

## **A white cane stands for independence (opinion)**

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VisionCorps President and CEO Dennis Steiner, who is believed to be one of only a handful of blind CEOs in the United States. Sunday Q&A Friday, November 9, 2018

DAN MARSCHKA | Staff Photographer

The white cane is a vital tool that helps people with low vision navigate their environment safely. It is a personal choice for many who use it to scan and detect for obstacles in front of them.

Every day, thousands of Americans use their white cane as they travel to school, work and other important destinations. As a person with a vision impairment, I understand the impact the cane can have on someone's life. Many of our employees and clients rely on it to safely and independently move throughout the community.

The white cane is not only an important tool. Along with dog guides, it is also a symbol of personal and economic autonomy for people who are blind.

Today is national White Cane Safety Day. It's a day that acknowledges the independence of people who are blind and creates awareness about white cane laws. First signed as a proclamation by President Lyndon Johnson in 1964, White Cane Safety Day recognizes the many achievements of people who are blind and the movement from dependency to independence.

Many people are unaware that Pennsylvania has a white cane law. It states: "The driver of a vehicle shall yield the right-of-way to any totally or partially blind pedestrian carrying a clearly visible white cane or accompanied by a guide dog and shall take such precautions as may be necessary to avoid injuring or endangering the pedestrian and, if necessary, shall stop the vehicle in order to prevent injury or danger to the pedestrian."

Here are some helpful tips if you meet someone with a vision impairment and to better interact with individuals using a white cane:

— If you are driving or bicycling, the law requires that you stop and give the right of way to the person using the white cane.

— Don't shout warnings or try to physically steer us away from things our white canes may bump. We are trained to use our cane to explore what is around us, including cracks in the sidewalks or finding curbs.

— Please don't assume we always need help. Most cane users receive orientation and mobility training to learn how to use the cane. If you think someone might need help, please ask him or her.

— People who use white canes might have some vision — blindness is a spectrum. Don't be surprised if you see a cane user reading off a menu or looking at their phone.

VisionCorps offers comprehensive services, including orientation and mobility training, at no cost to individuals in Lancaster County. If you would like to find out more about using a white cane or any of our other services, such as occupational therapy, access technology instruction, or our educational and peer support groups, please call 717-205-4141.

*Dennis Steiner is the president and CEO of VisionCorps. He is legally blind and benefited from the services that VisionCorps now provides.*