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COMMUNITY

White Cane Week about redefining vision loss

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Born with congenital glaucoma, Ian White had surgery as an infant that afforded him functional vision for four decades.

But at 40 years old, that all changed.

White developed cataracts which would eventually lead to a series of corneal, then retinal complications that would leave him blind.

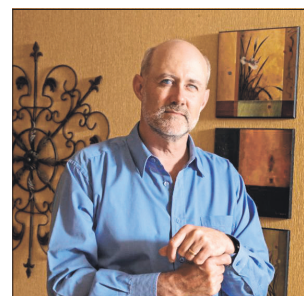
"I was sort of an emotional train wreck," White said, thinking back to that time - more than 16 years ago. "All of the things I used to redefine myself were based on what I could see."

At the time, White worked as a senior project manager of a corporate interior design firm. He spent his pastime reading and immersed himself in the realm of art and design.

"I was one of those people who just couldn't imagine what it would be like to live without being able to see," White said. "It meant I completely had to redefine how I saw myself in the world - what made me useful and interesting in the world and what kinds of things would give my life meaning."

For White, that meant finding a new way to read, through audio books, and going back to university to pursue a degree in philosophy.

"I started out very slowly," White said. "I got connected with the CNIB and I



Andrew Francis Wallace
/ Toronto Star

**CCB Toronto
Visionaries President,
Ian White.**

got some skill support - orientation and mobility - and a little bit of braille, and I got connected with the CNIB's library, which is now the Centre for Equitable Library Access."

Opening himself up to new opportunities led White to a volunteer position with the CNIB, where he eventually met the people with whom he would form the Canadian Council of the Blind's Toronto Visionaries, of which White is currently the president.

White says the CCB is dedicated to helping individuals and families dealing with vision loss through providing them with the resources and supports they need, including connecting them with others who are living with vision loss.

"One of the things we found is folks who are just at the beginning of their journey with vision loss, whether it's come on suddenly or it's something that is going to develop gradually as

their diagnosis progresses, it's a real struggle to sort of imagine how your life will be at a point in the future where you can't see as well as you do now," White said.

"We set up as many opportunities as we can for folks to get together socially and recreationally, and basically give them an excuse to get together with other people in an environment where sharing information is part of the deal."

This year, White Cane Week, a week to promote awareness about and provide resources for those living with vision loss, runs from Feb. 4 to Feb. 11 and CCB Toronto Visionaries kicked it off with their Experience Expo, held on Feb. 3.

The annual event displays exhibits from a variety of organizations, including recreational groups, adaptive technologies companies, employment services, educational support groups and more.

White says the idea behind White Cane Week is for the blind community to develop initiatives that will educate the public on both the challenges and successes that come with living with vision loss.

Alongside his work within the blind community, White says he is dedicated to promoting awareness everywhere he goes.

To learn more about White Cane Week and the events in your community, visit ccbnational.net.

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