expeditor, and Suvad Dizdarevic, production manager, to visit Horizon Industries in Tyler, TX. Horizon Industries is a division of East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind and produces industrial wiping towels for the US government. They also have the same machine as CABVI, and were willing to show Joe and Suvad the safety upgrades and how to adapt the machine for visually impaired operators.

“Both grants would be a prominent part in converting jobs from being available to sighted individuals only, to being accessible to visually impaired workers as well.”

The machine that is used to produce the disposable wipes looks like a ferris wheel. The wheel rotates, wrapping the cloth around to create multiple layers, which are then cut into smaller sections and packaged. Before the safety upgrades were made, the operator would use a large knife to cut the cloth off the wheel, resulting in an unsafe work environment. The process was also hard on the body, as the operators had to pull the sheets across a long table, to be cut into smaller sections.

Joe and Suvad took the information they brought back from Texas to Dion Scherz, CABVI's Maintenance Manager. Dion and his department were a leading part in making the safety upgrades and preserving the positions at CABVI. A special saw on a platform was installed to cut the sheets off the wheel so the operators would not have to use a knife. They also installed rails that allowed the operators to push the sheets of cloth across the table, instead of pulling, like they were before. This was easier on the operator's backs and made the task less laborious.

The wheel is currently located in CABVI's Syracuse facility to help increase operations and expand employment opportunities. The four employees who were promoted to operate the wipe wheel were Ronald Baron, Michael Edia, Yifa Haile, and Lori Trott.





A Night Out To Support Women and Children

Picture this. A room full of designer purses, drinks, hors d'oeuvres, and 150 men and women who are there for one reason, to raise money for CABVI's women and children services.

On November 7, CABVI, and the event committee, hosted their sixth annual Designer Draw at Aqua Vino restaurant in Utica. All of the proceeds from the event benefit programs and services that the agency offers.

"Our programs for women and children are essential for a healthy life," said Kathy Beaver, vice president of rehabilitation services. "We need fun and engaging events like Designer Draw to spread awareness to these types of programs, but at the same time, provide a comfortable atmosphere for everyone, men and women alike, to network and win some great prizes."

The grand prizes this year were a Louis Vuitton NeoNoe purse, a David Yurman bracelet, a \$500 gift certificate to the Turning Stone Casino, and a mystery prize, which consisted of a full Coach package. In addition to the grand prizes, over 20 designer purses were up for grabs. Brands like Kate Spade, Dooney & Bourke, Ralph Lauren, and many more could be won.

Designer Draw would not be possible without the support of the committee. Everyone works tirelessly to make sure the event is a hit, and each one of the members donate purses for the raffle. CABVI gives many thanks to the committee, the committee chair, Anne D'Amico, and all of the sponsors that helped make the event possible.





The Sharpefinnias Effect

Faith Murray joined the CABVI family in 2013 as a camper at the first CABVI Camp Abilities in Woodgate, NY. Since then, Faith has become a veteran camper, attending every winter and summer CABVI Camp Abilities, and moving into the pre-vocational program of Camp.

During Camp Abilities, the older campers participate in a pre-vocational program focused on different independent living skills. As Camp Abilities' oldest camper, Faith has grown and learned how to incorporate these skills in her daily life. "Through camp, I've learned just because I am visually impaired, doesn't mean that I cannot be independent," said Faith. "It doesn't matter what your disability is, you can still be independent, and you are still going to live a good life."

As part of her newly gained independence, Faith decided she wanted to give back to CABVI and the Camp Abilities program. In the summer of 2017, she founded The Sharpefinnias Effect, a recycling campaign dedicated to raising money for CABVI. Faith started collecting bottles and cans from around her community, and donates the money to CABVI Camp Abilities. "I've realized that CABVI's Camp Abilities program has really helped me," said Faith, "and what better way to give back than to donate."

Faith continues her recycling efforts and has collection cans throughout her school district in Averill Park, NY, and at various businesses in her community. Just recently, she started to give presentations to schools and colleges about living with a visual impairment and her recycling campaign. She most recently traveled to Utica to present at Disability Awareness Day at New York Mills Schools and during a Utica College Occupational Therapy class.

To date, The Sharpefinnias Effect has raised over \$11,000 for Camp Abilities. In recognition of her dedication and partnership with CABVI Camp Abilities, Faith was honored as the first ever Camp Abilities Ambassador at CABVI's annual Dark Dining event in 2017.



Over the past year, Camp Abilities in Motion (CAIM) has impacted the children that attended, and their families. CAIM focuses on the physical literacy of blind and visually impaired children from birth to the age of ten, and promotes continued physical engagement with the child's family.

This free, one-day camp consists of physical fitness activities including skill development, body awareness, fundamentals of ice skating & hockey, throwing, catching, cycling, running and additional sensory integration activities.

"Having the parents participate in the activities with their children was a wonderful experience for everyone," said Betsy Harvey-Minutti, director of rehabilitation & clinical services. "It enables the children to become more competent in the movements, and provides the stepping stones for CAIM's parent program, Camp Abilities."

The day camp helps promote self-confidence, increases physical mobility, increases self-esteem, and encourages feelings of belonging within peer groups. It can represent a paradigm shift in both physical and mental acuity, and influence an individual's overall quality of life.

"It's important that children, sighted, blind, or visually impaired, learn these skills at an early age," said Kathy Beaver, vice president of Rehabilitation. "Not only does it improve their confidence so they feel comfortable participating in activities in school and at home, but it conditions them to lead a healthy full life despite their vision challenges."

CAIM was made possible from the Jim and Juli Boenheim Foundation and Excellus Blue Cross Blue Shield. To date, CAIM was held in the Bronx, Long Island, Syracuse, Watertown, Saratoga, and Utica.

Let's Exercise And Run Now



Focus on the Future

During the last few years, several stages of our Vision Health and Wellness Center took place. It started as an idea at a meeting, which transformed into a rendering from the architect, and ends with a grand opening celebration in the near future.

If you drive down Elizabeth Street in Utica, NY, you may notice a building that is under construction. The walls are up, the roof is on, and the inside is being constructed. Our vision is becoming a reality, and it is because of you that this happened.

Without donations, and federal and state contracts, we would be in an empty building with no employees and no one to help.

The Vision Health and Wellness Center is in the home stretch, but we need your continued support. Our goal of \$7 million dollars is inching closer by the day.

Will you continue to support our goal of expanding our services and assisting more individuals with vision loss?

If so, please call 315-797-2233 ext. 1265, or visit us online, at www.cabvi.org. Look for the big yellow donate button at the top right of your screen to contribute today.

Sincerely,



Jim Turnbull
Co-Chair, Focus on the Future



Matt Sisti
Co-Chair, Focus on the Future



CABVI *tributes* THROUGH 12/19/2018

In Memory

Josephine Borawski

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Vincent and Ann Salatino

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Meet The Challenge with an IRA Qualified Charitable Contribution

Are you 70 ½ or older and not in need of your minimum IRA distribution this year?

If the answer is no, there's a tool you can use to double your support of CABVI through The Community Foundation Challenge called the qualified charitable contribution (QCD).

With a QCD, you can make a donation to CABVI directly from your IRA. Designate your gift to CABVI's Focus on the Future Vision & Wellness Center and it will be matched dollar-for-dollar by The Community Foundation of Herkimer & Oneida Counties.

Under a QCD, a charitable contribution made from an IRA is not included in your gross income. You do not take a deduction for the contribution. The QCD counts toward your required minimum distribution (RMD) for the year.

Suppose your RMD for the year is \$17,000. If you make at least \$17,000 of QCDs, you've satisfied both your RMD and \$17,000 of your charitable giving for the year. There's no additional gross income on your tax return. You don't deduct the QCDs as charitable contributions.

Confusing? Speak with your tax advisor, attorney or IRA administrator.

You must make the charitable contribution directly from your IRA custodian or trustee to CABVI, 507 Kent Street, Utica, NY 13501, Federal ID No. 15-0543587.

You must be at least age 70½ by the date of the charitable contribution.

Please contact Steve Gannon, Director of Development at 315-797-2233 ext.1265 for more information.

507 Kent Street, Utica, NY 13501

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DEBBIE KESSLER

Board member profile

Debbie Kessler is no stranger to the community or CABVI. Approaching her eleventh year with the CNY Foundation board of directors, she continues to show her dedication to its mission and proves to be an asset every year.

Debbie is a Rome native. She attended Utica College and received a bachelor's of science degree in public relations in 1990.

After college, Debbie held many positions in public relations in the Mohawk Valley, and is now president of Kessler Promotions.

Her company handles public relations for various clients, puts on large trade shows, and connects people and organizations within the community.

In early 2007, Paul Drejza, longtime CABVI advocate, introduced Debbie to CABVI. He invited her to a CABVI lunch and learn, and she was immediately impressed with what the agency had to offer their consumers and employees.



Debbie Kessler

"I liked the fact that CABVI promotes independence to its consumers, and encourages upward mobility within the agency," said Debbie. "One thing I did learn that connected me to the organization was their Base Supply Centers on various military installations. My son is a marine, so it really hit home."

Soon after her visit to CABVI, she was asked to be on the CNY Vision Foundation board of directors, which she now serves as the secretary for.

"A lot of people do not realize what services CABVI has to offer, and that most of them are free," said Debbie. "I feel confident that once the new vision and wellness center opens, we will be able to reach more people, and expand our programs and services to remain competitive at a nationwide level!"

In addition to her daily volunteer efforts, community outreach, and day-to-day responsibilities, Debbie enjoys golfing, snowmobiling, and spending time with her family. Her and her husband, Ward, have two adult children and reside in Poland, NY.