



Blind Children's Learning Center
18542-B Vanderlip Avenue
Santa Ana, CA 92705
714.573.888
www.blindkids.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Carolyn Baker
714.573.8888 x 2102
carolyn.baker@blindkids.org

Volunteers Unite to Create a Memorable Dining Experience to Benefit Blind Children's Learning Center

Santa Ana, Calif. (November 5, 2013) – Inspired by a visit to Blind Children's Learning Center, Kelly Vuong, Microsoft Community Development Specialist, rallied a team of volunteers to create a unique dining experience with the goal to build awareness of the challenges facing individuals with visual impairments and to raise funds for the Adaptive Technology Program at Blind Children's Learning Center. They succeeded in raising more than \$16,000 and creating an exceptionally memorable evening.

Sponsored by Microsoft, more than 80 guests experienced dining in the dark at The Waterfront Beach Resort, a Hilton Hotel in Huntington Beach, Calif. Chef Ben LaFleche created an exquisite six course meal to be a multi-sensory experience. Prior to their dining experience, guests were blindfolded and escorted into the dining room by volunteers who were blind or visually impaired. At each table, the volunteers instructed the guests on the techniques of eating without sight.



L to R: Nasim Mazaheri, Hessam Toudiee, Hasiba Barati, Paulina Irigoyen and Ali Mazaheri

As guests removed their blindfolds, the reactions were consistent with many diners expressing the experience was something they would never forget.

"...right after we took the blindfolds off, the feeling was invaluable. I now have so much compassion and empathy for individuals who are blind and can relate...the behavior and feelings, really hit home for everyone... such a powerful demonstration," said Helane Cohen, Microsoft US SMB.

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“Talk about an eye opening event for us. It made us appreciate the things like having vision that we sometimes take for granted,” expressed Hessam Toudiee, Microsoft Technology Strategist.

Wayne Heidle, an Adaptive Technology Specialist and volunteer at the Center, served as Master of Ceremonies for the evening. As an adult, Heidle developed Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP) and is legally blind. Using his personal experiences and humor, Heidle entertained guests with his perspective on what it is like to be visually impaired.

The evening was also very significant to Heidle because he is leading the efforts to provide adaptive technology for students at the Center.

“Technology can be easily adapted for use by children with visual impairments and multiple disabilities. It heightens their learning experience and makes a significant difference in their lives. Many educational programs for individuals with disabilities only run on Windows platform. So it was a simple decision to adopt Windows 8 with touch screens and Surface Pro tablets as the technology that will make the most difference in the lives of our students. We are deeply grateful to have this relationship with Microsoft,” said Heidle.



Guests experience walking to their tables blindfolded.

“Microsoft has a long history of commitment to accessibility. We strive to build accessibility features into many of our products and services and partner with other companies to discover new ways of using technology to help improve and transform people’s lives. Microsoft Retail Stores take this to heart and are honored to support Blind Children’s Learning Center in empowering children with visual impairments to reach their full potential,” said Vuong.

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About Blind Children’s Learning Center

Blind Children’s Learning Center, a non-profit agency, provides services for children with visual impairments. Founded in 1962 by six adults who were blind, the organization was originally called “Services for the Blind Orange County.” The founders quickly discovered the key to helping a person with visual impairments was to start working with them at a very early age. Today the agency serves children and their families through Bright Visions Early Childhood Center (onsite preschool) and Outreach Services with the mission to provide early intervention, education and services for blind, visually impaired or deaf-blind children and their families to empower independence. For more information please visit www.blindkids.org