

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information:
Prevent Blindness America
Sarah Hecker
(312) 363-6035

PREVENT BLINDNESS AMERICA MOURNS LOSS OF SIGHT-SAVING PIONEER VIRGINIA S. BOYCE SCHOONMAKER

CHICAGO (July 15, 2009) – Prevent Blindness America, the nation’s oldest volunteer eye health and safety organization, is mourning the loss of one of its most dedicated and accomplished family members, Ms. Virginia S. Boyce Schoonmaker. She served as Executive Director of Prevent Blindness America (formerly the National Society to Prevent Blindness) from 1972 – 1982, having held several other executive staff positions over the previous 35 years.

Among Boyce’s achievements with the organization were the design and promotion of a Home Eye Test for preschoolers, which is now used in various countries, development of the first glaucoma screening and educational program in the United States, plans for an intensive cataract education campaign, promotion of a TV Eye Test, initiation of a massive campaign to alert the nation to diabetic retinopathy and other retinal diseases, and the leadership of public education campaigns about ways to reduce eye injuries in sports, at schools and at work.

Over the years, Boyce worked with countless volunteers, medical luminaries, association leaders and board members. Her friendship and support of Dr. Carl Kupfer in establishing the National Eye Institute was key to its success and helped the NEI rapidly increase federal funding and attention to blindness prevention.

For her exemplary accomplishments, Boyce has been honored by numerous organizations including the National Health Council, the American Academy of Ophthalmology, Delta Gamma Fraternity, the Joint Commission on Allied Health Personnel in Ophthalmology, International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, and the Benedictine Health Foundation. Prevent Blindness America has also bestowed on her several accolades including a Lifetime Achievement award. In addition, Prevent Blindness America has also established the “Virginia S. Boyce Award” given to individuals or groups for outstanding service to the public and vision health community.

Born in 1912 in Kyserike, N.Y., Boyce earned a Bachelor of Science degree from New York University and completed graduate course work in public health,

epidemiology and social research at Columbia University, NYU and Yale University. For most of her life she split her time between her family homestead in Ulster County, NY and her Greenwich Village apartment.

“For 45 years, Prevent Blindness America has had the great fortune and privilege to have this outstanding individual, Virginia S. Boyce, serve not only our organization, but individuals across the globe as well,” said Hugh R. Parry, president and CEO of Prevent Blindness America. “It is with sadness that we learned of her passing. But we are inspired by her passion and dedication to preserving vision and pledge to continue our common mission of protecting the precious gift of sight in her honor.”

For more information on Ms. Boyce or Prevent Blindness America, please call (800) 331-2020 or log on to preventblindness.org.

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, Prevent Blindness America is committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America. For more information, or to make a contribution to the sight-saving fund, call (800) 331-2020 or visit us on the Web at preventblindness.org.