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Lighthouse News Update - Maximizing independence and providing employment opportunities for persons who are blind or visually impaired



SPRING 2015

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75 YEARS OF GROWTH AND SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY



612 E. Cass St. (1937)



507 W. Platt St. (1940's - early 1950's)



1106 W. Platt St. (1955)



1106 W. Platt St. (current)

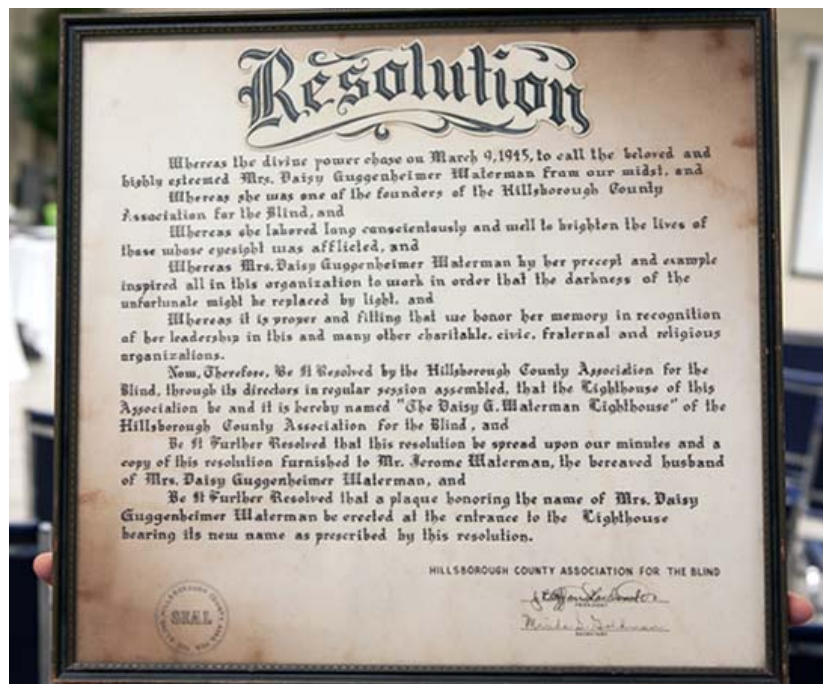
On May 3, 1940, the Lighthouse became a Florida not-for-profit corporation under the name of Hillsborough County Association for the Blind. This date is considered the Lighthouse's official inception date although the agency existed prior to then as three separate entities that were consolidated into a single county-wide entity with its new corporate status. The local Council of Jewish Women under the leadership of Daisy G. Waterman was credited with being the founding group of this new organization. Even though Hillsborough County Association for the Blind was its official name, most people referred to it as "The Lighthouse." For decades, the Lighthouse operated primarily as a workshop where client employees made household goods by hand that were sold door-to-door through a partner organization called Florida Cooperative for the Blind. In 1971, the agency's name was officially changed from Hillsborough County Association for the Blind to Tampa Lighthouse for the Blind. The Lighthouse began adding programs that focused on independent living skills and preparation for employment. Support programs including case management, low vision clinic, and the Lighthouse Store were also added. As computers became accessible to visually impaired people, computer training was added to teach those who wanted to use computers at work or at home. The Lighthouse expanded its services into Polk and surrounding counties by opening a facility in Winter Haven then started a "blind babies" program to help babies and young children ages birth to 6 to develop normally and keep up with their sighted peers in school. In the meantime, the workshop expanded and changed its name to "Industries." A new household deodorizer product line was developed in a new satellite workshop in Oldsmar, FL. Other new products included writing instruments, canteen covers, a military back pack component, and powdered foods that were produced in a new Lakeland facility. However, the Industries programs eventually reached a point where they were no longer viable and were discontinued in favor of placing our clients into community jobs. Thanks to the effectiveness of our job development and supported employment programs, all of our clients who wished to continue working were successfully placed. The space used for the Industries programs was leased out to other businesses to recoup revenue that was lost with the closure. New jobs were also generated with a new service contract with MacDill AFB where 12 Lighthouse employees, most of whom were legally blind, were trained as switchboard operators. This program successfully operated around the clock, 24 hours a day, for twelve years until the Air Force relocated its switchboard operations to a centralized location in California. A mailroom contract at the Army Corps of Engineers in Jacksonville was started in 2001 and is still operating. In 2003, the Lighthouse established a close working relationship with the James A. Haley Veterans' Administration Low Vision Clinic and began providing Assistive Technology services to legally blind veterans in their homes by setting up their computers with screen readers (speech output) and/or screen magnification and providing print magnification devices also known as closed circuit TVs (CCTVs). Also in 2003, the Lighthouse added a new Summer Teen Transition program designed to help blind and visually impaired teens prepare for a life of independence, the world of work, and higher education if applicable. Later this program was expanded to year-round. The computer training program generated a need for remote assistive technology services

at businesses where blind or visually impaired persons worked, home-based businesses, and homes of visually impaired veterans. Later the Lighthouse was awarded a contract expanding its assistive technology or rehabilitation engineering service area from West Central Florida to state-wide. In 2011, the Winter Haven facility was upgraded with a new 10,000 square foot building custom built on the same property previously occupied by its old much smaller building which was demolished. The proceeds from the sale of the Lakeland building were used to cover most of the cost of the new building. In the following year, the Tampa facility was refurbished with new roofs on both buildings, new paint color scheme designed to be more visually friendly for those with partial vision, and new carpeting to go with the new colors. Now, in its 75th year, the Lighthouse faces a bright future with its comprehensive offering of rehabilitation and support services, serving more people than ever before in facilities and programs that we are proud of, with highly qualified professional staff who enjoy coming to work each day. Additionally, the numerous heart-felt and often emotional endorsements we receive from our graduates and their family members each year at our annual graduations remind us that we are providing services that are life-changing and meaningful.

LIGHTHOUSE CELEBRATES 75TH ANNIVERSARY WITH OPEN HOUSE



Proclamations from City of Tampa's Councilman Frank Reddick (left photo) and Hillsborough County's Commissioner Sandra Murman (right photo) were presented to the Lighthouse's Board President Angela Hendershot (center of each photo) and Vice President Vandelon Holland (left side of each photo).



Dated March 9, 1945, the Resolution shown above, drawn up by Lighthouse's board, posthumously

honored Daisy G. Waterman by naming the Lighthouse after her in recognition of her leadership and efforts to bring the Lighthouse from concept to reality. Her name remains on the Lighthouse's main building in Tampa.

Tampa Lighthouse for the Blind opened its doors to the public Friday, May 1st to commemorate its 75th Anniversary with a showcase of services past and present. The highlight was a ceremony that included presentation of proclamations from the City of Tampa and Hillsborough County by Councilman Frank Reddick and Commissioner Sandra Murman respectively. The one hundred + visitors were treated to an array of displays that were arranged around the perimeter of the large Activity Room. One of the tables featured historical articles and photos dating as far back as 1936 when the Lighthouse was a concept and a dream of the Council of Jewish Women, led by Daisy G. Waterman whose grandchild was in attendance at the Open House. Each display represented a Lighthouse program that included a photo arrangement along with a number of tools and items used in the delivery of services. Refreshments were served along with commemorative Lighthouse 75th Anniversary bottled water. In keeping with the Lighthouse theme, small keychain flashlights were handed out to all guests upon their departures.

MARK HARSHBARGER: "WHY I GIVE"



Mark Harshbarger with his son, Peter, and his wife Cheryl

Just after the holidays, Executive Director Sheryl Brown received this kind note plus a donation check from Mark Harshbarger, a former client and employee of the Lighthouse. The note read: *"Hello Sheryl, Happy New Year! I hope things are okay at the Lighthouse. Things are busy with me, school all week and work at Publix all weekend. I meant to send this in at Christmas time, but I overlooked it. I realize my little contribution does not make a lot of impact on the operating costs at the Lighthouse, but my contribution is heartfelt. I truly appreciate you and the Lighthouse for always being on my side. I know the Lighthouse is always available to*

the Tampa community to walk alongside anyone in need. The Lighthouse is certainly a beacon of hope to “anyone” who needs a trusted friend in their journey into low vision or blindness. Tampa needs the Lighthouse! God Bless you all!”

Mark lost most of his eyesight 30 years ago at the age of 17 when he noticed what appeared to be a dense fog while driving. His vision rapidly deteriorated soon thereafter leaving him legally blind. The cause was atrophy of the optic nerve that was considered to be genetic in nature. Despite the setback, he continued with his education, earning his high school diploma, then attended Hillsborough Community College and University of South Florida where his studies are continuing.

Mark’s career started in the restaurant business where he worked as a short-order cook, then at a local Publix, initially bagging groceries, then moved up to training new employees and assisting managers as needed. He sought additional training to improve his job prospects and began attending assistive computer classes at the Lighthouse in 2002. He was already functioning independently, but wanted to develop his computer skills in order to advance his career. After graduating from the Lighthouse’s computer class, he was hired for the Lighthouse’s busy switchboard operation at MacDill Air Force Base in May, 2003. His superb job performance, highly personable nature, and personal success in overcoming his visual disability led to his being awarded the Rotary Club’s Frank A. McDonald Memorial Award. Mark is routinely described by many as one who goes above and beyond the call of duty.

After working for the Lighthouse’s switchboard, Mark and his wife relocated to Atlanta to pursue a career opportunity at Publix. In the meantime, the couple was blessed with their first child, Peter, who is now 8. Since then, Mark and his family have returned to Tampa where he continues working at Publix while pursuing his second master’s degree at USF.

In addition to working, Mark has volunteered his limited spare time for important causes in the community. He has assisted the Lighthouse’s Summer Transition Program mentoring the teens served by that program. In addition, Mark is a founding member and treasurer of the Hillsborough Advocates for Improved Transit, an organization that provides vital input for the bus system. He also volunteers for VIP clubs (clubs for visually impaired students) in the local public schools and serves as a role model for students who are blind or visually impaired.

Mark goes on to say, *“The Lighthouse has always been an anchor for many throughout the Tampa community. The variety of services provided creates opportunities for individuals with vision loss to return for services as their needs change throughout life.”*

Mark has maintained a close relationship with the Lighthouse throughout his experience with low vision. The gratitude he carries within his heart is genuine, and rests upon a foundation of relationships. Supporting the needs of others and offering contributions, regardless of amount, is rewarding to both Mark and the Lighthouse.

VISUALLY IMPAIRED ELEMENTARY STUDENTS TREATED TO AN OLD-FASHIONED FLORIDA CULTURAL DINING EXPERIENCE



Shaking hands with Chef Greg

Fodder: Raw material as for artistic creation

Moonshine: Informal foolish talk or thought; nonsense

“Our menu shines a light on Florida Cracker heritage. Our staff approaches traditional dishes and drinks from Florida’s “back woods” culture of the early- to mid-1900s with a modern mindset.” Fodder and Shine

Fodder and Shine had just opened its doors to the dining public in early 2015 when, only three weeks later, they invited two groups of students with visual impairments from Hillsborough County Public Schools for a couple of interactive field trips. Escorted by Lighthouse Transition Teacher Tiffany Conrad, students ages 6-11, with varying degrees of vision, arrived by bus at the new restaurant and were greeted by co-owners Greg and Michelle Baker. Child-size aprons were handed out to the students to heighten the experience. Feeling like tiny chefs, the children toured the restaurant, learning about all the inner workings of a busy kitchen. Questions to be answered included, “Who makes the food? Who is in charge of the kitchen? Where do you get your recipes? Where do the ingredients come from? What is a farm co-op? What type of meat comes from a pig?” These were the most appropriate kinds of questions one could ask about this unique and special “farm-to-table” concept restaurant. The students participated in sensory activities which involved dipping their hands in various grains, shelling raw peanuts, identifying several of Florida’s citrus fruits and tasting homemade pickles. They shivered with the cold and excitement of entering into a

huge walk-in refrigerator and giggled upon learning the history behind the chef's hat. After working up an appetite in the kitchen, students sat down for a meal specially prepared for them which featured Hamburger Lima Bean Stew with Cornmeal Dumplings, Breaded Quail Wings, Tomato Gravy and Rice, Blueberry Cobbler and Caramel Cake. The students left with full bellies and a new appreciation of Florida's "cracker" heritage.

JENNIFER WATSON - WHY WAS THIS 27-YEAR OLD LIVING IN A NURSING HOME??



JenniferWatson - liberated at last!

It was one of the most unusual cases ever encountered by Lighthouse staff when they first met Jennifer in the fall of 2011. At the time, she was residing in a nursing home and was referred to us by the nursing home's social worker who didn't think a 27-year old belonged there just because she was blind. However her blindness was just one of the health problems she had that needed to be addressed. Jennifer was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes at an early age. The diabetes began to affect her vision by the time she was in her early 20's. Complications of her diabetes along with her reduced vision led to her having a bad fall that caused her to break both of her legs. She required round the clock care that her mother was unable to provide due to her work schedule, therefore she was placed into the nursing home for what was supposed to be temporary convalescent care. The so-called temporary placement turned into nearly two years where she languished with virtually no progress. It was only then that the home's social worker decided to refer her to the Lighthouse. When our staff met Jennifer, she was sharing a room with an elderly lady with dementia. To pass the time, Jennifer spent most of her day sleeping. Our independent living teacher and our Orientation and Mobility teacher began making weekly visits, often several times a week, to teach Jennifer basic skills that would lead to her becoming more independent. It was very tough in the beginning as she understandably tired easily. However, as time went on, Jennifer became stronger and her stamina improved. She progressed from walking around the facility pushing a wheelchair or walker to using a cane and then to going out with the teacher to the mall and around the neighborhood. Our independent living teacher worked with her on her daily living skills with the goal of having her return home to live independently. The skills that she learned ranged from personal care to home management and meal preparation. By the beginning of 2012, Jennifer had gained enough strength and stamina to handle a full class schedule at the Lighthouse. She participated in the 6-week independent

living class and also attended the monthly social and exercise class. Once her training was complete, she was ready to bid farewell to the nursing home. By the end of 2012, Jennifer had moved into an apartment with her mother, but, this time, she was able to care of herself completely without her mother's help. She continues to work on her travel skills and is still coming into the Lighthouse monthly for our social group. Her goal is obtain a guide dog and look into employment options for the first time ever. She still has health problems from complications with her diabetes and is on the kidney transplant waiting list but has made tremendous gains in spite of these problems. With her renewed spirit along with her new set of skills, we expect that Jennifer will continue to experience success in the future as her health improves.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR HONORED FOR HER 30TH ANNIVERSARY AT THE LIGHTHOUSE



On March 10th, Executive Director Sheryl Brown was honored by the Lighthouse staff for her 30 years at the Lighthouse which commenced March 11, 1985 when she was hired as a Case Manager. Since then, she served for over 25 years as Rehabilitation Services Manager in charge of both Lighthouse locations. Sheryl helped bring about a tremendous growth in programs and services before her appointment as Executive Director in July, 2013.

**YOUR DONATIONS HELP US TO CONTINUE
PROVIDING SERVICES TO THOSE NEEDING THEM**

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or tablet to go to our website's donation page.



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MAJOR FUNDING SOURCES

City of Tampa (funded by HUD)

City of Winter Haven Community Development Block Grant

Sponsored by DOE/Division of Blind Services and the State of Florida

Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners

Polk County Community Development Block Grant

United Way of Central Florida

United Way Suncoast



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