

# The WhiteCane

The magazine of the Iowa Department for the Blind



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50 years of  
Opportunity

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job retention

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## |from the editor

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *The White Cane*, the quarterly magazine of the Iowa Department for the Blind.

We are excited to be launching this publication to better inform our readers about our breadth of services we offer blind and visually impaired Iowans. This publication replaces several newsletters the department has issued over the years.

We are out every day working to help empower those with significant vision loss to live productive and full lives.

There have been many changes at the department, including our new website and logo and our redesigned building. We have also welcomed new staff members to help expand our reach throughout Iowa.

We hope you enjoy this first issue and continue to support the IDB's efforts.

— Shoshana Hebshi

Letters & comments can be e-mailed to: [idbcomm@blind.state.ia.us](mailto:idbcomm@blind.state.ia.us)

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Because of Iowa's current economic situation, Gov. Culver mandated a 10-percent across-the-board cut to all departments in the executive branch, including the Iowa Department for the Blind.

In addition, the governor has mandated seven days without pay for our 60 non-contract employees and five days without pay for our 32 contract-covered employees.

The net result of these cuts will be some delays in services, as staff balance their workloads with fewer hands and fewer hours. We will also be unable to match all of the available federal funds as a result.

The upcoming legislative session will focus on the state budget and legislators have promised to take a hard look at reorganizing state government to create savings wherever possible. All in all, we anticipate a challenging year ahead. In spite of this, we pledge to do our best to meet your needs.

Department offices will be closed on Feb. 12, March 15, April 2 and May 28 due to the mandated time off.

All is not doom and gloom, however. In October we celebrated the 50th anniversary of our Orientation Center with an open house, awards ceremony, a public transit forum, and

a 50th anniversary banquet. We have launched our new website at

[www.IDBonline.org](http://www.IDBonline.org), along with a new presence on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. And you won't want to miss our blog focused on the Orientation Center.

We have created our first locally produced digital talking books and, with the help of a substantial grant from the Friends of the Library, we will be making them available on cartridges soon. We have sent our new employee, Lance Blas, out to introduce the new digital talking book players to people across the state.

We have several upcoming training events during which participants will meet others in their communities dealing with vision loss and learn easy ways to carry out everyday tasks. And best of all, we are helping people regain their independence, find jobs, and get back into the full and productive lives all blind people deserve.

Sincerely,  
*Karen Keninger*





# 50 Years of Opportunity

The Iowa Department for the Blind celebrates 50 years of turning its groundbreaking philosophy into daily practice

**F**ifty years ago, Dr. Kenneth Jernigan refined the novel concept of empowering blind people to lead confident, successful lives.

He brought that vision to Iowa and transformed the state's services for blind and visually impaired Iowans, making the Iowa Department for the Blind one of the top service providers of its kind in the country.

Jernigan's philosophy has given thousands of Iowans renewed hope after severe



vision loss. Through the Department's array of services that includes help finding and retaining jobs, teaching non-visual techniques for everyday tasks and encouraging confidence, Iowans around the state have found success in their lives at home, at work and in their communities.

The Department celebrated these accomplishments during an open house on Friday, Oct. 30, 2009 in its historical downtown Des Moines building, which has recently been remodeled to better serve its clients.

During the open house tours of the building were offered to the public, providing an in-depth look at the many services the Department offers and a chance to meet with staff and clients.

The anniversary program also featured a panel of clients, who discussed how they have benefitted from the Department's services.

IDB client Phillip Tracy checks out some of the accessible technology devices on display during the open house.



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An awards ceremony followed the panel, honoring clients, community partners and employers who have made a significant contribution to the Department's work over the years.

"At the Iowa Department for the Blind, our mission is to create opportunities for independence," said Director Karen Keninger. "It is the place in Iowa where blind and visually impaired Iowans can learn the skills, develop the confidence and get the help they need to go back to work, back to school, back to their roles in family and community-- in a word, back to life.

"Over the past 50 years we have proven thousands of times that with the proper training and opportunities, blind people can work at regular jobs, raise families, run for public office, volunteer, take leadership roles in their communities and civic organizations, and do anything else they want to do."

The 50th anniversary celebration also included a public transit forum, at which

officials from the Iowa Department of Transportation and Sen. Chuck Grassley presented to the public a statewide study assessing Iowa's transportation needs.

Audience members were able to comment on the study's findings, which were presented to the state legislature this winter for action.

The annual Orientation Center alumni banquet followed the transportation forum. Nearly 100 alumni and department staff attended (see story on page 15).

"The 50th anniversary was an opportunity to show the public and our clients how far we have come since 1959 and also to acknowledge the work ahead for us," said Keninger. ♦



LEFT: Department Staff Tiffany Bickell demonstrates an old loom during the Open House. TOP: Monty Habben discusses his success in the Business Enterprises Program. ABOVE: Kevin and Linda Slayton during the Alumni Banquet.







IDB staff Susie Stageberg reads the Braille on the placards at the new Pappajohn Sculpture Park in downtown Des Moines. Working with the Des Moines Art Center, which oversees the multi-million dollar public garden, the Iowa Department for the Blind encouraged the addition of Braille on the placards. Additionally, the Department will be training docents this spring in giving special tours of the sculpture park to those with significant vision loss.



## Art Center incorporates Braille into downtown sculpture park

## Work with Iowa poet laureate moves beyond words

When Iowa Poet Laureate Mary Swander had dinner with a few friends of the Department for the Blind, no one knew of the relationship that was about to form.

Swander had come to the Department to read from her latest book of poetry as part of the annual Friends of the Iowa Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped Iowa author reads series. During dinner before the reading, she was presented

with an idea of creating poetry that was more accessible to the blind.

Being an advocate for disability awareness and also a library patron, Swander took on the challenge.

Two months later, Swander presented her Iowa State University undergraduate poetry students' project: "More than Words: A tactile and audible poetry experience."

The students wrote original poems and described

them through music, sculpture and other objects.

The project is on display in the IDB Library, and there are hopes of expanding the project and its messages of accessibility. ♦



Mary Swander

# Seminar series brings new approach to vision loss training in communities

By Barb Weigel  
Contributing Editor

Since 2000, the Iowa Department for the Blind's Independent Living (IL) program has provided Iowans who have significant vision loss with education in non-visual skills through community-based trainings.

Typically these training opportunities are arranged wherever a need has been expressed and there are three or more individuals interested in participating. This has worked well, and we plan to continue to use this approach.

However, the Department decided at the end of 2009 to sponsor trainings before requests were made. We set a time, date and place and allowed people to register before-

hand. The trainings were advertised and open to anyone in the area with significant vision loss.

These trainings were a great success.

With assistance from Sue English at Northland Aging Association in Decora and Mary Lynn ReVoor, Iowa Lead Disability Navigator with Iowa Workforce Partners Employment Network, six trainings were arranged in northeast Iowa.

"These trainings were great because they provided

“They provided in-depth exposure to vision loss and the accommodations that can be made.

—Samuel Townswick  
*Human Services Instructor*

a much more in-depth exposure to vision loss and the accommodations that can be made, than I am able to



Shirley Wiggins received the Independent Living Award during the Iowa Department for the Blind's 50th anniversary celebration for her service to the IDB and to the Cedar Rapids community. Wiggins, an active client of the Department, has been instrumental in getting Cedar Rapids-area residents with vision loss linked up with the Department for services. She also serves as leader of the Linn County support group for people with vision loss.

provide," said Samuel Townswick, human services instructor at Northern Iowa Community College, a site of one of the trainings.

"I liked the simulations done with sleep shades: cooking, check writing, cane travel. I liked to see students grappling with these tasks," Townswick said."

The final session will be held Feb. 24 and 25 at the Elkader Senior Center in

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Elkader.

Each session included six hours of training offered in a flexible format either during a single day or across a couple of days.

Participants were provided with guidance to help them maintain independence.

This includes:

- Group discussion to promote a positive adjustment to vision loss;
- Information on how to access free audio services for books, magazines, newspaper, and general information;
- Communication techniques including use of the phone, managing personal records and correspondence, keeping track of phone numbers and appointments, and more;
- Techniques for safe and independent mobility;
- Simple techniques for many activities of daily living including cooking, shopping, managing medications, and handling money.

Anyone interested in participating in or hosting a community-based training should contact the Independent Living program at 800-362-2587. ♦

## Looking for a Speaker?

Representatives from the Independent Living program are available to provide presentations to your group at no cost to you.

Throughout the years, we have spoken to a variety of groups including residents of retirement communities, visiting nurses, activity departments, social workers, care facilities, senior centers, groups of retirees, optimist clubs, church groups, civic organizations and more.

A variety of topics can be discussed, including services available through the Iowa Department for the Blind, devices available to assist with every day tasks, simple solutions for completing tasks and more.

The length of the presentations can be set according to the needs of your group.

For more information or to request a presentation, call Carolyn Hicklin at 800-362-2587 or e-mail [carolyn.hicklin@blind.state.ia.us](mailto:carolyn.hicklin@blind.state.ia.us)



## Get Independent Living Tips in your e-mail inbox!

The IDB Independent Living program has begun a monthly e-mail providing a single tip to encourage independent living.

The tips show how simple non-visual techniques can make a seemingly difficult task, like making a shopping list or identifying an on/off button, easy.

These tips can be quite helpful for everyday living and maintaining independence.

Sign up to receive these tips by filling out a simple form with your name and e-mail online at <http://www.idbonline.org/form/independent-living-tips-sign-form>



## Partnership with Iowa DOT nets job retention

By Julie Aufdenkamp  
Contributing Editor

**S**ue Hickey is an information technology system support worker in the Office of Driver Services (ODS) at the Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT). She is a hard working, tax-paying Iowan. She is also blind.

For the past three decades, Hickey has done her best to keep up with her workload, which includes a lot of time in front of a computer screen. Hickey's vision loss has proven to be a challenge throughout much of her career; however, the DOT has been very supportive.

"Over the years the DOT has always been on board with doing whatever it took to make my job easier," said Hickey, who is totally blind in her left eye and legally blind in her right. "And I thought I was doing okay."

A friend and co-worker told Hickey about the Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB), and she decided to call. She was connected with IDB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Rosie Thierer in April 2009.

After assessing Hickey's work environment, Thierer secured some work equipment, such as two large



Members of the Iowa Department of Transportation Driver Services Division receive an award from the IDB for their cooperation and support in helping Sue Hickey alter her work environment to help adjust for her vision loss.

monitors and ZoomText software, which magnifies text and uses audio and enhanced color options to help the user see what is on the screen, and by June, Hickey was using the equipment at work. At her home she also received a computer program with speech to help her learn keyboarding skills. Hickey also began receiving books on tape from the Department's Library.

"Rosie provided recommendations and training she knew would assist me daily, not only in my job but in my personal life as well," said Hickey, who has had vision loss since birth. "I didn't realize how behind-the-times I was. There have been so many advances in

technology that I didn't even know about."

While Hickey said she is still learning how to use her new system, it has already helped in areas she would not have expected. "I didn't realize how much I leaned over in my chair to get as close to the screen as I could," she said. "It's so nice to be able to sit back in my chair and still be able to read the screen."

The many screen options with ZoomText has greatly enhanced her workspace. "There are color choices to help reduce glare. Dark text on a light background has always been a problem for me and caused a lot of eye strain and headaches. That's

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# Employment specialist wins award for her dedication

**B**renda Criswell, a job placement specialist with the Iowa Department for the Blind, received the Commissioners' Award in October 2009 for her work helping blind and visually impaired Iowans seek and retain competitive employment.



The award is presented as part of the Governor's Annual Awards Program through the Iowa Commission of Persons with Disabilities.

Criswell, who has worked for the IDB for 31 years, works as a liaison between employers and blind and visually impaired clients, often using her persistence and personable demeanor to place clients in well-suited, career-oriented jobs.

"The Commission is honored to bestow this award on Brenda Criswell," said Jackie Wipperman, disability counselor with the Division and Commission of Persons with Disabilities. "Brenda puts those ideals into action every day in the work she does." ♦

## Talking Tech w/ Curtis Chong

### "The 64-Bit Conundrum"

**W**hen we first began using Windows back in the mid to late '90's, the computers we purchased were built around 32-bit processors.

I will not bore you with all the technical details, but suffice it to say that a 32-bit processor represented the foundation upon which everything was built--the operating system, speech or screen enlargement access technology, and all of the programs used to perform ordinary tasks on the computer.

At the time these processors were built, few people thought computers would need to address more than four gigabytes of memory. Today, when you go to the store to purchase a new computer, you are almost guaranteed to get a 64-bit processor.

Because the 64-bit processor is only now becoming ubiquitous in the computer marketplace, you need to ask whether the computer you are buying uses a 32-bit or a 64-bit processor.

Armed with this very important data, you can ensure that your new computer will

## Accessible Technology

work properly for you.

I have checked with leading vendors Freedom Scientific, GW Micro and Ai Squared, and all three assured me that the latest versions of their respective programs work on a 64-bit computer.

However, you should be aware that there is a problem with support for refreshable Braille displays.

Simply put, if you are buying a new computer and you want to use it with a particular Braille display model, you should first check with the access technology vendor to be sure the display you want will work in the 64-bit environment.

For example, we found that in JAWS for Windows, the number of refreshable Braille displays supported in its 64-bit version dropped off dramatically as compared to the 32-bit version.

Also, if you have an older scanner, printer, or some other external device that you want to use with your new computer, you should take great care to ensure that a "driver" for this device can be obtained for your new 64-bit computer. The best way to do this is to check with the company that sells the particular printer or scanner. ♦



# Digital talking books combine ease and quality

By **Beth Hirst**  
Contributing Editor

**T**he digital revolution is under way! The Iowa Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped received its first shipment of Digital Talking Book Machines (DTMs) in May 2009, as part of the pre-launch testing program for the National Library Service (NLS). The testing was concluded in July, and regular monthly

shipments began in August.

All library patrons on the original waiting list for machines have received players and are now enjoying the benefits of high-quality sound and ease of operation. Those patrons who have not yet received a digital machine are invited to call the Library at 800-362-2587 to request one.

DTBs consist of a flash



memory cartridge, about the size of a cassette tape, with a large finger hole near one end. A single cartridge, which does not have to be turned over or rewound, will hold an entire book. The mailing containers are blue and about half as thick as the green cassette boxes.

The library has received about 1,000 DTB titles for circulation, with additional books arriving every day.

"Patrons who have tried the new format are thrilled with the sound clarity as well as the simplicity of navigation," said Library Director Tracey Morsek. "This digital format also makes the books more durable so we can continue to have a sizeable collection in prime condition."

A new feature of the digital player that has received rave reviews is

## Library to honor stalwart mail carriers

The Iowa Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped celebrates its 50th anniversary in July, and without the collaboration with the United States Postal Service, library service statewide would not have been so swift and easy.

Faithful and tireless mail carriers have delivered countless Braille and large-print books, records, cassettes, videos, playback machines and digital books between the Des Moines headquarters and our many patrons throughout the state.

In July the Library will honor this legacy by recognizing individual postal workers who have touched the lives of our patrons with their caring service.

Do you have a mail carrier who goes out of his or her way to ensure you receive your library material? Help us say thank you by submitting a name for nomination by May 1 to your reader advisor or library secretary Dawna Ray at (800) 362-2587 or [dawna.ray@blind.state.ia.us](mailto:dawna.ray@blind.state.ia.us). Provide the carrier's name, post office address and phone number and details as to why you are making the nomination.



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# Volunteers' donation to increase locally-produced digital audio books and sacred texts distribution

The Friends of the Iowa Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped presented Library Director Tracey Morsek with a \$10,000 check in December 2009, to help with sacred book distribution and with the transition to digital book format.

This was the third year in a row the Friends donated \$10,000 to the Library. Morsek acknowledged the gift as an important and exciting contribution to the Library's ongoing effort to provide the public with accessible books and magazines.

"The Friends make a difference every year," Morsek said. "The work they do increases our ability to serve our patrons and grow our collection. We are grateful for their dedication to our program. I cannot praise the Friends board enough."

Friends President Louise Duvall said the money raised is generated completely

through volunteer activity and donated to the library as a gift. There are no overhead costs.

She praised the donations as going to pay for "real things that we can put our hands on."

Previous gifts have helped furnish a reading room, and supported events, such as the Iowa Braille Challenge, the Perowsky Volunteer Luncheon and the summer reading club.

This year's gift is separated into specified amounts toward several projects—the largest amounts going to the purchase and distribution of sacred texts and to the transition from analog to digital audio book format. The donation will pay for digital book cartridges to be played on the new National Library Service digital talking book players.

"Our transition to digital

audio makes our books more accessible for our patrons," Morsek said. "Our ability to produce high-quality recordings augments the national

The work they do increases our ability to serve our patrons.

—Tracey Morsek  
Library Director

collection, and the enhanced navigation allows our borrowers to read more independently."

You can support the Library by joining the Friends or making a donation. Write to:

Friends of the Iowa  
Library for the Blind and  
Physically Handicapped  
P.O. Box 93046  
Des Moines, IA 50393-  
3046

or e-mail: [library\\_friends@msn.com](mailto:library_friends@msn.com). ♦

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the sleep button. When this button, shaped like a crescent moon, is pressed, a timer is engaged. The player will shut off after 15 minutes.

Each press of the button will add 15 minutes to the timer, up to one hour. The timer will save the reader's place in the book in case he or she falls asleep.

Because the cost of

materials for a DTB is considerably more than that for a cassette book, the library is asking patrons to return all digital books and magazines when finished with them. ♦



# Independent living-Library liasion to connect services

By Beth Hirst  
Contributing Editor

**L**ance Blas is something of a renaissance man. As the Department's new Independent Living-Library liasion, Blas will travel statewide to visit patrons, assist with library services including the new digital talking books, teach independent living skills, and develop support groups and book clubs.

Blas was hired in October 2009 and now travels the state connecting Independent Living clients with library services and Library patrons with independent living services.

"I love the idea of helping people to open the doors to their world through literature," said Blas. "Whether it is someone discovering the joy of reading for the first time or getting reacquainted with their favorite books that they thought they could no longer read. I feel honored to be a part of this. It's exciting to see people gain independence by embracing the services that we offer at the Iowa Department for the Blind."

It has been more than 20 years since the Library had a staff member assigned to meet with patrons in their homes. When the Department came into some federal stimulus money, the decision was made to create a position that would combine the services of an Independent Living teacher with a Library representative. The timing was perfect to take the new digital player on the road and introduce it to our senior patrons.

If you would like to have Lance visit you or speak to a group in your area, you can call: 800-362-2587 (toll-free in Iowa), 515-281-7724, or e-mail: lance.blas@blind.state.ia.us. ♦



Lance Blas (right) describes how to use a digital talking book player.

## From the librarian

**A**s our Iowa winter lingers, readers looking for some warm reading may want to order our Winter Reading Club booklist: *Fireside Reading*.



Ranging from cozy and comfortable to a tad more dangerous, all of the titles on the list offer an escape from the wind and biting cold of an Iowa winter. Best of all, each time you borrow one of the Fireside Books, you'll be entered in a drawing to win a Winter Reading Club prize. Call your reader advisor to request Fireside Reading and join the reading club.

On July 1, 1960, the Library circulated its first book. We will be marking this milestone with a 50th anniversary celebration this July, and we need your help. We would love to hear your memories and stories about the Library. So we are inviting our borrowers of all ages and backgrounds to write to us, explaining what the Iowa Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped means to you.

Do you remember what it was like to be a blind Iowan before our library opened? Has the Library made a difference in your life? After 50 years, we want to chronicle how far we have come as we map our future of providing access to information for blind and disabled readers throughout the state.

Happy reading,  
Tracey Morsek

# BOOKLIST

## At the Movies

Teens and movies go together like...popcorn and butter. But some of the most interesting movie characters first started out as characters in books. Readers young and old may enjoy these novels for junior and senior high readers that served as inspiration for some recent motion pictures.

**DB/RC 57232**

***Eragon* by Christopher Paolini**

Fifteen-year-old Eragon bonds with the baby dragon, Saphira, that hatches from a mysterious blue stone. They train in magic and martial arts and, refusing to serve the evil king, sally forth to encounter warriors, dwarves, and others battling the empire. Some violence.

**BR 13276, DB/RC 44343, LT 7052**

***The Golden Compass* by Phillip Pullman**

A tale set in Victorian England on an alternate Earth. Young Lyra Belacqua and her daemon enjoy an idyllic life among the scholars at Jordan College. Then her friend Roger and other children are abducted by the Gobblers. Venturing north in pursuit, Lyra encounters an alien and sinister world. Violence.

**BRD 21236, RC 51524**

***The Princess Diaries* by Meg Cabot**

Fourteen-year-old Mia

keeps a diary of her problems – she's too tall and flat, she's flunking algebra, and her mom is dating her teacher. But then her dad arrives from Europe to announce that Mia is really a princess and the heir to his throne.

**BR 18146, DB/RC 62066**

***Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer**

After 17-year-old Bella moves in with her dad in Washington state, she falls in love with high school senior Edward Cullen. Bella discovers that Edward and his adoptive clan are vampires. Though they feast on wildlife rather than humans, Bella is still in danger. ♦

## *Driftless* by David Rhodes

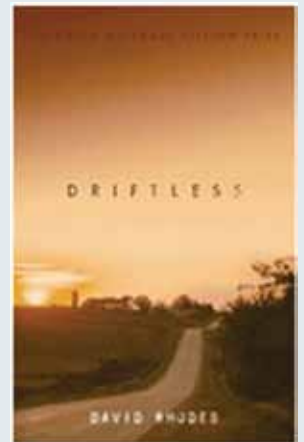
The Iowa Center for the Book has announced the 2010 All Iowa Reads title: *Driftless*, by David Rhodes, who grew up near Des Moines. *The following information was provided by the Iowa Center for the Book.*

With *Driftless*, Rhodes returns to the midwestern landscape he knows so well, offering a fascinating and entirely unsentimental portrait of a town apparently left behind by the march of time.

Home to a few hundred people yet absent from state maps, Words, Wisconsin, comes richly to life by way of an extraordinary cast of characters. Among them, a middle-aged couple guards the family farm from the mendacious schemes of their milk co-operative; a lifelong paraplegic suddenly regains the use of her legs, only to find herself crippled by fury at her sister and caretaker; a woman of conflicting impulses and pastor of the local Friends church stumbles upon an enlightenment she never expected; a cantankerous retiree discovers a cougar living in his haymow, haunting him like a childhood memory; and a former drifter forever alters the ties that bind a community together.

At once intimate and funny, wise and generous, *Driftless* is an unforgettable story of contemporary life in rural America.

Request LT8806, DB 68424 or BRD23872. If you would be interested in joining a book discussion on this title, contact Lance Blas, 515-281-7724 or [lance.blas@blind.state.ia.us](mailto:lance.blas@blind.state.ia.us).





# Celebrating 50 years of ‘building cathedrals’

By Rebecca Swainey  
Contributing Editor

**A**t 5 p.m. on the evening of Oct. 31, 2009, a group of 182 gathered in the Assembly Room of the Iowa Department for the Blind for a banquet to celebrate the success of an experiment that began on Nov. 1, 1959.

Orientation Center alumni, current students, present and former staff, family and friends all came together not only to celebrate the golden anniversary of the Iowa Orientation and Adjustment Center, but to honor one who was there at the inception and who played an instrumental role in the success of this innovative training program.

Sandy Tigges, Orientation Center administrator and a 1966 graduate of the Center, welcomed everyone to the festivities and introduced Cindy Ray, a 1965 alumnus of the Center, for the invocation before the meal was served.

Each table contained a basket of rolls. Servers came around to ladle bowls of “dirty water” shrimp soup.



Jim Witte (left), a former director of the Iowa Department for the Blind's Orientation Center, receives an award for his service and dedication from Dave Hauge, rehabilitation referral specialist for the Center.

The entrée consisted of a delicious stuffed pork loin accompanied by mixed vegetables and a wild rice dish with mushrooms and celery. For dessert we had cheesecake with a berry compote drizzled on top. Once everyone had enjoyed their meal and time to chat with their table companions, Sandy rose again to act as program moderator.

Our own well-loved poet laureate, James K. Crawford, was on hand with his tribute to the evening (see page 16).

Ed Sheppard was also on deck for the reading of the list of attendance.

A new twist was added

when Terry Brannen, a student who had just completed Center training, was presented his certificate during the program.

Then came the main event; Karen Keninger, Director of the Iowa Department for the Blind, spoke of the history of the Center, its inception and creation, and of the role our guest of honor, one L. James Witte, played in its formation and success.

She called Dave Hauge forward to present Jim a beautifully framed picture of him sitting in his “log cabin” office in 1986 when he was

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Orientation Program Administrator. Under the picture was a plaque with the words “L. James Witte, Cathedral Builder,” a tribute to the wisdom of Jim’s own comments about the Center during a banquet address given shortly after his retirement. It was an emotionally moving moment as everyone rose to their feet in his honor.

Jim took a moment to gather himself, then with his ever-present sense of humor commented that the picture was of a much younger fellow, and he didn’t recognize the man Karen had spoken of earlier.

He went on to say he felt he should set the record straight and tell everyone how it all really started. It was a treat to hear him reminiscence about those early days when, together with Ruth Schroeder and under the guidance of Kenneth Jernigan, they pioneered what came to be known as “The Iowa Model.”

Following Jim, Karen again took the podium to give the evening’s banquet address. She gave further insight into the history and the role Dorothy Kirschner, then a Commission Board Member, played in bringing Mr. Jernigan to Iowa and in obtaining the building at 524 Fourth Street. Karen gave respectful recognition

## Recent graduates off to work, school

Two of the Orientation Center’s recent graduates have completed their months of training and started on with the rest of their lives.

Terry Brannen, who graduated in October, has entered the Department’s B.E.P. program as a licensed operator and is learning the ropes of operating an independent vending business.

Kaylee Hill has returned to her native Council Bluffs and enrolled as a full-time student at Iowa Western Junior College.

Their graduations are representative of the many successes produced through the valuable training that leads to increased self-confidence, motivation and independent living.

Cane Tracks, a blog about life in the Orientation Center written by its students is online at <http://idbcomm.wordpress.com>



**TOP:** Terry Brannen, left, receives a certificate of completion of the Orientation Center from its director, Sandy Tigges.

**ABOVE:** Kaylee Hill explores a Victor Stream digital audio player.

of all that has been accomplished in the 50 years since the Center began. But she also admonished her audience not to be complacent. She reminded everyone that we have come a long way in 50 years, but we still have a long way to go before blindness is truly put in its proper perspective and equality achieved.

*We’re gathered here to take our bows, for work we’ve done –renew our vows. We greet old friends, we make some new; we keep on learning things to do. But most of all, I guess you’d say: “Let’s carry on with Alumni Day!”*

— Jim Crawford  
10/31/09 ♦

# Blind teens learn job prep skills during retreat

By Tai Blas

Contributing Editor

In November, six blind and visually impaired teens in the Iowa Department for the Blind's Youth Transition Program got some experience pounding the pavement during a weekend retreat in Montour, Iowa.

While a main intent of the retreat was to have fun and meet other people with similar experiences, the retreat also focused on job readiness.

"Too many blind and visually impaired students graduate from college with no job experience, leaving them ill-equipped to compete when applying for full-time work," said Megan Johnson, IDB transition employment specialist. "This retreat provided them with skills and practice for getting that first job."

Participants learned interviewing etiquette and other job-related skills, such as filling out applications and making a good first impression.

They also learned about the Americans with Disabilities Act and questions that are illegal for employers to ask. The youth learned different techniques for addressing their blindness or visual impairment during the application process.

Johnson explained that with the poor economy, the job market is tight, especially for entry-level jobs, for which these students would be competing. To land that first job, she added, it is important for the students to be prepared.

"The retreat offered the students a safe setting to learn some functional tools they can take with them into the job market," Johnson said.

Each student created an employment portfolio that included job applications and references. Johnson will work with the students to continually update these portfolios over time.

"During the retreat, the students knew the information they were getting was useful and worthwhile," Johnson said.

Some of the participants had never seen job applications before; they have not been expected to work because of their disability, Johnson said.

"But when they get into the job market thinking they want to be a teacher, land the job, then discover they don't like teaching, there is a



Transition Specialist Keri Osterhaus helps Jeremy Ellis with collecting information for his employment portfolio.

problem. Getting them work experience before they graduate from college will help them figure out their career paths," Johnson said.

"Employers see the need to diversify their employees," she continued. "There are incentives, and they can see that. If you can prove to them that the job can get done by a blind person, they are typically willing to try it."

The students didn't just work during the retreat, however. They also had fun, taking hikes, playing career bingo and hanging out around a bonfire.

"The intent of these weekend retreats is not only to teach valuable independence skills, but to provide a social setting for blind youth to relax and have a good time with each other," said Keri Osterhaus, one of the retreat organizers. ♦



## New manager uses honed skills to build operation

**By Roger Erpelding**  
Contributing Editor

**I**t is our mission in the Business Enterprises Program to create and maintain profitable businesses for blind managers. Part of this mission is to make these blind managers truly independent business folks.

The program—part of the IDB’s vocational rehabilitation services—works jointly with a federal-state government partnership that reserves food service operations in government offices for our program participants.

On the federal level, this is known as The Randolph-Sheppard Act. On the state level, it is simply referred to as 216D, the numeric reference to the Iowa Code citation.

The Department purchases the necessary equipment to operate these food service facilities. Since the program is perpetual, the Department maintains title to the equipment, and replaces it upon obsolescence. The Department also assures an initial product inventory for the incoming business manager.

But it doesn’t stop here. Under the law, the Department, through the B.E.P., conducts ongoing management assistance or

monitoring of all of our facilities.

Keep these things in mind as I introduce you to Carl Drees, our newest blind manager.

Drees, 48, became manager of the Wallace Building Vending Route on April 1, 2009, after completing several months of training to learn the skills and attitudes of blindness at our Orientation and Adjustment Center.

Since our businesses are small, and the manager needs to work hard and be visible, the ability to deal positively with blindness is essential.

Drees lost his vision in 1993 due to optic atrophy. He turned to the IDB because he had heard about the B.E.P. program and thought it would provide him an opportunity to earn a good living and spend more time with his family.

“It took me a while to convince myself that I would be able to do a lot of these things,” he said.

After completing training in the Center, Drees entered into B.E.P. training, where he learned our rules, regulations and requirements along with practical

knowledge of how our program worked and how our facilities were structured.

When Drees came on board, the vending machines were already in place, and a base product inventory was on hand. He was an easy fit

*I am certainly glad I made this step.*

—Carl Drees  
*B.E.P. Manager*

for our program, as he has business experience in day care, locksmithing, farming and operation of a bar in a small town in northeast Iowa. He served food as well as beverages in his bar and, therefore, had a great deal of familiarity with sanitation requirements.

Since our “food service” locations are now almost exclusively in the area of vending machines, his concentration in training was in their operation, maintenance, repair, pricing, programming and vending customer service.

The Wallace Building serves as headquarters for this operation. Drees also serves customers in several other nearby state

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buildings on the Capitol Complex, along with some city locations.

Drawing on his experience as an independent business man, Drees set out to hire employees, get his vehicle ready for the route, hire an accountant to assist with bookkeeping, set a schedule to service the vending machines and ascertain customer needs and preferences in the vending arena.

He went to a nearby vehicle auction with the hope of purchasing an additional vehicle. Being always on the lookout for opportunity, he asked why no food or drink was being catered, and if he could have the chance to do so. The vehicle dispatch folks were more than willing to give him this opportunity. As a result, he catered their vehicle auction on Nov. 14.

Not knowing quite what to expect, the auction catering was a learning experience, and he will do things differently (and more profitably) the next time.

As plans unfolded for the state of Iowa to purchase and occupy the Mercy Capitol Building just a few blocks from the Wallace Building, Drees used his contacts (and now friends) to get his vending “foot in the door” at that location.

His efforts were assisted by the probability that a considerable amount of



Carl Drees manages the Wallace Building vending route in Des Moines. He has found a good fit in the Business Enterprises Program to balance work and family life.

personnel currently occupying offices at some of his buildings would be moving to this location after remodeling.

On Dec. 15, the state formally obtained possession of this building; of course, Drees has been serving the architects and state planners snacks and beverages for several months. Occupancy plans are still far from certain at this writing, but this looks like a good bet for expanded business opportunity and profit for Drees.

It has been said that “the

harder I work, the luckier I get.” Drees has proven this to be the case.

Drees now is able to take pride in his work while supporting seven children and a wife. He even has time to attend his kids’ activities, of which he has “missed far too many” in the past. He also has enough income to provide a better life for his

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

**All the vending services at rest-stops along Iowa highways are operated by blind Iowans in the Business Enterprises Program.**

family.

“It is a very good fit,” he said. “I am certainly glad I made this step.” ♦

# Out of the dark

## Fort Madison woman rediscovers her independence through non-visual techniques and new friendship

By Shoshana Hebshi  
Editor

**W**hen Karen Cox agreed to attend the Iowa Department for the Blind's Senior Orientation week, her main focus was learning to cook again.

After losing much of her vision due to side-effects from lupus and medication, Cox, 57, often mixed up recipes, leaving out key ingredients and causing her husband some gastronomic displeasure.

Cox, a Ft. Madison resident, also had trouble seeing in the dark. Her vision had become so bad that she didn't feel safe leaving the house past dark.

But, after spending an intense week at the Department's Orientation Center, learning non-visual techniques for household tasks and mobility, she gained confidence and made connections with a dozen other seniors dealing with blindness.

It was these connections that prompted her and her rehabilitation teacher from the Department, Susan Howard, to re-launch a defunct



**ABOVE:** Karen Cox (right) graduates from the IDB's senior orientation week in September with (from left) Project Specialist Barb Weigel, Marcia Bauer, Margaret Oliver and fellow student Betty Bernard.

**BELOW:** During senior orientation week, Cox wore sleep shades to train herself to learn non-visual techniques for tasks, such as cooking, doing crafts and woodworking.

vision loss support group in Ft. Madison.

"I think you can learn so much from each other," Cox said. "It's bad enough to have an affliction of whatever it is, but knowledge to me is power, and the more

knowledge we can gain from each other the better."

Cox is a natural people-person. Warm and bubbly, she often cracks jokes and pokes fun at her own disabilities. During Senior Orientation week, she recalled a story about mistaking another man in a hot tub for her

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By Linda Slayton

I love laughter. Of all the sounds I've heard laughter is the one I think is most universal. Everyone responds to it even when we try not to be affected. One of the by-products of blindness in my life is laughter. When things happen that I don't anticipate I could cry. Laughing is a better choice. Laughter is one of those alternative techniques I find most valuable.

Is there anyone out there who hasn't battled a snow drift and lost? Raise your hand if you've talked to someone who has left the room. Better yet, talked to someone who was never in the room?

Funny things just happen when people can't see. It's a given. Certainly in my early days of blindness things weren't so funny. In fact they seemed pretty miserable. I quit my job, moved back home, and spent hours wondering what would become of the life I planned. There wasn't much room for laughter.

Laughter came back into my life in the IDB's Orientation Center. One day one of the teachers papered our doors



with newspaper. I woke up and saw a classmate trying to repair the newspaper barrier after she ripped through it. I asked her what she was doing and she innocently responded, "Putting it back up. I thought it was supposed to be there." We laughed and I helped her remove it.

In the following months it was war. There were sink spray-

I've decided that living as a blind person is sort of like starring in a sitcom.

ers rubber banded in home ec, toilets Saran wrapped in the restrooms, door knobs greased in the halls, and anything and everything else our ingenious minds could dream up. Still, we learned while we laughed.

By the time I left orientation laughter was just a part of life. I made so many mistakes I had no choice but to laugh at them.

I was a college student at the University of Iowa then, and I was fighting the battles of talking to teachers about testing methods and note taking,

of getting text books on tape and learning how to maneuver through them, of meeting people who called my cane a stick and made blind jokes that weren't funny (at least not as funny as mine).

Just when I thought I was through the worst of these trials, I fell twice breaking my left hand and my right wrist. I remember one professor's face when I (already a burden because of my blindness) went in with my hand in a splint, my arm in a cast and told him I thought I might need some extra time. For a man who had the answer to every question including those not even thought of at the time, he was dumbfounded. I had to laugh.

I've decided that living as a blind person is sort of like starring in a sitcom. Sometimes I catch something in the peripheral line of sight I no longer possess and scare myself. Even though no one else is there it makes me laugh. I laugh when my husband, Kevin, and I discuss who is least likely to damage the van on those rare occasions when it needs to be pulled into the garage. Both of us know the odds are about even.

I'm glad that there is always something to laugh about. It

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**COX:** husband and putting her arm around him.

But her severe vision loss and battle with lupus is no comic relief. Cox, who previously started a lupus support group, believes that connecting with others dealing with similar issues will help her in the long run.

"I like support groups," she said. "I think it would be nice to learn some things and to bounce ideas off of each other.

Everybody's going to have different experiences and ways to support each other."

Cox does not hide from her disabilities. When she could no longer work as a bookkeeper because of her vision loss, she retired. She also gave up driving—which has been a difficult thing to surrender. But she hopes the support group, which began in mid-December, will spark connections, including ride-sharing. ♦

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**SLAYTON:** helps with the tougher times.

There's also value in those who dare to laugh with me. They become the important people in my life. I choose to subscribe to the old adage, "Laugh and the world laughs with you. Cry and you'll have to spend a lot more on makeup than necessary." Well something like that... Let's face it, blindness can be funny and we're the comedians in this show. Sometimes, you just gotta laugh. ♦

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all gone now with the ability to have light text on a dark background," Hickey said.

"The IDB training has been great," Hickey added. "I was always current on my work, but now I feel I can be a lot more thorough and hopefully a more productive employee."

Thierer said Hickey was unsure about switching equipment at first, but after a month she was "amazed" at how much easier her job had become. Hickey also was less tired at the end of the day, Thierer said.

"Sue is now a believer in technology and the help that it has given her," said Thierer. "While Sue has 30 years of employment with the DOT, she was not yet ready to retire, and this new technology

will help her keep working until she is ready to go."

Office of Driver Services' Director Kim Snook

I was always current on my work, but now I feel I can be a lot more thorough.

—Sue Hickey  
Department of Transportation

said Hickey is a very positive person and a great employee. She added it is nice to see her looking more

comfortable in her job. "We are very pleased with the outcome of this cooperation with the Department for the Blind."

Hickey said she has always rolled with the punches in life. "This is just a part of me," she said. "You learn to adapt and just accept what you can't change and ask for help when you need it. This new equipment and the way it has changed how I do my job is a tangible benefit that resulted from cooperation between the DOT and Department for the Blind." ♦

### DID YOU KNOW?

The IDB rehabilitates about 100 people a year, saving taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars. Forty rehabilitations a year would pay for IDB's entire budget.

# NOTES

## Director

Karen Keninger

karen.keninger@blind.state.ia.us

## Deputy Director

Bruce Snethen

bruce.snethen@blind.state.ia.us

## Governor's Office Liaison

Brian Jennings

brian.jennings@iowa.gov

## Commission for the Blind

Next meeting: March 18, 10 a.m.

Sandi Ryan, commission chair

Steve Hagemoser, member

Mike Hoenig, 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

## Feb. 24 & 25

### Vision-loss Seminar

#### Elkader Senior Center

Those living in the area experiencing significant vision loss can learn some helpful non-visual techniques for completing everyday tasks. Event is free, but registration is required.

1 to 4 p.m. 133 S. Main St., Elkader

## March 18

### Legislative Open House

#### State Capitol Dining Room

The Iowa Department for the Blind will host a breakfast and informational display about its services that give "something for everyone."

7 to 9 a.m.

## April 16

### Elizabeth Perowsky Volunteer Workshop IDB building, Des Moines

Volunteers are the ambassadors for the Department. During this day-long workshop and luncheon, they will be honored for their service and learn about the many ways they can help spread the word about the IDB.

## April 21

### Luncheon and Open House Clarion Hotel, Sioux City

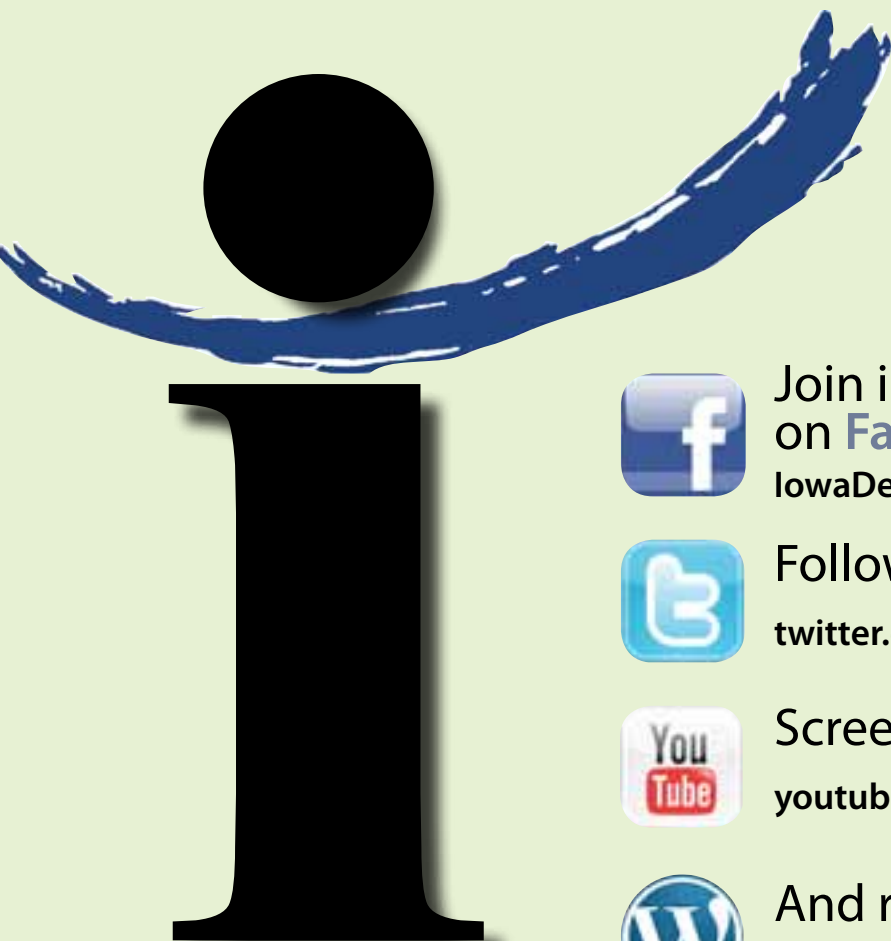
Siouxland employers, people with vision loss and assistive technology vendors are invited to a day-long learning experience about employment opportunities for those with vision loss.

Lunch for employers begins at noon.

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



# The Iowa Department for the Blind is growing its online community!



Find our redesigned  
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And read about Orientation Center  
students on the **Cane Tracks** blog  
[idbcomm.wordpress.com](http://idbcomm.wordpress.com)

Iowa Dept. for the Blind  
524 Fourth St.  
Des Moines, IA 50309

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