



# New Vision News

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[www.newvisionfl.org](http://www.newvisionfl.org)

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This newsletter is in large print, APHont 16pt font. It is also available electronically or as an audio recording on [newvisionfl.org/newsletter.php](http://newvisionfl.org/newsletter.php), or as an audio recording on cassette upon request.

## October 15 is White Cane Safety Day

The white cane is an important tool for many people with visual impairments. It is a tool for mobility, for identification, for safety. New Vision joins organizations throughout the United States in celebrating White Cane Safety Day on October 15.



## WHITE CANE SAFETY DAY

[www.newvisionfl.org](http://www.newvisionfl.org)



### History of the White Cane and White Cane Safety Day

Source: Lions International (<http://www.lionsclubs.org/EN/common/pdfs/iad413.pdf>)

To make the American people more fully aware of the meaning of the white cane

## White Cane Safety Day, continued

and of the need for motorists to exercise special care for the blind person who carries it, on October 6, 1964, the U.S. Congress approved a resolution authorizing the President of the US to annually issue a proclamation designating October 15th as "National White Cane Safety Day."

In 1921, James Biggs, a photographer from Bristol, England, became blind following an accident. Because he was feeling uncomfortable with the amount of traffic around his home, he painted his walking stick white to be more easily visible.

In 1930, the late George A. Bonham, President of the Peoria Lions Club (Illinois) introduced the idea of using the white cane with a red band as a means of assisting the blind in independent mobility. The Peoria Lions approved the idea, white canes

were made and distributed, and the Peoria City Council adopted an ordinance giving the bearers the right-of-way to cross the street. News of the club's activity spread quickly to other Lions clubs throughout the United States, and their visually handicapped friends experimented with the white canes. Overwhelming acceptance of the white cane idea by the blind and sighted alike quickly gave cane users a unique method of identifying their special need for travel consideration among their sighted counterparts.

Today white cane laws are on the books of every state in the US and many other countries, providing blind persons a legal status in traffic. The white cane now universally acknowledges that the bearer is blind.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Close Your Eyes for White Cane Safety Day

This event will give you the opportunity to learn first-hand about the abilities of persons who are blind or visually impaired. Attendees will be blindfolded and asked to complete everyday tasks as a simulation of vision loss.

Join us Tuesday, October 15 at 9 a.m. at Tavares City Hall, 201 E. Main St., Tavares.

You are strongly encouraged to bring a friend or co-worker with you. If you are visually impaired, invite a friend or family member to attend and cheer them on!

Shoes appropriate for safe, comfortable walking are recommended. Space is limited to 30 people so please RSVP by October 10.

### Freedom Scientific Demonstrations

Learn about new assistive technology devices.

When: October 29—times to be determined

Where: Lake Sumter State College, Magnolia Room, 9501 US Hwy 441, Leesburg

### Annual Luncheon

Join us for our Annual Luncheon on Wednesday, December 4, 11:30 to 1.

Cost: \$10

Where: Venetian Gardens, 109 E. Dixie Ave., Leesburg

RSVP/purchase tickets by November 25 (no tickets sold at the door)

## When the Eyes Play Tricks: Charles Bonnet Syndrome Explains Visual Hallucinations in Those With Visual Impairments

Edited for space | By Mary D'Apice | Source: VisionAware.org  
<http://www.visionaware.org/blog.aspx?logEntryID=897&BlogID=9>

### Visual Hallucinations

One night, 75-year-old Dolores woke up to find a huge tree growing beside her bed. Dolores is not a character out of a fiction story but one of many individuals who experience visual hallucinations brought on by vision loss. Dolores later learned the name for this phenomenon, "Charles Bonnet Syndrome". At the time she had no idea what was happening when the tree made her jump. "The image was very real to me, like it was in 3-D. I can still picture it." Soon she was regularly seeing pretty flowers popping up out of walls but none of her visions scared her. "I never saw anything frightening, like creepy crawlies."

When she told her retinal specialist about the experience, the concerned doctor ordered an MRI and referred her to a psychologist who later reported that "her brain was just fine." Not until Dolores attended her low vision support group did she discover the hallucinations were linked to her worsening eyesight caused by macular degeneration. Charles Bonnet Syndrome was named for the Swiss naturalist and philosopher who first described his grandfather's visions of carriages, birds and buildings in 1760. Dolores later returned to her retinal specialist with literature on Charles Bonnet.

Charles Bonnet Syndrome | Continued >>

"He's an excellent doctor, but he had never heard anything about it."

## Importance of Understanding Charles Bonnet

Dr. Susan Hirshfield, clinical psychologist and Living Skills Specialist at the Earle Baum Center, is not surprised that much of the medical community is unaware of the syndrome. "I had a family thinking their mother was psychotic." Thanks to her intervention, the woman was weaned off the unnecessary anti-psychotic medications that were making her sick. While such misdiagnoses may be rare, it's no wonder people are reluctant to admit that they've seen monkeys in the kitchen or skyscrapers in the backyard.

Twelve years ago, Dr. Hirshfield was unfamiliar with the syndrome, but as a clinical psychologist, she had an intuitive understanding that some visual hallucinations were not necessarily a sign of mental illness or dementia. She met Martha, an older, totally blind woman, who was seeing images of maps floating in the air. Martha's eyes had been enucleated (surgically removed) due to an illness. When asked what the maps meant to her, Martha said that she and her husband used to drive across-country and she navigated. Hirshfield got to the heart of the matter by discovering that maps symbolized happiness and adventure. "I realized that her brain was trying to understand not seeing," says Hirshfield. "It was offering something familiar and enjoyable to look at in the absence of any real visual input." Martha also enjoyed other visions, such as an image of sunlight dancing on the colors of a rug, which hung on a clothesline. "It's much better than the blackness," Martha told Hirshfield.

Martha's experience inspired Hirshfield to research and confirm that this was a neurological anomaly akin to phantom limb syndrome. "The brain cannot accommodate having the feeling that the eyes are open, the individual is out and about, fully awake but not seeing." Hirshfield points out that this does not happen to people who were born blind because the hallucinations are fed by visual memories.

## Advice on the Experience of Charles Bonnet

Vision loss disproportionately affects seniors, so many people with Charles Bonnet are older. Neither age nor type of visual impairment makes an individual more or less prone to seeing visions. "Bonnet is an equal opportunity trickster," says Hirshfield, who tries to normalize the experience. "The syndrome is harmless so don't panic," Dolores advises. "The visions may come and go. Mine lasted a few months and stopped," an experience typical of many with Charles Bonnet.

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Thank you to Walt Disney World for their donation of tickets to Animal Kingdom for our end-of-the-summer trip. Our teens had a great time, and practiced important budgeting, time management, and self-advocacy skills.



## HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT US

### **Russell Stover Fundraiser: Buy Chocolate & Help Us!**

Buy delicious chocolate at Russell Stover, 950 Industrial Drive, Wildwood, on October 5 and New Vision will earn 10% of your purchase. Pick up the bar code at the door on October 5.

### **In the Community**

@ the Driver's License office: make a contribution to "Senior Vision Services" to support New Vision's services.

@ the Lake County Tax Collector's office: buy a candy bar to support New Vision's blind babies program. You can also purchase "A State of Vision" license plate or make a contribution to "Blind Babies" to support us.

### **2013 5k Run/Walk Cancelled**

New Vision's annual 5k fundraiser has been cancelled for 2013. Thanks for your continued support. Please consider supporting us in a different way such as attending Dining in the Dark 2014 or making a donation.

### **Dining in the Dark**

The 4th annual Dining in the Dark fundraiser is scheduled for Friday, May 2 at Lake Receptions, Mount Dora. Tickets are \$60 per person or reserve a table of 8 for \$440. We sold out last year so buy your tickets early at [www.newvisionfl.org](http://www.newvisionfl.org)!

New Vision for Independence  
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Leesburg, FL 34788

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gram

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Hours: Monday-Thursday, 8-5