

March 2022



# Lighthouse Guild

## Lighthouse Guild In Brief

From Dr. Cal Roberts, President and CEO



Dear Friends,

### March Madness... About Tech!

At Lighthouse Guild, we are mad about technology. Why? Game-changing advances like artificial intelligence, program learning, virtual reality, facial recognition, and 5G are becoming increasingly available to benefit people who are blind and visually impaired. The Lighthouse Guild Technology Center, which offers people who are blind or visually impaired access to the latest assistive devices and state-of-the-art technology, celebrated its official launch on March 8th. Among those joining Lighthouse Guild staff and clients were Gail Brewer, New York City Council Member, District 6 Manhattan; Martha Jackson, Assistant Commissioner Employment and Business Development, Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD); Julie Hovey, Associate Commissioner New York State Office of Children and Family Services - Commission for the Blind (NYSCB); and Roberta Semer, Senior Task Force Chair for Community Board 7.



Photo left to right: Lighthouse Guild volunteer Karen Odom, Chief Program and Services Officer Maura Sweeney, Assistant Commissioner of MOPD Martha Jackson, Lighthouse Guild volunteer and client William, President and CEO Dr. Calvin W. Roberts, COO Paul Misiti, Associate Commissioner of NYSCB Julie Hovey, Lighthouse Guild Adaptive Technology Specialist Ed Plumacher and client Emily gathered to cut the ribbon commemorating our official launch.

Attendees toured a high-tech Smart Home, featuring a kitchen, office, and living area, where people with vision loss can try the latest technology to help them control their home environment. Lighthouse Guild experts and clients demonstrated some of the latest adaptive devices available at the Center, in conjunction with the rehabilitation services and training that is key to their success.



Photo left to right: Council Member Gale Brewer and Dr. Roberts in front of a display of tech devices; Lighthouse Guild Vision Rehabilitation Teacher Monica Torres demonstrates Amazon Echo Show identifying a cookie dough package in the Smart Home kitchen.

Our Technology Center is a hub connecting innovators and users to advance adaptive technology for our community and beyond. We are proud to help New Yorkers and others with vision loss access the technology they need to live the lives they aspire to.

For more on our Technology Center, visit our [website](#).

## On Tech & Vision

For the latest on technology to help people with vision loss, listen to our podcast: On Tech & Vision with Dr. Cal Roberts. In our most recent episode — **Restoring Vision: Code Breaking and Optogenetics** — I talk with Dr. Sheila Nirenberg, a neuroscientist at Weill Cornell Medicine and principal and founder of Bionic Sight, about how she used input-output mapping to crack the retina's neural code. Until recently, no one knew the code the retina uses to communicate with the brain to create sight. We also discuss optogenetics, a relatively new procedure in neuroscience that helps neurons become responsive to light. Dr. Nirenberg uses this to recreate the electric signals to the brain which may help restore sight in people with retinal degeneration.



Photo left to right: Lighthouse Guild client Emily demonstrates her painting techniques with the help of a virtual reality headset and training; Client and volunteer William demonstrates reading the newspaper with OrCam MyEye while Occupational Therapist Alice Massa observes; Lighthouse Guild's Adaptive Technology Specialists Cheryl Chung and Ed Plumacher demonstrate the ZoomText magnification/reader program on a computer.

## Dr. Bryan Wolynski Joins Lighthouse Guild

In addition to the launch of our Technology Center, we are pleased to welcome Chief Technology Officer Bryan Wolynski, OD, FAAO. Dr. Wolynski will lead our assistive technology initiatives and further expand our Center's offerings to help people with vision impairment meet their goals.

Dr. Wolynski is an optometrist with over three decades of professional experience in eye care but considers himself to have been "in the vision field since I was a little kid." Bryan's father was an optician, and he "grew up" in his father's optical store.

**"A significant highlight of my job is letting someone know that there's nothing that they can't accomplish. Today, that includes use of technology."**



Photo: A quote, "A significant highlight of my job is letting someone know that there's nothing that they can't accomplish. Today, that includes use of technology," next to a photo of Dr. Bryan Wolynski.

He has provided eye care in multiple settings: private practice; the Miami Lighthouse as their low vision optometrist and in their Florida Heiken Children's Vision Program providing comprehensive eye care to financially underprivileged schoolchildren; at Metro Community Health Centers in the Bronx, concentrating on eye care for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities; and at the State University of New York (SUNY) College of Optometry as an adjunct clinical instructor, providing mobile eye care to people who are homebound.

Dr. Wolynski has also consulted at OrCam Technologies, an Israel-based company developing personal AI assistive technology.

Dr. Wolynski is a fellow of the American Academy of Optometry and belongs to the American Optometric Association. He received undergraduate degrees from Newbury College and the State University of New York (SUNY) College at Oneonta and has a Doctor of Optometry degree from the New England College of Optometry and completed a residency in primary eye care at NOVA Southeastern University.

Assistive technology has been Dr. Wolynski's focus for many years — he has worked to incorporate it into his everyday practice. He says, "A significant highlight of my job is letting someone know that there's nothing that they can't accomplish. Today, that includes use of technology."

To learn more about Dr. Wolynski, visit our [website](#) and contact him at [wolynskib@lighthouseguild.org](mailto:wolynskib@lighthouseguild.org).



## TechPALs: Teaching Tech and Learning Tech

This summer, Lighthouse Guild's Technology Peers for Accessible Living (TechPALs) program will debut thanks to generous funding from Reader's Digest Partners for Sight Foundation! One generation of people who are blind and visually impaired will help another. Young adults aged 18-24 will serve as technology mentors to adults who are at least 55 years old. The tech mentors will help the older adults become proficient in using mobile phones and tablets.

Mentors will receive extensive training on techniques for teaching as well as ongoing support through collaboration with Cyber-Seniors, an international organization that provides virtual intergenerational technology training.

Training tailored for older adult mentees' individual goals will be provided at Lighthouse Guild's state-of-the-art Technology Center. Mentors will be proficient in teaching accessibility features on personal devices and demonstrating helpful apps. Basic functions of mobile phones and tablets, such as texting, emailing, using social media and remote platforms, will be taught as well.



Photo: A close-up of hands holding smart phones, with one hand pointing to one of the screens.

TechPALs will incorporate a number of Lighthouse Guild programs, drawing mentee candidates interested in receiving training from our Adaptive Living program, Low Vision Optometry services, and Volunteer Reader Services program. Young adults from our Youth Services programs will be recruited as mentors.

At the end of the program, the young mentors will be placed in internships with Cyber-Seniors' community partners such as Best Buy to develop further skills leading to employment in the technology sector. We are very excited about the many reciprocal benefits of the TechPALs program! Stay tuned for future updates.

## Emily's Creative Freedom

One enthusiastic participant at our Technology Center launch was Lighthouse Guild client Emily. Now in her late 20s, she first came to us for services as a young teenager. She has Stargardt's Disease, which creates a blind spot in one's field of vision. She received a comprehensive low vision exam and eyeglasses. She has also received orientation and mobility training.

At every step, Emily has been introduced to the technology appropriate for her needs. "When I was getting ready to attend college, Lighthouse Guild staff set me up with a lot of helpful equipment such as my laptop and some low vision aid magnifiers and scanner textbooks. They provided me with the technology and instructed me on how to use it." Emily was able to use these tools to pursue her education, which included being trained as a cosmetologist.

Emily is an artist who needs to maximize her visual function so the Tech Center's virtual reality headset and CCTVs were of particular interest. The CCTV system consists of an overhead camera that connects to a computer screen. "I brought with me a sketch book and some pens and pencils, etc. I tried it out and it is pretty revolutionary. I also have arthritis in my back, so being able to sit upright and to see what's

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Photo: A quote, “I could feel not only my own excitement but the excitement of those that I have interacted with, particularly in the Technology Center,” next to a photo of Emily.

on the screen is also being displayed on the table is pretty impressive and an experience I’ve never had before. I took out some art and tried to play around with that and could see the details much clearer with less strain on my eyes and the physical body.” She was also able to flip the camera to show her face and put on her makeup. “That was a really cool feature.” This system would help her in her work: As an artist, “I either paint on canvas or people’s faces. This device is helpful to me with both.”

Lighthouse Guild experts who train Emily on how to use the devices have always given her a big boost. Emily says, “I could feel not only my own excitement but the excitement of those that I have interacted with, particularly in the Technology Center.” Inna Babaeva, an occupational therapist, is one specialist she has worked with. Emily says about Inna, “You can really tell the excitement coming from her when she’s helping me. It makes me happy when I feel and see her excitement. And that’s just fun.”

Learn more about Emily on our [website](#).

## **Teens with Vision Impairment Can Chat with Peers from Around the Country**

Lighthouse Guild’s Tele-Support Group for first- and second-year high school students who are blind or visually impaired is seeking new members! Our free telephone support group connects teens from across the country to discuss school, relationships, mobility, assistive technology, career interests, or whatever is on their minds. Meetings are facilitated by a licensed social worker. For more information visit our [website](#).

As never before, technological advances are poised to benefit people with visual impairment. With your support, Lighthouse Guild is uniquely positioned to drive those advances in a way that will have a profound impact. Please consider **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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