



Vision Loss Alliance

of New Jersey

Formerly NJ Foundation for the Blind

FALL 2023

SPANNING 8 DECADES

For 80 years, Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey has empowered people with vision loss or blindness to adapt, surmount barriers and thrive. VLANJ took root in Newark as a social club for camaraderie and to challenge societal biases. As NJ Foundation for the Blind, it opened a summer camp for blind women in Denville in 1955. Efforts expanded in the 1990s to provide year-round life-skills training and wellness programs. Technology classes were later introduced. The organization’s reputation grew, and in 2016, it became known as VLANJ. Focused on self-sufficiency, VLANJ added occupational therapy and expanded technology training. The nonprofit effectively pivoted to online programming during the pandemic and launched orientation and mobility outings that have boosted participants’ self-advocacy and community awareness.

Top Left Image: Man at nonprofit’s Newark location, 1944

Middle Left Image: Diamond Spring Lodge exterior, 1955

Bottom Left Image: Summer camp participants dancing to piano music

Top Right Image: Participant getting O&M training in the 1990s

Middle Right Image: VLANJ participant and instructor working on laptop

Bottom Right Image: O&M outing in downtown Denville, 2023



Bill Schuldt
President and CEO

Dear Friend,

Eighty years ago, people with vision loss or blindness created a social club where they could be among peers and support one another — the founders of what today is Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey. Our organization grew and evolved over the decades, attracting loyal donors, instructors, and volunteers committed to empowering adults with vision loss to lead independent, fulfilling lives. All these individuals, many of them

with intertwined roles, are the pillars of VLANJ and the reason we are here in 2023 celebrating our 80th anniversary.

This newsletter includes reflections from our longest-involved participant and a couple who are long-serving volunteers. You’ll see photos from VLANJ’s early days accompanied by a brief history, and hear about our successful, second annual Day of Giving.

Over the last few years, VLANJ has become more flexible and creative, focused on providing programs in skills training, technology and wellness that are both effective and accessible. One example is the newly launched VLANJ@Home. This innovative program provides occupational therapy for independent living skills to people in their homes. It is particularly beneficial for individuals who recently lost their sight so they feel confident and prepared to venture beyond their home.

This organization **is** its people. We will honor all involved at “Tasting in the Dark – A Celebration of 80 Years,” our major annual fundraiser during Blindness Awareness Month. Mark your calendars for Oct. 26 at the elegant Park Avenue Club in Florham Park and help us make this our most successful event yet! Read on for more details, including how to get tickets.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the vibrancy of this organization, one that I’m pleased to say keeps getting better! As always, feel free to reach out to me.

Sincerely,

Bill Schuldt
VLANJ President and CEO
wschuldt@vlanj.org
(973) 627-0055



Scan to read the Fall 2023 newsletter digitally.

“They Inspire Me”

VLANJ’s Longest-Attending Participant Awed by Her Peers

Lucy Steinthal



When Lucy Steinthal began losing her sight to macular degeneration more than 20 years ago, “I felt everything I loved was being taken away from me,” she said.

Lucy learned about VLANJ (then called NJ Foundation for the Blind) through a support group, and in 2005 took a class in computers useful for her job as a secretary. Over the past 18 years, Lucy has enjoyed classes in cooking, sewing, art, orientation and mobility, and more. But the camaraderie she finds at VLANJ has made the biggest impact, she said.

“I find it very interesting listening to problems others have overcome. It helps me with my mindset,” said Lucy, who lives in Pompton Plains with her husband of 60 years. As her vision has deteriorated, she now can only read large print books with a magnifier. She said she struggles with frustration of not being able to do what she

once did. “The friendships have been a tremendous help to me,” she said. “I have more bright days than dark days.”

The 82-year-old fondly recalled attending weeklong Christmas season classes at the Diamond Spring Lodge, the nonprofit’s former headquarters. She sewed a horse-print lap blanket for her daughter, an equine enthusiast, and purchased gadgets that made life with vision loss a little easier. These days, she especially enjoys her VLANJ support group. Lucy resisted participating in the mobile technology program, but said now she is eager to learn how to better use her iPhone.

Denville Couple’s Volunteerism with VLANJ Runs Deep

As volunteers at Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey for more than 15 years, Bob and Karen Terlizzi feel they get back more than they give.

“It’s a lot of fun. The people are wonderful,” said Karen, who runs the pottery classes alongside volunteer Kathie Maglio, a retired art teacher. Bob added: “I’m inspired by the participants’ attitudes, perseverance, and their constant support for one another.”

The couple first inquired about volunteering when they moved to Denville 30 years ago, but the organization, then named NJ Foundation for the Blind, wasn’t taking volunteers at that time, Bob recalled. Years later, they attended a volunteer orientation Bob read about in a local newspaper. They’ve been with VLANJ ever since.

That first year, Karen and Bob volunteered together in an art

studio class. Karen then helped in the adaptive cooking skills class, but when the opportunity arose to work with pottery, she happily accepted. Bob, meanwhile, assisted in fitness classes for years. He affectionately earned the moniker “Bingo Bob” when he began calling the numbers at VLANJ’s weekly bingo class, where participants practice using Braille.

The Terlizzis retired more than 20 years ago from AT&T and are now in their 60s. In addition to giving time weekly at VLANJ, they volunteer as ushers at the Mayo Performing Arts Center in Morristown and for St. Mary’s Catholic Church’s Meals on Wheels program in Denville.

“VLANJ is very social and upbeat,” Karen said. The people and positive atmosphere “will keep us coming back for as long as they will have us,” Bob added.



Bob and Karen Terlizzi



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80TH ANNIVERSARY DAY OF GIVING SCORED BIG!



VLANJ staff with balloons shaped as the number 80

VLANJ's second annual Day of Giving on June 8 proved a rousing success, surpassing its goal, garnering shout-outs from two nationally recognized low-vision advocates, and attracting generous support from program participants and donors. "We are so grateful for the generosity of our supporters and their understanding of how vital our programs are for maximizing the independence and life satisfaction of adults with vision loss or blindness," said Jennifer Singer, VLANJ Vice President of Development and Communications.

Supporters, including 21 participants of VLANJ programs, helped the nonprofit exceed the \$8,888 target, set in honor of the 80th anniversary, Singer said. VLANJ's Day of Giving raised more than \$10,000. All program participants who donated were entered in a raffle

to win an Eone watch donated by the company (visit eone-time.com). Mary Ann Zino won the fashionable and accessible watch.

Dr. Hobie Wedler, a chemist, entrepreneur and sensory expert blind since birth, congratulated VLANJ for its 80th anniversary with a Day of Giving video shout-out. He credited VLANJ with "reshaping what it means to have vision loss in this sighted world that we live in." He added: "VLANJ for 80 years has been teaching people and showing people how to live lives

that are full of self-confidence, independence and true joy." Wedler will lead wine tastings at VLANJ's Tasting in the Dark on October 26.

Sam Seavy, creator of "The Blind Life," a popular YouTube channel, also filmed a shout-out for the Day of Giving. Seavy, an assistive technology specialist, has been a repeat guest of VLANJ's various virtual speaker series.

"As we bask in the glow of this achievement, we can't help but get excited about what the future holds," Singer said, promising next year's event to be more extraordinary.



Mary Ann Zino showing her Eone Time watch

MEET CHRISTOPHER REICHERT: VLANJ'S NEWEST TRUSTEE



Christopher Reichert, VLANJ's Trustee

Christopher Reichert first witnessed the challenges of vision loss in adulthood when his sister lost sight in one eye to glaucoma. In 2010, he joined the Saddle River Valley Lions Club, an organization that advocates for the blind and visually impaired and is a big supporter of Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey.

Reichert has spent 38 years in mortgage banking, and is currently a vice president in servicing at Wells Fargo. He joined the VLANJ trustee board's finance committee, and plans to get involved with expanding the nonprofit's marketing and fundraising efforts.

Reichert lives in Upper Saddle River with his wife, Lorraine, and son, Matthew, and has been an active community member. In addition to leadership roles in the Lions Club (he's a past president), he coached his son's baseball team for 10 years and is a lector at his church.

Reichert also donates blood regularly; lacking a virus common to most people's blood, Reichert's blood has helped save lives of children and adults with compromised immune systems.

The 58-year-old Reichert earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and political science at the State University of New York at Albany.

"It can be really traumatic to lose your sight later in life. VLANJ gives people that confidence to have a fulfilling life," said Reichert, the newest member of VLANJ's Board of Trustees. VLANJ's technology program, which teaches adults with vision loss to harness the power of iPhones and iPads, has "incredible potential" to increase independence, he said.



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REGISTER NOW!

DON'T MISS OUR 80TH ANNIVERSARY TASTING IN THE DARK!

To mark Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey's 80th anniversary, we're taking our signature annual sensory fundraiser up a notch. On Thursday, Oct. 26, guests of "Tasting in the Dark - A Celebration of 80 Years" will enjoy a culinary event using smell, taste, and sound but not sight. The twist is, a renowned chemist will lead guests in wine-music pairings so guests experience how sound can alter taste!

Join us for a three-hour cocktail hour reception and silent auction at the sumptuous Park Avenue Club in Florham Park. All proceeds directly benefit VLANJ programs, which empower people with vision loss or blindness through training, education, camaraderie and advocacy.

The wine-music pairing will be hosted by Hoby Wedler, a Ph.D. chemist who has been blind since birth. Wedler is a nationally recognized advocate for people with vision loss and a sensory expert. He developed a non-sight wine experience in collaboration with Francis Ford Coppola, during which guests sample a variety of wines paired with different music. Wedler helps attendees break from processing up to 90% of their

surroundings with eyesight and experience the world without visual distractions.

Tasting in the Dark, featuring a silent auction, is VLANJ's major annual fundraiser, so please help make it our best year yet! For tickets and tables, or to become a sponsor, please visit our website at vlanj.org. Contact Vice President of Development and Communications Jennifer Singer at (973) 627-0055 or Jsinger@vlanj.org if you have questions.



Scan for
event
information

Donations to Vision Loss Alliance can be made online at vlanj.org/donations or by mailing a check to Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey, 155 Morris Ave., Suite 2, Denville, NJ, 07834, ATTN: VP of Development and Communications Jennifer Singer