

Blind

DARK glasses, a white cane and a seeing-eye dog are thought of as trademarks of the blind. But at the Doran Resource Center for the Blind, that stereotype is challenged.

In fact, Hugh McIntyre shows visitors around the center like a man with full visual capabilities, yet he is legally blind. After he lost his center of vision, McIntyre thought his life had ended. Now, with the help of the Doran Center he leads an active life and serves as its executive director.

With the newly opened building at 413 Laurel St., the center hopes to reach out to other partially sighted individuals in Santa Cruz. Once run as a one-day-a-week service at the Salvation Army, the Doran Center now has its own building, complete with kitchen, meeting room, ramps

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Bringing Light Into Darkness

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Doran Center brings independence to the visually impaired

for the handicapped and a low-vision clinic.

Started 10 years ago by three Santa Cruz women who had worked with the blind in other areas, the Doran Center is the only facility in Santa Cruz County dedicated to helping those with extremely poor vision. The new building was donated and refurbished by Ray Westman, one of the original founders and current center president, and is the "fulfillment of a dream," said McIntyre.

McIntyre said the center's purpose is to help legally blind citizens realize their potential and gain confidence.

"(We hope) to help visually impaired people obtain an optimum degree of independence and enjoyment of life," said McIntyre. "We use the word 'blind' as an acronym — 'Bringing Light Into Darkness.'"

The hallmark of the Doran Center's program is its low-vision clinic. Marc Shaw, the center's optometrist, explained the low-vision clinic is designed to treat patients with ailments beyond the help of regular optometry.

"There's a general lack of sensitivity to low-vision patients by professionals. Generally, (low-vision pa-

tients) go to different eye doctors who will say, 'There's nothing I can do for you.' And they'll go multiple years without being aware that something like our clinic exists," Shaw said.

Hugh McIntyre is one such person. Three years ago McIntyre was employed as an electronics engineer. Sitting at his desk one day working on a specification, his eyesight suddenly "went crazy."

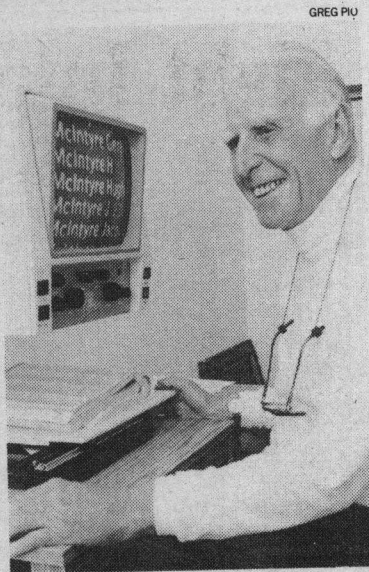
McIntyre, then 62, fell victim to a condition known as macular degeneration, which affects primarily older adults. Within four months he had lost his center of vision and could

only see through the corners of his eyes.

After various treatments, the prognosis was always the same: McIntyre's eyesight would remain as it was. Before he found out about the Doran Center he said he "bumbled around for about a year" and caused his family "a bunch of grief." His pride was so damaged that he even refused a white cane.

McIntyre said people who suddenly lose their vision "are completely unprepared to cope with the situation. What happens is that you're suddenly alone and if you're not careful, you build a jail for yourself."

After finding out about the Doran Center, McIntyre still was skeptical. He thought to himself, "What can they do for me?" Shaw designed some



Lightbringer: Hugh McIntyre at documents reader.

glasses that don't alleviate his problem but help him do things he was unable to before. Now he does his own banking, he reads and he even wrote one "bad novel" on his Macintosh computer, which has a program to enlarge type.

Misconceptions about partially sighted persons are still prevalent, McIntyre said.

"People believe (the blind) are helpless and useless. To me, it's just a nuisance, just like being nearsighted. Just like everyone else, we want to be productive and accepted," he said.

"There's a need for public education to let the world know that when they see a white cane it doesn't necessarily mean the person is stone blind. People should know that we're just like them except we don't see as well." •

—Rose Dean