

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

FOCUS

Volume 33 | Spring 2020



CABVI EMPLOYEES GO BEYOND “NEW NORMAL”

ESSENTIAL SERVICES PROVIDE SUPPORT IN FIGHT AGAINST PANDEMIC

FOCUS

FOCUS is an official publication of the **Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired**.

Current newsletters and annual reports are available by mail, in Braille, e-mail, on disk, audio cassette, or on our website. If you prefer to receive future editions of our publications in one of these alternate formats, call CABVI at (315) 797-2233 x1303.

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Publisher/Editor

Michael Marrone, Public Relations and Events Manager

Editor

Allison Kollar, Marketing and Design Associate

Contributing Editor

Tara Capponi, Media Relations and Outreach Coordinator

Contributing Editor

Malik Gayle, Public Relations Assistant

Contributing Editor

Steve Gannon, Vice President of Development and Communications

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Ed Welsh
President and CEO

Anyone following current events knows the unprecedented difficulties facing all of New York State and the Nation. As a leading agency in our industry for many years and deemed an essential business, we are front and center during this global pandemic. When friends of the agency ask, "How are things at CABVI? How are the employees doing," I take pride in saying our staff is thankful to still be employed during these struggling times.

It is appropriate that this issue of Focus spotlights our three Employees of the Year: Joe Palmeri, John Enders, and John Coveleski. Although we are only allowed to honor three individuals, we wish we could award every employee with this honor because they are all huge assets to this agency.

I hope everyone is staying safe, staying healthy, and looking forward to warmer weather.

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CABVI SECURES RUBBER BAND CONTRACT FOR THE US CENSUS

If you are thinking about filling out the US Census and notice a rubber band, CABVI had a hand on that band.

Rubber bands are on the AbilityOne procurement list, meaning that CABVI has the rights to sell this product to the federal government. Mike Blake, a product manager at CABVI, oversees the progress on the rubber band contract.

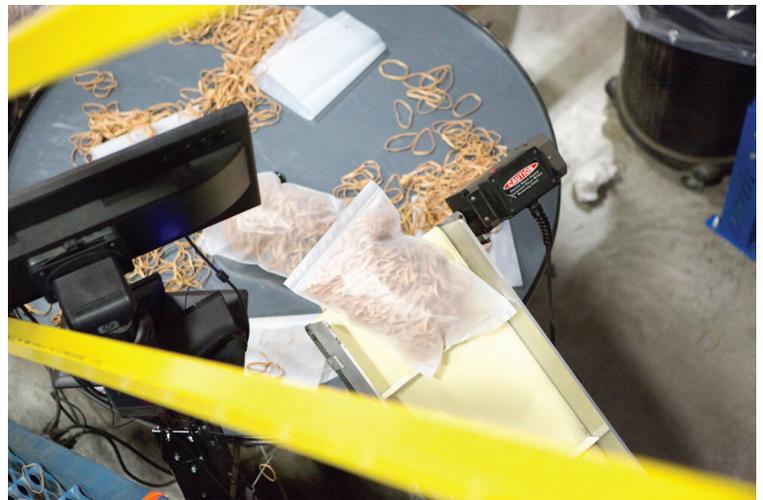
The contract requires CABVI to ship 5,000, one-pound bags to the Census each week. That means the Central Industries production team handles 1,000 bags per day. In total, CABVI will ship over 39 million individual rubber bands by the time the contract ends.

“The credit really goes to our production and warehouse teams for getting the product out the door on time,” Mike said. “Since all of the bands are packed by hand, we rely solely on the production staff to pack them, weigh them, and seal them in the boxes.”

“Without the assistance of the Central Industries staff, most of whom are blind or visually impaired, it would be impossible to keep up with the order,” Mike adds.

The shipping department plays a vital role ensuring the rubber bands are inspected prior to being shipped and delivered on time. “Our shipping department is crucial to CABVI’s business model since our state and federal contracts are very precise with their requirements,” Mike said. “Along with making sure we are shipping to the right customer, we also have to ensure we are shipping the appropriate product.”

While the contract is only for the 2020 census, Mike believes that the contract will renew because CABVI has efficiently shipped the product while providing first rate customer service.



2020 EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR AWARDS

ANNUAL AWARD WINNERS ANNOUNCED



You will often hear CABVI senior staff note the importance of the over 280 employees at CABVI who come to work day-in and day-out.

From the employees in Central Industries who pack gloves and assemble pens, to the rehabilitation team that helps individuals who are blind or visually impaired continue to live independently, to our call center staff who work in shifts to make sure all needs are met for our customers, every employee contributes in some way to the success of the agency.

Each year, CABVI's senior management nominates and elects three employees who are visually impaired to receive annual awards. These awards are given to individuals who go above and beyond their job description, and take the meaning of *team* to another level.

Joseph Palmeri

Production Worker

2020 NYSPSP Employee of the Year

Joe Palmeri has been a loyal employee of CABVI for 17 years. He is a very versatile member of Central Industries and has worked in several areas of production. Joe is one of CABVI's top performers, and his quality of work is exemplary. In addition to working on the production line, Joe assists the Pre-Vocational Training Department with various tasks in Central Industries. Joe is a member of the CABVI Sunshine Club Committee, and he plays an active role in selling raffle tickets and recruiting participants. When Joe is not working on the production line, he enjoys getting to know his co-workers around the agency, and he can always put a smile on your face.



John Enders

Licensed Social Worker

2020 Milton J. Samuelson Career Achievement Award

John brings over 25 years of experience in education and counseling to his position. John's contributions are reflected in the growth of CABVI's Social Work Department. "As an individual with vision loss, he has been effective in helping others to embrace change and move forward in a positive way," CABVI Director of Rehabilitation Clinical Services, Betsy Harvey-Minutti said. "He has been an exceptional resource for families, parents, and staff." John is developing a progressive and innovative program that helps children manage various stressors connected to their vision loss by helping them to improve executive functioning skills, such as flexible thinking and self-control.



John Coveleski

Customer Service Representative I

2020 Peter J. Salmon Direct Labor Employee of the Year

Since 2012, John has been a face for the agency's contact center at Kent Street as a Customer Service Representative. Over the years, he has traveled to Washington D.C. and New York City to evaluate various call centers' accessibility for workers who are blind or visually impaired. John has collaborated with CABVI's Information Technology Team to test new systems and software versions for users in the contact center who are legally blind or visually impaired. John also assists with new employee training while helping tenured employees with refreshers or simpler ways to use call center programs. He is not shy in sharing his vision on ways to improve processes in the contact center.



OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS AND TEACHERS OF THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED

HOW TWO THERAPIES COMPLEMENT EACH OTHER

Low vision or a visual impairment can decrease a person's functional ability and independence. When a child is beginning to develop fine motor skills and learn independence, low vision or a visual impairment can significantly delay the child's development.

Early intervention occupational therapy enhances a vision rehabilitation program by including meaningful daily living skills such as eating, dressing, and play. Vision therapy can improve basic visual abilities that are essential to academic success. Occupational therapy helps to improve fine and gross motor skills, balance and coordination, and it can address sensory integration dysfunction.

"When working with a vision rehabilitation therapist or teacher of the visually impaired (TVI), the role of the occupational therapist is to enable the child to engage in meaningful and functional activities," CABVI Vice President of Rehabilitation, Kathy Beaver said.

Both occupational therapists and TVIs have a common goal: to enable the child to access activities of daily life. The two therapies go hand-in-hand and often overlap each other.

Brittnee Hughes, OTR/L, CABVI Occupational Therapist, says some of the settings in which an OT might provide services to a child are day care, home setting, community, and classroom setting. "In a home setting, I educate parents on how to

carry over skills that we practice in therapy sessions," Brittnee said. "I tailor services to each child based on their strengths and weaknesses."

Through therapeutic intervention, OTs support the development of fine and gross motor skills by assisting the child to build muscle and adjusting their posture for better motor control.

"I focus on adapting the environment or task to fit the child's needs by providing adaptive equipment for home or school," Brittnee said.

OTs and TVIs might work together in a school district for the same child with a visual impairment. An OT might work on the rehabilitation of visual skills such as ocular motility (pursuits, saccadic eye movement, scanning), or ocular convergence skills, while a TVI might work on modifications of school materials. The disciplines complement each other by assisting the student with functional tasks while supporting greater independence in school-related tasks.

The combined knowledge of OTs with TVIs, or vision rehabilitation therapists, helps both parties achieve the common goal of improving a child's independence and development.

Together, they create a learning program that has more impact and ensures "the best of both" for the child.







CABVI EMPLOYEES GO BEYOND “NEW NORMAL”

ESSENTIAL SERVICES PROVIDE SUPPORT IN FIGHT AGAINST PANDEMIC

The Utica area was buzzing with excitement. Stores, businesses, and restaurants were decorated with shamrocks, pots of gold, and signs of a traditional St. Patrick’s Day celebration. The community was looking forward to a day to unite with friends and families and support local businesses after a long winter.

With a swift, harsh dose of reality, just one week prior to St. Patrick’s Day, the invisible invasion known as COVID-19 put New York State on pause. That pause would keep the community apart for St. Patrick’s Day, Easter, Mother’s Day, and

the unofficial start of summer – Memorial Day weekend.

As everyone settled into their new ways of conducting business, working from home, and utilizing video conferencing to meet with their peers, the staff at CABVI worked overtime to meet the needs of their consumers and customers.

CABVI provided personal protective equipment (PPE) to a multitude of State and Federal agencies. As the pandemic swept the nation, CABVI ramped up the production of gloves, disposable wipes, disinfectants, sanitizer, and other

items as the orders from downstate and the Federal government multiplied.

The warehouse and distribution staff worked 12-hour shifts. The customer service and call center staff were deployed to several buildings, and many worked from home. In March, staff came in on the weekends to get ahead on production to meet the orders of existing and new customers.

Unable to deliver face-to-face services, the vision rehabilitation staff implemented services and counseling over the phone and

via video conferencing. "It's not so important they see us, but it is important we see them so we can see for ourselves how they're doing their activities, and teach accordingly," CABVI Orientation and Mobility Specialist, Brenda Crespo Valle said.

Both students and CABVI staff benefit from parents being at home with their children during this pause because the parents are getting lessons on what the child learns. Normally, their child would learn these skills and techniques at school; with the parents included in the sessions, the lessons are reinforced in the home for both the parents and child.

"With a lot of thought, creative approaches, and a unique spin on things during this pandemic, we're happy to be able to continue providing services to our consumers. We can't wait to see them in person, but until then, we're so grateful to have such a talented team that perseveres for our consumers," Brenda said.

"Our people, starting always with those who are blind or visually impaired, staff, volunteers, customers, and donors, have contributed enthusiastically and selflessly during this unprecedented time," CABVI President and CEO, Ed Welsh said.

In addition to an employee's "normal" duties, most of the staff stepped up to support production, both in person and virtually. "Everyone, together, has kept the agency in business," Ed said. "Our 120 blind employees have proven, once again, that they are not only essential, but critical to the success of CABVI."





CABVI HOSTS 6TH WINTER CAMP

With the new Vision Health & Wellness Center come new programs and activities at CABVI. This year marked the first year CABVI Winter Camp took place at the new facility.

Campers started their long weekend with a day trip to McCauley Mountain where they hit the slopes and trails.

The second day was filled with exciting activities facilitated by the Utica College Inter-Professional Education classes, including pool Zumba, yoga and meditation, dancing, and crafts. Then they headed over to the Whitestown Community Center for a learn to skate/learn to play hockey session with the Junior Utica Comets.

On Saturday, the campers made their own lunch using adaptive equipment that makes cooking easier and safer for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. They were joined by 4 Elements Art Studio in the afternoon for painting and pottery. They ended their day cheering on the Utica College Men's Hockey team as they played Wilkes University.

"This is a really exciting year for Camp because we get to do completely new activities in our new facility," CABVI Vice President of Rehabilitation, Kathy Beaver said. "Who can say they went skiing one day and swimming the next, in the middle of February in Upstate New York? It's really a unique experience that the kids truly love."

CABVI hosts three different camping experiences during the year for children and teens at different locations in Upstate New York. Each camp engages kids who are blind or visually impaired to remain physically active by participating in fun activities. It also focuses on skill building such as communication, self-advocacy, and teamwork.

"You can really see a difference in the campers from the start of camp to the last day," CABVI Adaptive Sports and Recreation Manager, Dylan Drexler said. "They come out of their shells and build lifelong relationships with both the other campers and the counselors."





BAND MAKES MUSIC INCLUSIVE FOR ALL

Several CABVI employees capped the year off with a boom when they met X Ambassadors at the band's show at the Turning Stone Resort Casino in December. The platinum-selling group hails from Ithaca, NY and is known for the hit singles "Renegades," "Unsteady," and "Jungle." Casey Harris, the band's keyboardist, has been visually impaired since birth due to Senior-Loken syndrome.

The group made strides in raising awareness and making their music accessible. For their latest album, *Orion*, the band adopted a high-contrast yellow-on-black color theme in all of their promotional materials, allowing Casey to interact with the band's artwork for the first time.

"We wanted to make sure that everything we do is inclusive of everyone in the band," Casey's brother and X Ambassadors front man, Sam Harris said, when talking to Syracuse.com.

In collaboration with Microsoft, the group also produced the first-ever audio-only music video app for their track, "Boom." The app uses sounds from both Ithaca and Brooklyn to tell stories of a day in each city, and users can adjust the sounds based on their preferences.



CABVI's Media Relations and Outreach Specialist, Tara Capponi, reached out to the band's management team to arrange the meet and greet after hearing about the show. "Casey was so excited when we said we were from CABVI. He said, 'Oh my god, you guys are here!'" Tara said. "To me, that's what it is all about and it was a really special night."

CABVI would like to thank This Fiction Management and X Ambassadors for such great experience.

MICROSOFT BOOM: AN AUDIO EXPERIENCE

Technology is an ever-changing industry that in many ways changes people's lives daily. It can make it easier to keep in touch with family and friends around the world, help you navigate through new cities, or can be used as a means to pass the time while scrolling through social media. Technology has made strides when it comes to accessibility for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

Microsoft recently collaborated with the band X Ambassadors to create a unique musical experience, a music video without the video. The band has been known for their advocacy for individuals who have vision loss. Their keyboardist, Casey Harris, being blind himself, wanted to create an experience that was inclusive for all of their fans, including those who are blind or visually impaired.

"We were having a conversation one day about music videos and I mentioned that most music videos for me were basically just listening to the track," Casey said. "We came up with this idea of an augmented reality experience, but for audio instead of visuals."

Shortly after that idea, Boom was invented. The app, named after their hit "Boom," features two different "videos," an urban setting - Bushwick, Brooklyn, where the band first started recording music, or Ithaca, NY, the bandmates' hometown. Field recordings from each location help create a visceral sonic environment for the listener. These were spatialized with Windows Sonic to place the listener "in" the various locations, alongside the lead singer.

"The app is really for everybody. I hope that people who are visually impaired enjoy it and get a lot out of it, but I'm also really excited for sighted people and everyone else to experience the world and experience the music video in a totally different and new way," Casey said.

Casey and the X Ambassadors are only getting started. "We're still finding our way in this realm so we're going to keep on trying to push boundaries and try new things and, as much as possible, just make our music as available to as many different types of people as we can."

The app is available from the Microsoft store for mobile devices, PCs, and HoloLens.



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November 1, 2019 - April 30, 2020

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Dolores Del Medico

Charlotte Ambler

Charlotte Products LTD

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Delbert Darrach

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Lucille DeGristina

Jo Anne Deller

Mitch and Margaret Hansen

Betty Doherty

Beverly Johnson

Margaret Durr

Joan Davis

Luca Esposito

Richard and Carol Benedetto

Mary Esposito

Marie Turi

Lenore Falvo

Carrie Bonanza

Jacqueline Fletcher

Mary Fletcher

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Generous contributors help CABVI provide our vision rehabilitation services without charge. Tens of thousands of people who are blind or visually impaired have benefited from your generosity through the years.

CABVI created the Legacy Society to honor individuals whose gifts through wills, life insurance, retirement plans and various charitable trusts or annuities have already been received or will someday accrue to the agency.

You can join the CABVI Legacy Society by naming CABVI in your will for a specific dollar amount or a percentage of your net residual estate. If you have a will already, an amendment called a codicil should suffice.

Following is sample wording of a bequest codicil: I give to the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired of Utica, New York, _____ dollars (\$_____) or _____% of my net residual estate.

We are deeply grateful to each and every donor for their thoughtful commitment to the future financial wellbeing of the Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

For more information about the Legacy Society, please contact Steve Gannon, Vice President of Development and Communications, at 315-797-2233 ext.1265 for more information.

STEVE CATER

Board Member Profile

Steve Cater has been a member of the C.A.B. Foundation board for over 10 years, serving as board member, secretary/treasurer, and now, the new board chair.

He grew up in Whitesboro, NY working at his family's car dealership, *Cater Lincoln Mercury*. He worked his way up from washing cars and putting on hub caps to General Manager. "I think I'm one of the few in the car business that actually loves cars," Steve said.

Eventually Steve's family sold the business to Steet Ponte Auto Group, who added the Lincoln dealership to their conglomerate of dealerships. Although the business does not have his family name on it anymore, Steve has remained with the company for 16 years as a sales manager.



Steve Cater

"I appraise the customer trade-ins and make car deals in a very fast-paced atmosphere," Steve said. "I'm pretty lucky to be doing what I love."

Steve brings his automotive knowledge of trade-in values to the Vehicles for Vision program, where he is an influential force in determining the best path to take with unique car donations.

When Steve is not determining the value of cars, he enjoys taking his 1969 Mercury Cougar Eliminator to various shows and drag-racing events.

He currently resides in Whitesboro, NY with his wife Tricia, daughter Jessica, and son Spencer.