
Device allows woman to see more with technology

BY BRIAN SMITH / PUBLISHED: JULY 20, 2019 / SCHUYLKILL HAVEN

A woman who has been legally blind her entire life has high hopes that she will soon be able to do some things she never could.

Charlette Golphin, 66, a native of Philadelphia who has lived in Schuylkill County since 1989, suffers from retinitis pigmentosa, an inherited disease that causes loss of peripheral vision and other problems, but seldom total blindness. Golphin must sit right next to the television set to see, holds her cellphone right at her face, and must ask people to help her read labels in the store. However, in the coming week, a set of electronic glasses, which the Lions Club has bought her, may make it easier for her to perform those tasks, and do a few others for the first time.

“The first thing I am going to do is get a sewing machine, because I want to learn to sew,” she said Friday while waiting for Dawn Prall, of Sage Vision, to arrive and fit her for a set of NuEyes electronic glasses.

“I’ve been legally blind all my life, and Paul Moyer called me and said the Lion’s Club wanted to bless me with these glasses,” she said, sitting with her family at the Schuylkill Haven Highrise — the site chosen for the meeting. Golphin lives on FitzReed Avenue. She is married for 35 years to Darnell Golphin, who is totally blind, losing his sight at age 13, and can often be seen playing his flute or saxophone in the community.

Golphin said she was born premature, at six months.



ANDY MATSKO / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Dawn Prall, right, president/CEO of Sage Vision, shows glasses to be fitted on Charlette Golphin, left, of Schuylkill Haven, on Friday, July 19, 2019. Charlette has been legally blind all her life and was fitted with NuEyes through money raised by the Lions Service Foundation. At center is Charlette’s husband Darnell Golphin.

“So what they did back then, they used a lot of light and oxygen (in the incubator) and that’s what made it worse,” she said.

When Prall, owner of Sage Vision, arrived, she helped Golphin don a device resembling military night vision goggles, explaining the idea behind electronic glasses.

While research continues into the 600 diseases of the eye, the quest to cure the blindness they cause seems never ending. Spinoffs from military night vision technology can make the wait easier for those who, like Golphin, suffer low vision.

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“What do people do in the mean time? People need to function in their lives,” Prall said. NuEyes is one of several manufactures of electronic glasses.

The device Golphin was trying on is a combination of camera and computer. While it helped her to see her grandson, Darnell — named after his grandfather — sitting beside her, there remains much adjustment and practice to get it right. Prall said there is about 20 hours of training involved.

Golphin tried on a smaller device — more closely resembling the Star Trek device. This one seemed less effective and bathed what she could see in a greenish hue.

Prall said that many people report that and then, with time, it goes away as the brain becomes used to the device.

“You don’t see with your eyes. You see with your brain,” she had said earlier in her presentation. Schuylkill Haven Lions Club President Gerald Reichert, his wife, Kathy, and Wayne Paul Moyer, of Wayne Township, board member of the Northeast Pennsylvania Lions Service Foundation, presented Sage Vision with a \$6,000 check to cover the cost of the glasses.

“Sight First” is our motto, Reichert said, in reference to the service club’s well-known dedication to providing eyeglasses to those in need.

He explained the origin of the Schuylkill Haven Lion’s Community Charity. “In 2001, for over 50 years, we ran the ambulance association in Schuylkill Haven.



In 2001, as membership dwindled, we couldn’t keep members on the board, so we merged with Pottsville EMS, but all the money that we invested over the years did not go to Pottsville,” he said. “In the beginning, we took \$300,000 and put it with the Schuylkill Foundation,” he said. The interest from which is used for various grants — recently 12 \$1,000 grants for medical students. The Schuylkill Haven Lion’s and Moyer’s group went roughly halves on the glasses for Golphin.

Moyer explained how the Lions, the Golphins, and Sage got together. He had been attending a Lions convention in Columbus, Ohio, in September and saw a woman at a table with a seeing eye dog and wearing a device he compared to that worn by the Star Trek character Giordi La Forge. The woman turned out to be a doctor who suffers macular degeneration and expressed satisfaction with the electronic glasses.

Returning home, Moyer did some research on the internet and found Sage Vision and went looking for someone who could benefit from the technology. Brian Clauser, of Clauser Wind Instrument Repair, Orwigsburg, a fellow member of Moyer’s church, who had worked on Darnell’s saxophone, suggested the Golphins.
