

February 2023



Lighthouse Guild

Lighthouse Guild In Brief

From Dr. Cal Roberts, President and CEO



Dear Friends,

About Low Vision

February is Low Vision Awareness Month. Low vision can make it difficult to do everyday activities such as reading, shopping, cooking, or writing. According to the National Eye Institute, currently 4.2 million Americans ages 40 and older are visually impaired. Of these, 3 million have low vision. By 2030, when the last baby boomers turn 65, the number of Americans who have visual impairments is projected to reach 7.2 million, with 5 million having low vision.

“The most important thing you can do for your eyes is to get a comprehensive eye exam,” says our Dr. Andrea Zimmerman, Low Vision Specialist at Lighthouse Guild. The three main causes of low vision and blindness in the United States are glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration (AMD), and diabetic eye disease. Only a thorough exam can detect these diseases in their early stages.”

While low vision can't be corrected by regular eyeglasses, contact lenses, medications, or surgery, new technologies and **rehabilitation** can make life easier and more rewarding. Lighthouse Guild offers some practical tips for people who are experiencing low vision:

- **Use contrast** to distinguish items, such as a light cutting board on a dark countertop.
- **Use night lights, a flashlight, or hall or room lighting** if you get up during the night.
- **Use shades** on light sources to reduce glare.
- **Embrace technology!** Video magnifiers, audio and electronic books, smartphones, and tablets enable you to change the font size and lighting level or magnify. Smartphone apps can help you identify money, colors, and navigate your surroundings. Check out our free **technology workshops** that can help you make the most of any tech device.

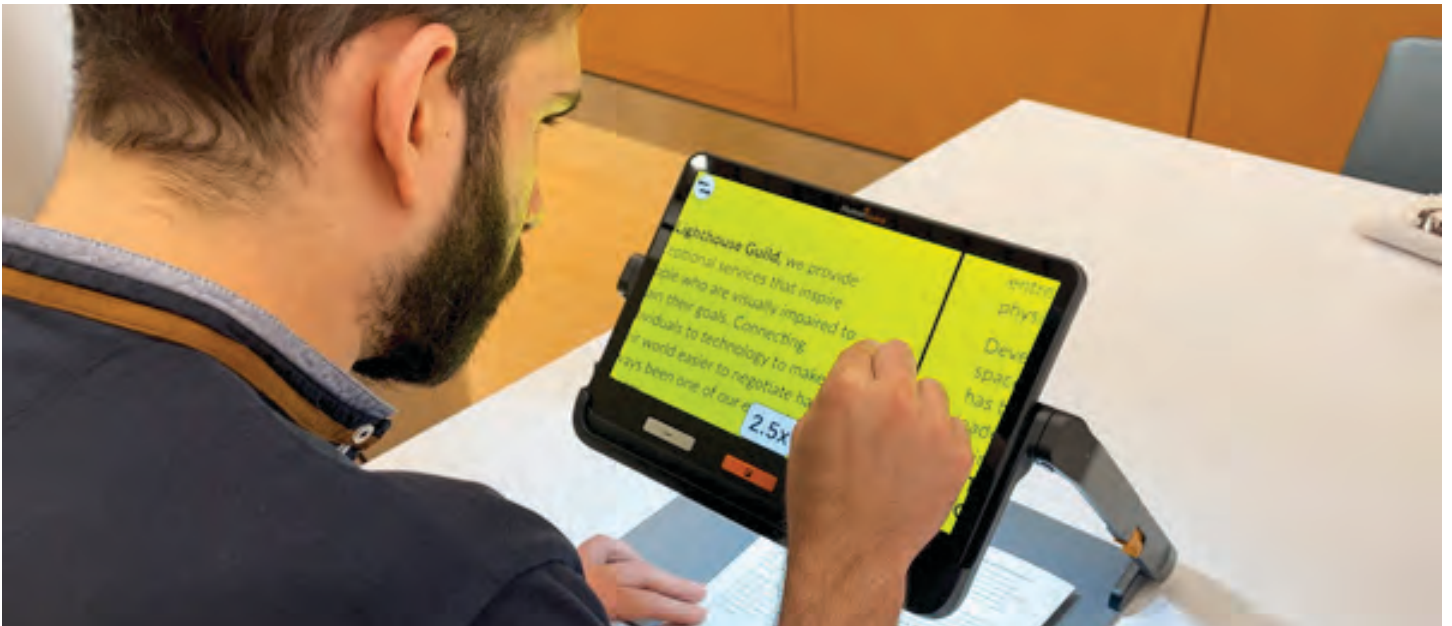


Photo: A man enlarging the view of a document on a video magnifier.

For more tips, visit our **website**. And check out the **optometry and eye exams** page to hear Dr. Zimmerman explain what a low vision exam is.

Lisa Ostrin, OD, PhD, FARVO Receives the 2023 Oberdorfer Award

We congratulate Dr. Lisa Ostrin on receiving this year's Oberdorfer Award in Low Vision Research. Dr. Ostrin is an associate professor at the University of Houston College of Optometry in Houston, Texas. Her research focuses on understanding the increasing prevalence of myopia and developing new treatment options to ultimately reduce the socioeconomic impact and potentially blinding complications associated with the axial elongation that accompanies myopia.

“I am greatly honored to have been selected for the Oberdorfer Award in Low Vision and truly appreciate the support of the Lighthouse Guild in recognizing this important area of vision research.”

—Dr. Lisa Ostrin



Photo: A quote, “I am greatly honored to have been selected for the Oberdorfer Award in Low Vision and truly appreciate the support of the Lighthouse Guild in recognizing this important area of vision research,” next to a portrait of Dr. Lisa Ostrin.

The Oberdorfer Award in Low Vision Research was created in 2012 in collaboration with the **Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO) Foundation** with support from Lighthouse Guild.

Learn more about Dr. Ostrin and the Oberdorfer Award on our [website](#).

New Grants to Ensure Vision Health for All

I am thrilled to announce two new grants to Lighthouse Guild focused on providing low vision exams, occupational therapy, and assistive technology assessments to New Yorkers who might not otherwise be able to afford those services. The grants from the Mother Cabrini Health Foundation (\$100K) and Fay J. Lindner Foundation (\$60K) combine to fill a critical gap in vision health support. They also create funds to ensure Lighthouse Guild clients can attain glasses and assistive technology devices and our team of professionals will also contact them to other impactful community services and resources if needed.

We are truly grateful for this vital support – sustaining the essential work we are already doing and ensuring that all people who are visually impaired can access the support and resources they need.

Corporations and Foundations are essential to the success and future of Lighthouse Guild. To become a visionary partner, visit our [website](#).

Jon’s Taking Steps to Improve his Life

One day, during a vision screening with an optometrist, a retinal scan revealed that Jon had Retinitis Pigmentosa. Like many eye diseases, he wasn’t experiencing symptoms at the time besides night blindness. And then, his peripheral vision gradually shrunk, and life became a little more difficult every year. Finally, he decided he had to do something about it.

Jon reached out to the organization Prevent Blindness, and they introduced him to the Eye2Eye program at Rutgers University. He found an ophthalmologist, and from there, he had a visual field test, retinal scans, and a genetic test. Jon received an official diagnosis of Retinitis Pigmentosa, and a plan of action was developed.

Connecting with Lighthouse Guild

The New York State Commission for the Blind connected Jon with Lighthouse Guild, and that’s when the ball really started rolling. Jon says, “My coordinator put me in touch with Outreach and Referral Coordinator Lisa Miller at Lighthouse Guild, and Lisa arranged for me to take keyboard training.”

“I’m incredibly grateful that I’ve been able to work with Lighthouse Guild, and I can’t wait to continue my journey with them going forward.”

—John Gingerich



Photo: A quote, “I’m incredibly grateful that I’ve been able to work with Lighthouse Guild, and I can’t wait to continue my journey with them going forward,” next to a portrait of John Gingerich.

Rehabilitation Teacher Dennis Farro provided Jon with keyboard training. He says, “[It] was actually pretty fun. It’s kind of like playing a video game.” Jon began to receive Orientation & Mobility (O&M) training. “It’s been a very educational experience,” he shares. “My orientation & mobility instructor, Diane Formoso, is amazing.” Jon feels all the training has been invaluable. He had been using a cane for about nine months but found out there was a correct way to use it. He says Diane has been great in teaching him the tricks and techniques that he never knew about, like ensuring that you’re swinging the cane the right way, changing the tip on the end of the cane, and navigating the subway stairs.

Jon says, “What I’ve gained from working with the Lighthouse Guild has been fantastic. Honestly, it’s been a lifesaver for me. I’m still able to maintain my independence, I can still go to work, and I can still walk my daughter to school every morning. The work I’ve been able to do at Lighthouse Guild has been immeasurable in maintaining that independence.”

Jon reflects that he was at a standstill when his vision loss started happening. He says, “When this kind of thing happens to you, the first reaction is denial. So, I spent the first couple of years pretending I could see when I couldn’t.” This caused more problems for Jon, and his life became just one hurdle of embarrassing episode after another.

“Things got so bad,” Jon said. “It finally occurred to me that if I just accepted it, and if I took the proper steps to take care of this problem, it would over-shoot whatever minuscule gains I was getting by pretending that I could see.” Once he accepted the situation and started taking proactive steps to take care of himself, whether buying that first cane, speaking with a counselor, receiving keyboard training and Orientation & Mobility training, every step he took helped improve his life.

Writing a Novel While Experiencing Vision Loss

Jon is a magazine editor and has been teaching fiction writing for more than ten years. He’s also an author — publishing short stories for about twelve years and recently a novel entitled **The Appetite Factory**. He started writing the book a number of years ago, incidentally, around the time that he was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa.

The book is about a man who works in crisis management. He helps take care of people’s secrets, the business leaders, and celebrities who find themselves besmeared by reputational scandal. But the man is experiencing a crisis of his own. He has a deep, dark secret, which he’s been hiding his entire life, and then someone discovers his secret and threatens to blackmail him.

Jon shares, “What I didn’t realize at the time that I was writing the book is that there are very distinct parallels between what the character was experiencing and what I was experiencing. I didn’t want anyone to know that I was going blind. I even managed to sell the book and get it published. My publisher had absolutely no idea they were publishing a book by a blind guy, which looking back, was a terrible decision, but that was just my way of handling it at the time.”

Advice for Others Experiencing Vision Loss

Jon says, “For someone experiencing eyesight loss, I understand that it can be embarrassing, but taking care of the problem is paramount. You really have two choices: You can either put your head in the sand and watch your life get progressively worse, or you can take positive steps to improve things. Some of us take that step sooner than others, but the dividends begin paying out quickly once you do.”

He continues, “Lighthouse Guild is an incredible resource for anybody who has vision loss, low vision, or Blindness. I consider myself incredibly lucky to live in a city where I can access a resource like this. I’m incredibly grateful that I’ve been able to work with Lighthouse Guild, and I can’t wait to continue my journey with them going forward.”

What’s Next?

Because of his work, Jon is writing all the time, and the writing is more challenging now, but he’s found ways of working for the time being. Jon says, “My next big step, and hopefully, that will be soon, is to begin adaptive technology training. That’s something I’m really looking forward to.”

Read more about Jon on our [website](#) and his book, *The Appetite Factory*, is available on [Amazon](#).



Photo: Cyclists lined up at the TD 5 Boro Bike Tour starting line.

We Need You!

On **Sunday, May 7, 2023**, Lighthouse Guild will participate as one of the charity partners in the **TD Five Boro Bike Tour** — one of New York City’s iconic athletic events. **Join Team Lighthouse Guild** for an unforgettable day cycling through New York City and help make a difference in the lives of people with vision loss. Riders will raise awareness of and funds for Lighthouse Guild programs and services while crisscrossing all five boroughs with over 32,000 other cyclists. Visit our **website** for more information on how to join our team or support our riders!

We are Accepting Applications for Lighthouse Guild Scholarships!

Each year, Lighthouse Guild offers **scholarships** to outstanding college-bound and graduate students who are legally blind from across the United States. The scholarship amount varies from year to year. In 2022, ten college-bound scholarships, and five graduate scholarships were awarded, with each recipient receiving \$10,000 in unrestricted funds. That is, you can use it for your tuition, room and board, books, supplies, or travel. **The deadline to apply is March 31, 2023.** Questions? Contact Fernanda Garcia-Piña at **garciap@lighthouseguild.org**

“Lighthouse Guild has given me hope for a brighter future.”

—Brandon



Photo: A quote, “Lighthouse Guild has given me hope for a brighter future,” next to a portrait of 2022 Scholarship recipient, Brandon.

Voice Assistant Technology: Bringing Inclusivity and Accessibility to Jobs, industries, and Space!

In the latest episode of our podcast, **On Tech & Vision**, I talk to David Frerichs, Principal Engineer, Alexa Experience at Amazon on the aging and accessibility team, about his design philosophy for making voice assistants more inclusive and the preferred mode of engagement for every user. He also shares that the next stage of smart home assistants will be ambient computing, where your devices will understand your needs without you speaking to them. We also hear from Lighthouse Guild client Matthew Cho, who traveled to the Johnson Space Center in Houston to speak to the uncrewed Orion Spacecraft via the Amazon Alexa on board. Check out **Ambient Computing and Voice Assistants: From Your Home to the Stars.**

Professional Learning Exchange

We were honored to host Dr. Yazmín Gutiérrez, Low Vision Rehabilitation Specialist from **Conde de Valenciana Institute**, Mexico City. Dr. Gutiérrez spent two weeks with us meeting with Lighthouse Guild specialists and experts from our Low Vision Services, Rehabilitation Services, Technology Center, Behavioral Health Clinic, Health Center, Adult Day Health Care program, Youth Services program, Research Institute, and several staff members. The visit enabled a learning exchange of experiences, resources, and insights between both organizations. Such visits further our efforts to help people who are visually impaired world-wide attain their goals.

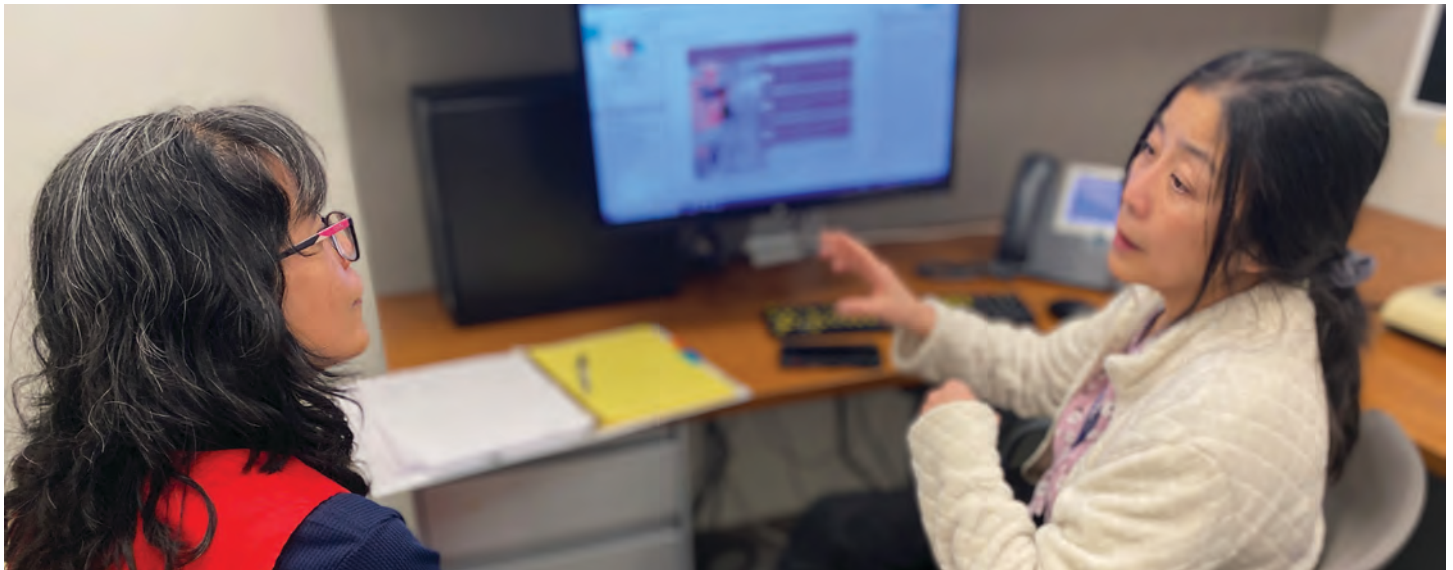


Photo: Dr. Gutiérrez learning about our online Low Vision CE course for professionals from Occupational Therapist Yu-Pin Hsu.

Immediate Open Spots in Our GuildCare Programs!

Do you care for adult patients, clients, or loved ones who have chronic health conditions? Need assistance with activities of daily living? Have functional vision problems?

Our **GuildCare Adult Day Health Care program** offers comprehensive healthcare and a full day of activities. With centers in New York City, Albany, Buffalo, and Niagara Falls, we will provide a safe, comfortable, and attentive environment. Our expert team provides nursing care, diabetes care, physical, occupational and speech therapy, medication management, vision rehabilitation therapy, social work services, and structured therapeutic activities. Services and activities are specially designed and adapted for individuals with all levels of disability — physical, cognitive, and visual.

Adult Day Health Care

Comprehensive healthcare and a full day of activities




Photo: “Adult Day Health Care, Comprehensive healthcare and a full day of activities” next to a photo of an older man with glasses sitting near a healthcare provider.

Our GuildCare team is ready to provide your patient or your loved one with the daily care that meets their medical and social needs. For more information, to make a referral, or schedule a tour, visit the GuildCare section of our **website**.

The journey after diagnosis can be difficult for someone with vision loss. Lighthouse Guild is there for them every step of the way, but we cannot do that without your support. Please join us by **donating, volunteering, referring** people who can benefit from our services, and spreading the word on **Twitter** and **Facebook**!

Be well and stay safe,



Calvin W. Roberts, MD
President and CEO, Lighthouse Guild
Twitter: @EyeDrCal

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 **Lighthouse Guild**

Dedicated to providing exceptional services that inspire people who are visually impaired to attain their goals.
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