

Helping Others Help Themselves

There are approximately 10 million blind or visually impaired people in the United States. Every 7 minutes someone in America will become blind or visually impaired. Macular Degeneration is one of the leading causes of low vision.

Life for these individuals can be very difficult. Fortunately, there are organizations, like the Tri-State Independent Blind Society, Inc., willing to provide products and services to make life easier for them.

The Tri-State Independent Blind Society is a non-profit organization founded in 1973 by Don Gagne and 9 others who donated \$10 each for its establishment. Don still serves as executive director.



Don Gagne

Although the Tri-State Independent Blind Society was established to assist the visually impaired, over the years many different demographics have been helped. It opened the first low vision center in Iowa and was the first organization in Dubuque to offer handicapped transportation, although that responsibility was later transferred to Project Concern. At one time the society also helped to feed the hungry in Dubuque. It is still the only organization in the area that offers no-cost training to those with visual impairments.

There are many different facets to the Blind Society. All of its products, services, and programs are in place to either raise money to be used for the visually impaired and senior citizens, or to help them directly. The 20-plus employees are needed to maintain the quality and scope of offerings.

The Low Vision Center and Eye Store is a training facility for maintaining independent living and improving the quality of life of those effected by visual impairments. Within this facility computer classes and many other independent-living skills are taught, such as kitchen and cooking skills, cane travel, Braille, and the proper use of a variety of other equipment. Individuals can also participate in a social group, which offers card playing, crafts, bowling, games, picnics, outings, and many other activities.



Tri-State Blind's Social Group

The Center has magnifiers; large print calendars; super jumbo playing cards; talking watches, talking clocks, and other talking devices; Lions Club canes; telephones; voice dialers; kitchen devices; personal and

health products; marking and labeling devices; and just about any other item that will assist the visually impaired.

A new program is up and running whereby disabled and elderly people can bring in items they have crocheted, sewed, worked in wood, or otherwise made, to sell at the bookstore and during bingo. The proceeds from the sales go directly to those individuals who made the items. The Society is currently looking for more people to make items, and they encourage the public to come and see the selection of items available.

The Society continues to offer fruit baskets to the visually impaired and shut-ins during the Christmas in July program.

The bookstore itself exists because generous people donated their books for resale. Hard cover, paper back, large print books: thousands of books, as well as some audio cassettes and miscellaneous things, are available. Sales from these items help fund the Society's operations.



Another way to support the Blind Society and its programs is to attend bingo. Bingo is offered Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday. Warm-up games start at 6:25 p.m. with the regular games at 7:00 p.m. The Society sells concessions, and a gift shop is open as well. Over 50 games are played each evening, including two jackpot games that grow to \$1,000 each. Up to \$6,000 is paid out each bingo night.

The Tri-State Independent Blind Society's Board of Directors have one goal in mind: that of helping people in need. They are constantly looking at ways to expand the Society's services.

Currently, transportation is provided to and from Society activities. The goal is to add transportation to other places as well, like doctor's offices and grocery stores, as funds become available. Recently, the Blind Society received a grant from the Dubuque Racing Association, which helped with the expansion of the Low Vision Center and the Eye Store. Other capital improvements and funding for building upkeep have been paid for through the bequests of several generous families. In the future more building updates are planned. The Society does not receive any financial assistance from state or federal funding. Please consider making a donation to the Tri-State Independent Blind Society and remember them in your estate planning.

The Tri-State Independent Blind Society encourages anyone who has difficulty doing everyday tasks, like reading the newspaper, to seek help. Located at 3333 Asbury Road, Dubuque, the Blind Society is a great place to start. Low Vision Clinic hours are Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and the bookstore is open Monday through Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Phone 563-556-8746 or e-mail tristateblind@qwestoffice.net.

The directors and staff would also like to express their appreciation for the public's support. As a non-profit organization, it can always use the help of others.

Tri-State Independent Blind Society



**3333 ASBURY ROAD
DUBUQUE, IA
563-556-8746**

Mission Statement:

*To Improve The Quality Of Life For The Blind
And Low Vision Individuals Of Our Community
And To Help Them Live Independently.*