

# The WhiteCane

The magazine of the Iowa Department for the Blind



## Reaching Out

### **INSIDE:**

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diverse modes  
open avenues

There is power  
in numbers

A success story  
from vocational  
rehabilitation

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## |from the editor

Wintertime is traditionally a time of drawing in and reflecting on the events of the year gone by and looking forward to the coming months. Nevertheless, work continues here to inform Iowans of the breadth of services available from the Iowa Department for the Blind for those experiencing blindness and vision loss.

In this issue we explore various aspects of the idea of reaching out, whether it is in contacting and helping others in need of our services, or, in another sense, of reaching outside of ourselves to encounter new experiences and opportunities for learning and growth.

As we strive to reduce costs and work more "Green," we plan to print fewer copies of the White Cane magazine beginning with the next issue. However, we'll continue to make the magazine available online in multiple digital forms on our website.

— Rick Dressler

Letters & comments can be e-mailed to:  
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The Iowa Department for the Blind places a lot of emphasis on reaching out to potential consumers. As a result, the number of consumers we serve has increased significantly. In 2009, we served 300 Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) clients. As we closed Federal Fiscal Year 2012, that number grew to nearly 400. We exceeded our goal for 130 new applications for the 2012 fiscal year by a wide margin because, when the fiscal year ended, 162 consumers had applied for VR services.

Our Independent Living and Older Blind programs also continue to expand. Our most recent statistics show that we are serving approximately 1,400 consumers. Outreach activities have caused more blind Iowans to apply for library services, and the IDB library continues to grow. We are delighted that our marketing efforts have achieved significant positive results, and we will continue to make blind Iowans aware of our training programs and promote our positive philosophy of blindness.

The 2013 calendar year is drawing near, and its arrival marks the beginning of a new legislative session. We submitted our budget to the Governor and requested an increase of \$550,000 in state funds so that we can continue to provide our current high level of service delivery to blind Iowans. Oper-

ating costs continue to increase and state dollars have decreased by one third since 2009. Approximately 79% of the IDB budget is supported with federal funds, but our federal support has not increased even though the Rehabilitation Services Administration understands that blindness rehabilitation agencies throughout the nation need more money to provide services.

On November 26th, Governor Branstad provided us with the opportunity to discuss our need for more state dollars at a budget hearing. We outlined the critical services that IDB is providing and discussed the fact that more state dollars will allow us to increase our federal match. The Governor will release his plans for the budget in January. If the Governor recommends an increase to the IDB budget, the recommendation will have to be passed by the Legislature. An increase was recommended last year, but unfortunately, it was not passed by the House. If this year's budget recommendation is to be funded, citizens will need to contact their legislators to express their support.

Sincerely,  
*Richard Sorey*

# 2012 RESOURCE FAIRS

## IDB reaches out to lowans in their home communities

The Vision Expo in Spencer featured speakers Curtis Chong, Gary Farmer, and Dr. Stephen P. Fox of the Wolfe Eye Clinic.

One of the most important ways the Iowa Department for the Blind reaches out to lowans to provide information and services to those experiencing blindness and vision loss is to go out and meet them in their communities. This may be through contact with our field staff on an individual basis, group work at community-based trainings, public speaking presentations, or at events like the resource fairs that were held during 2012 at different locations around the state.

At both the Vision Expo in Spencer at the beginning of August and two back-to-back Vision Loss Resource Fairs in Iowa City and Waterloo in October, IDB staff joined with area agency partners, local eye doctors, and assistive technology vendors to present a wide range of useful contact and information. Local residents had the opportunity to ask questions on coping with vision loss, see assistive technology such as magnifiers demonstrated, meet local service providers, and hear about the latest treatment for eye diseases from area doctors. ◆



Amanda Gloyd, Marketing and Community Relations Manager for Spencer Municipal Utilities (SMU), interviews Curtis Chong, IDB's "technology guru." SMU helped publicize the Vision Expo, taped parts of the event for re-broadcast, and edited this interview to produce short segments to air about IDB's services.



IDB Rehabilitation Teacher Susan Howard greeted and registered attendees at the Senior Center in Iowa City.



Mark Neumeier of Magnification Resources showed a magnifier to a fairgoer and IDB Library's Meredith Ferguson visited with Alvin Schroeder in Iowa City.



Becky Criswell demonstrated a watch from IDB's Aids & Devices Store to Shirley Schroeder in Iowa City.



IDB Director Richard Sorey greeted guests at the resource fair held at the Waterloo Public Library.



Gwen Garretson of Cedar Rapids Vision in Motion shared information with Richard Pint of Waterloo.



IDB's Curtis Chong and Laurie Holtry demonstrated a variety of assistive technology devices.



Dr. Brendan Girschek spoke about eye diseases and their treatment in Waterloo.

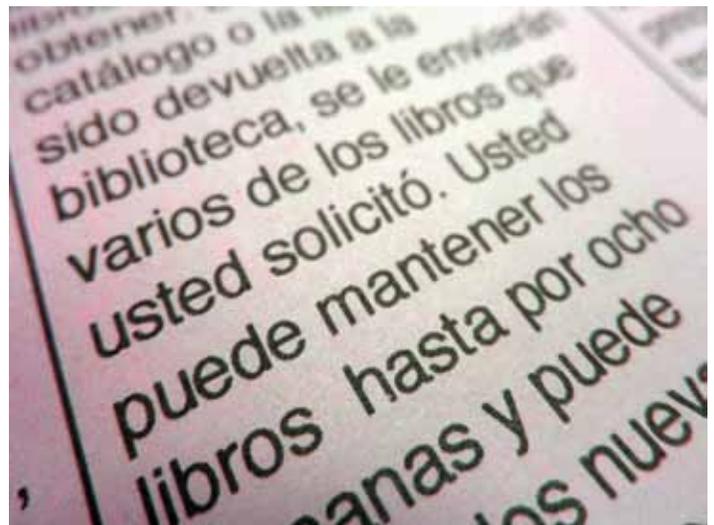
# IDB News: Diverse modes of outreach

In mid-October twelve docents plus staff from the Des Moines Art Center attended a training workshop on how to lead tours for the blind and visually impaired at the Pappajohn Sculpture Park. It was an elective class for the museum-trained volunteers, and the intrepid group proved their mettle when they ventured out to the sculpture park in spite of the cold and rainy weather. The training session among the artworks was preceded by a discussion group at IDB led by Orientation Center Administrator Sandy Tigges.



Docent trainees brave wind and cold at sculpture park.

An effort is under way by the department to improve outreach to the Latino community in Iowa. Two outdated brochures that detail IDB and Library services are being revised. Several department applications, forms, and documents used in delivering services are also being translated. A recent meeting with the Rev. Barb Dinnen, of Comunidad de Fe Las Americas / Las Americas Faith Community, and community leader Dawn Oropeza yielded a list of primary contacts to engage in getting the word out about our services.



A brochure detailing Library services is one being revised.

The Iowa Department for the Blind continues to improve accessibility to its own building by augmenting existing signage. A Braille version of the bronze National Register of Historic Places plaque has been delivered and awaits a spell of warm weather for installation. It will be placed directly below the print plaque by the main entrance on Fourth Street. Other Braille signs will supplement the existing print versions that identify the IDB building and the Dorothy Kirsner Room (Director's Conference Room).



This Braille is cast in bronze on the NRHP plaque.

## There is power in numbers

By Barb Weigel

IL Project Specialist

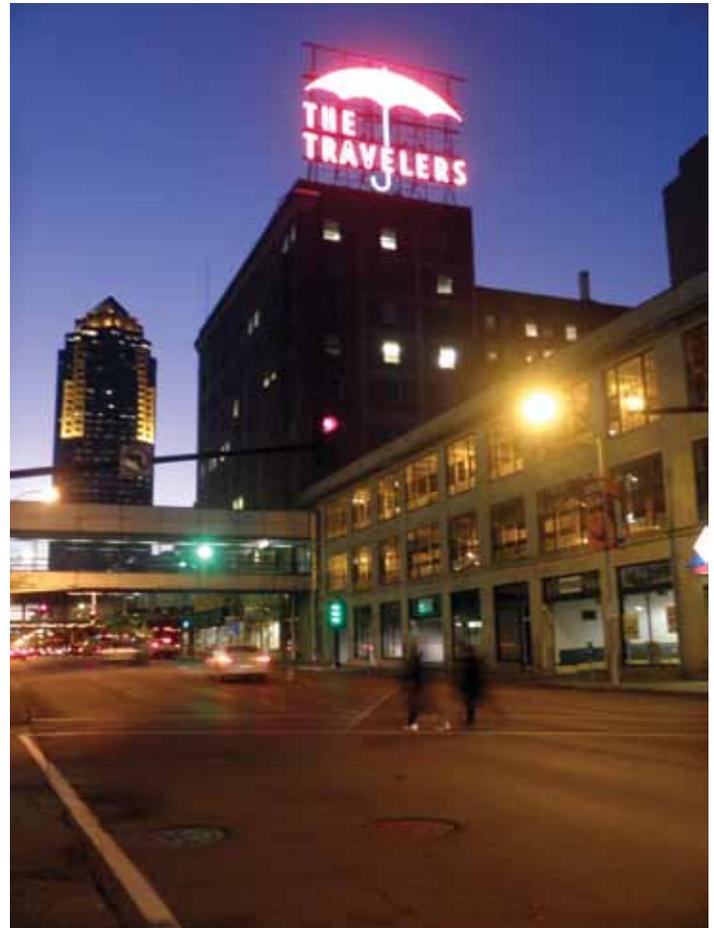
Throughout the year, the Independent Living (IL) program conducts Community-Based Trainings (CBTs). These sessions provide individuals with an opportunity to meet others with vision loss while learning some of the basic skills to enable them to stay independent.

The trainings are conducted throughout the state wherever 3 or more people express interest in participating. Since October, CBTs have been conducted in Ottumwa, Muscatine, West Union, Waterloo, Council Bluffs and Urbandale. Additional ones are scheduled for Independence and Monticello.

On average, the training sizes vary from 3-10 participants and last a minimum of 6 hours. The outcome is always positive. Not only do participants realize they can complete tasks they no longer thought possible, but they also start thinking about additional possibilities. If they can pour a glass of water without vision, what else can they do? Training opportunities include hands-on skills training in the areas of:

- Home Management – how to pour liquids, identify and label items around the home, measure items in the kitchen, identify coins and paper currency and more.
- Communications – how to create a grocery list, address an envelope, fill out a check, access phone numbers and addresses, dial a phone and more.
- Braille – an introduction to Braille and how it can be useful in everyday life.
- Leisure activities such as audio books and newspaper reading programs.

At the conclusion of the training, each participant is offered the opportunity to provide



Two students venture out from the Orientation Center with their long white canes on a recent cold December evening. They are a blur as they cross Grand Avenue, heading towards dinner in the Court Avenue district.

feedback. A variety of questions are asked, including what each participant found to be the most valuable. As you can imagine, the answers vary greatly since each person has a unique set of needs and living situation. However, a common response is the benefit gained from being around others experiencing vision loss and the realization that they are not alone. This interaction often has as much impact on a person beginning to believe in their own abilities as the actual skills gained.

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The training recently offered in Ottumwa was a perfect example. From the start, the group jelled. There was good discussion among the participants about the difficulties they experience and techniques they have found to be useful. They shared ideas, laughed with each other, and, through this simple interaction, discovered new ways to move on with their lives. Some exchanged contact information so they could keep in touch.

Their desire to get together again led to a discussion about the possibility of forming a support group so they could meet on a regular basis. One participant had been part of a group in another state, found it to be very helpful, and encouraged the others to give it a try. As with the CBTs, a support group offers the opportunity to get together, share ideas, and benefit from the shared experience of others learning to live active, fulfilling lives after vision loss.



IDB Independent Living (IL) staff Becky Criswell and Barb Weigel visited with IL Advisory Committee Chair Rebecca Barrionuevo, leader of a vision loss support group in Waterloo, at a recent vision loss resource fair.

The training participants jumped on board with the idea and started making suggestions for meetings and possible locations. With these take-charge people willing to provide leadership, a new support group is on the horizon for Ottumwa!

Currently, Iowa has approximately 19 support groups meeting regularly. This includes groups in Cedar Falls, Cedar Rapids, Clinton, Davenport, Denison, Des Moines, Dubuque, Fairfield, Ft. Madison, Indianola, Mason City, Monticello, Muscatine, Sioux City, Spencer, Spirit Lake, Wapello, and Waterloo. Someone from within each group takes on a leadership role with others assisting with various tasks (e.g. calling members to remind them

of meetings, etc.). For specifics on when and where a group meets and who to contact for more information, visit <http://www.idb-online.org/living/support-groups>. This listing is updated around the beginning of each year.

In addition, Iowa has two organized consumer groups, The Iowa Council of the United Blind (<http://acb.org/node/84>) and The National Federation of the Blind of Iowa (<http://www.nfbi.org/>). Visit their websites to learn more about each organization and when and where local chapters meet.

If you would like more information on how to arrange a Community-Based Training or assistance with starting a support group in your area, contact the Independent Living Program at 515-281-1333. ♦

*For more information on other independent living services, call (800) 362-2587 or e-mail [barb.weigel@blind.state.ia.us](mailto:barb.weigel@blind.state.ia.us)*

“There is power in unity and there is power in numbers.”

—Rev. Martin Luther King

## Employment program yields another success story



Hilary Mallett's experiences training in blindness skills while attending the Orientation Center were first chronicled in the Summer 2011 issue of the White Cane magazine and online at <http://idbcomm.wordpress.com>.

Iowa Department for the Blind employees actively collect success stories that record the progress made by clients. One of IDB's newest success stories is a 2012 graduate of the Adult Orientation and Adjustment Center. Originally from Silicon Valley, California, Hilary Mallett began experiencing vision loss in 2007 while still a resident of that state. Though the company she worked for tried to accommodate her, she eventually lost her job due to her lack of adaptive skills. A move brought her to Des Moines in 2010 and as a result of positive contacts with Orientation Center alumni and IDB vocational rehabilitation staff, Hilary decided to become a student at the Center.

She graduated from the program earlier this year, and continued working with her Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Rosie Thierer. Following Rosie's suggestion, she attended the six week Financial Services Academy (FSA) at DMACC in July and August of 2012.

Her recent employment by Nationwide Insurance in Des Moines as a P/C Customer Service Representative at the company's offices downtown is the fruit of her labors. Recently, Hilary wrote, "I am pretty excited to be finally working again. I have no doubt that completing my orientation classes at the IDB helped me get here."

Hilary concludes, "As a result of networking through the FSA classes, I was able to find out about some positions at Nationwide and Wells Fargo Financial Services. I decided to go ahead and apply online for these positions, and after a few interviews, I was offered a job. Now I'm working with Nationwide and IDB to make sure that I have all of the tools that I need to be successful in my job. It has been challenging, but I feel pretty lucky to have the support of the IDB as I re-enter the workforce. It has been over six years since I have worked, and I'm really happy." ◆

## Talking Tech

w/ Curtis Chong

### Considering the Future Costs of Technology

The upfront cost of computers and assistive technology can range anywhere from a few hundred to several thousand dollars. Prudent users of this technology should remember there will also be costs connected with the maintenance and repair of this equipment. What are the future costs of owning computers and assistive technology, and how much of a financial burden will these costs impose on users? The numbers shown below are approximations only, but they illustrate the future costs that users would do well to keep in mind as they plan their budgets.

#### Desktop and laptop computers

Fixed annual maintenance costs associated with computers are rare, but they can break down unexpectedly. A video card, mother board, or hard drive can fail at any time. If the computer is not under warranty, the cost to fix any of these items can run into hundreds of dollars. I once had to replace a failed video card in a PC that I owned. The cost of the replacement card plus the labor to install it was around \$500. This kind of a repair bill is, unfortunately, all too typical for the desktop and laptop computers that we use today. I recommend putting aside about \$25 per month as a form of repair insurance.

#### Screen Access Software

JAWS for Windows, the most well-known screen access program, has a new release announced about once each year. A service maintenance agreement for JAWS costs about \$200 (this is a discounted rate), and it provides two release updates--meaning that the ongoing cost to anyone who owns this program is about \$100 per year. The prudent individual would do well to set aside about \$10 a month since

a new service maintenance agreement usually comes due about once every other year. If a JAWS user allows the maintenance agreement to lapse, the cost of a maintenance agreement rises to \$260.

Some people might ask why they should even bother to pay for a JAWS maintenance agreement. This is a perfectly reasonable question. Some folks can avoid upgrading their JAWS software for as long as six years. However, if this amount of time has passed, it is highly likely that a new computer will need to be purchased and that the older version of JAWS that has been working quite well on an older computer will not run on this new computer. It is also probable that upgrading to the latest version of JAWS will, in the end, cost more than making the regular maintenance payments.

#### Refreshable Braille Displays

Refreshable Braille displays are relatively expensive compared to other forms of nonvisual access technology. An example is the Focus 40 Blue from Freedom Scientific. This 40-cell display costs \$2,795 up front, and a one-year maintenance agreement costs \$470. Refreshable Braille technology is particularly fragile. Repair costs are often in the thousands of dollars. Therefore, an annual maintenance agreement is strongly advised. On a monthly basis, a prudent user should be setting aside \$57 for the Focus 40 Blue. An 80-cell display will require roughly twice as much money to be set aside each month.

#### Refreshable Braille Note-Takers

Note-takers with a refreshable Braille display usually cost approximately \$6,000. The Braille Sense U2 (both Braille keyboard and QWERTY keyboard versions) comes with a free one-year warranty. After the first year, the annual maintenance rate is \$650. Accordingly, a person us-

| *Continued on Page 11* |

ing this technology would do well to put aside \$60 per month to cover this maintenance cost.

### **Optical Character Recognition Technology**

Some blind or visually impaired individuals will use the Kurzweil 1000 or the OpenBook® print-reading programs. Unlike the screen access software discussed earlier, these programs have no ongoing maintenance costs, and the cost to upgrade to the latest version is comparatively inexpensive (about \$150).

### **In Conclusion**

The point of this article is not to provide a comprehensive list of ongoing maintenance costs.

Rather, what I have tried to do is to provide examples of some ongoing maintenance costs with which I am familiar and to urge as strongly as I know how that users of nonvisual access technology take these costs into account when planning for the future. As wise and informed users of technology, we who are blind must understand that it is in our best interest to set aside a planned amount of money each and every month to provide for the ongoing maintenance of the technology we have acquired. Only in this way will we be able to ensure that our equipment continues to work as it was originally intended. ♦

## Holiday Season is bright at IDB



A crew from the Orientation Center chose, cut, and brought back a fragrant Christmas tree from a farm.



Orientation Center students decorate the Christmas tree and the windows in the Rec Room at IDB.



The Employee Recognition Committee's fundraiser raised money for a needy family's holiday benefit.

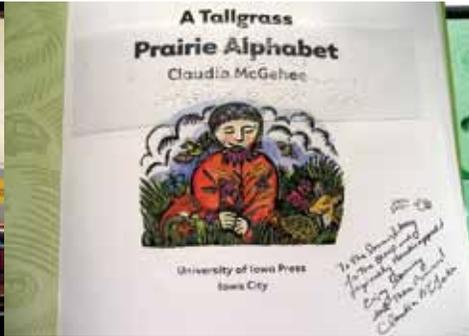


The ERC presents Library Administrator Randy Landgrebe with the Employee of the Year Award.

# Hands-On Book Fest opens young minds



Gail Stricker and Carol Eckey



A print/Braille book on display



Deena Cross and Marcella Edmonds

by Gail Stricker

Instructional Materials Center Librarian

A recent event found staff from the Iowa Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (ILBPH) venturing out from their home base, located on the Fourth Floor of the Iowa Department for the Blind building, into the community.

During the week-long Wonder of Words Festival at the Des Moines Public Library, about 300 children from four Des Moines area schools participated in a fun-filled day that celebrated reading and literacy. The second annual Hands-On Book Fest for Kids was held on Tuesday, October 23. The fest is part of an ongoing outreach effort spearheaded by the Rotary Club that strives to include underserved kids. Students learned about the process of writing, illustrating, and binding a book and enjoyed many hands-on activities. They learned how paper is made, delved into the history of book making, and enjoyed the opportunity to explore the library. The students expressed their satisfaction after rendering their own initials using a scratchboard. They also tried out making paper, decorating pages with rubber stamps, and impression rubbing.

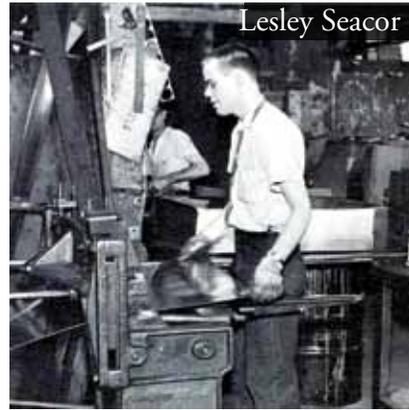
ILBPH staff Deena Cross, Carol Eckey, Marcella Edmonds, and Gail Stricker were present to share library books in alternative

media such as Braille and digital audio while interacting with the students. The children were shown how to write their name in Braille, practiced using a slate and stylus, and experienced tactile drawings through touch. Iowa children's fantasy author Sarah Prineas and award-winning author/illustrator Claudia McGehee were also on hand and explained the writing and illustrating process. Claudia was delighted to see her book, *A Tallgrass Prairie Alphabet*, in print/Braille and graciously autographed the book.

The Hands-On Book Fest is a collaborative effort sponsored by Rotary Club of Des Moines, with support from the Des Moines Public Library, the Iowa Center for the Book, Iowa Library Services/State Library, the Iowa Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, University of Iowa Center for the Book, the Butler House, Beaverdale Books, and the Library of Congress Center for the Book. Cooperative efforts like these provide yet another way for IDB employees to engage the public and share information about the department. Without their contribution, these students would not have had this unique glimpse into the world of services and literature available to those with blindness and vision loss through IDB's library. ◆



Dorothy Kirsner



Lesley Seacor

## Dorothy Kirsner: Outreach personified

**D**orothy Kirsner’s contributions to the success of the library and many other aspects of IDB are numerous. In a recent interview she recounted with gentle humor how she and her husband, Alvin, helped a young, blind Iowan named Lesley Seacor start working after attending the Orientation Center.

Dorothy: Oh, yes. Well, Alvin had a factory, metal stamping factory (Eagle Iron Works) and we were looking ... Lesley had graduated from high school and was at the Commission for the Blind and finishing the course there, but we didn’t know what to do with him. So we said to Alvin, would you hire Lesley? And he did. John Taylor, who was the head of the Commission for the Blind then, went to Alvin’s plant and tried every piece of machinery to see which one he thought Lesley could work. The one that he selected as the best was the big shearing one. Put in a great big piece of steel, press and a knife came down and cut it. You think he’d cut off his hand, you know (laughter). But it was ...

Alvin: Everybody gasped... I first brought my friends over there to show (a blind person) shearing steel and they shuddered (laughter).

Dorothy: They couldn’t watch.

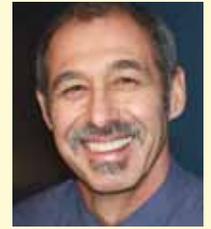
Alvin: They shuddered, they shuddered at somebody doing this and that was a great thing.

Dorothy: Every time... he was really good...Lesley worked for Alvin for about forty years. One day all the electricity went off in the building; it was absolutely dark, and nobody knew how to get out except Lesley.

He led the whole plant out (laughter). ◆

## From the Librarian

Perhaps, the most fundamentally kind thing human beings can do is open their hearts and minds. Only then do they communicate in a manner that offers possibilities of real connection to another person. As we receive your phone calls and book lists at the library, you should know that the individuals you are working with are coming from that fundamental place of openness.



This probably seems an odd way to talk about conducting business—and the Library is indeed a business. However, the difference the Iowa Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped wants to create is one where a respectful connection with everyone who uses the Library’s services is established.

How does that work? First, you will always be heard. Your needs, wants, and wishes regarding Library services—tell us what they are! Would you like different magazines to read? Want to read a book that’s not in the Library’s collection? Having problems with your digital audio player? BARD downloading giving you fits? Whatever your concern, call us. We can’t help unless we know there is a problem—and we strive to help you get the most out of your Library. Contact us, we’re here for you.

*Sincerely,  
Randy Landgrebe*

# BOOKLIST

## New Year's Book List: Resolutions

By Rachel Bussan

This issue we feature a variety of titles with the common theme of New Year's resolutions. Call your reader advisor to order these inspiring titles and kickstart the New Year.

**DB72499**

*Chicken Soup for the Soul: My Resolution; 101 Stories – Great Ideas for Your Mind, Body, and Wallet*, by Jack Canfield

Ordinary people share resolutions they have made and kept, including simplifying their lives, "going green," getting healthy, improving their relationships, dealing with addictions, and changing jobs. Commercial audiobook. 2008.

**DB70754**

*Switch: How To Change Things When Change Is Hard*, by Chip Heath

The Heath brothers use case studies of individuals, schools, and companies to illustrate principles of behavior change. They describe ways to motivate employees, family, and oneself to alter habits by balancing the rational and irrational minds. Examples include conquering drug addiction,

disruptive behavior, and poor diets. Bestseller. 2010. Co-author is Dan Heath.

**DB/RC59768**

*Start Late, Finish Rich: A No-Fail Plan for Achieving Financial Freedom at Any Age*, by David Bach

Advises people who have neglected to manage money. Outlines saving, cutting credit card debt, budgeting, creating a self-directed retirement account, investing in the stock market, owning a home, getting a raise, and more. Bestseller. 2005.

**BR16193, DB/RC61233**

*What Color Is Your Parachute? 2005: A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers*, by Richard N. Bolles

Revised and updated edition of the popular guide for determining job objectives and career goals. This 2005 version assesses the impact of global outsourcing on job growth as compared to actual job vacancies, which are the product of constant employment turnover. Offers advice for finding a niche. Includes resources. 2005.

**DB/RC67870**

*American Medical Association Complete Guide To Prevention And Wellness: What*

*You Need To Know About Preventing Illness, Staying Healthy, And Living Longer (2008)*, by American Medical Association

Discusses the importance of proper nutrition, weight, and exercise. Outlines preventive measures for various health problems and ways to keep specific body parts fit, including the reproductive system. Covers the needs of children and adolescents and issues such as premature aging. 2008.

**DB/RC61738**

*The Biggest Loser: The Weight-Loss Program to Transform Your Body, Health, and Life – Adapted from NBC's Hit Show!*, by Maggie Greenwood-Robinson

Outlines the lifestyle modification program that was adopted for "The Biggest Loser" television series. Trainers and show contestants offer tips for losing weight through diet and exercise changes. Includes recipes, meal plans, exercise instructions, and motivational strategies, including organizing your own Biggest Loser weight-loss competition. Bestseller. 2005.

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## Center students and staff retreat beyond borders



The Chapel of St. Anthony of Padua (1885) near Festina, Iowa, is known as “the world’s smallest church.”

by Rebecca Swainey  
Braille Teacher

For over a decade now, students and staff of the Iowa Department for the Blind’s Adult Orientation and Adjustment Center have gone each fall on a retreat at Sugar Creek Bible Camp, nestled in a valley just across the Mississippi River in Southwestern Wisconsin. The few days at the camp, as well as the trip to and from the site, provide wonderful opportunities to hone the skills we’ve been developing in the training Center.

Stops along the way break up the tedium of the long drive. Over the years we have visited a number of attractions and points of interest in Iowa.

This year our first stop was a tour of The Northeast Iowa Dairy Foundation. It’s a large dairy operation run in partnership with Iowa State University and Northeast Iowa Community College. Their purpose is to prepare young people to operate dairy farms, provide ongoing education for dairy farmers, and serve as a public educational facility. Upon arrival, our guide handed out what looked like oversize baggies with elastic bands at the top. In the general shape of a boot,



Orientation Center student Jan Borgwardt takes the opportunity to pet the cows in the barns at the dairy foundation.

these bags provide protective covering for shoes and lower legs. We learned their purpose isn’t simply to keep the muck off people; it’s also to keep people from tracking things harmful to the cattle into the barns.

The first barn held infant calves, adorable in their eagerness for attention. The second barn held older calves. Clustered in groups, they put one in mind of teens standing around in small cliques suspiciously watching outsiders move through their space. The third barn held full-grown, pregnant cows. A few in our group expressed astonishment at the massive size of some breeds of cattle. Here, as well as in the next barn, we were very appreciative of our shoe coverings. The fourth barn was full of milk cows that had been brought in out of the rain.

The most interesting aspect of this area was the technology. An automated bar ran slowly along the aisles of cows, sweeping mud and droppings in its path, eliminating the need for workers to be tied up mucking out the barn. Last stop was an observation

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The visit to the Northeast Iowa Dairy Foundation provided ample opportunity for students and staff to interact with the animals, learn about dairy farming, and practice travel skills on uneven ground.

deck overlooking the automated milking parlor, a very clean, organized process. As we left, several members of our group commented about what a surprisingly interesting, informative tour it had been. We learned a lot about dairy farming, but even more valuable was the experience gained walking barn to barn, navigating through mud and rain with the long white cane.

A short drive from the dairy brought us to what is known as “the world’s smallest church.” Built in 1885 near Festina, Iowa, the Chapel of St. Anthony of Padua measures 14x20 feet, boasts four stained glass windows, and has seating for eight. Donning sleep shades prior to entering, the students quickly explored the diminutive structure, locating altar, pews, statuary, and a basket of rosary beads. It was clear as we pulled away, this tiny building had made a big impression. Not only were people now aware of its existence, the chapel also served to

demonstrate how quickly and easily detailed information can be gathered through nonvisual means.

All of these experiences set the stage for Sugar Creek. Following tradition, arrival at the facility’s Koinonia Lodge is planned for well after dark when no lights of any kind are allowed. We carry in our belongings, locate our rooms downstairs, and select our beds. Those new to the lodge further explore the upstairs to locate the kitchen, discover how many stoves and sinks it contains, and determine the location and number of outside exits. Once the exploration is completed, it’s time for a good night’s sleep in preparation for the full days ahead.

The relaxed setting at the camp enables an enhanced perspective which can easily become lost in the course of day-to-day instruction. Activities, whether shaded or in the dark, are participated in equally by staff as well as students. There are plenty of opportunities to improve travel skills and, possibly of even more value, to develop problem solving skills in settings far removed from the predictable patterns of cement sidewalks and city streets. Finding the way across grassy slopes or down gravel and dirt paths to successfully locate destinations such as a footbridge or nature center provides a terrific sense of accomplishment. Working with a team consisting of both staff and students wearing sleep shades to prepare a delicious meal for the consumption of the entire group generates more pride of accomplishment, to say nothing of the fun created by the good-natured competition as teams strive to outdo one another’s culinary offerings.

An afternoon cruise on the Mississippi River and tours of Fort Crawford in historic Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, and The Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum in Decorah, Iowa, gave further opportunities for fun and growth on this trip.

## Reaching new heights at the Survival Revival

by Julie Aufdenkamp

Transition Counselor

A recent teen weekend retreat is a great example of how the Iowa Department for the Blind's Transition Program reaches out to blind and visually impaired youth from across the state. This particular retreat provided individual participants with opportunities to reach out of their comfort zones to improve their skills and independence and ultimately boost their confidence.

During the weekend of October 26-28, several Iowa high school students who are blind or visually impaired took part in the Survival Revival retreat held at the YMCA Camp near Boone, Iowa. The retreat focused on developing independent living survival skills in the kitchen as well as overall team-building and problem-solving methods. Activities also touched on a crucial wilderness survival technique and a rigorous climbing challenge involving confidence and trust. None of the retreat activities were designed specifically for blind and visually impaired kids. All of the participants at one time or another had to figure out an alternative way of accomplishing a task.

The students gained plenty of hands-on experience in the kitchen as they prepared four meals and a spread for a fall party. Their creations included homemade chili, grilled ham and cheese sandwiches, French toast, and a variety of snacks and treats. They learned how to use alternative techniques to prepare food and mastered the use of tools such as knives, whisks, spatulas, measuring cups and spoons, and can openers. They also braved working with the stove top and oven, a microwave, and small electric appliances including a crockpot, a griddle, a frying pan, a pizza cooker, and a mixer.

Some of the kids were a bit nervous about cutting, chopping, and peeling fruits and vegetables. Others were uncertain about frying hamburger and determining when it was done. Putting things in and taking things out of the hot oven was intimidating for a few teens. Nevertheless, the meals were very good and the students left the retreat with improved cooking skills and confidence and a packet of new recipes to prepare at home.

Some of the food that was made by the teens on Saturday was served during a Fall Holiday Party held that night. Students were divided into groups and each group took part in the planning of activities and decorating the lodge.

When the teens were not in the kitchen, they were taking part in outdoor activities. The fall weather was nearly perfect, despite the chilly temperatures. Everyone enjoyed



Though securely tied into a safety harness the compound challenges of climbing a pole to a tiny platform for a descent via zipline provided Survival Revival students with a daunting task.

## Expansion means going the extra mile in BEP

By Roger Erpelding  
B.E.P. Program Administrator

It is often said that managers in the Business Enterprises Program that do their business in local, state, and federal office buildings serve a limited number of customers over and over again. When this is the case, it may limit the blind manager's business and profit. However, opportunities do arise to reach out to new customers in the building, visitors from outside, and to members of the surrounding community.

Randy Kluesner is a prime example of a BEP manager that employs this strategy. On September 28, 2012, Scott County employees held a United Way fundraiser. Randy maintains vending in two county buildings—the Scott County Court House, and the Scott County Administrative Office Building. When he heard of this upcoming event, Randy voluntarily donated water and soda pop to contribute to the success of the effort. As a result, Randy gained two things—lots of good will, and a thank you letter from the fundraising committee. It is all in a day's work for Randy. His attitude is “that's my job and that's what I'm supposed to do.”

During the Thanksgiving holiday, Randy provided rolls at many of his vending locations in downtown Davenport. “They were as pleased as punch. As the boss, it is my job to be there, I like being with and talking with the customers, and it gives me a chance to ask how I can



Signs posted at interstate rest areas and other locations let customers know of presence of “Vending Machines Operated by Iowa Department for the Blind.”

make things better,” he reflected on his business philosophy. Significantly, it goes beyond Randy's business acumen. “It makes us all look better as blind people.”

When not reaching out to the community and customers, BEP managers are interested in expanding their operations through their own initiative. In April of 2009, Carl Drees began his BEP career as manager of the Wallace Building Vending and

several satellite locations. An opportunity arose to bid on a junior high school, the “bus barn,” a learning resource center, and ten teachers' lounges in the West Des Moines school district. Carl had previous promising gross sales figures from these locations and, although unsure of continued sales and profit, he recognized this as an opportunity to expand his business into the private sector. His bids on these locations were successful and he purchased the equipment to operate them. “I needed to get started elsewhere and to branch out,” Carl related. “BEP is wonderful, but I needed more.” As stipulated by the current regulations of the state's program, all his government building locations would go to another blind manager under the program's provisions. Without this additional business, “when I left the program, I'd have no business left over for retirement or my kids to manage or to sell.”

Was this opportunity a worthwhile venture? “The lounges are what I expected, the rest of the locations garner a little less in sales,” was Carl's reply.

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Carl made a very practical move when he began to expand beyond BEP. He contacted the Iowa Self-Employment Program (ISE) for financial and technical assistance to help to make this effort possible. Carl is currently in the process of bidding on an additional location, and if it's obtained, he hopes to begin vending there in January of 2013.

Dwain Sundine entered the management realm of the BEP program in 1991. His first operation was at the Woodward Resource Center (formerly known as Woodward State Hospital School). He successfully bid on two new locations at the Tiffin Rest Area, which opened in 1992. This was closely followed by assignment to several small, local satellite locations in Iowa City.

But, like Carl, he wanted more and had the ambition to go out and find it. What motivated Dwain? "Family security," was his immediate response. He has a wife and two daughters, and if he left the program for whatever reason, they would be left without an income. Dwain began his quest by placing his contact information in the local telephone book. He began to get inquiries about his vending business and, over time, established

himself as a competent businessman in the Iowa City area. He also began to make "cold contacts," yielding additional results. These first opportunities came forth in smaller and marginal locations and his vending service consisted of beverages and snacks, but he pursued them nevertheless.

It is impossible to argue with results, though, and Dwain's reputation continued to grow. His favorite lo-



BEP manager Carl Drees services a vending machine at one of the many locations in his operation.

cations are in factories, where he offers the full complement of vending services—snacks, beverages, cold food, coffee, and frozen food products. At one point, he even explored the possibility of purchasing another vending company.

Looking to the future, Dwain knows he may need to change his tactics. "I'm kind of in a transitional phase. The telephone book has been replaced by the Internet, and I'm now looking into establishing a website for

this purpose."

Other managers choose to work within the limits of the BEP to pursue new opportunities. This is the case at STREAM, a large call center in Sergeant Bluff now served by Jon Buffington of Sioux City. Jon already had a number of Randolph-Sheppard Act-covered locations on his vending route. Randolph-Sheppard is the federal and state legislation that gives blind vending operators first rights to operate in government buildings. When STREAM contacted him, he couldn't resist adding them to his roster. Iowa's BEP program helped finalize a contract with the company and purchased the equipment. This made STREAM's location subject to all of the BEP rules and regulations, including management succession if Jon leaves for whatever reason. This contract is currently being re-negotiated for renewal, and Jon has a strong desire to continue vending service at this lucrative location.

Ambition, grit, the desire to do better, and the need to make more money—all cause our Business Enterprises Program managers to reach out and give their customers the best service possible. ◆

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the radiant heat from two campfires during the retreat. Roasting marshmallows and making and eating s'mores was a treat around the fire on Friday night.

One of the outdoor activities on Saturday provided a way for the IDB transition students and staff to “reach out” or “give back” to the YMCA Camp community. The group tackled a very large pile of firewood and neatly stacked it in a nearby wood shed. The next task involved raking up and bagging a thick blanket of leaves that had accumulated around some of the Camp buildings.

Another outdoor activity on Saturday provided each of the teenagers and IDB staff with a physically challenging yet confidence-building opportunity. Participants volunteered to climb a ladder propped up against a telephone pole. Two students were asked to hold the ladder so it wouldn't slip off the pole while the participant climbed. Climbers were equipped with safety harnesses to prevent falls. A line connected to the harnesses through a pulley system was manned by a YMCA Camp staffer.

Once a participant reached the top of the ladder, they stepped up onto a series of pegs attached to the telephone pole. The participant continued to climb up the pole by grabbing pegs with his or her hands while stepping on other pegs with his or her feet. The climber ascended a total of 35 feet onto a small platform extending out from the telephone pole. Another YMCA Camp employee then transferred the safety lines to a zip line. The participant sat down on the platform and slid off the edge for an exhilarating zip line ride across the grassy area and down to a few feet from the ground.

The activity was an exercise in trust for the students. In question were their own abilities, the two people holding the ladder, the

man in charge of the safety line, and the assistant on the platform. The zip line was a new challenge for most of the transition students.

On Sunday morning, students and staff learned how to build two types of survival campfires – one for warmth and the other for cooking. They first gathered the necessary wood and kindling. The group learned that the best heat-producing fire is created when several logs are stood on end so that the other ends of the logs can lean toward each other to form a “teepee.” If there is a need to cook over a campfire, the wood is arranged in the shape of a log cabin, forming a flat surface on top. In both cases, the students learned that kindling is an important element of starting a fire and that fanning the flames may be necessary to keep the fire going.

The Survival Revival Retreat provided many opportunities for the blind and visually impaired teens to make conscious decisions to push themselves out of their comfort zones. The retreat was successful in helping IDB Transition students make strides toward understanding that if they reach beyond what they think are their limitations, they will discover their true abilities. ♦



Students “give back” by raking leaves at the YMCA Camp.



By Linda Slayton

Reaching out can imply either an act of giving or receiving. Most people find themselves on both sides of that coin from time to time. We offer help when we can and sometimes we must also ask for help. The latter isn't always so easy to do. Our society values independence and so it seems somehow wrong to need assistance. Yet, we don't think another is weak because they need a hand. In fact, there is a bond that is created when people work together for the good of one or more individuals.



hard. Instinct tells us to protect our boundaries. If we let someone see the gaps in our fortress, then we never know when an attack might come.

I can't say attacks never happen because we've all had them. People take advantage through scams or through ridicule. They are careless with our feelings. The bigger picture, however, is that every fortress also has a gate, and it is through letting good, caring people



Blindness, too, is part of that two-sided coin. Sometimes we help others by providing information, advice, or teaching alternative techniques. There are also times we must seek help. It might involve transitioning into blindness, learning skills, or navigating in a sighted world. As much as we'd like to just do it on our own, we can't. I think it goes beyond the independence issue. It also involves vulnerability. One of the hardest things to do is trust someone with our weaknesses. We may know our limits, but putting them out there for others to see is

in that we make our fortress stronger. For me, reaching out is all about letting others in. Initially, telling people about my blindness seemed like admitting a weakness. As I gained self confidence and skills, that weakness grew into strength. It became a tool to connect me with other blind people, as well as people in general. Having knowledge about any subject, including blindness, creates an opportunity for growth. The advancements

in this world wouldn't exist without the sharing of information and the willingness to help one another.

The more we interact, the more we learn the value of helping each other. It becomes less about "me" and more about "we". Reaching out is a process of building a network of like-minded individuals who provide support, interact and build bonds with each other. Sometimes it's called working for the greater good. Sometimes it's simply called building friendships.

Reaching out is important no matter which side of the coin we may find ourselves on, for there is great value in both giving and receiving. We all know how good it feels to help others, and we should remember that letting others help us can be a gift not only to them but also to ourselves. I have learned a lot about myself from being on both sides of the coin, and I have learned that the first step is to reach out. But the most important thing about reaching out, whether through giving or receiving, is that you can't reach out without first "reaching in." ♦

*Linda Slayton is a freelance writer living in Des Moines. She can be reached by email at [lcslayton@yahoo.com](mailto:lcslayton@yahoo.com)*

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**DB/RC57420**

***The Queen of Clean Conquers Clutter*, by Linda Cobb**

Author of books on house cleaning and home management offers suggestions for getting rid of clutter. From room to room Cobb shows how to use her QUEEN system: question, unpack, evaluate, eliminate, and neaten up. Her advice for the kitchen covers storage life for various foods. 2002.

**BRD18117, DB53469**

***How to Win Friends and Influence People (1998)*, by Dale Carnegie**

Originally published in 1937, this guide provides fundamental techniques in handling people. Includes how to make people like you, how to win them to your way of thinking, and how to be a leader without offending or arousing resentment.

**BR17671, DB/RC66114**

***Focus on the Good Stuff: The Power of Appreciation*, by Mike Robbins**

Robbins, a motivational speaker and a former professional baseball player, offers strategies for overcoming negative influences to improve relationships, find success and fulfillment, and experience an overall gratitude for life. Discusses five principles of appreciation, the power of positive thinking, and the importance of acknowledging others. Includes exercises. 2007. Foreword by Richard Carlson. ◆

*To request these or other titles contact your Reader's Advisor at (800) 362-2587.*

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But no matter what activities we do, or what side-trips we take, people are reminded throughout these retreats that the goal of training is not the accomplishment of a specific task. It's the overall process; the successful development of skills and techniques, and the confidence to use them and participate fully in society. ◆



An afternoon cruise on the Mississippi River was an excellent way to learn about the area's natural history.



The beautiful, natural setting of Sugar Creek contributes to the unique experiences that campers have at the retreat.

# NOTES

## Director

Richard Sorey

Richard.Sorey@blind.state.ia.us

## Deputy Director

Bruce Snethen

bruce.snethen@blind.state.ia.us

## Commission for the Blind

Next meeting: Saturday, January 12, 2013, 10:00 a.m.

Director's Conference Room, IDB

Mike Hoenig, Commission Chair

Peggy Elliott, Member

Sandra Ryan, Member

## Mission:

The Iowa Department for the Blind is the means for persons who are blind to obtain for themselves universal accessibility and full participation in society in whatever roles they may choose, including roles that improve Iowa's economic growth.

- We would love to come speak about blindness at your club or organization's next meeting.
- We also provide training workshops on blindness at your school or office.
- If you've never seen our building and want to learn more about our services and what we provide in our building, we'd love to give you a tour.

Email us at [information@blind.state.ia.us](mailto:information@blind.state.ia.us) or call us at (800) 362-2587 for more information.

# UPCOMING EVENTS

## February 2

### The 2013 Iowa Braille Challenge

#### IDB Building, Des Moines, IA

The Iowa Braille Challenge is a state-level competition in which students are tested on Braille reading, comprehension and writing. They compete with others their age in these categories. Those with the highest scores will have a chance to compete at the national competition.

## March 27

### Legislative Open House

#### Iowa State Capitol, Des Moines, IA

Staff members from IDB host an early morning open house at the Capitol to meet and greet state legislators and their staff. Guests munch on tasty breakfast items and sip on hot coffee while learning about the many services offered to blind and visually impaired Iowans through the IDB. From 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. Open to the public.

## April 19

### Elizabeth Perowsky Volunteer Workshop and Luncheon

#### IDB Building, Des Moines, IA

Library volunteers attend training at the workshop, enjoy a luncheon, and receive recognition from the Iowa Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped at an awards ceremony.

More upcoming events and details at [www.idbonline.org/news](http://www.idbonline.org/news)

## **Did You Know?**

**The Iowa Department for the Blind achieved a number of accomplishments related to our strategic goals in FY2012:**

- **Eighty-two blind lowans obtained or retained a job after receiving Vocational Rehabilitation services, with an average hourly wage of \$18.96.**
- **Of the 82 employment outcomes, eight blind lowans became self-employed. In addition, eighteen blind lowans are self-employed vending operators in the Business Enterprises Program, with an average annual net income of \$44,420.**
- **The Department's Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped maintains a collection of over 88,000 book titles and over 100 different magazines in alternative media. This year the library exceeded its circulation target by 83,656.**
- **Older lowans who experience significant vision loss need training in order to learn new ways of performing daily tasks so that they can maintain or regain their independence. Independent Living (IL) skills training by IL staff ensured that 90% of our IL clients met their Independent Living goals.**