SPREADING LIGHT THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

There are two ways of spreading light - to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.
– Edith Wharton, Vesalius in Zante

As the Northern Plains Eye Foundation (NPEF) reflects on the past and develops initiatives to lead the Foundation into the future, we must relay deep appreciation for our many partners who allow NPEF to serve our region by enhancing eye health for the people of the Northern Plains. We are deeply grateful to these partners, the “candles” and “mirrors” from which the Foundation is “spreading light” throughout the communities we serve.

The Foundation’s 2009 Christmas Gift of Sight Program embodies this in the truest sense of the word. As one of NPEF’s flagship programs, Christmas Gift of Sight awards sight saving surgery to an individual in need. Referrals are made by eye care professionals in Rapid City and the surrounding Black Hills.

Gina Finnell, the 2009 Christmas Gift of Sight recipient, was told she was considered legally blind after experiencing ongoing problems with her vision due to complications related to diabetes and high blood pressure. She was not able to work, and subsequently had no income or health insurance. Nor did she qualify for any other form of assistance. She was devastated and scared.

Thankfully, Dr. John Herlihy, Gina’s ophthalmologist, had received information from NPEF regarding its annual Christmas Gift of Sight Program. With Gina’s permission, Dr. Herlihy submitted her application.

When Gina was selected as the Christmas Gift of Sight recipient, NPEF phoned her to share the news. She was shaken and hesitant. “Are you sure you called the right number?” she asked. The answer, of course, was yes. Gina described her award as, “a wonderful gift I will remember as long as I live.”

“Spreading light” through NPEF’s Christmas Gift of Sight is possible due to generous and caring program partners, Dr. John Herlihy, The Eye Doctors at Rapid City Medical Center, and Bill May and the staff of the Black Hills Surgical Hospital, who generously donated services for Gina’s Christmas Gift of Sight.

NPEF was also able to assist another Christmas Gift of Sight applicant, Rick Marnette, through partnerships with Rushmore Lions Club and Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI), both of which worked to provide cataract surgery to enable Rick to continue to operate his business.

In addition, our thanks go to Christmas Gift of Sight business sponsors, who, also, are integral in “spreading light:” First Interstate Bank, Mid-Dakota Diesel and Black Hills Power, along with media partners, Knology, Lamar and Epic Outdoor.

These partners are “shining” examples of the goodwill and charity that is so prevalent throughout the Black Hills area. We are thankful to the many “candles” and “mirrors” whose support allows our Foundation to continue “spreading light” in service to our region.
Eye to eye: the Director’s view

Spring and Summer...blossoming and budding...the time of growth continues at the Northern Plains Eye Foundation. New growth with the addition of new Board Members and new Staff. **Blossoming** with our new **Visionary Partners Program** that creates fruitful partnerships to support our three flagship programs. **Budding** with expansion of the **Healthy Vision Week** program throughout the Black Hills, with the addition of Pierre for Fall 2010.

Then, there are the perennials in the NPEF garden. The continuation of the second annual **Fireworks-Related Eye Injury Study** throughout South Dakota, with the assistance of participating ophthalmologists and the support of the **South Dakota Academy of Ophthalmology**. And **Health-Care Education Scholarship Programs** providing $11,000 in tuition assistance for students in the region pursuing health-care related studies.

As I look back to where the Foundation was when I began four and a half years ago, I am astounded and pleased with the progress that has been made. Three flagship programs where there was once only a small Scholarship Program. Strong connections forged with the eye care community, service organizations and supportive business partners. And we continually look for ways to serve our region by promoting eye health through education, eye-related research, and community service.

I hope that the stories that we share in this newsletter will inspire you—stories about givers focused on the good of others. Join us! For as Anne Frank exclaimed, “How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.” Why not **you**? Why not **now**? Plant a seed and help us promote “**Vision for a Lifetime!”**

Kathleen Kovarik,
Executive Director

**Final Note:** As we go to press, I want to let you know that I will be stepping down from my leadership role at NPEF to pursue new directions in my life. I thank the Board of Directors of NPEF for supporting me these 4½ years, in bringing the vision of the 3 flagship programs to fruition, and NPEF’s staff for co-creating and doing the hard work of bringing the good ideas to life.

**NEW BOARD MEMBERS BRING FINANCIAL KNOW-HOW**

The Northern Plains Eye Foundation Board of Directors welcomes two new members, who bring a wealth of knowledge and experience, especially in the realm of finance!

**Linda Rydstrom** is a Rapid City native who currently serves as President of Westjet, where she began her career 35 years ago. Linda has both a bachelor’s degree in business and a second degree in accounting from Black Hills State University, passing the CPA exam shortly after the completion of her accounting degree. In addition to her financial acumen, she has a wealth of flight knowledge and experience, with over 12,000 hours of flying. She was a professional pilot until 2006, when she retired due to cancer.

Linda is married to Don Rydstrom, owner of Westjet. Their daughter, Miranda, will be a sophomore at Arizona State University in Tempe. Linda loves to play golf, and enjoys traveling with her husband. She also serves on the Board of Youth and Family Services.

NPEF’s other new director, **Jarrett Breuninger**, is the Business Manager for the Black Hills Division of Knology. Jarrett enjoys his work and emphasizes, “Every day welcomes a new challenge.” Jarrett, like Linda, is also a life-long resident of the Black Hills. He received his composite bachelor’s degree in accounting and business from Black Hills State University and plans to pursue his MBA in the near future.

Beside the varied challenges of his job, Jarrett has spent the last 19 years studying, competing, and teaching Jukite Jujitsu at Dynamic Martial Arts. He and his wife, Doreen, who is the Compliance Manager for Green Tree’s legal department, have 4 children, ages 3 to 19. Together as a family they enjoy the year-round outdoor recreational opportunities the Black Hills has to offer. Jarrett also serves on the Board of Ups of Downs, an organization focused on Downs Syndrome.

We are grateful to have both Linda and Jarrett join our talented Board team. A warm welcome!
This spring, NPEF announced a new partnership opportunity inviting businesses and organizations to share in the mission of the Foundation – to enhance eye health for people of the Northern Plains through education, research and community service – as a Visionary Partner. The Visionary Partners Program provides a platform in which businesses with a philanthropic interest in promoting eye health in their communities can partner with NPEF through a single sponsorship program. NPEF’s three flagship programs, Health-Care Education and Continuing Scholarships, Healthy Vision Week and Christmas Gift of Sight are supported by the Visionary Partners Program.

NPEF's Health-Care Education Scholarship Program was launched in 2005 in recognition of the need for future health care and eye care professionals. In 5 years, NPEF has awarded over $48,000 in scholarships in its 5-state service area to deserving high school seniors pursuing college health care studies, (Health-Care Education Scholars), and former NPEF scholarship winners continuing in full-time health-care studies, (Continuing Scholars).

Three years later, in 2008, NPEF launched two additional flagship programs, Healthy Vision Week, a component of the Healthy Vision Initiative, and Christmas Gift of Sight. Healthy Vision Week, a key element of the Healthy Vision Initiative, offers free vision screenings for children ages 3 - 11 through the cooperation of numerous eye care professionals throughout the region, who have generously donated their services. NPEF's Christmas Gift of Sight provides sight saving surgery to an individual who does not have the financial means to afford the necessary care.

Just a few weeks ago Black Hills Power (BHP) announced its commitment to the Visionary Partners Program – as NPEF’s first Visionary Partner. BHP’s Energy Services & External Affairs Director, Mutch Usera, relayed his thoughts on the Visionary Partnership in this way, “Supporting the communities we serve is a critical component of Black Hills Corporation and Black Hills Power’s mission. NPEF has demonstrated a long-term commitment to improving the quality of life in our region through their various community service programs,” continued Usera. “Their leadership and vision is akin to the values of our company and we look forward to working hand-in-hand with NPEF to further benefit the communities we serve.”

Recently, NPEF was pleased to learn that one of the region’s largest eye care clinics, Black Hills Regional Eye Institute, also committed to the Visionary Partners Program. “Black Hills Regional Eye Institute is a recognized leader in the ocular health-care arena,” said Dr. Monte Dirks. “Visionary Partners reflects Black Hills Regional Eye Institute’s belief in the work of the Northern Plains Eye Foundation, as one of its key stakeholders.”

“These programs allow NPEF to play a role in making this a better and healthier place to live and work for generations to come,” stated Ronda Gusinsky, NPEF’s Development Director. “The funding provided by our Visionary Partners for these flagship programs ensures that future generations have access to quality health care in our communities; that eye-related problems in our children continue to be detected through free annual screenings; and that the gift of sight is shared with those less fortunate in our community,” Gusinsky continued.

For more information, or to become a Visionary Partner, please contact Ronda Gusinsky at (605) 716-6733.
ANOTHER RECORD YEAR FOR THE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Northern Plains Eye Foundation (NPEF) has two scholarship programs. One provides college scholarships to high school seniors pursuing a health-care related field of study (Health-Care Education Scholarship). The other program assists college students who were previous recipients of the Health-Care Education Scholarship and are continuing to pursue their health-care related college degree (Continuing Scholar Scholarship).

For several years now, NPEF has distributed information on the scholarship program to high schools in all of South Dakota, as well as a 300-mile radius of Rapid City in Wyoming, Nebraska, North Dakota, and Montana. Since its inception in 2005, the number of applications for these scholarships has quadrupled. In 2010, NPEF received 133 Health-Care Education Scholarship applications and 12 Continuing Scholar applications.

The selection process for winners of these scholarships includes an extensive set of criteria in order for the committee members to be sure the best recipient is chosen. The competition is fierce, with most recipients usually having a GPA of 3.95 or higher. The whole process begins with a landslide of applications, which staff open and sort (see photo). Watch for the announcement of the scholarship award recipients and sponsors in the fall newsletter.

Interested in assuring future medical providers are available to care for you and your family? Help fund deserving college students through this program by calling us at (605) 716-6733, e-mailing us at vision@npef.org, or clicking on the “Donate Now” button in the lower left corner on our website at www.npef.org. You can also download the printable donation form by clicking on the “Contributions” tab. Help us support our future health-care professionals!
Watch for expansion of healthy vision week this fall

Join with the Northern Plains Eye Foundation this fall to make healthy vision a priority for children in our region. Healthy Vision Week (HVW) highlights the importance of vision screenings by offering free vision screenings for pre-school and elementary-age children. Eye care professionals throughout the Black Hills and Pierre will join with NPEF to provide free eye screenings for children ages 3 through 11 during the week of September 27th through October 1st.

Oftentimes, children do not even know they are having trouble seeing. They may not realize that blurry trees or faces are abnormal. If fuzzy images are all they have ever seen, that is normal to them. Early diagnosis is key, as vision loss and blindness may be prevented through timely treatment. Correction of vision problems can actually prevent eye-related learning problems.

While a vision screening does not take the place of a comprehensive eye exam, a vision screening is a basic first step that can help identify vision problems in children. According to statistics from NPEF’s 2009 HVW (see below), participating doctors reported that, of the children who received vision screenings, 56% had vision problems. Of those with vision problems, almost 10% needed glasses. NPEF is committed to educating the public about eye health and safety. Join us in supporting Healthy Vision Week, September 27 - October 1, 2010, and help preserve our children’s sight in Western South Dakota.

**HJVW 2008 Statistics**

- 18 Doctors Participated
- 252 Eye Screenings Conducted
- 2 Black Hills Communities Served
- 136 Rapid City Students Screened *
- 31 Black Hills Area Students Screened *
- 41 Required Glasses (16.3%)

*Geographic distribution per 167 Patient Evaluations returned

$11,580 in Donated Eye Care Services

**HJVW 2009 Statistics**

- 33 Doctors Participated
- 302 Eye Screenings Conducted
- 7 Black Hills Communities Served
- 174 Rapid City Students Screened *
- 107 Black Hills Area Students Screened *
- 29 Required Glasses (9.6%)

*Geographic distribution per 281 Patient Evaluations returned

$12,830 in Donated Eye Care Services

**Hats off to our generous partners who made HVW 2009 a Success**

- Heidi Bartell, OD
- Gail Bernard, MD
- Patricia Bogaard, OD
- Anne Britton, OD
- Mary Buurma, PA-C
- Monte Dirks, MD
- Elizabeth Ellender, OD
- M. Scott Ellender, OD
- Cary Feldman, OD
- Brian Gill, OD
- Michael Guilbert, OD
- Joseph Hartford, OD
- Kathy Haivala, OD
- Tammy Hersch, OD
- Bill Holec, OD
- Dwayne Ice, OD
- Scott Kennedy, OD
- Gaylene Kudrna, OD
- Brad Moriarty, OD
- Robert Nixon, MD
- Eric Porisch, OD
- Michael Richey, OD
- Scott Schirber, OD
- Paula Sorensen, OD
- James Trimble, OD
- Lynn Tucker, OD
- Dawn Wattenhofer, OD
- Pauline Weichler, OD
- Nathan Wiederholt, OD
- Dallas Wilkinson, OD
- Robert Wilson, OD
- Falon Young, OD
- Paul Zimmerman, MD

**EYE CARE PROFESSIONALS**

- Ketel Thorstenson, LLP
- MediCap Pharmacy

**SPONSORS**

- Black Hills Insurance Agency
- Miller Wealth Mgmt.
- RBC Wealth Mgmt.

- Simpsons Printing
- Whiting, Hagg, Hagg

- Dorsey & Hagg, LLP
“...And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air, gave proof through the night that our flag was still there…”

How fitting that we celebrate our country’s birthday with fireworks displays! Though these words from the Star-Spangled Banner speak of another kind of “fireworks,” there is something spectacular and thrilling about watching beautiful colors and formations explode and light up the sky. But fireworks in the hands of anyone but trained professionals can go from fun to fatal in a moment. Consider this story shared by local eye doctor, Dallas Wilkinson:

“When I was a teenager we were at a friend’s house and shooting off some fireworks. There were people across the street doing the same. We started to have a little rivalry of sorts and began shooting bottle rockets across the street toward each other. My good friend, Jody, was upstairs, shooting them out the window from a bottle in his hand. We had both been firing bottle rockets with report (exploding) and had just run out. The next one Jody lit, hit the windowsill, came back, and hit him in the eye, penetrating and causing a retinal detachment. He was very lucky that we had just finished the report ones or he would have likely lost the eye entirely. He is blind in that eye now, but the eye looks normal. I guess you can call that lucky!? We spent the rest of the night in the emergency room and he spent several hours in surgery and follow up appointments. Something as simple, cheap and easy to buy as a bottle rocket has caused a lifetime of difficulty for Jody.”

How many of you know someone who can share a similar story? Perhaps too many, which is why the Northern Plains Eye Foundation (NPEF) launched a “Fireworks-Related Eye Injury Study” (FREIS) in 2009 to explore the significance of eye injuries around Independence Day in South Dakota. We were grateful to have 29 ophthalmologists (along with their staff) from across South Dakota agree to participate. Of these, 6 doctors reported treating fireworks-related eye injuries during the reporting period of June 15 to July 31, 2009. Statistics on these eye injuries included:

• 4 males, 2 females;
• 3 of the males & 1 female were using the fireworks themselves;
• 2 of the males reported alcohol intake;
• 1 male & 1 female were bystanders (1 within 10’, 1 within 30’);
• 2 of those handling fireworks were in the age category of 6 - 12;
• 2 were in the 18 - 29 year old group;
• 1 bystander was in the age category of 13 - 17, 1 was in the 30 - 45 year old group;
• Fireworks causing the injuries = 3 bottle rockets, 1 punk, 1 other aerial device, 1 unknown;
• Prognosis for injured individuals = 1 mild visual impairment; 1 unknown (possible mild impairment to possible full visual recovery); 4 were fortunate enough to expect full visual recovery.

Dr. Monte Dirks, who presented the study’s results at the fall 2009 meeting of the South Dakota Academy of Ophthalmology (SDAO), reported favorable feedback from the doctors attending. The Research Committee of NPEF unanimously voted to continue FREIS for the summer of 2010. Special thanks go out to all the eye doctors and staff who made this study possible. We are also extremely grateful for the support of the SDAO and Executive Director, Gloria Hermanson, who provided a $2,000 grant which helped defray costs of the 2009 FREIS study.

Although eye injuries are the focus of the FREIS study, one of our Board members who is a volunteer fire-fighter, Dr. Chet Roberts, continues to remind us of the fires and burn injuries that also result from carelessness with fireworks. Five states ban backyard fireworks completely, and a majority of states prohibit aerial devices, and certain other fireworks, deemed “more dangerous.” South Dakota has the dubious distinction of being one of only 10 states where the use of bottle rockets is still legal.

If you enjoy fireworks, why not choose to be a spectator at a professional display, where fireworks safety is a priority? Or, if you insist on setting off fireworks yourself, then minimally take precaution by wearing protective eye gear and keeping children as far away as possible - and think twice about using bottle rockets. Although six eye injuries may not seem like a lot, even one eye injury is one too many. Eyesight is precious. Just ask Jody.

SPECIAL THANKS TO NPEF CHRISTMAS GIFT OF SIGHT PARTNERS

**Program Sponsors**

**and**

Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI)**
She was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. For the remainder of Mary’s days, George lovingly cared for her in their home and on Sunday, April 19th, 2009, George lost his beloved wife. He described the unfathomable grief he felt and, over time, came to understand that grief, if left unattended, would build up inside him, “like a pressure cooker.” For George, the only way to relieve it and work through his grief was to share the story of the life he so treasured with Mary.

While the life that George shared with Mary is a cherished memory, George’s life as a young boy was indeed very different. A product of a divorce, George and his siblings were raised by his mother. Money was nonexistent, school was difficult and trouble was oftentimes “just around the corner.” At the age of 15, George got a part-time job on a farm. One afternoon, George was helping the farmer and was asked to get “that” piece of tin from “that” shed. George struggled to see the tin at which the farmer was pointing. Noticing that George was not doing what he’d been asked, the farmer scolded him. George shamefully admitted that he “couldn’t see.” The farmer arranged for George to have his eyes examined and shortly thereafter George was fitted with his first pair of glasses, paid for by the kind farmer. George immediately realized that the “fuzzy” world he came to see as normal was anything but normal. George described it as, “My world was brighter than I ever could have imagined.” Academically, George began to excel, and shortly thereafter he was accepted into the Air Force.

The farmer who bought George his first pair of glasses would not have imagined that his bequest was due primarily to a farmer in New York state in the early 1960’s, who bought George his first pair of glasses.

George eloquently weaved a narrative of his life beginning with the love he felt for his wife of over 35 years, Mary, who had recently passed away. Mary was born in England and George, who is a 26-year Air Force veteran, met her in Illinois after she had moved to the states to live with her sister. They traveled the world together, and in 1991 upon George’s retirement from the Air Force, he and Mary settled in the Black Hills to begin their retirement years. In the fall of 2008, Mary became ill and needed to be hospitalized.

Last August George walked into the Northern Plains Eye Foundation (NPEF) office, surprising NPEF Associate Director, Carolyn Ness, with his desire to add the Foundation as a beneficiary in his will. George explained that his bequest was due primarily to a “random act of kindness” displayed by a farmer in New York state in the early 1960’s, who bought George his first pair of glasses.

George’s life was transformed by the farmer, and he let his family know that his bequest was due primarily to a “random act of kindness” displayed by a farmer in New York state in the early 1960’s, who bought George his first pair of glasses.

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COMING ATTRACTIONS

NPEF Board of Directors Meeting
June 29 – Rapid City

South Dakota School Nurse Conference
July 20 & 21 – Pierre

Healthy Vision Week
September 27-October 1 – Black Hills Area & Pierre