



The white cane as a concept evolved when in 1930, the Lions of Peoria supported the idea of using the white cane with a red band to assist the blind in their independence. President Lyndon B. Johnson, with the support of Congress and in conjunction with the National Federation of the Blind declared October 15 of each year as White Cane Safety Day. The President recognized the white cane as a staff of independence for the blind and indeed, the white cane and harness has become a symbol of self-reliance and self-sufficiency for the blind citizens of the United States of America. The idea spread rapidly throughout the United States, and internationally. White cane day was celebrated this year as far afield as Yangon, Myanmar.

MCPHS School of Optometry's involvement was a joint effort by Dr. Lou Frank OD, Associate Professor and Kelly Morgese, president of the Student American Academy of Optometry Club at MCPHS. This fall, as colored leaves sprinkled the sidewalks and the blustery wind brought a chill to the air, MCPHS School of Optometry participated in White Cane Safety Day as they have done in the three years before. The celebration started in front of the Police Station, across from the Eye and Vision Center, and the walk through Worcester streets ended at the library where a fair was held. The walk is graced by everyone's favorite golden retriever guide dog, Harmony. This beautiful animal knows how to steal everyone's heart, but his heart belongs to Peg.

Navigating the cityscape blindfolded may seem like a dangerous task, but each participant is guided by a sighted guide that attended six weeks of training prior to the event. "The sighted guides first learn how to traverse doors, stairs and ramps and then move on to field training in Elm Park, where all four corners of the park has pedestrian crossings present different challenges to the blind," says Ms. Morgese.

Dignitaries taking the walk included Tony Economou from the Worcester City Council and John R.

Kelly, city commissioner of Inspectional services. “The blind rely heavily on the city infrastructure,” says Ms. Morgese of the importance of including community leaders on the walk. Attorney Elizabeth Myska, an attorney from Worcester, serves as a coordinator for the White Cane Day Event. Ms. Myska, who has Retinitis Pigmentosa, has been legally blind since 2005.

In addition to several MCPHS Students, Provost of the Worcester campus, Caroline Zeind and campus security officer Hazel Berry attended and participated in the event. A round table discussion was hosted by the dean of MCPHS School of Optometry, Dr. Morris Berman at the conclusion of the walk. The fair presented representatives from the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind, the Worcester Talking Book Library and the Massachusetts Office on Disabilities.