

PR man promotes the visually impaired

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Gene LaNier has a long career in marketing and public relations, promoting New Smyrna Beach as a tourism destination to Europeans and working as director of corporate communications **for the** ITT Community Development Corporation, **the** original developer of Palm Coast.

Facts

WHO: Gene LaNier

OCCUPATION: Chairman, chief executive of My Marketing Group; chairman of **the** board **for the Center for the Visually Impaired**

AGE: 77

RESIDENCE: Ormond Beach

He currently serves as chairman of **the** board **for the Center for the Visually Impaired** while also dealing with his own condition of macular degeneration, a leading cause of vision loss and blindness among Americans who are 65 and older.

He spoke about his condition and service on **the** board to **The** News-Journal.

How did you become involved with **the** cause of **the** visually impaired?

I have always had an affinity **for the** blind. As a child, my father would take me to see a cowboy movie every Saturday afternoon. On **the** way home, we saw a blind man on **the** street corner. My father told him we would help him cross **the** intersection. He drove slowly alongside him until he got to other side. Later, I saw my father crying. He was sad he said because, he 'could not make him (**the** blind man) see.' My father was a Baptist minister.

How long have you served with **the** Center for Visually Impaired?

About two years on **the** board, one year as chairman. We serve **the** blind and visually impaired in four counties: Volusia, Flagler, Putnam and Brevard. Our mission has expanded so much — helping **the** young, **the** old, helping people to get job training — that we recently had to re-write our charter and submit it to **the** state. We were originally founded in 1988 to help older people with vision problems.

What are some of **the** issues facing **the** blind?

About 70 percent of **the** blind are unemployed. Many are on disability and living on a limited income. Yet there are so many opportunities with training. You don't have to see to type, or operate a switchboard, **for** example. Generally **the** lack of employment is not due to lack of skills but rather to **the** misconceptions that employers have about blindness. Many see blind people as incompetent and some believe that their insurance rates will rise by hiring a blind person so they won't take a chance.

Transportation is another area of difficulty. Many bus routes don't run at night or do not run in areas where a person wants to work. So potential jobs are lost due to lack of accessible transportation.

Technology is another area of concern. Keeping up with training and **the** cost of buying technology is sometimes out of **the** reach of a person living on a fixed income. Many cannot purchase **the** equipment they need to learn to be effective computer users.

There are limited services offered by many nonprofits due to limited funding. **The** programs **for** vocational rehabilitation are funded at better levels (**for** those in their prime earning years) than those **for** seniors and children.

Who has inspired you?

One woman had been a successful real estate agent. Then she woke up one day and could not see. She thought her life was over. She had to move back home with her mother. Eventually she started her own business and became independent again.

Another woman would take a bus from Daytona Beach to Orlando, where she would change buses, to take a class at **the** University of Central Florida. She earned a master's degree and went to work **for** us. She was recently hired away.

How have you coped with your own vision problems with macular degeneration, or damage to **the** retina?

It doesn't bother me too much. My depth perception is a little less than I would like. I still have peripheral vision so on a clear day I see everything except what I look at directly; often that becomes a solid black spot. I was told that macular degeneration often happens in both eyes. I have been fortunate having only one eye affected, my left eye.

Maybe exercise has helped. My daily routine is walking three miles in **the** morning down and up Beach Street in Ormond Beach. Then thirty sit-ups on a slant board. Then, punch a speed bag **for** five minutes. Once or twice a week, I jump up and down on a small trampoline and top it all off by lifting weights.

I just added a new item, which is difficult — a balance board. I really have to be careful because it is easy to fall and get hurt.

After all **the** physical exercise, I exercise **the** old brain **for** thirty minutes to an hour by studying brain science and neuro-marketing. This is a new form of marketing using brain science research and involves several areas such as smell, attention, memory, emotion and priming. Much more effective than using logic since we are dealing more with **the** non-conscious mind.

In **the** interim periods, I empty **the** cat boxes.

Fitness & Well-being spotlight is a weekly feature profiling area residents who have made healthy habits a priority in their lives, or those dedicated to helping others make healthy lifestyle changes. If you would like to nominate someone **for** a profile, email jim.haug@news-jrnl.com.