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## **SECOND LEADING CAUSE OF BLINDNESS CAN STRIKE AT ANY AGE**

*In Rare Cases, Children and Teenagers May Have the Disease*

**CHICAGO (Dec. 23, 2008)** – Glaucoma is often called the “sneak thief of sight” because half of all patients have it and do not know it. Although some may consider the eye disease something that only happens to older people, the truth is, even children and teenagers can be diagnosed with it.

A.J. DeGeorge is now 27 years old but has been receiving treatment for juvenile open-angle glaucoma since he was 13. At the time of his diagnosis, he exhibited no signs or symptoms of the potentially blinding eye disease. His glaucoma was only discovered because of a routine eye exam.

Glaucoma causes loss of sight by slowly damaging a part of the eye called the optic nerve. When the optic nerve becomes damaged, it usually begins to damage peripheral vision. Without treatment, central vision becomes diminished. It is the second leading cause of blindness, second only to cataracts.

“There were no warning signs. I had very close to 20/20 vision and never had any pain,” said DeGeorge. “But, when the doctors checked the pressures in my eyes, they were unbelievably high and my optic nerves had shown signs of damage.”

After his diagnosis, DeGeorge began treatment with a glaucoma specialist, Mildred M.G. Olivier, M.D. of the Midwest Glaucoma Center. Initial treatment included medications but later a Trabeculectomy (surgery) was needed in the right eye to lower the eye pressure so that no further damage would occur. Today, thanks to the early detection and consistently following his doctor’s directions, DeGeorge needs only to take eye drops in his left eye once a day.

“Although having glaucoma at such a young age is rare, I think A.J.’s story demonstrates the need for everyone, including those young and more mature, to receive an eye exam,” said Dr. Olivier. “There is no cure for glaucoma, but with early treatment, we can lessen the risk of severe vision loss.”

As of today, there are more than 2.2 million Americans over the age of 40 who have been diagnosed. Unfortunately, once glaucoma takes away sight, it cannot be restored. That is why Prevent Blindness America, the leading volunteer eye health and safety organization, has joined other leading eye care groups in designating January as National Glaucoma Awareness Month in an effort to educate the public on the disease.

Prevent Blindness America offers free informational resources, including treatment options and general information through its Web site and toll free number. "The Glaucoma Learning Center," at [www.preventblindness.org/glaucoma](http://www.preventblindness.org/glaucoma), contains a variety of resources including an adult vision risk assessment and an interactive guide on how to take eye drops. The Web site also includes "The Glaucoma Web Discussion Forum" that allows patients and caregivers the opportunity to discuss online all subjects related to the disease.

Prevent Blindness America also offers free printed materials including the "Guide for People with Glaucoma." This comprehensive booklet serves as a handbook for patients and includes information on what to expect during treatment and even a list of questions to ask the eye doctor.

And, Prevent Blindness America offers a resource directory for those who may require financial assistance. And, consumers can obtain free printed materials on glaucoma in either English or Spanish by calling 1-800-331-2020. Additional information can be found online at [www.preventblindness.org/glaucoma](http://www.preventblindness.org/glaucoma).

### **About Prevent Blindness America**

Founded in 1908, Prevent Blindness America is the nation's leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight. Focused on promoting a continuum of vision care, Prevent Blindness America touches the lives of millions of people each year through public and professional education, advocacy, certified vision screening and training, community and patient service programs and research. These services are made possible through the generous support of the American public. Together with a network of affiliates, divisions and chapters, it's committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America. For more information, or to make a contribution to the sight-saving fund, call 1-800-331-2020 or visit us on the Web at [www.preventblindness.org](http://www.preventblindness.org).

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