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PBT Joins "Eyes on Capitol Hill" Campaign

Donna Miller, Prevent Blindness Tennessee President and CEO and Ryan Jolley, Tennessee vision advocate, joined more than one hundred individuals from around the country in the **Eyes on Capitol Hill** campaign in Washington D.C. **Eyes on Capitol Hill** is a national campaign spearheaded by Prevent Blindness America as a way for individuals who have experienced eye disease or vision loss to tell their stories to lawmakers in Washington and urge support of effective public health policies relating to eye health and safety.

"Our goals for Eyes on Capitol Hill were to train all our participants as grassroots advocates and send them to their legislators in Washington to tell their stories about dealing with and overcoming eye disease or vision impairment," said Joel Kurzman, Director of State Government Affairs for Prevent Blindness America and organizer of the event. "After this event we want everyone to return to

their states as champions for better vision health policies."

During the Eyes on Capitol Hill campaign, Miller and Jolley met with US Senators Bill Frist and Lamar Alexander as well as aids to Congresswoman Marsha Blackburn and Congressman John Dunkin to talk about the critical importance of sound vision health policy to all Americans. "I am grateful to Prevent Blindness Tennessee for the work it does in raising awareness and promoting the kind of vision screening that helped save my sight," said Ryan Jolley. "I'm in college now but, I may not have had this opportunity if it were not for the vision screening I received that detected a vision problem, which impaired my learning. I came to Washington to speak on behalf of other students who have trouble learning because they cannot see, in hopes that they too will have access to vision healthcare."

Ryan received a vision screening in the third grade



Ryan Jolley in front of the U.S. Capitol during "Eyes on Capitol Hill"

that led to his diagnosis of a form of juvenile macular degeneration. Although there is no cure for the eye disease, Ryan has benefited over the years from professional eye care that has helped him attain his dream of attending college.

"Like most children with vision problems, Ryan had no idea he was not seeing as he should," said Donna Miller. "Because most of what children learn comes from what they see, the youth who benefit from our programs are more likely to become better students, participate in extra-curricular activities and lead healthier lives."

Wal-Mart and Sam's Club raise over \$25,000 to Save Sight

Tennessee Wal-Mart Vision Centers and SAM'S CLUB Optical's raised more than \$25,000 for Prevent Blindness Tennessee during the 2005 Campaign to Save Sight held last summer. Associates from 56 stores across the state participated in the campaign by organizing back to school barbecues and

other fun activities to raise money and increase awareness about healthy vision. Nine stores contributed \$1,000 or more with the average gift from each store being \$500. "We appreciate Wal-Mart and Sam's Club for their support in our efforts to save sight in Tennessee," said Jennifer

Gamble, Vice President of Marketing and Development. "We look forward to continuing our partnership this year as we gear up for the 2006 Campaign to Save Sight that begins this summer. Please support your local Wal-Mart and Sam's Club optical stores and their fund raising efforts!"

Sometimes Inequality is About a Way of Seeing



Donna Miller

Recently, I met with a young man who received a vision screening, years ago, by Prevent Blindness Tennessee. He was in the third grade when the screening led to diagnoses of juvenile macular degeneration. Although there is no cure for his vision problem, because PBT screened Ryan his family was able to access resources including a terrific physician and a sight teacher. The young man is in college, now, and has done well in school and knows that vision loss does not have to take away his independence. For every child that receives a vision screening, in Tennessee, there are thousands that we have not, yet, reached. Those children may not know what it is like to have Ryan's successes.

Ryan is going to be a great leader, but I had to wonder where he would be today if he had not been screened. Who would he be if he had spent those early years thinking that he was stupid because he couldn't learn the way the other children learned, not because of a low IQ but rather because he couldn't see the teacher, the blackboard or the books. You see, not all children are created with equal opportunities or life chances. Children are all born equal, but when a child

can't see to learn he's no longer equal in life choices.

Older adults, who are losing their independence because they are losing their sight, are also being served by Prevent Blindness Tennessee. Nearly a half million seniors, in Tennessee, are experiencing profound vision loss because of age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, and cataracts. The majority of vision problems in adults can be solved with a simple pair of eyeglasses, yet many of our clients must choose between food, prescriptions, housing and glasses. When an older adult

"You see, sometimes inequality is about a way of seeing or without PBT, inequality may be about not seeing."

loses her ability to drive, go to church, visit her friends, or go to the grocery, because her vision is declining and she can not afford eyeglasses, she is no longer equal in the quantity of hope she feels.

You see, sometimes inequality is about a way of seeing, or without PBT, inequality may be about not seeing. Prevent Blindness Tennessee is working to make sure that children and seniors have eye care and eye glasses, when they are needed. We want to ensure that children and seniors have the same opportunities and life choices as other Tennesseans. We work

to see that vision loss does not rob them of opportunities to have the best quality of life possible. But we cannot serve these clients without our supporters who give of their time and finances. I know that if you ask the individuals who volunteered or made donations to PBT, why they have continued to give, they would say that they want to give our clients a better future. I know they would also say that by giving they felt better about themselves. Helping others feels good, whether it's helping a child or a senior. Helping and giving reminds the givers how fortunate they are that they can give. It makes us thankful for our blessings. It helps define who we are as individuals and as a community.

On April 20, 2006, we had our first Volunteer and Donor Recognition luncheon. We thanked many of the individuals and organizations that support our vision. Now, we will continue into a new year of providing children and seniors with the tools to see greater opportunities and greater life choices. I invite you to join in our work, in 2006. We need you. They need us. Together "keeping the SEE in Tennessee" can be so much more than a tag line, it can be our promise to do away with one more healthcare inequity.

Donna Miller, President and CEO

Prevent Blindness Tennessee recognized volunteers and donors for their support of vision at our first annual recognition luncheon on Thursday, April 20. Together, we keep the SEE in TennesSEE!

2005 Volunteer and Donor Recognition Award Honorees

The HCA Foundation
 The Memorial Foundation
 The Mick Foundation
 Cal Turner Family Foundation
 Don H. Splawn Foundation
 Wal-Mart Vision Centers and Sam's Club Opticals
 Mr. Rick Hart
 Dr. Brad Kehler
 Ms. Christi Armstrong
 Dr. Erich Groos



Aging Eye Symposium Educates Seniors to Preserve Their Sight for Years of Active Living

More than 130 participants attended PBT's first **Aging Eye Symposium** held on Friday, April 7, 2006. The free vision symposium, designed for seniors and professionals who work with seniors, was presented by Prevent Blindness Tennessee in collaboration with the Tennessee Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired to raise awareness about the vision problems affecting Tennessee's aging population.

The one-day symposium featured presentations by eye care professionals who specialize in age-related eye diseases, which are the leading causes of vision loss in seniors. During the morning session Barbara Odes, O.D. spoke about vision acuity and cataracts, Rachel Kuchtey, M.D., Ph.D. talked about glaucoma and Brad Kehler, O.D. presented on diabetic retinopathy. The afternoon session included a presentation concerning low vision by Kristin Anderson, O.D. and age-related macular degeneration by Eric Kostamaa, M.D. Additionally, participants visited exhibit booths and received information about eye healthcare, a free vision screening and lunch was provided.

"We are pleased with the turnout at our first Aging Eye Symposium," said Jeane Ostenfeld, PBT Director of Programs. "The speakers were dynamic and the attendees received valuable information about how to preserve their sight for years of active living."

State Representative Edith Langster was also on hand to present a joint resolu-

tion by the House and Senate to recognize January as Glaucoma Awareness Month in Tennessee. Langster told the crowd of seniors that glaucoma runs in her family and is very prevalent among African Americans. She urged everyone to take care of their sight by having regular eye examinations.

The need for increased awareness of vision loss and prevention is prevalent throughout the state. In Tennessee, more than 20,000 people over age 40 are blind, and many other Tennesseans over 40 have vision problems that could lead to blindness; 65,000 are vision impaired, 413,000 have cataracts, 45,000 have glaucoma, 107,000 experience diabetic retinopathy and 32,000 have age-related macular degeneration. Those numbers are estimated to double by the year 2030 as baby boomers live longer and the aging population increases.

What is cataract?

A cataract is a clouding of the lens in the eye that affects vision. Cataracts are very common in older people. By age 80, more than half of all Americans either have a cataract or have had cataract surgery. A cataract can occur in either or both eyes. It cannot spread from one eye to the other. Risk factors for cataract include age, diabetes, smoking, alcohol use, and prolonged exposure to ultraviolet sunlight. The symptoms of early cataract may be improved with new eyeglasses, brighter lighting, anti-glare sunglasses, or magnifying lenses. If these measures do

not help, surgery is the only effective treatment.

What is glaucoma?

Glaucoma is a result of increased pressure on the optic nerve, causing loss of sight over time. It is commonly called the "sneak thief of sight". More than 3 million people have glaucoma but half of them don't even know it. Glaucoma is the most frequent cause of blindness among African Americans. You are at high risk for glaucoma if you are age 55 or older, black or Hispanic, nearsighted, have diabetes or family history of glaucoma. Glaucoma usually does not cause pain, so many people don't notice it until they have lost a great deal of their vision. If glaucoma is discovered early, medical treatment usually keeps it from worsening. However, sight destroyed by glaucoma cannot be restored. The best defense against glaucoma is prevention. Those age 55 or older should get a complete eye exam at least once every two years.

What is diabetic retinopathy?

Diabetic retinopathy is a disease that affects the blood vessels of the eye. Anyone with diabetes is at risk for diabetic retinopathy. More than 5.3 million Americans age 18 and older have diabetic retinopathy. Diabetic retinopathy harms blood vessels in the retina, in the back of the eye. When unhealthy new blood vessels grow they can bleed causing dark spots that look like cobwebs, which cloud vision. Laser treatment is used to seal leaking or bleeding vessels. If you have



State Rep. Edith Langster, holding the proclamation for glaucoma awareness, stands with PBT President Donna Miller, Chairman Gavin Maloy and Vice President Jennifer Gamble

Below: Jeane Ostenfeld poses with Dr. Rachel Kuchtey



diabetes, there are three important steps you can take to prevent vision loss from diabetic retinopathy: watch and control your blood sugar levels; eat healthy and stay active; and see an eye doctor at least once a year.

What is age-related macular degeneration (AMD)?

AMD is a degenerative retinal disease that can cause central vision loss and blindness. AMD is the leading cause of vision loss in Americans age 65 and older. There are two forms of AMD, wet AMD and the most common dry AMD. AMD can cause vision loss quickly or slowly, and can make it very hard to do things that require sharp vision, such as reading, driving or sewing. AMD is treated with medication and laser therapy.

Contact PBT for more information about age-related eye diseases.

PBT receives grant from Nashville Predators Foundation to promote eye safety

Prevent Blindness Tennessee has been selected to receive a grant in the amount of \$3,590 towards a “Play It Safe” poster for children. The “Play It Safe” poster is designed to educate children and those who work with children in sports about the dangers of playing sports without protective eyewear, in an effort to prevent unnecessary vision loss from sports-related eye injuries.

“We need more safety programs and program tools to attract and remind school-aged children, who are likely to participate in sports, about the importance of eye safety,” said Donna Miller, PBT President. “I believe the “Play It Safe” poster featuring the Nashville Predators is a great way to encourage young people to take care of their eyes.”

According to the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) an estimated 80,000 sports-related eye injuries occur each year in the United States. About 90 percent of sports-related eye injuries are preventable, and one-third of the victims of sports-related eye injuries are children. Prevent Blindness Tennessee is committed to increasing eye health and safety programs for student athletes of all ages. The “Play It Safe” poster will emphasize to students that even really tough athletes take care of their eyes.

In addition to the money, The Predators will also contribute by providing photographs of the players and assisting with the graphic design of the poster. Approximately 8,000 “Play It Safe” posters will be distributed to



Gerry Helper, President of the Nashville Predators Foundation, poses next to the Stanley Cup while presenting a check to (from left to right) PBT Chairman Gavin Maloy, Justin Gamble, student, and Donna Miller.

Metro schools in the fall.

For more information about eye health and safety, contact Prevent Blindness Tennessee or visit the website at www.preventblindnesstn.org.



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