Visually Impaired Once Again Sees A Low Vision Center Available

In early 1980, Ida Fracasse requested the hierarchy of Foothill Presbyterian Hospital establish a Low Vision Center within their jurisdiction. In the seven years that EYE-DAS, the support organization for the blind and visually impaired had then been in operation, the need had become apparent. The support group was helping in a big way, but the professionals in the eye care business could be of even greater help. New techniques were being devised that could allow the blind and visually impaired to work and live more productive and independent lives. The nearest centers offering these services were in the Los Angeles area and extremely difficult to reach for those needing it.

The idea wasn't easily accepted. Fracasse told the board that it would not be a profitable business, but since FPH was not a for-profit operation, it seemed logical that they develop such a program as part of their outreach. Eventually the program was accepted and operated as an area and community benefit known as The Gene Beckwith Low Vision Center. Beckwith, deceased, had been an outstanding blind community leader and advocate for the visually impaired. Sometime after, the designation was changed to Foothill Center for the Partially Sighted.

Suddenly, in 2009, with an untimely abruptness, the Low Vision Center was closed. Nothing officially was announced, but the Low Vision Center had closed.

The loss of this area and community asset was devastating to all who used its services and those who had supported its concept. Staff from Fullerton College of Optometry who had weekly staffed the facility were surprised by the suddenness of its closure. Many patients were confused and left with unresolved problems. When inquiries were made persons involved were without explanation. After several weeks of conflicting inquiries the reason given was that because of the drastic economic downturn it required equal drastic and not always popular business decisions.

Foothill Presbyterian Hospital had several years before, become a part of Citrus Valley Health Partners and as such was subject to decisions made at a higher level of management. It appeared to many that no local input or discussion had been requested or made prior to the decision for closure where alternative options might have been explored or offered. Many long-time supporters of the center were left confused and with negative feelings.

Now there is good news for the visually challenged community. A state-of-the-art Low Vision Clinic under the auspices of Western University of Health Sciences has just opened in Pomona. Thanks to their foresight, the blind and low vision citizens of the area will once again be able to learn of the latest techniques available to help them cope and live more productive and independent lives. Ida Fracasse, who in 1975 began the EYE-DAS Foundation for the Visually Impaired and Blind stated, "Although those serving the visually impaired community were devastated by the closure of Glendora's Low Vision Center, we rejoice at the announcement of the opening of Western University's Eye Care Center. This truly incredible center offers the latest technically advanced electronic testing and aids as well as highly qualified, skilled, motivated and caring individuals to serve the needs of the members of our visually impaired communities. From the ashes of disappointment has risen more than we could have ever hoped for."