

January 2022



Lighthouse Guild

Lighthouse Guild In Brief

From Dr. Cal Roberts, President and CEO



Dear Friends,

January is Glaucoma Awareness Month

Perhaps you are noticing changes in your vision: issues with reading, driving at night, bright lights or glare, peripheral vision, and walking because curbs and steps are hard to see. You may think these problems are typical of normal aging. They are not! You may have glaucoma — one of the leading causes of blindness worldwide, affecting more than 3 million people in the United States.

Dubbed “the silent thief of sight,” glaucoma robs people of vision slowly and without early symptoms. The disease damages the optic nerve in the back of the eye and can occur in one or both eyes. Difficulties with peripheral vision may be the first symptom people notice. Without treatment, glaucoma can eventually cause blindness.

“It’s important to know that while glaucoma cannot be prevented or cured, it is treatable,” says Dr. Laura Sperazza, Director of Low Vision Services at Lighthouse Guild. Treatments for glaucoma include prescription eye drops, laser treatment, and surgery.

Risks

Your risk of glaucoma increases if you:

- are older,
- have a family history of glaucoma,
- have high blood pressure,
- have diabetes.

Anyone at risk should speak to your eye care professional about your heightened vulnerability and ask how often you need to have your eyes checked. Genetics is a significant factor in developing glaucoma, so if one of your parents had glaucoma, you need to be checked regularly, even if you have no vision symptoms. “Glaucoma does not have to lead to blindness. Early intervention can protect vision,” says Dr. Sperazza.

If you are diagnosed with glaucoma, monitor your condition and keep it from worsening by having regular eye examinations as recommended by your eye doctor. For more information visit our [website](#).

Vision Rehabilitation

If you or someone you know has vision loss due to glaucoma, or other eye diseases, vision rehabilitation can improve quality of life and the ability to perform daily tasks. Technology also offers great solutions, including screen readers, voice-over for smartphones, and apps that can identify money, objects, and help with independent travel. Visit our website to learn more about our [services](#).



For someone with glaucoma, the world may look like this.

Photo: a baby’s face darkly clouded around the edges to simulate what it may look like to someone with glaucoma.

Remembering Jane G. Rittmaster



Photo: Portrait of Jane Rittmaster

We are deeply saddened by the passing of our esteemed colleague and former member of our Board of Directors, Jane Rittmaster. We will be forever grateful for her lifelong support of Lighthouse Guild, as will the clients, patients, and students we serve. Ms. Rittmaster began as a volunteer when she was a young teenager, served as Chairman of numerous Lighthouse Guild committees and fundraising events, and was President of the Women’s Division. Her family’s foundation, the Goldstone Foundation, has continued to be a major supporter of our organization. We extend our deepest sympathies to her husband Paul, her sons, their families, and everyone whose lives she touched.

Donna’s Advice

About 15 years ago, Donna was performing in an Ionesco play when she felt strange. “I knew something was wrong. I wasn’t seeing properly,” she says. She visited an eye care specialist. Donna has glaucoma and is now completely blind in her left eye; she has some vision in her right, but glaucoma has destroyed her peripheral vision.

“You have to come here, get as much guidance as you can, and try to do something that uplifts your spirit.”



Photo: a portrait of Donna

Initially, Donna was not comfortable about having to learn to use a cane to navigate. But she was determined not to lose her ability to sing on stage. She succeeded. “I have been singing now 25 years and 15 years with the [cane]. Now the [cane] is like my partner, my guide, my friend. I love it. I can’t be without my [cane].”

Donna sees low vision specialist Dr. Andrea Zimmerman. “I think Dr. Zimmerman is the best. She was wonderful to me, she’s very exacting, she listens.” Dr. Zimmerman put Donna at ease about wearing dark glasses. “I am a singer, and I was a little afraid at first.” But she says Dr. Zimmerman told her: “Donna, you look beautiful in your glasses.”

An occupational therapist helped Donna set up her home — enabling her to function independently. “He put red stickers on the stove [that helps me use the oven dials].” She’s maintained that set-up and is proud to note: “I’ve never burned myself in the kitchen, never, and I still cook, and I’m going to be 80 years old my next birthday.”

Donna says, “You have to come here, get as much guidance as you can, and try to do something that uplifts your spirit. That’s very, very important because you can get down in the dumps so easily. You build relationships here with the people who are assisting you, and then you start to have friends who love you and from one thing to the next. And that’s how you do it. But you have to be willing to give of yourself and to get yourself going.” Great advice, Donna! Read more about Donna on our [website](#).

2022 Oberdorfer Award Recipient

The Oberdorfer Award in Low Vision Research recognizes an individual for his or her role in advancing low vision research and rehabilitation. This year’s recipient is Joanne Wood, PhD, a professor in the Centre for Vision and Eye Research, School of Optometry and Vision Science, at Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Brisbane, Australia. The subject of Professor Wood’s prize lecture is “Spotlight on Macular Disease: Impact On Everyday Function and Wellbeing.” To learn more about the award and Dr. Wood, visit our [website](#).

eLearning for Social Workers

If you are a social worker caring for older adults and those with special needs, you may be coming across clients who have vision issues. As the population ages, vision loss will become increasingly prevalent. Lighthouse Guild can help you help your clients through our [Understanding and Addressing Vision Loss](#) program. This two-hour online program provides social workers with an understanding of vision loss and its impact. It offers strategies to help clients address their loss and access vision rehabilitation services. And you can learn at your own pace! For more information about this program and others or to register, visit the eLearning section of our [website](#).



Photo: a human eye looking at an eye chart.

Join Us for A Visionary Evening

Lighthouse Guild’s “A Visionary Evening” in Palm Beach is back this year, saluting individuals whose vision and philanthropic spirit transform lives. On February 20, we are truly excited to recognize the Honorable David Fischer and Jennifer Fischer! For more information, visit our [website](#).

See with Sound: Using Audio to Activate the Brain’s Visual Cortex

If we lose our vision, can we access our visual cortex through other senses? The ability for the brain to change its activity is called “plasticity,” and brain plasticity is an area of active research. Listen to this episode of **“On Tech & Vision with Dr. Cal Roberts,”** where we’ll explore how, through sensory substitution, audio feedback can in some cases stimulate a user’s visual cortex, allowing a user to — without sight — achieve something close to visual perception. We hear from Erik Weißenmayer, a world-class mountain climber and kayaker who lost his vision due to retinoschisis. He brings us to the summit of Everest by describing what it sounds like. I speak with Peter Meier, the creator of The vOICe, an experimental technology that converts visual information into sound and has been shown to activate users’ visual cortices, especially as users train on the technology and master how to interpret the audio feedback.



Photo: A silhouette of a figure standing on a cliff surveying a landscape of mountain tops on which dimensional linear grids are superimposed.

We at Lighthouse Guild are excited for this new year of possibilities for the people we serve. With your support, no summit is unreachable! Please consider starting off 2022 by supporting our mission through **donating**, and **volunteering**, referring people who can benefit from our services, and spreading the word on **Twitter** and **Facebook**!

Be well and stay safe,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Calvin Roberts, MD". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Calvin" being more prominent.

Calvin W. Roberts, MD
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