

Source: "Diario Las Americas"
07-18-2009

Let's help the organization "Miami Lighthouse for the Blind"

By Ileana Ros-Lehtinen

As an experienced financial executive, Virginia Jacko worked for more than 24 years at Purdue University in Indiana. However, due to her gradual vision loss, she moved to South Florida and became a client of Miami Lighthouse for the Blind which has offered vision rehabilitation, vocational education, and social services to the blind or visually impaired community since the 1930's. Ms. Jacko was then named Treasurer of the Board of Directors and at present, she is President and Chief Executive Officer of this noble organization.

Under Virginia's leadership, Miami Lighthouse has increased its clients hours of service by 35%, and the programs for children and adults has grown significantly, taking care of the specific needs of every group with especially designed programs according to their ages. Beginning with social group activities, employment opportunities, family support initiatives and recreational programs, this organization offers emotional and physical support to groups of all the ages.

Vision is a gift and is one of the most important tools we have to interact and understand our surrounding world, which is the reason why they teach personal management classes, which include learning how to cook, personal grooming and hygiene, and computer training classes, which are essential for the continuous learning process. Miami Lighthouse for the Blind has facilitated the transitional process for numerous people and has become a strong voice for the visually impaired community, fighting to get more attention, funding, and resources.

Equally important are the prevention and early detection programs, especially for the youth. That is why I have sponsored the 2009 Vision Care Law for the Children. This law offers funds to the states to complement efforts to offer vision exams, to correct vision problems, to educate medical assistants, and to obtain information to improve the vision health programs. I have also co-sponsored the legislation to designate the decade from 2010 until 2020 as the "Vision Decade," for the purpose of keeping constant attention on the changes of public health associated with visual illnesses.

Through those actions, we will be able to better emphasize the need for federal funding to support and maintain preventative investigations, early detection, and access to treatment and rehabilitation resources. As co-president of the Central Vision Committee of the Congress, in alliance with Miami Lighthouse for the Blind, I have committed myself to convert those goals into reality.

I recently visited this organization and I have personally witnessed how the children develop their skills and participate in fun recreational activities daily. I could see how the lives of these people have greatly improved with their participation at Miami Lighthouse for the Blind, and I know that the available programming will be expanded and improved.

Miami Lighthouse has recently received the *One Million Dollar Challenge in Memory of Sash A. Spencer*, which will help ensure the organization will be able to continue offering free services to the blind and visually impaired community in Miami-Dade and Monroe counties. We, as a community can participate and help them serving their mission.