

JUPITER COURIER

Newsweekly

RELAX

AND GET YOUR COCONUT ON

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Beyond Blind

Loggerhead Fitness gives back:
Work out, keep fit, socialize **Page 10**

Kudos to Kylee

Softball district loss can't erase JHS
season or Kylee's kudos **Page 23**

'Seeing' their way to fitness

Beyond Blind Institute

BARBARA WOODWORTH
PROVIDED TO THE COURIER NEWSWEEKLY

Eric Seyman, Mort Wexler and Kevin Wesel have something in common.

All reside in Jupiter, all are sight-impaired or blind and all, as members of the Beyond Blind Institute, participate in Bodies Beyond Blindness™, a twice weekly program held at Loggerhead Fitness Center in Juno Beach.

Thanks to the generous sponsorship of Loggerhead Fitness owner Rick Opton, BeyondBlind members meet privately Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, to work out, keep fit and socialize; all while maintaining program mandates (weigh-ins & BMI measurements) for healthy living and eating.

Now in its third year of hosting this program, Loggerhead Fitness is well-recognized for giving back.

"It's our way of supporting the Jupiter/

Juno community. Our ongoing commitment to BBI reaps great rewards. It's gratifying to see the positive difference the fitness program, under the direction of BBI CEO Joyce Gugel, has made in the lives and health of its members," says Opton.

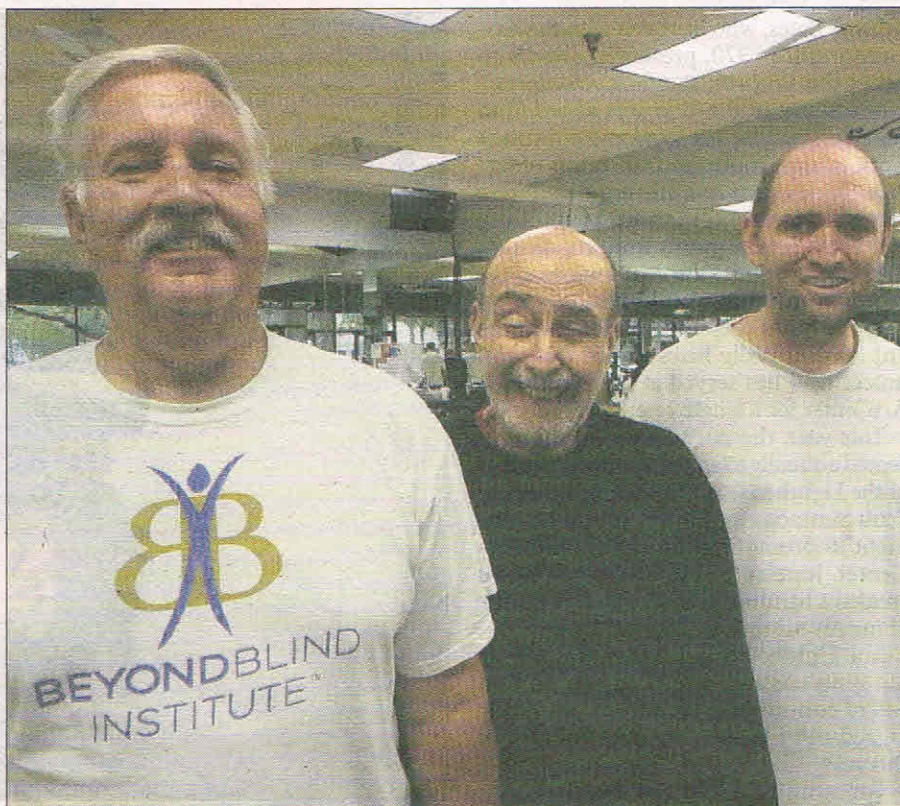
According to Gugel, legally blind since her early twenties, "BBI is an innovative program that takes visually impaired and blind individuals from isolation to illumination by empowering them with individualized lifestyle and career possibilities.

The Institute (located in Palm Beach Gardens) focuses on health, wellness, education and a comprehensive social life that enhances the confidence and well-being of each member."

CHANGING WORLDS

It was six years ago that Eric Seyman's world changed — drastically.

That's when this ex-Marine, former police officer and shipping company manager



Eric Seyman, Mort Wexler and Kevin Wesel

PROVIDED PHOTO / BBI

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JUPITER COURIER
Newsweekly

The Jupiter Courier Newsweekly is a weekly publication of Scripps Treasure Coast Publishing Co., PO Box 9009, Stuart, Florida 34995-9009.

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Letters to the Editor
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CommunityFeatures

lost his sight. Hit while motorcycling with friends, Eric spent the next three months in a coma, not expected to live. Although consciousness returned, his sight did not. Putting it in perspective, Eric said, "I lost my ability to see but a friend lost his life."

In the months and years that intervened, Eric entered a new and sightless world. Legally blind, he could no longer work or enjoy such recreational pastimes as golf.

"Before the accident I'd look out at the world each morning. Now there was no world to see," he related. "When your environment and your routine change so monumentally it's quite an adjustment."

Fortunately a chance meeting between Eric's wife and Joyce Gugel – the heart and soul of BBI – led Eric to BBI. He signed on and for the past two-years he's been an ardent member and supporter.

"Life is what it is. My lack of sight won't change, but thanks to BBI I'm now involved in more activities. I do more physically and I take a greater interest in things. I walk my non-service dog (who is certain she's earned service dog status) and ride a stationary bike. I'm also well-aware of the importance of maintaining my health; even while enjoying my wife's fabulous cooking," said Eric.

At 63, Eric well knows the value of humor. He laughs often and heartily and always tries to "see" the bright side. "You either laugh or cry. You accept or stay stagnant," believes Eric, who successfully conveyed this concept to his four grown children.

"Thankful for BBI," Eric said, "It's opened my world a little wider and I've learned that many sighted people really don't see at all." For Eric, that is a sad and unacceptable commentary on life.

ACTIVELY PARTICIPATES

Mort Wexler may be 88 years of age – and completely blind – but, thanks to BBI, he actively participates in life.

"When my wife learned about BBI and mentioned it to me I knew it was just what I needed to get off the couch and into the world again," said Mort.

A BBI member for the past two years, he finds the Loggerhead fitness program

pivotal.

"It's impacted my life in two ways. Strengthening my body enables me to get around more and gives me something to look forward to," he said.

On days when BBI's fitness, culinary and art programs aren't in session, Mort keeps in touch with fellow BBI members. Each morning he does deep knee bends to keep his flexibility.

"BBI gave me the opportunity to become a person again; to feel worthwhile. Before I did the blind shuffle; now when my 6-year-old black lab service dog, Mia, and I take a walk, I walk as though I can see," said Mort, with a smile that bespeaks a thousand words.

HEALTHIER/MEETING MORE

Kevin Wesel initially learned about BBI through a newspaper article. That was two years ago and ever since he's been an active participant in all BeyondBlind programs; relying on Palm Tran and his parents for transportation.

"As a result of BBI," he said, "I'm healthier and meeting more people. I walk more, eat better and have increased my level of exercise."

Acknowledging that he now feels better about himself, Kevin says, "I have a more positive feeling of self-worth."

Looking ahead, Kevin, who lives independently, looks forward to being able

to get a job despite a visual impairment that inhibits his ability to read small print. Like many BBI members, Kevin is appreciative of this program and would like to see it grow in number of programs as well as in its focus on career preparation.

For those interested in learning more about BeyondBlind, or donating to this worthy organization, the web site is www.BeyondBlind.org.

Barbara Woodworth is a full-time journalist and proverbial snow-bird who looks forward to spending winters, along with her husband, in the Jupiter/Juno area. Her more than 1,500 articles appear in 50-plus international, national, regional and local publications.

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