THE EYES HAVE IT

A BC trio charts a communication path for severely handicapped children

Brenda, who is 17 years old, can’t move 98 percent of her body, but Phil DiMattia, director of BC’s Campus School, where Brenda is a student, knows her nonetheless. “She’s very alert and bright,” he says, “but she couldn’t learn the traditional way. Through this project, I’m confident she and others will.”

“This project” is a new use of computer technology, created by a team of BC researchers, that has allowed Brenda to look at a computer screen and cause colors to appear wherever her eyes focus. It’s called eye painting, and at the Campus School, which cares for severely handicapped children and adolescents from throughout the metropolitan Boston area, eyes are the key to communication. “Our children have severe sensory damage and disabilities, but their eyes for the most part are not disabled,” said DiMattia. “We know they take in information because of the way they communicate with their eyes.”

Eye painting is an outgrowth of a collaboration between James Gips and Peter Olivieri of the Carroll School of Management and Joseph Tecce of psychology. Their original intention was to work on broadly based systems that could be controlled with eye movement, but they are pleased with the diversion into the small world of Campus School students like Brenda. “It’s still in the experimental phase,” said Gips, “but the kids are enjoying it because it gives them control over their environment.” The researchers hope that software for reading, writing and arithmetic—as well as for a new, visually presented IQ test for the severely handicapped—can be developed.

“We’re expecting this gives [Campus School students] a little more quality of life,” Tecce added. “The potential is awesome.”

STREET LIFE
Theodore Dziak, SJ, a University chaplain, chats with passersby in his new role as director of the Boston College Neighborhood Resource Center. The storefront office, located on Washington Street in Brighton, opened in January with a week of programs that included a conference on revitalizing Allston-Brighton’s economy, a lecture by Professor of History Andrew Buni on the neighborhood’s past, and community clean-up, sports clinics and other services by student volunteers. The Neighborhood Center will continue to schedule programming, as well as serve as a central location for providing services for local residents, offering help with everything from job placement to filling out tax returns.