“Better Together” Series: Getting to Know Robert K. Druger, MD and Druger Eye Care

Here is the second article in our series highlighting our valuable sponsors and partners in the community. We are only as good as the great people who surround and support us and we want you to know how much we appreciate the contributions they make. This time we are featuring Dr. Robert K. Druger and his staff at Druger Eye Care. Dr. Druger has been giving back to AURORA for over a decade and is a faithful supporter and attendee of our annual Musical Feast for the Eyes and Ears Fundraiser.

Dr. Druger has been practicing as a general ophthalmologist and eye surgeon since 1998. He is a native Syracusan who graduated from Nottingham High School and Syracuse University. He has degrees in geology, psychology and chemical engineering and has a Ph.D. in molecular biology, as well as an M.D. Druger Eye Care has been in existence since 2005. Through this thriving practice, located in Camillus, Dr. Druger has treated thousands of patients and has performed cataract surgery on over 20,000 people.

In His Own Words:

Why has it been important for you to support AURORA through the years?

AURORA is a local charity that has effects on a local level. The number of people that AURORA helps is amazing! And that is help that I see with patients in my office.

Supporting AURORA is supporting those that need help with visual and hearing skills in our community.

What can you tell our readers about the future for vision care in our community?

The need for eye and vision care and cataract surgery grows as our population ages. It is a great feeling to help people to see better! Improved surgical techniques and improved technology give people with cataracts who are starting to lose their vision a chance to not only see better, and keep it that way, but to get rid of their need for glasses for both distance and near for the rest of their lives! It is a miracle for many who have worn glasses their entire lives. There are also advances in diagnostic technology that prevent vision loss from glaucoma and macular degeneration and other diseases. So the future for vision care and cataract surgery looks bright for our community!

(continued on page 2)
What should we know about your practice?
Well, first of all I am not a typical doctor. I try to do my best to give my all to each patient. I know this is not perfect, but I try my best and also try to keep improving both my practice and myself. Each patient becomes family. I am also nothing without my staff. I am very grateful for my excellent staff and co-workers! It is sometimes difficult, and not perfect, but we try our best to give the best possible care of each patient that walks through the door!

Of all the things that you have studied and mastered, why did you choose to practice Ophthalmology?
I have a very varied education because I am a curious person. I was a professional student for a long time! My Ph.D. is in molecular biology and biochemistry where I studied proteins expressed in goldfish visual pathway. Goldfish and other fish can regenerate their optic nerves and reconnect to the brain after nerve injury. This ability is not found in higher vertebrates, including humans. I specifically studied the expression of a protein called keratin which is in cells that surround the optic nerve in fish. This protein is normally found in epidermal tissue, or skin. So for me it was either Ophthalmology or Dermatology as a specialty and I ended up an ophthalmologist. I find the eyes and world of vision amazing. It is extremely complex and each part of the eyes and visual pathway must work together for us to be able to see. It really is a miracle! I also like helping people to see better and help reduce their need for glasses with cataract surgery, which has become my specialty. I am very grateful that I have the ability to do this! I would also like to thank my wife and three kids! Without them I would lose perspective.

Employment Opportunity
If you are legally blind and seeking employment, AURORA is currently looking for candidates to apply for the switchboard operator position located at the Syracuse VA Medical Center. This rewarding opportunity serves the community of veterans and their families as an Ability One worksite which is one of the nation’s largest providers of jobs for people who are blind. Strong communication, customer service skills, and computer knowledge will help you succeed in this position. Full and part-time positions are available.

For more information or to apply, contact Mariah Boyle at 315-422-7263

Support Groups Going Live!
Starting in May, the Syracuse Blind Support Group will be meeting in person. The group will meet at St. David Court Apartments located at 99 Deerfield Road, East Syracuse, NY. The building is handicap accessible, on the Call-A-Bus line and has access to a large indoor and outdoor space. The meetings will continue to be held every third Wednesday of each month at 1pm. If you, or someone you know is interested in joining the group, call AURORA at 315-422-7263 for more information.
The Women of AURORA-Reach Out Event is Returning!

We are pleased to announce the return of this important fundraising event that brings together a growing number of women dedicated to our mission. It promises to be an informative evening hosted by the historic and elegant Century Club at 480 James Street in Syracuse on May 5th, 2022. Women of AURORA is borne of the belief that a woman-to-woman approach to learning about and supporting some of the emerging programs and services to assist people with vision and hearing loss, is an effective way to meet needs and make a difference in our community.

Because of these gatherings, children who are deaf or hard of hearing have received much-needed hearing aids and youth who are blind or visually impaired have learned to use adaptive technology so they can succeed in school and beyond. This year we will be highlighting and honoring the contributions and accomplishments of Sheila Austin, Director of Road to Emmaus Ministry of Syracuse. Emmaus Ministry is a valuable partner in helping us to reach out to the most vulnerable among our community.

Those in attendance will learn about the joint efforts of Emmaus Ministry and AURORA to provide access to vision and hearing screenings, special equipment and connection to health and vision care for those in our midst who are in greatest need. For more information about the event, contact Mariah Boyle at mboyle@auroraofcny.org or 315-422-7263.

Laying the Groundwork for a Healthier Community

AURORA is honored to be selected as a Cabrini Health Foundation 2022 grantee receiving close to $150,000 for outreach to the most vulnerable communities in Onondaga and Oswego County. The project will be called Project HELP which stands for Healthy, Engaged Lives in Progress. The goal is to address barriers to healthcare for underserved individuals in our community who are experiencing poverty, geographic isolation, age or chronic health conditions that affect vision or hearing health. To accomplish this, we will work with other community partners like Emmaus Ministry to offer vision and hearing screenings, health promotional events, aids and devices and make connections to the Liberty-AURORA Eye Center and other healthcare resources in our community.

The Mother Cabrini Health Foundation is a private, nonprofit organization whose mission is to improve the health and well-being of New Yorkers, bolster the health outcomes of vulnerable communities, eliminate barriers to care, and bridge gaps in health services. Named after a tireless advocate for immigrants, children, and the poor, the Mother Cabrini Health Foundation funds programs and initiatives across New York State that either provide direct healthcare services or address the social determinants of health. For more information, visit https://www.cabrinihealth.org/
Spotlight On: Advocacy

We are pleased to announce that Susan Gray, former Board President and support group facilitator, has agreed to serve voluntarily as a Community Advocate for AURORA on behalf of those we serve. This is a key position that addresses the on-going need for systemic improvements that lead to greater community-wide awareness, accessibility and accommodation for people with vision and hearing loss.

Susan was Board President of Options for Independence in Auburn and then served as Vice President of the board for ARISE in Syracuse. At the state level, Susan was on the board of the New York State Independent Living Council for six years. She is currently involved in the Onondaga County Emergency Preparedness committee.

We asked Susan to reflect on her new role and the importance of advocacy for people with disabilities. Excerpts from her essay, “Birth of a Blind Advocate” are shared here and can be found in its entirety on our website at www.auroraofcny.org.

From Susan Gray:

“What is an advocate, and how does one become one?” While definitions may vary, most advocates would agree that they work on behalf of others to promote fair and equitable lives, more independence and access to the things that differences present barriers to. Advocates work on behalf of unserved and underserved populations, informing and educating the world at large about the correct ways to communicate, build, educate, transport, work and live in a world that was not designed for them.

Becoming an advocate begins with the recognition that there is injustice in our world, and that rather than feel bad about that, you decide to change it. You recognize that your path has been populated with advocates fighting for you while you journeyed on. They showed you your strength through theirs, and taught you how to be your own best advocate. And, when you looked back on that path to the people coming along behind you, you decided to pass these lessons on.

While having a disability is an education in itself, one also needs to learn how the law works both for us and against us when advocating for access. Discrimination comes in many forms, but not all of it can be legislated. Even when the law is on our side, we are still dealing with people, and people require diplomacy. Tempering the feelings of injustice when discrimination occurs takes balance. Even when we are right, and our anger is justified, we need to try to balance that with effective communication, so that those we serve can be heard, and other’s minds can open to the possibilities of a fairer system.

While we will not win every battle, the importance of continuing to fight cannot be over-emphasized. Silence, on this front, is not an option.
Spotlight On: New Board Members

We are pleased to welcome two new members to our Board of Directors. They both bring personal and professional experience to our mission and we look forward to their contributions! Let’s get to know them:

Michael W. Mazzaroppi

Mr. Mazzaroppi currently holds two positions with Syracuse University (SU) as a full time Access Coordinator with the Center for Disability Resources and as a part-time American Sign Language (ASL) Instructor. As an undergraduate student, he worked at AURORA’s Summer Education Program for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students. Before working at SU, Michael worked at ARISE, at an independent living center, for almost 10 years as a passionate advocate for people with all types of disabilities.

Born and raised in Syracuse, Michael later attended Gallaudet University in Washington D.C. and then lived abroad in Paraguay, Japan and most recently New York City before returning to this area. His next big trip is planned for 2023; he will visit South Korea with Hands on Travel, an agency for ASL users.

When asked why he decided to join AURORA’s Board, Michael responded, “As a deaf person, I believe in the work of AURORA… and as a deaf professional, I hope I will be able to bring my experience and wisdom to the board. I am familiar with the unique needs of deaf and hard of hearing people. I am interested in learning more about the specific needs of blind and partially sighted individuals. I would like to see more Deaf, hard of hearing and blind students go on to college or achieve higher paying positions.”

Felipe Rivera

We are pleased to have Felipe Rivera join our board. Mr. Rivera is currently the facilitator of the Auburn Support Group for people with vision loss. His personal experience of losing his sight to glaucoma fuels his passion to provide education and raise awareness for the community on issues that confront people with all types of disabilities. Felipe shares his story so others do not have to experience the struggles that he endured. He speaks about the pain of isolation of having no one to talk to about his vision loss.

For many years, Felipe was unaware that AURORA existed and he plans to change that as a member of our board. We look forward to having Felipe’s insight and energy on the Program Advisory Committee.
A special thank you to all of our generous sponsors, donors, and friends who attended our 2021 Musical Feast for the Eyes and Ears. We are so grateful for your ongoing support!

**Presenting Sponsor—$10,000**
Dr. Lawrence Stewart

**Crystal Sponsors—$5,000**
Druger Eye Care  
*Dr. Robert Druger*
Eye Plastic & Reconstructive Surgeons of CNY  
*Dr. Thomas A. Bersani*
Retina Vitreous Surgeons  
*Dr. Jamin Brown*  
*Dr. Tahsin Choudhury*  
*Dr. Patrick Oellers*  
*Dr. Bryan Rutledge*  
*Dr. Kevin Rosenberg*  
*Dr. Rajeev K. Seth*  
*Dr. Sam C. Spalding, III*
Specialty Surgery Center of CNY

**Silver Sponsors—$1,000**
Anaren  
Carrols Corp  
Mr. & Mrs. Michael O’Connor  
Ms. Laura Smith  
Syracuse Lions Club  
Wegmans

**Bronze Sponsors—$500**
CNY Community Foundation  
Empower Federal Credit Union  
Ms. Earleen Foulk  
Hear2Learn  
Mr. John King  
Morse Manufacturing  
O’Connor Financial Services, Inc.  
Ms. Priscilla Soden  
Hon. Karen Uplinger

**Diamond Sponsor—$3,500**
Hillrom

**Platinum Sponsor—$2,000**
Mr. & Mrs. Richard Marsden  
Geddes Federal Savings & Loan Association  
Mr. & Mrs. Lawrence Sala

**Gold Sponsor—$1,500**
Costello, Cooney & Fearon  
Mr. & Mrs. Murray Grossman  
MacDonough Enterprises  
Mr. & Mrs. Daniel Pluff

**Video Patron—$250**
Mr. & Mrs. Albert Antonini  
Dermody, Burke & Brown  
D.J. & J.A. Cirando, PLLC  
Fulton Savings Bank  
Mr. John Scala  
Drs. Richard & Kathy Steinmann
Thank you to the following members and donors who are committed to the continuation of AURORA’s vital services for those with vision and/or hearing loss. Names listed are those who have contributed from January 1, 2021 to December 31, 2021. We apologize for any name that may have been omitted from our list.

Thank you!!

$5,000 and above:
Central New York Community Foundation
Estate of Barbara A. Schramm
Estate of Concetta Ponzio
Estate of Cora A. Gaylord
Flora Bernice Smith Foundation
Fred & Berthe P. Harder Foundation

$4,999-$1,000:
Dr. & Mrs. Bryant Carruth
Mr. Michael Conway
Mr. & Mrs. John Delaney
Dr. & Mrs. William V. Delaney, Jr.
Lions Club of Central Square
Mr. & Mrs. Richard C. Gray
Fulton Lions Club, Inc.
Mr. Michael D. Madden
Mr. & Mrs. Albert H. Morton
Nucor Steel-Auburn
Mr. & Mrs. Bradley O’Connor
Mr. & Mrs. Michael E. O’Connor
Mr. David H. Panasci
Mr. & Mrs. Kenneth Reger
Mr. Felipe Rivera
Dr. Lawrence Stewart

$999-$500
Mr. Robert Ferri
Ms. Earleen Foulk
Mr. & Mrs. David Hardy
Dr. Erin Hill
Mr. & Mrs. Michael J. Irwin
Lions Club of Pompey
Mr. John B. McCormick
Dr. Donald E. Milmore
Morgan Rubbish Removal, Inc.
Mr. & Mrs. Daniel Pluff
Mr. John Prior
Mr. Theodore Rupracht
Ms. Josephine Anne E. Rurka
Mr. & Mrs. Richard Russo
Dr. George Salloum
Mr. & Mrs. John Sanders
Ms. Priscilla L. Soden
Drs. Richard & Kathy Steinmann
Syracuse Lions Club
Ukrainian Society of St. Nicholas National Club
Hon. Karen M. Uplinger

$499-$250:
Ms. Brenda M. Casinella
Ms. Joan M. Dambrosos
Ms. Donna M. DiFulvio
Mr. V. James Granito
Lions Club of Chittenango

Lions Club of Skaneateles
Rev. Frederick Mannara
Mr. & Mrs. John D. Marsellus
Mr. & Mrs. David M. Minahan
Mr. & Mrs. Frederick A. Noack
Ms. Kelly O’Connor
Mr. & Mrs. Robert D. Reidy
Mr. & Mrs. David Ridings
Dr. John H. Sipple
Dr. & Mrs. Robert Slavens
Dr. & Mrs. Paul F. Torrisi

$249-$125
Ms. Alice E. Andrews
Mrs. Marcia Barnes
Mrs. Patricia P. DeAngelis
Ms. Lee Gatta
Drs. Michael & Wendy Gordon
Mr. & Mrs. William A. Harfosh
Ms. Bonnie Levy
Ms. Lois M. Meyer
Ms. Rae Jean James
Mrs. Margie B. Parmentier
Mr. & Mrs. Edward Rapson
Mr. & Mrs. Gerald W. Rothschild
Ms. Theresa A. Watt
$124 - $50
Ms. Kathleen Albright
Ms. Martha G. Aliwalas
Mr. Donald Argus
Ms. Eleanor Barber
Mr. Paul Baum
Mrs. Dorothy V. Blakeman
Mr. & Mrs. Charles E. Blom
Dr. Casimir K. Bobowski, OD
Mr. & Mrs. David & Elaine Boull
Ms. Margaret Bourke
Mr. Carl R. Boyer
Bristol-Myers Squibb
Ms. Anne Brodie
Ms. Marjorie A. Canino
Mrs. Nancy B. Cann
Ms. Kerry Carney
Mrs. Kathryn Castellani
Ms. Denise M. Castro
Mr. & Mrs. Robert B. Chamberlain
Ms. Danielle M. McCann-Cima
Civic Social Club of Greater Syracuse
Ms. Gladys A. Collins
Mr. & Mrs. David J. Compton
Mr. Peter A. Congel
Ms. Elaine M. Coppola
Ms. Barbara Crawford
Ms. Marcia L. Crosby
Ms. Heidi Cross
Mr. Antonio DelBrocco
Mr. Ted DeLass
Mr. & Mrs. Peter J. DiLaura
Ms. Phyllis M. DiRaddo
Ms. Camille Dragone
Ms. Nina Dukette
Mrs. Betty J. Ecker
Mrs. Annamay S. Edgbert
Ms. Nancy M. Edinger
Ms. Ann D. Elliott
Mr. & Mrs. Ronald M. Farewell
Ms. Eleanor G. Feitler
Mrs. Elizabeth M. Fessler
Mrs. Anna M. Flanigan
Ms. Catherine Fleming
Mr. John Folger
Ms. Diane H. Gallo
Mr. & Mrs. Patrick B. Gillson
Ms. Elaine P. Gordon
Mr. & Mrs. Charles E. Greene
Mr. & Mrs. Hugh C. Gregg II
Mr. & Mrs. Harold L. Hackney Ed.D.
Mr. & Mrs. Tom Hafner
Ms. Christine S. Hall
Mr. & Mrs. Donald M. Haswell
Mr. & Mrs. Robert E. Hibbert
Ms. Mary Anne Hogan
Mrs. Joanne Holley
Mrs. Elvira Honis
Mrs. Wanda H. Irish
Mr. Frank A. Ives
Mr. & Mrs. Daniel L. Kajdasz
Dr. & Mrs. Allan Kanter
Mrs. Helen C. Kennedy
Ms. Susan M. Kennedy
Mr. & Mrs. John H. Klein
Mrs. Frances M. Knorr
Mr. & Mrs. Stephen K. Koldin
Ms. Barbara B. Kosecki
Mr. & Mrs. James S. Kraus
Ms. Diane LaBeff
Mr. Charles E. Laman, DSS
Mr. & Mrs. Norman A. LaMontagne
Mr. & Mrs. Jay K. Lee
Ms. Phyllis Lind
Ms. Peggy Link
Mr. Tim Link
Mrs. Filomena Lukasiewicz
Mr. Joseph T. Mahshie
Mrs. Helen M. Markowski
Mr. & Mrs. John D. Marshall
Maurer Funeral Home
Ms. Kathleen M. McElroy
Mr. Terry Maier
Dr. & Mrs. Walter Merriam
Ms. Patricia A. Messina
Mrs. Barbara Monson
Ms. Donna O’Brien
Ms. Carol R. Olson
Dr. Nancy Oplinger
Mr. & Mrs. Ronald A. Parmele
Mr. & Mrs. Theodore M. Pasinski
Mrs. Deanna M. Pavlacka
Mrs. Mary Pelligrini
Mr. Bruce B. Phelps
Mr. & Mrs. James K. Pitts
Port City Family Medicine, PC
Mr. & Mrs. Roger Praetorius
Mrs. Marjorie S. Prill
Mrs. Khaleda B. Rahman
Ms. Marlene M. Reilly
Mr. Peter Rhodes
Mrs. Allene Rossler
Ms. Rosalie M. Rudolph
Mr. Theodore A. Rupracht
Mrs. Maria P. Russell
Mr. Vincent Santarelle
Ms. Magdalene M. Schmidt
Mrs. Sandra R. Schwartz
Ms. JoAnne Sgambati
Ms. Madeline Shruell
Mr. & Mrs. Richard Sills
Dr. Brian K. Smith, MD
Ms. Carol M. Smith
Ms. Laura Smith
Dr. Jeffrey S. Sneider
Mr. & Mrs. John A. Soldo
Mr. Lawrence A. Steinburg
Ms. Sharon P. Sullivan
Mr. Edward C. Sylvester
Ms. Mary D. Taffet
Ms. Robin Thompson
Ms. Sharon C. Thompson
Mrs. Doris A. Toomey
Mr. & Mrs. Francis Tyrrell
Mr. & Mrs. David N. Venery
Mr. Gerald T. Vidler
Mrs. Barbara P. Von Hendy
Mrs. Margery Walsh
Ms. Kathleen K. Ward
Ms. Carolyn L. Waterman
Mr. Thomas Barry Weinheimer
Mr. Volker Weiss
Weiss, Savedoff & Ciccone Doctors of Optometry
Mr. & Mrs. Robert S. Welcher
Ms. Marsha Zimmerman

$49 - $25
Mr. & Mrs. William E. Aiken
Mr. & Mrs. Mark Allnatt
Mr. Stephen Alvaro
American Legion Post #1107
Mrs. Jean H. Bailer
Ms. Laraine S. Baran
Ms. Mary K. Barbano
Ms. Sally L. Bargelski
Ms. Loretha Baums
Mrs. Linda Bauso
Ms. Elizabeth J. Beauregard
Ms. Annette M. Brady
Ms. Susan M. Brennan
Ms. Kathleen Brenon
Ms. Beverley W. Campbell
Mr. Stephen W. Castleman
Mr. Mark Cavanaugh
Ms. Shelley Conture
Mr. Joseph G. Delaney
Mr. Donald DeSalvia
Mr. Robert J. Dice
Mrs. Barbara Dunn
Mr. & Mrs. Issa F. Essi
Ms. Laura Feldman
Mrs. Vicki B. Finley
Mr. Gerald B. Fitzgerald
Ms. Beverly J. Forman
Dr. Richard A. Frio, OD
Ms. Sheila Greene
Mrs. Patricia A. Gurak
Ms. Mary Elizabeth Haas
Ms. Mary E. T. Herbst
Ms. Marian P. Hickey
Ms. Lauri L. Hoover
Ms. Patricia Howe
Mrs. Patricia Huddleston
Mr. & Mrs. Robert B. James
Mr. Edwin Justian
Mrs. Patricia A. Kirchner
Ms. Theresa Knepper
Ms. Lorraine C. Kosiba
Ms. Kathryn A. Laubengayer
Ms. Teresa M. Lavalle
Mr. Harry B. Lewis
Mrs. Ann Marie L. Mamorella
Ms. Julia Mariotte-McLane
Ms. Dana L. Marzynski
Ms. Mary A. Melnick
Mrs. Marijane Milmoe
Mrs. Gloria A. Murphy
Mrs. Georgianne Neimeyer
Mr. & Mrs. Robert A. O'Connor
Ms. Gloria Palmiere
Mrs. Margaret P. Ranz
Mr. Gregory W. Ranz
Mr. & Mrs. Wallace C. Rowland, Jr.
Spotlight On: The Liberty-AURORA Eye Center

The Liberty-AURORA Eye Center is open for business at 1045 James Street and for anyone seeking the services of Dr. Donna Konick, O.D., will also encounter her optometric assistant and Patient Care Specialist, Adam Castleman.

Adam is responsible for setting up patient appointments and coordinating services at the Center. He will also be conducting initial patient screenings prior to each exam. Adam began working at AURORA in 2018 as our Inventory Coordinator which means he is very familiar with all of the assistive aids and devices that are often prescribed through a Low Vision Evaluation.

According to Adam the most rewarding part of the job so far has been “Seeing patients smile when they are finally able to make use of the vision they have left.” He notes that it is sometimes a simple aid or device that can help significantly.

The Eye Center is currently taking referrals for low vision evaluations and is accepting new patients. It is co-located within Liberty Resources’ Primary Care and Behavioral Health care practices, with the Genoa Pharmacy on site for a “one-stop-shop” healthcare experience.

For more information, please contact Adam at 315-413-7693.
Join Our Mission — Without the generous support of our donors, we would not have been able to serve this community for over 100 years. Donors like you provide much-needed funds for programs such as our support groups, social work services, and skills training. We appreciate donations in any amount and thank you for your assistance. Please complete & mail this form to: **AURORA of CNY**
1065 James Street
Syracuse, NY 13203-2282

---

**AURORA of Central New York 2022 Donation Form**

Name ____________________________________________

Address ____________________________________________

City __________________________ State _____________ Zip _____________

Phone __________________________ Email __________________________

I would like to make a contribution to AURORA of Central New York at the following level:

[ ] $25  [ ] $50  [ ] $100  [ ] $250  [ ] $500  Other Amount: _______________________

I am paying by:  [ ] Check (please make checks payable to AURORA of CNY, Inc.)

[ ] MasterCard  [ ] Visa  [ ] Discover  [ ] American Express

Credit Card __________________________ Expiration Date _____________

V-Code (three digit code on back of card) __________________________

Name on account (if different from above) __________________________

Billing address (if different from above) __________________________

I am aware and allow AURORA of Central New York to charge my card for the above purposes.

Signature: __________________________ Date: _______________

*Gifts may be acknowledged in our newsletter; if you wish to remain anonymous please check here: [ ]

**In return for your gift you receive no material goods or tangible services for supporting AURORA of Central New York. Your donation to AURORA is tax deductible.**
Coming soon!
Our website is getting a makeover! Stay tuned for a new fresh look at our website www.auroraofcny.org.