



AER Vision Rehabilitation Therapy (VRT) Division

VRT News Fall, 2018

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Message from the Chair

Greetings colleagues, friends, and vision rehabilitation professionals alike,

It is my honor and privilege to be the AER VRT Chair for the next two years. I am excited to take the ensuing steps to challenge and evolve our field with YOU! Vision Rehab Therapy is the backbone of our field, whether it be teaching our clients how to coordinate clothes so they match or teaching them the latest and greatest app, we go here, there, and just about everywhere. So, let me know where YOU want to go next, what YOU want to learn, and how WE can drive our field forward to bigger and better heights.

Did you know? The VRT division is going to have a NEW chair-elect and a NEW treasurer/secretary. BE ON THE LOOKOUT: a survey has gone out to an email near you! Have YOUR voice be heard and choose the coming leadership of YOUR VRT division.

In other news, did you attend the AER 2018 International Conference in Reno, Nevada? It was an amazing experience that I, for one, hope to repeat in 2020 in St. Louis, Missouri. It was an amazing opportunity to meet colleagues from across the WORLD and learn new trades, tricks, and shed a tear or two! We are fortunate to be part of such a great organization that is AERBVI. Kudos to all who were involved in making it both enriching and memorable. If you were there, I would love to hear about your experience and what you got from the conference.

And, if you haven't heard this year, when you go to renew your AER membership, use the letters BMc (note: case sensitive) to get a savings. Tell a VRT friend that if they aren't yet an AER member, they too can receive savings if they use those letters. This tip comes from the AER Douglas McFarland Award winner Barbara McCarthy. Also, if you know someone who is an AER member and part of the VRT division and is NOT receiving these letters, let me know. I want to hear from YOU: YOUR ideas, YOUR goals for our profession, what can WE do.

Finally, be on the lookout for webinars, watercoolers, and other opportunities to learn and gain CEUs.

As we approach darker evenings, let us be the light for our clients and for one another--

Amber Mooney, M.Ed. CVRT
AER VRT Division Chair

Announcing VRT Division Award Winners

At the AER International conference in July, the VRT Division met to discuss business and celebrate the achievements of the stellar work of all VRTs, but specifically to recognize a few in particular. We celebrate these recipients, those who nominated them, and the award committee who volunteered their time to make the hard decisions. Without further ado, join me in congratulating the following:

**The Bruce McKenzie Lifetime Achievement Award: Diane S. Weiss, New York;
Laura Vittorioso, Maine**

Purpose:

The Bruce McKenzie award is a biennial award established by the VRT Division to honor Bruce McKenzie for his pioneering leadership in the field of rehabilitation teaching. It is the Division's highest award, presented to an exemplary individual for outstanding contributions to the field of rehabilitation teaching and independent living services. It is the Division's Lifetime Achievement Award.

Both these incredible people have given 40 years of service to the field and aren't done yet. They have worked as VRTs in direct practice, supervision, administration, personnel prep, and as a published writer, curriculum developer, and presenter with extensive service to the field in a variety of capacities with membership. They are

exemplary Vision Rehabilitation Therapists. We can only hope to accomplish and give so much. Thank you, Laura and Diane!

The Susan & Paul Ponchillia Publication Award: Steve Kelley, Maine

Purpose:

For VRT division members who have written and published work regarding VRT.

Steve has been not only a superb VRT with direct service to his clients, but is a prolific writer with contributions to the American Foundation for the Blind, his own Low Vision Tech blog, and this newsletter. Steve is always curious in the field and strives to find what will work best for clients. Thank you, Steve!

The Alice Raftary Rising Star Award: Amber Mooney, Maine

Purpose:

To recognize talented teachers who are new to their careers.

It was my distinct honor and pleasure to receive this award and I thank those who nominated me and the award committee. I like to say it is the dream job I never knew I always wanted. I am proud to serve alongside these other award recipients.

Sadly, there were no nominations for **The Elizabeth Lennon Award for Meritorious Achievement**. I know we all know someone worthy of this award! There will be another opportunity in 2020 to nominate for all these awards. Start thinking and planning now! If you have any questions, don't be shy!

**Vision Rehabilitation Therapy in Action:
Getting to know your fellow therapist in the field**

I have had the pleasure to work side by side with fellow Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist, Samantha Green, who has worked for The Iris Network in Maine for 18 years. She graciously accepted my request to interview her and this is what she had to say:

Q: When, how and why did you become a VRT?

A: I became a VRT in 1995. As an undergraduate student, I lost a significant amount of vision and had a VRT of my own. I later got the opportunity to shadow her, and I knew right away that this was what I wanted to do as a career. She was a graduate of Western Michigan University and recommended it. I received my graduate degree from Western Michigan University in Rehabilitation Teaching in 1995.

Q: What is your current role?

A: I currently work as an itinerant VRT part-time, and as a team lead supervising other VRTs in other territories.

Q: What is your favorite part of the job?

A: Being able to observe my clients when they achieve a goal. I truly enjoy the look of achievement on their faces and astonishment that they can still do a task with little or no vision.

Q: What is the most challenging part of the job?

A: Keeping updated on all the new technology (computer and other digital devices).

Q: Have you ever been to an International Conference? What did you think?

A: Yes, I attended the AER International Conference in San Antonio, Texas. I believe it was in 2014. I really enjoyed the experience talking with vision rehabilitation professionals from all over the world.

Q: Is there any where you would like to see the field go or grow?

A: I would like to see our field gear towards working with younger children, maybe in an educational setting in addition to the labor setting. Early intervention may be the key in narrowing the gap between our kids and their peers.

Thanks again, Sam, for everything you do! It was a pleasure.

VRTs: would YOU be interested in telling the VRT world about the great things you are doing, or know someone who is? Let me know!

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month

The following is reprinted with permission of the author:

Steve Kelley CVRT, CRC, CATIS

www.lowvisiontech.com

Walking the Employment Talk

What do you think about, when you think of hiring a potential employee who has a disability? What if the next person who walked in the door to interview for a position in your company walked in using a white cane? Explained that they used a “screen

magnifier” on their computer, or pulled out a handheld magnifier to read some of the documents you presented to them?

What would you think?

Might you wonder if they were capable of doing the advertised position? Would you worry about the liability in your workplace of someone with a vision impairment? Is there a quiet voice whispering in your ear, “It’s the *right thing to do*, hiring a person with a disability?

October is *National Disability Employment Awareness Month*, and you might be surprised to learn that “walking the talk,” on hiring an employee who is blind, visually impaired, or who may have some other disability is one of the smartest things you can do for the bottom line of your business!

Sure, for many of us, the idea of offering a job or opportunity to someone with a disability, may conjure up all kinds of emotions—some of them very conflicting, and most of them based on misperceptions. Consider for a moment some of these facts:

- Most workplace accommodations cost little or nothing. The average cost of a workplace accommodation is a one-time cost of less than \$500 (\$1.37 per day for the first year).
- Research documents lower turn-over rates for employees with disabilities, higher safety records, and less time out of work due to accidents.
- Workers with disabilities are absent less often than co-workers according to studies at Dupont and IT&T research.
- Workplace innovation increases, research shows, with diversity among employees.
- 92% of American consumers surveyed in 2005 viewed companies more favorably if their hiring included workers with a disability.

If you are just getting back into the workplace with a disability, there may be some misperceptions about your abilities, but all the data indicates you will be an asset to the business that hires you.

Employers, walking the talk, opening the door and welcoming a diverse workforce, one that includes individuals with disabilities, according to the research, is one of the smartest things you can do to boost your bottom line!

To check out the stats, try the [Statistics page on the “Ability First” website](#) or “The Benefits of Disability in the Workplace,” on the Forbes website.

Share your thoughts with Steve at skelley4195@yahoo.com or send a tweet to @lowvisiontech. You may also wish to check out The Career Index, a great resource to utilize when thinking about returning to work or to set out on a new career, and needless to say, a great tool for students. To access TCI, go to www.thecareerindex.com. This tool allows you to type in the job you want and it will give you information like a description of that job; you can type in your zip code and it will tell you how many jobs are available in your area; you can also get an idea of salary. Share far and wide! Go to the website and play with it.

Watercooler Announcement

The VRT Division is excited to announce a watercooler, “Instructional Strategies in Working with Determining Eccentric Viewing for Clients”. Karen Shane Cote, CLVT, has worked in the field of low vision for 40+ years. She will share her knowledge, expertise, and practices on determine eccentric viewing positions for our clients.

We welcome you to this session, and will provide an e-blast to the membership with additional attendance information closer to the date.

Event Details:

Wednesday, December 12, 2018

7:30 pm Eastern/4:30 pm Pacific

Access details to follow in email blast.

ACVREP credit approval pending for the benefit of the field and the enhancement of our knowledge base.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

February 15, 2019 Deadline for articles for next issue of VRT News. Send articles to Amber Mooney at amooney@theiris.org.

Vision Rehabilitation Therapy Division Board Contact Information

Chair: Amber Mooney, M.Ed., CVRT
amooney@theiris.org

Please contact me if you have any questions, concerns, or errors regarding the VRT newsletter.