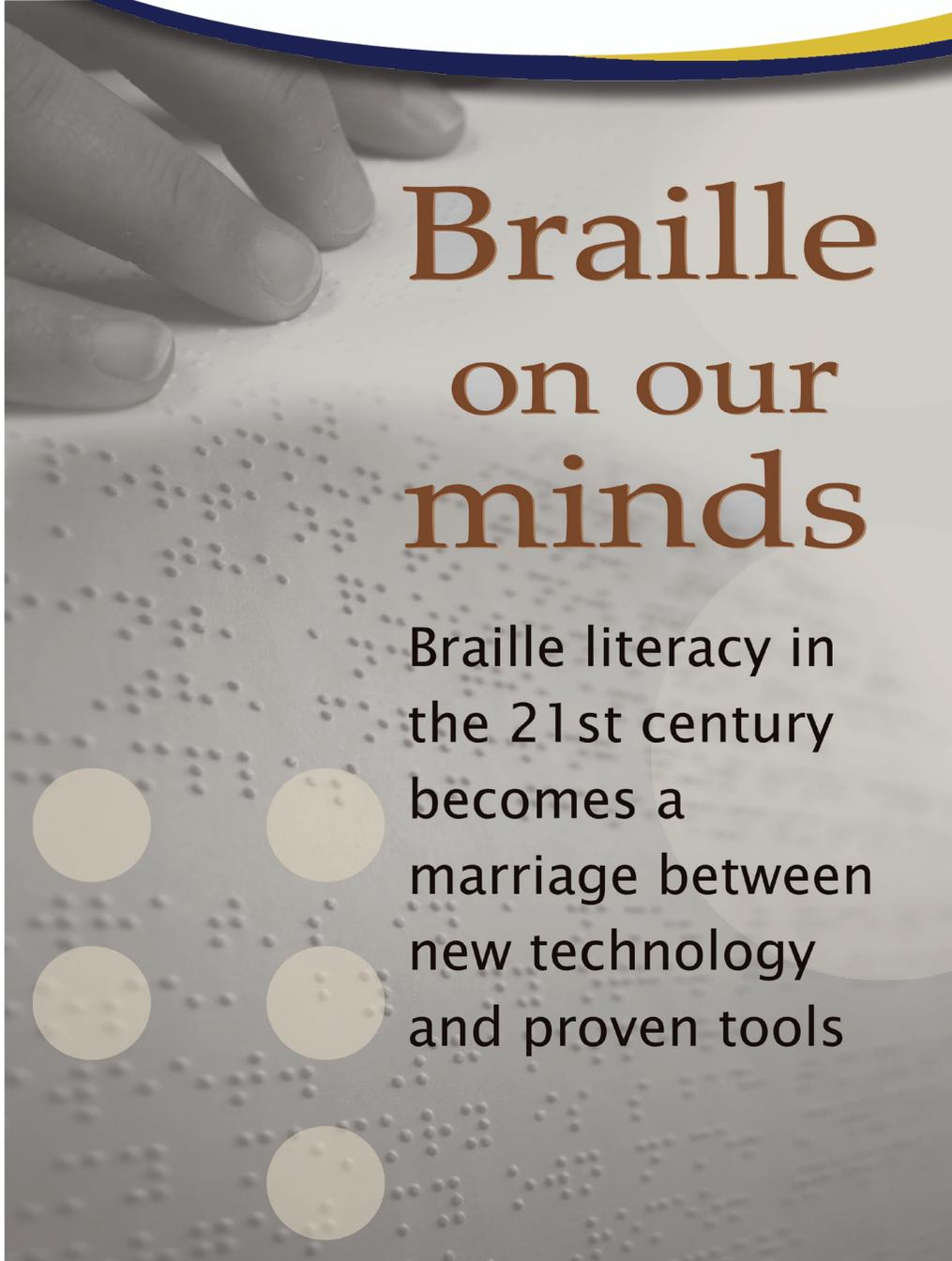


# The WhiteCane

The magazine of the Iowa Department for the Blind



## Braille on our minds

Braille literacy in  
the 21st century  
becomes a  
marriage between  
new technology  
and proven tools

### **INSIDE:**

Learning Braille  
helps maintain  
independence

Americans with  
Disabilities Act  
turns 20

Culture and  
chocolate in  
Orientation

Library  
volunteers as  
ambassadors

Mason City  
man innovates  
with Braille

Yard work:  
Where there's a  
will there's a way

# |contents|

spring 2010 volume I \_ number 2

## news|features

- 4 | Braille in the 21st Century  
Blending new technology with proven methods
- 20 | Braillovation  
Mason City man uses Braille to create organizational tools to stay independent
- 21 | Blind Perspective  
Yard work: Where there's a will there's a way
- 22 | Legislative Open House  
IDB serves up some blindness awareness at annual breakfast at the State Capitol

## |departments

- 3 | From the Director
- 7 | Independent Living
- 9 | Vocational Rehabilitation
- 10 | Accessible Technology
- 11 | Library for the Blind
- 15 | Orientation Center
- 17 | Youth Transition
- 18 | Business Enterprises
- 23 | Upcoming Events



## |from the editor

Spring is here! The Iowa Department for the Blind spent much of its winter talking about Braille and Braille literacy, so we decided to focus on the topic for this issue of the *White Cane*.

Braille is an integral part of a blind individual's development. Studies have shown that those who are taught Braille skills from an early age go on to be more successful academically and professionally than those who do not learn Braille.

Braille allows a blind person to understand language as a sighted person would with printed language. Braille fluency allows a reader to learn grammar, spelling and punctuation, sentence structure and other nuances of written language.

This issue includes articles on the Iowa Braille Challenge and some of our clients who have become successful Braille readers in their later years.

— Shoshana Hebshi

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

**Editor:** Shoshana Hebshi.

**Contributing Editors:** Julie Aufdenkamp, Tai Blas, Curtis Chong, Roger Erpelding, Betty Hansen, Beth Hirst, Tracey Morsek, Rebecca Swainey and Barb Weigel.

## contact us|

### Main Office:

524 Fourth St.  
Des Moines, IA  
50309-2364  
(515) 281-1333 or  
(800) 362-2587 (in Iowa)  
Fax: (515) 281-1263  
TTY: (515) 281-1259

### Cedar Rapids Office:

411 3rd St. SE, Ste. 700  
Cedar Rapids, IA  
52401-1837  
(319) 365-9111

online at:  
[www.IDBonline.org](http://www.IDBonline.org)

General email:  
[information@blind.state.ia.us](mailto:information@blind.state.ia.us)

Printed with soy ink.



*The White Cane* is published quarterly. Address or subscription changes can be sent to [information@blind.state.ia.us](mailto:information@blind.state.ia.us)

The Iowa Department for the Blind will experience a 3.94-percent cut in state funding over last year's initial budget. The impact of this lower budget means we may be leaving approximately \$1 million in federal funding on the table for lack of match.

Although we believe we can weather 2011 if we're careful, the impact of this loss will be acutely felt in 2012 if additional funding is not available. Hopefully, the economy will have turned around enough a year from now to allow the legislature to appropriate enough funding for us to capture all of our federal share once again.

Meanwhile, using Recovery Act funds through 2011, we have hired two new counselors. Jamie Corwin has completed her training and has begun working with VR clients in eastern Iowa. We hope to have the second counselor deployed soon in northwest Iowa as well.

In spite of the economy and all the job losses in Iowa, our counselors have continued placing blind Iowans in jobs. They have been exploring both the open and the hidden job markets to accomplish this with good results.

This year marks two major anniversaries for the Department. The



Library opened its doors on July 1, 1960, and the Independent Living Program began serving older Iowans who are blind on July 1, 1980. Watch for upcoming events to mark these milestones. Events will be posted on our website at [www.idbonline.org](http://www.idbonline.org) as soon as they are scheduled.

As part of these celebrations, we hope to launch an oral history project this year. This project will capture the memories of blind Iowans as witness to the changes which have occurred for blind people in Iowa and nationwide over the past century. If you are interested in telling your story, please let us know.

We will be collecting as many written stories as we can, and, if we get grant funding, 50 high-quality audio interviews for permanent archiving here and with the Library of Congress.

Sincerely,  
*Karen Keninger*

# Braille in the 21st century

Blending new technology with proven methods

**W**e are at a crossroads. Technological innovations have allowed blind and visually impaired people to access printed material more than ever. With computer screen-reading software, like JAWS for Windows, talking smart phones, alarm clocks and scales, plus audio books and recorded newspapers and magazines, those who cannot see the printed word can easily—often at the touch of a button—listen to just about anything they want to “read.”

While many technological advancements have increased a blind person's ability to communicate, Braille literacy is still an important part of a blind person's development.

Braille literacy is linked with higher self-esteem, independence and professional and academic success. According to the Braille Institute of America, only 30 percent of blind adults gain full-time employment, but 90 percent of those who do so are Braille readers.

Though these statistics demonstrate the importance of knowing Braille, Braille literacy among blind Americans has significantly

decreased. Only about 10 percent of legally blind youth are taught the tactile code in school. Many are encouraged to use what usable vision they have to continue to read print, even if it means they are reading at a much slower pace than their sighted peers.

True literacy has long been considered

the ability to read, write and comprehend written language. For most people “written language” means print. For the blind, it means Braille.

Through Braille, the blind learn the tenets of language—sentence structure, punctuation, spelling,

phrasing—and the landmarks that organize thought—headings, sections, and paragraphs.

In fact, it has been shown that cognitively and neurologically, learning and reading Braille triggers the same part of the brain as reading printed material.

As print literacy does for the sighted, learning Braille links to higher self-esteem for the blind and a lower frequency of reliance upon government aid, such as Social Security Disability Insurance, food stamps

“Braille can provide complete and efficient literacy.”

—Karen Keninger  
*Director, Iowa Department  
for the Blind*

| Continued from Page 4 |

and other public assistance.

“Braille literacy provides full and detailed access to the written word, including spelling, punctuation and organizational structure. Children and adults with limited vision often struggle to read print when Braille can provide complete and efficient literacy,” said Karen Keninger, director of the Iowa Department for the Blind and a lifelong Braille reader. “Arguments surface for the different types of learning styles; some are audible learners, some are visual learners. But in the mainstream schools, you would not experience a sighted child learning the ABCs solely through listening.”

Braille, named after its creator, Louis Braille, uses a system of raised dots to form letters and words. These Braille dots are read with the fingertips and provide blind and visually impaired students a system of reading and writing independently.

Braille was introduced in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in France and has since been used to make accessible nearly every written language in the world, as well as math and scientific notation.

The Iowa Department for the Blind has long been a strong supporter of Braille literacy. Its library maintains the largest collection of Braille materials in the nation. Its independent living teachers and vocational rehabilitation counselors teach their clients Braille if needed, and all students who pass through the Orientation Center learn at least basic Braille. This enables them to write notes, which they can read back at will, and label items. Some become proficient enough to read novels.

Braille literacy is a trending topic. A recent *New York Times Magazine* article weighed the reasons why people choose or do not choose to learn Braille. The National Federation of the Blind released a white paper in March 2009 depicting the declining Braille literacy among blind youth as a crisis.



TOP: Annabelle Costanzo, winner of the Junior Varsity age bracket during the 2010 Iowa Braille Challenge, depends on Braille for her education and independence. ABOVE: Parents, students and educators donned these catchy shirts during the Iowa Braille Challenge on Jan. 23.

This decline, many predict, will have long-term implications among the blind population, as professional success is linked to literacy for the blind as much as for the sighted. Studies have shown that in the general population more than 68 percent of proficient readers have jobs in management

| Continued on Page 6 |

| Continued from Page 5 |

or in business, financial, professional or related job sectors.

As indicated earlier, the importance of Braille literacy for blind job seekers may be even more significant. One study of Braille and non-Braille readers indicated that where the average employment rate for the blind population is 30 percent, 44 percent of Braille readers were employed as opposed to only 23 percent of non-Braille readers. Furthermore, those Braille readers were far more likely to hold advanced degrees. None of the non-Braille readers held a doctorate.

In January, the Department with the Iowa Braille School sponsored the annual Iowa Braille Challenge, which brought 13 school-aged blind children from across Iowa to Des Moines to test their Braille skills in reading, writing and comprehension.

The Challenge, part of the national Braille Challenge put on by the Braille Institute of America, is an opportunity for the Department to celebrate Braille literacy and recognize the students, their families and educators who work hard to ensure that all children who need to learn Braille receive the tools they need to do so.

“The Braille Challenge gives us all an opportunity to celebrate Braille literacy and its importance in a blind person’s life,” said Tracey Morsek, director of the Iowa Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, a division of the Iowa Department for the Blind. “It is integral to our work as librarians that we draw attention to Braille and those who depend on it to live successful, productive lives.”

January 23 to 30 was Braille Awareness Week, and the Department witnessed a mayoral proclamation in Des Moines acknowledging the week, which recognized Braille as “key to independence and success for the blind and visually impaired.”

Even with the push for awareness and in-



Staff and Orientation Center students from the Iowa Department for the Blind support blind literacy with Des Moines Mayor Frank Cownie after he signed a proclamation for Braille Awareness Week in January.

creased literacy, there remains a lack of resources for educators in the public school system.

While Iowa schools are trying to meet the needs, there is still more to be done to make sure every blind child has the opportunity to learn Braille. Unfortunately, many parents and blind children alike perceive Braille to be a last resort instead of the complete and highly effective literacy tool it is.

“In order to combat the Braille literacy crisis, it is important first to recognize that Braille is a necessary tool in the long-term success of our blind children,” said Keninger. “We as a society must understand that we are doing a disservice to blind and visually impaired Iowans by attaching a stigma to Braille. We must encourage literacy in all our children—blind and sighted alike—to better our communities, our schools and our future as a society.” ◆

# Life-long learner takes up Braille in her eighties

By Barb Weigel  
Contributing Editor

Lenore Barnes began losing vision in her early 80s due to macular degeneration—an eye disorder that primarily affects older adults and causes damage to the retina. In her mid-80s, as her vision continued to decrease, she quit driving and purchased a closed-circuit television (CCTV), which enables the user to enlarge printed materials. Eventually, her vision worsened, and while the CCTV remained helpful it was of diminishing benefit.

With her vision loss, Barnes also became increasingly fearful of her ability to go anywhere by herself, and she began to limit her outings to those occasions where friends and family volunteered to take her places.

Barnes, who had always been active and had a lively interest in the world around her, began to fear the possibility of becoming isolated and losing her independence because of her vision loss. She knew she could count on family support, but she



Lenore Barnes, 95, learned Braille and other non-visual ways to do things to remain independent.

did not want anyone to worry about her.

Barnes was referred to the Department's Independent Living (IL) program and was soon contacted by Jonathan Ice, a rehabilitation teacher. She had two basic needs in mind: better access to print information and the ability to go whenever and wherever she wanted. As Barnes put it, she wanted to "stay among the living."

Barnes decided to embark on the process of learning some new techniques. She learned Braille, travel with a long white cane and non-visual techniques

for cooking and home management. Ice also helped her to access and learn to use audio books and public transportation.

Ice said Barnes was the oldest person to whom he had ever taught Braille.

"When I was working with her, Lenore was a delight to work with," said Ice. "She worked on her Braille between my visits and always had good questions to ask to clarify confusing points about the Braille code, and she learned from my answers! She has a refreshing openness to

trying new things—not common in people of any age, and even more remarkable for people of advanced age—and an interest in learning for learning's sake. Her kind and generous spirit makes it hard not to love her."

Barnes also began to participate in a local support group for the blind and visually impaired in Davenport, in southeast Iowa.

Today, Barnes, 95, is in the full swing of life. In response to a standard request for comments and feedback on services provided by the Department, Barnes said: "I

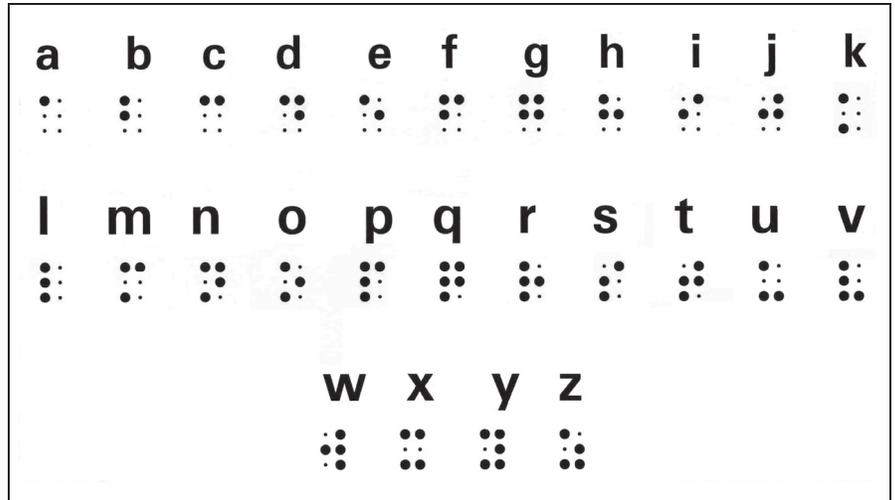
| *Continued on Page 8* |

# Simple Braille knowledge increases independence

**B**raille is a writing system made up of a series of cells, each containing up to six raised dots. Each cell can create an individual letter, number, word or punctuation, depending on the combination of raised dots.

Learning to read and write Braille is like anything else a person wants to learn. Once the basic structure is explained and understood, the learning process is much less overwhelming. All it takes is the desire to learn, the ability to memorize and a sense of touch. In fact, many people in their 70s and 80s learn basic Braille and find it very useful. Here are some examples of ways to use Braille:

- **Labeling clothing.** You can create your own labels using Teflon Dymo tape or you may also choose to purchase metal clothing labels already containing Braille.
- **Labeling medications.** You can attach adhesive Dymo tape to your prescription and over-the-counter medications for independent management of these items. And, you can use Braille to document the pharmacy and prescription number.
- **Managing phone numbers and addresses.** Create a card-filing system using Braille to record a name, address and phone number on each card. The cards can then be filed alphabetically for easy retrieval.
- **Managing finances.** Use Braille to document who is owed, how much and when a bill is due. You can put Braille on the envelope



flap or attach it to a bill. Braille and a talking calculator will also allow you to balance your checkbook.

- **Labeling kitchen items.** Magnetic Dymo tape or adhesive Dymo tape can be attached to canned goods, spices and other kitchen items for easy identification.
- **Signage in public buildings.** Braille is used on elevators, restrooms and office numbers.
- **Playing games.** Playing cards, Monopoly, Scrabble and many other games are equipped with Braille.
- **Reading novels, magazines and textbooks.** The IDB library holds a large collection of Braille.

As you can tell, Braille can be used for just about anything. Devoting a little time each day will enable you to learn Braille and begin to use it in your daily life to make things accessible, identifiable and efficient.

If you or someone you know would like to learn Braille, contact the Department at 800-362-2587. ◆

| *Continued from Page 7* |

would like to express my appreciation for the services I have received from the Department for the Blind and from my instructor, Jonathan Ice. He has worked hard

with me to teach me to read Braille and get about independently. He has also answered many questions to help me to adjust to my ever-failing vision. I also appreciate the book-tapes from

the library and the help I receive selecting them. I was an avid reader, and with their help, can still enjoy books.... I am so glad I put away my fears and decided to accept training.” ◆

# ADA turns 20, but fear of the disabled persists

By Julie Aufdenkamp  
Contributing Editor

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which President George H. W. Bush signed into law on July 26, 1990 to prohibit discrimination against and ensure equal opportunity for people with disabilities. The law has paved the way for improvements to disabled people's lives, including equal access to jobs and better access to public facilities and transportation.

During the last 20 years, vocational rehabilitation counselors and employment specialists at the Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB) have seen an increase in awareness of disabilities through the implementation of the ADA. However, the law has not been a contributing factor in landing jobs for IDB clients.

Though there are many blind Iowans who are successfully employed, roadblocks for blind people seeking employment still exist.

Curtis Chong, IDB's director of field operations and assistive technology, said though the law has increased awareness, it has also barred prospective employers from asking certain questions.

"While we know that



Vocational Rehabilitation client Michael Manahl participates in a random calling exercise to tap the hidden Iowa job market, looking for unadvertised employment opportunities. The exercise is part of an IDB effort to increase job placement for blind and visually impaired Iowans even with the economic downturn.

employers have some very real fears and concerns about a person's ability to accomplish specific tasks because of blindness or low vision," said Chong, "it is also true that an employer is prohibited from asking questions, such as, 'If you can't see, how are you going to read printed material on the job?'"

According to IDB Employment Specialist Brenda Criswell, who has worked for the Department for more than 30 years, the law has not contributed much to client statistics. It also has not improved the unemployment rate among the blind community,

nor for the disabled population as a whole.

"There is still almost a 70-percent unemployment rate for persons with disabilities, as I believe was the case since the inception of the ADA in 1990," said Criswell.

Chong said the ADA has not removed the "technological barrier that often makes it difficult or impossible for nonvisual access technology to be integrated into the workplace.

"Today, it is not uncommon to find corporate information technology systems that have been designed for the sighted

| Continued on Page 10 |

| Continued from Page 9 |

which cannot work with programs, such as JAWS for Windows,” Chong continued. “A blind job applicant who meets all of the paper qualifications and who is, in fact, the top candidate from a human resources perspective, may not be able to accept the job because of the inability to use computer software throughout most of the day without sighted assistance.”

After two decades, some say much work remains to guarantee that Americans with disabilities are ensured equality. “I do not think the story regarding the ADA is complete,” said Chong. “There are still court cases to be fought and won or lost. Questions such as: ‘What is a disability?’ still seem to trouble our judicial system.”

Criswell, who works every day with Iowa businesses to secure jobs for blind Iowans, says employers are fearful of the ADA in that it will force them to make changes they do not feel they can afford.

Criswell said the responsibility to combat fear about disabilities lands on the disabled. If they take personal responsibility for their employment searches, the law will work for them if necessary.

“The law doesn’t get people jobs, people do,” she said. “I really believe that the ADA is the foundation and that we are the ones, along with our clients, who ‘build the house.’” ◆

## Talking Tech w/ Michael Barber

### “The BookSense: A Sensible Reading Solution”

We’ve all heard about the Victor Reader Stream and the PlexTalk Pocket, small hand-held devices which read digital text or audio files. Now the BookSense is here. This handy little device is the size of a candy bar, fits nicely in a shirt or coat pocket, and comes in two flavors: Standard and XT.

The Standard is orange and has a slot for an SD card, which stores all of your folders and files. The XT is white and comes with four gigabytes of onboard storage plus an SD card slot for added storage.

Both versions of the BookSense will play the following types of material:

- Digital talking books from the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Bookshare.org, Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic, and audio books from Audible.com;
- Newspaper articles from NFB-NEWSLINE®;
- Podcasts, music and other audio files stored in MP3, MP4, OGG, WAV, WAX, M4A, and WMA audio formats;
- Described movies that can be downloaded from Sero-

tek’s System Access Mobile Network (SAMNET); and

- The following electronic text file formats: TXT, RTF, DOC, DOCX, HTML, CML, BRL and BRF.

And if this isn’t enough, both models also have an onboard clock and alarm system as well as a sleep timer you can set by entering your own parameters. You can also record voice notes or proceedings of conferences in either WAV or MP3 format and with four different microphone sensitivity settings.

The XT boasts an FM radio and Bluetooth connectivity for your headset. The Neospeech Kate and Paul voices used in the BookSense for text-to-speech conversion adds a nice touch for people who want to use the device to read a lot of text documents.

You can quickly charge the battery either with the AC adapter or via the USB port.

Finally, this little unit puts out a lot of volume from its relatively small internal speaker, a quality I’ve come to appreciate over the past few months.

It is manufactured by HIMS of Korea and sold in the U.S. by GW Micro.

For more information about the BookSense, contact GW Micro at [www.gwmicro.com](http://www.gwmicro.com) or (260) 489-3671. ◆

# Volunteers make for some great IDB ambassadors

By Beth Hirst  
Contributing Editor

Volunteers are an integral part of the Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. They transcribe text into Braille, they record books and magazines in audio format, they proofread, scan or shelve books, and they help support our mission and events. When people come to the Department for volunteer opportunities, they are sent to the Library and quickly put to work.

The Library has a network of more than 100 volunteers throughout the state that help grease the wheels that keep the Library operations moving and growing.

Each year the Library honors one outstanding volunteer with the Elizabeth Perowsky Volunteer Award during an annual volunteer recognition event.

“The award ceremony is a special time to recognize the tremendous amount of work contributed by the Library’s volunteers and to highlight a single person’s dedication to the Library,” said Library Director Tracey Morsek.

The event is named for Elizabeth Perowsky, a renowned ballerina, choreographer and dance teacher from



IDB Library volunteer narrator Mary Doidge is one of more than 100 volunteers who help the Library run smoothly.

Iowa who was an avid volunteer Brailist. She taught herself literary Braille, Nemeth code (used for math) and music Braille.

When the Iowa Library for the Blind opened in 1960, Perowsky had already been Brailleing for 27 years. In addition to volunteering for the Library, she served as leader and main teacher for the Temple Sisterhood Braille Group. She also conducted training workshops across the country. Elizabeth was still Brailleing within a few

weeks of her death at the age of 97 in May 1996.

Perowsky’s many Braille projects included the complete Old and New Testaments, mathematics and foreign-language textbooks, musical compositions and much more. Her dedication and leadership were an inspiration to all who knew her.

The Library’s annual volunteer event was re-named the Elizabeth Perowsky Volunteer Workshop and Luncheon in 1997, and a

| *Continued on Page 12* |

# Audio book downloads bring patrons freedom

For the first time in history, library patrons can get books and magazines of their choice at any time of the day or night and keep them in their own “virtual library.”

The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) now offers digital audio recordings by download from the Internet through its Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD) service. Recently a Kentucky library user accessed the 1-millionth piece of reading material from BARD, just shy of a year from its April 30, 2009 launch date.

More than 18,000 titles are currently available from BARD. More than 15,000 of NLS’s 800,000-plus patrons are registered for BARD.



“We’re gratified by the passionate response BARD has received,” said NLS Director Frank Kurt Cylke. “At NLS, we strive to continually improve our patrons’ opportunities to access a wide range of reading material. BARD has been an unequalled success in speeding delivery to our patrons.”

Patrons can transfer the downloaded files to a digital

cartridge with a USB cable. The cartridge can be played on the Digital Talking Book machine.

Cartridges and cables are available for purchase from the Iowa Department for the Blind’s Aids and Devices Store. Contact Jodi George at 800-362-2587 for current pricing.

One library patron reported: “Finally having instant access to thousands of books and magazines that I can download and read as desired, rather than waiting and hoping for new books to come in the mail, has been an incredible experience. After using BARD, I can’t imagine what I did without it.”

To learn more about BARD and how to sign up, call your reader advisor. ◆

---

| Continued from Page 11 |

volunteer of the year award was instituted in her memory. Music Brailist Alberta Wing, a former student of Elizabeth’s, was the first recipient.

The 2009 winner of the Elizabeth Perowsky Memorial Award was Brailist Lila Fisher of Ottumwa. In her 11 years as a certified Braille transcriber, Fisher completed about 125 assignments, including novels, textbooks, cookbooks, hymnals and menus.

“My longest assignment was 21 Braille volumes, which was ninth-grade literature,” Fisher stated when accepting the award. “I really enjoyed it because it had such a variety of formatting challenges. I learned a lot about Braille formatting and literature from that particular assignment. I have a friend who once said that I should be eligible for a college degree for the information I have read and Brailled. Well, I have now earned my degree: The Elizabeth Perowsky

Award.”

All IDB volunteers are eligible for consideration to receive the Perowsky Award. Past recipients have included narrators, audio cassette rewinders and machine repair volunteers, in addition to Braillists.

The 2010 Elizabeth Perowsky Volunteer Workshop and Luncheon will be held April 16 at the Iowa Department for the Blind. Anticipation is running high—who will be this year’s Volunteer of the Year? ◆

# ISU graduate students offer new writing course at IDB

*To me, the greatest pleasure of writing is not what it's about, but the inner music the words make.*

~Truman Capote

This summer the Library will be offering a free creative writing program for library patrons who, like Capote, enjoy “the inner music the words make.”

Instructors Laura Sweeney and Jason Arbogast will conduct two, six-week courses at the Iowa Department for the Blind to help participants express themselves in writing.

Sweeney and Arbogast are Iowa State University graduate students, and the courses are offered for free through ISU.

The first course will be offered May 17 through June 25 and will be geared to adults. The second program, designed for youth participants, will be held July 12 through Aug. 20.

There is also a distance-learning option, which will run for one month. Space is limited, so please contact your reader advisor to register. When you call, please let them know what time (morning, afternoon, evening) and what days of the week would be best for your schedule.

---

## Honoring postal workers

As part of the Library's 50th anniversary, we are honoring postal workers who make the distribution of our books possible throughout Iowa.

We want to hear from you, our patrons, about your mail carrier.

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.

## From the librarian

The Library's magazine program offers a wide variety of reading options. Do you find yourself too busy to tackle a whole novel? Try *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* or *Asimov's Science Fiction*. Are you fascinated (or horrified) by current politics? How about *The National Review* or *The Nation*? Are you interested in history, science, gardening, cooking or sports? There are titles in all these areas.



More than 100 magazines are available in Braille or audio format.

There have been some changes in the magazines offered. *U.S. News and World Report*, *Discipleship Journal* and *Healthy Exchanges Food Newsletter* have all ceased publication. *Choice Magazine Listening* is still available for download but is no longer on cassette. *Matilda Ziegler* is not being produced in Braille or cassette anymore but is available on the Internet at [www.matildaziegler.com](http://www.matildaziegler.com).

*The Week*, a current events magazine that includes “all you need to know about everything that matters,” replaces *U. S. News*. Also new is *Looking Back*, which contains stories of “the happy days gone by.”

Call your reader advisor to order these or any other magazine titles at (800) 362-2587.

Happy reading,

Tracey Morsek

# BOOKLIST

## Mysterious Women

We all like a good mystery. Whether it's a cozy British country house story by Agatha Christie, a hard-boiled detective tale by Sue Grafton, or a historical police procedural by Anne Perry, a harrowing tale of murder can allow us a shiver of fear while comfortably settled in a recliner.

This quarter the Library is featuring mysteries and crime novels by women authors. There are titles for every taste, including some of those shown in the "crime scene" photo to the right. Library staffers Deena Cross, Deb Wade, Susie Stageberg, Tracey Morsek, Marcella Edmonds and Beth Hirst demonstrate that suspense can be had in Braille, large print, digital audio and cassette formats.

**DB64062, RC64062**

***Strangled Prose: 1 Claire Malloy Series* by Joan Hess**

Bookstore owner Claire Malloy hosts a reception celebrating the release of her friend Mildred Twiller's trashy new romance novel. During the party, excerpts reveal Mildred has libeled many of the attendees. Soon after, Mildred is found strangled to death. Some strong language. 1986.

**BR9684, DB63926, RC63926, LT4327**

***Dead Man's Island: 1 Henrie O. Series* by Carolyn G. Hart**



Media magnate Chase Prescott invites old flame retired reporter Henrietta O'Dwyer Collins—Henrie O—to his private Carolina island to ferret out his would-be murderer from among the family and associates assembled there. Henrie O questions fellow guests as a ferocious hurricane draws near. Some strong language and violence. 1993.

**BR18384, DB69645, RC69645**

***Dead Until Dark: 1 Southern Vampire Series* by Charlaine Harris**

While waiting tables at a bar in Bon Temps, Louisiana, telepath Sookie Stackhouse meets handsome vampire Bill. When a rowdy vampire gang moves into town and murders remain unsolved, Sookie's attraction to Bill puts her in danger. Violence, explicit descriptions of sex and some strong language. 2001.

**BR13928, DB53709, RC53709, LT7169**

***Daddy's Little Girl* by Mary Higgins Clark**

Ellie Cavanaugh returns to Westchester County, New York, to protest the parole of wealthy heir Rob Westfield, convicted of murdering her teenaged sister 22 years ago. Then someone threatens her life. 2002

**DB61421, RC61421, LT7762**

***Body Double: 4 Rizzoli and Isles Series* by Tess Gerritsen**

Boston medical examiner Maura Isles discovers that the dead woman in her driveway is her identical twin. Detective Jane Rizzoli, who is expecting a child, assists Maura in the investigation, which leads them to a serial killer who targets pregnant women. Violence and strong language. 2004. ♦

## Students get some culture during OC field trips

By Rebecca Swainey  
Contributing Editor

Field trips are a vital part of the Orientation Center's program. They provide students numerous opportunities to put newly acquired skills into practice. They are also often good opportunities to examine attitudes, both our own and those of the general public.

On Feb. 7 students and teachers attended a theatrical production of "Eye Piece" at the University of Iowa, which aimed to present the experience of blindness to the general public.

"Eye Piece" is the work of playwright/director/actor Rinde Eckert in collaboration with Dr. Ed Stone of the University of Iowa Carver Family Center for Macular Degeneration and Stephen Kuusisto, University of Iowa English department faculty member. This "piece" came about as part of The Creative Campus Innovations Program administered by the Association of Performing Arts Presenters and funded by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.

In "Eye Piece" a promising

**Correction:** Jim Witte's title in the Winter 2010 issue was incorrect. Witte was the first travel teacher in the Orientation Center, but later became program administrator for the Center until 1995.



Orientation Center students and staff receive a behind-the-scenes tour of "Eye Piece," a play about blindness at the University of Iowa.

young artist is losing his sight to retinitis pigmentosa, a disorder that attacks the retina and causes gradual blindness. The style pulls in several theatrical elements, mostly from Greek tragedy. Thus the playwright makes use of two mythological figures; Tiresias, famous for his clairvoyance despite blindness, and Oedipus, famous as an example of pathetic helplessness and despair. The storyline is presented from a medical perspective with a group of "doctors" acting as Greek chorus throughout.

The young artist is a patient his doctor cannot "cure." The doctor, while concerned and caring, doesn't know

how to advise his patient. Left much to his own devices, the artist goes through a number of stages to which many in our group could easily relate, running the gamut from depression to determination. Somehow by the end, the artist is back to working successfully.

The problem with the play is that it gives no hint as to how this transformation from a newly blinded individual to a successful working blind person took place. It would seem from this production that, once the doctors are no longer able to help, something magical and mysterious occurs to put the blind person back on his or her feet. What's more, they suddenly

| Continued on Page 16 |

# Center graduate hones Braille skills, confidence

**K**en Murphy, a former second-grade teacher from Cedar Falls, is among our most recent Center graduates. At the age of 55, training in the Center was not easy for Murphy, particularly the challenges presented by Braille.

Because of decreased sensitivity in his fingertips from diabetes, he found it hard to feel the small, raised dots on the page. He struggled to memorize contractions. Tracking lines was an arduous task. But through creativity and perseverance he overcame the barriers to learning Braille.

“I was struggling in most all my classes and beginning to think I’d never make progress,” Murphy said. “The breakthrough in Braille is what made the turn-around for me. Once I began to see definite progress there, I knew I could make it. I really feel good now about Braille.”

For Murphy, Braille not only provided a tool for

communication, it was the means through which he regained self-confidence and began to look at his life not in terms of limitations but of possibilities. ◆



Ken Murphy proudly displays the garden bench he made in woodshop during his time at the Orientation Center. He graduated in February.

| Continued from Page 15 |

begin carrying a cane for mobility with no training having taken place. Nowhere in the entire three-hour performance is there even a suggestion of rehabilitation services being involved in the process. Unfortunately this scenario—doctors unaware of, or unwilling to suggest, services beyond the medical profession—is all too familiar to many of our clients.

## Tales of a Chocolatier

On March 4 we enjoyed an outing to Chocolaterie Stam, where we were greeted with plates of tasty treats accompanied by our choice of beverage. While we sampled,



Orientation Center Director Sandy Tigges and center students sample chocolates at Chocolaterie Stam in Des Moines handed out by Stam owner Ton Stam.

owner Ton Stam regaled us with stories of his family’s long history as chocolatiers in Holland. After moving to the U. S. he opened a highly successful branch of the family business here in Des Moines.

In addition to several amusing anecdotes, Stam gave a very informative

explanation of the process of making chocolate. He even had a dried cocoa pod to pass around. Later, in the production area, we felt the candy molds while learning more about the process of transforming cocoa beans to mouth-watering confections. ◆

# Ag-oriented teen is hired on at local supply store

By Tai Blas  
Contributing Editor

**G**rowing up in rural Iowa, Alex has always been interested in agriculture. In 4-H, he raised two cows from bottle calves to breeding stock. Now at age 17, he is a member of Future Farmers of America and participated in the FFA national competition last November in Indianapolis. Currently, he is working in FFA's business management division and will be attending the national competition again next year.

So when Alex began looking for work in the agriculture field, the most logical place to look was Theisen's, a farm supply store in Grinnell.

Blind since birth due to a retina disorder called juvenile retinoschisis, Alex has very limited vision. He had some concerns regarding how he would perform the essential functions of a job at Theisen's as a blind person.

After Alex applied for the job, Megen Johnson, IDB transition work experience specialist, contacted Rob Thomas, then the general manager of Theisen's. He said while the store had a hiring freeze, he hoped to hire a new employee in the near future. Johnson asked whether Theisen's would need extra help during the holidays and

offered to provide paid on-the-job training for Alex.

"One of the essential benefits the Department can provide to employers is trained, qualified employees who can start work before a business goes through the time-consuming and sometimes costly process of advertising a position, interviewing candidates and hiring," Johnson said. "An employer is much more likely to hire a pre-trained individual with whom they already have a relationship."

Alex began his training in November 2009. Because he did such a great job during training, he was hired by Theisen's when the freeze was lifted and is now working 12 to 16 hours a week earning \$7.50 an hour.

His duties include unloading pallets, loading customer orders into vehicles, stocking

products and cleaning the store. Other than the use of a pocket magnifier, Alex needs very few accommodations to complete his job duties.

According to manager Craig Loftin, "Alex has become one of the Theisen's family. He possesses the farm-boy work ethic, is very reliable and always has a positive attitude, qualities that are essential in our industry. Alex gets things done so quickly that we are constantly giving him more things to do. He is a great employee."

Alex said he loves working at Theisen's. "The Iowa Department for the Blind gave me the boost I needed to land this job by putting in a good word for me," he said. "IDB allowed me to prove I was a good worker and that I could do this job as a blind person." ♦

## Summer camps offered for blind youth

IDB Transition program will host a series of camps for teens with vision loss to help them gain confidence, meet other teens and have fun. The camps are:

- June 14-15 FUNDamentals: Blindness skills and fun
- June 23-27 Artful Antics: Interactive art experience
- July 19-21 Mission Possible II: Success in jobs
- July 16-28 Dare to Care: A look at community service
- Aug 2-4 Action Extravaganza: Recreation and sports
- Aug 13-15 The Great Outdoors Weekend Retreat

To register for these camps or for more information, contact Keri Osterhaus or Tai Blas at (800) 362-2587.

## Vending business growth occurs at multiple levels

By Roger Erpelding  
Contributing Editor

In the Business Enterprises Program (BEP), we are always on the hunt for new income for our blind managers. In some cases, new income can be found through new products or services. Other times, income can increase by expanding vending operations to new locations.

Under the federal Randolph-Sheppard Act, passed by Congress in 1936 to give blind persons employment in selling dry goods on federal property, many federal locations are “law covered.” This means the BEP has priority to provide vending services there. Of course, since its enactment, the law has been amended several times to include other types of food services (snack bars, cafeterias and vending machines).

Through frequent contact with our federal partner, the General Services



Loren Wakefield manages several vending operations in the Waterloo/Cedar Falls area, including the Waterloo central post office, which was secured through the Randolph-Sheppard Act.

Administration (GSA), we remain engaged in the growth opportunities for vending in government buildings.

Currently, the BEP works with 21 blind managers who operate 22 locations around the state of Iowa.

A new Internal Revenue Service call center scheduled to open this June in West Des Moines and a new federal court house slated to open in late 2012 are just two prime examples of government projects our blind managers will expand into in the near future.

The process for securing these expansions mainly involves long-term planning, keeping our ears open and staying in close contact with the GSA. But we are always ready and eager to find new locations and to grow our program.

We do not only set up vending operations in public buildings, we venture into the private sector, as well.

One of our blind managers, Jon Buffington, had a great experience contracting with a call center near Sioux

| *Continued on Page 19* |

| Continued from Page 18 |

City operated by a company called STREAM.

In the summer of 2006, Buffington, who operates several vending facilities in Sioux City, heard that a new call center in nearby Sergeant Bluff would be coming to town. The company would occupy a large building formerly operated by another call center firm. He called about vending, but was told they had a vendor in place and didn't need anyone.

Being in the vending business, and with his ear to the ground, Buffington soon heard that STREAM was unhappy with its current vending arrangement and wanted a change. He contacted

IDB staff Mark West and me. West stopped by, found the parking lot full of cars and couldn't wait to present our materials to the company and to talk about Buffington. "Don't take my word for it,"

“With the reductions in state and county employees, and the rough winter on the roadside, STREAM has been a positive force in my business.”

—Jon Buffington  
*B.E.P. Manager*

West said. "Here are some of Jon's nearby locations, look for yourself."

STREAM did and found his record to their liking.

A contract was forged, and Buffington began vending at STREAM on Dec. 7, 2006. The company's employment varies from 400 to

1,200, and currently stands at about 1,000 employees. Buffington and I make frequent contact with STREAM management to make sure everything is in order. At all of our locations, we sell service, and we must deliver accordingly.

Buffington has been able to adjust and meet the challenges associated with vending at STREAM. "With the reductions in state and county employees, and the rough winter on the roadside, STREAM has definitely been a positive force in my business," he says.

Since our blind managers are "working managers," our program continues to give us the opportunity to spread the word about our positive attitude, which is so essential to success as blind people. ♦

*Roger Erpelding is the program administrator for the Business Enterprises Program. Reach him at [roger.erpelding@blind.state.ia.us](mailto:roger.erpelding@blind.state.ia.us)*

Looking for a **speaker** for your next meeting, support group or conference?



An IDB representative would love to speak to your group about **vision loss** and how the Department's services **benefit** those with vision loss.

Call Carolyn Hicklin to request a speaker at (515) 281-1337 or e-mail her at [carolyn.hicklin@blind.state.ia.us](mailto:carolyn.hicklin@blind.state.ia.us)

# Braillovation

## Mason City man creates useful tools using Braille

By Shoshana Hebshi  
Editor

In his Mason City home, Gene Kleinow sits at his kitchen table. He is stoic and formidable, as a former police chief would be. His wife, Pat, busies herself around the house, while her husband explains how Braille has been keeping him busy for the last two years.

“It’s very helpful,” the 70-year-old retiree says of Braille. “I’d recommend it to anyone. I was 68 when I learned it. Any old person can learn it. It’s just a matter of sitting down and learning it.”

Kleinow, who was diagnosed as legally blind four years ago, won’t admit to being fluent in Braille, but he knows enough to get by. And with his penchant to continually invent and create, he has constructed several useful tools to help him use his Braille to keep his life organized.

Kleinow holds a stack of yellow cards that look like Community Chest cards from Monopoly. One side is blank. The other reveals they are old tickets from a Masonic Lodge chicken dinner. They



Gene Kleinow has created helpful tools using Braille, such as an appointment book, to keep his life organized.

now serve as his appointment cards.

When he makes a dentist appointment or a lunch date, he jots the time and location in Braille on the card, then slips it into a plastic sleeve of a business-card holder, which has been labeled with Braille to correspond with a date in the month.

An appointment for April 17 will go in the slot that has a 17 Brailled into it. He also has months separated out, so if he makes an appointment for June, he will stick that card in the June section,

then transfer it to the corresponding dated slot when June arrives. “I couldn’t find anything else I could use, so I just figured it out,” he said of the calendar.

His calendar book is not only extremely functional and easy to use, but it is popular. He has given away four of them, and will happily make a new one for anyone who asks.

“They are cheap,” he says. He can buy an empty business-card holder at K-Mart or Wal-Mart for a few

| *Continued on Page 22* |

By Linda Slayton

Spring is in the air! The days are getting warmer. The ground isn't white. I'm even pondering opening the windows. There are so many good things that happen with the arrival of springtime. The birds chirp, flowers bloom, and the sun shines. Suddenly the world comes alive. Unfortunately, so does the lawnmower!

Ah, I hear some of your minds whirring too. That hum seems to say, "But blind people don't do yard work." The fact is some do and some don't. Yard work for blind folks falls into the category of "Where there's a will, there's a way." Most things for blind people fall into that category. It boils down to old-fashioned ingenuity. We have a code for those inspirations of wisdom. They're called alternative techniques.

I find it interesting that I never mowed a lawn or even thought about it until I was blind. My first experience with mowing arrived when I rented a duplex and that chore came along with it. I really had no idea what I was going to do about the yard when I signed my lease. I ended up spending a great deal on an



electric mower. It seemed like the perfect solution. I wouldn't have to buy gas and I wouldn't have to deal with the pull-start. It was as simple as pushing a button.

I prepared well for my first mowing experience. I bought a 100-foot extension cord that was suitable for outdoor use. I put on work clothes and sturdy shoes. Then I pushed the button and off I went feeling pret-

“One great thing about blind folks is that we all openly share our best tips on anything.”

ty plucky. What I neglected to consider was that I was on dialysis at the time and after one swipe down a row and back I had to rest. My pluckiness evaporated.

My next problem occurred halfway through that first yard. The mower started smoking and then quit. Of course everyone I knew asked, "Did you run over the cord?" No, that was the one thing I probably did *right*. So after a return to the store and money back for a defective mower, I bought a second one. (This one wasn't on the clearance rack.)

I can honestly say my yard

was mowed faithfully. Sometimes I missed a few small patches, but they were easy to get the next time around. I also thought they gave an artful look to my home. Since my husband, Kevin, and I were dating at that time, I sort of saved my mowing for the weekends. I knew he might visit and maybe I could convince him to "help." The bottom line is the yard got mowed. After all, where there's a will, there's a way.

Yes, there are plenty of blind people who do yard work. Some of you may be familiar with a blind man who was known to drive through his yard on a riding lawnmower wearing a hard helmet to avoid an over-hanging deck. My mother-in-law tells me to be sure that when picking up sticks in the yard to first make certain they don't slither away.

One great thing about blind folks is that we all openly share our best tips on anything and everything. Even Kevin and I have improved our yard-care strategies over time. So, if you ever need good mowing advice just give us a call. We'll gladly share the name of our lawn service. ♦

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

# Legislative breakfast serves up blind awareness



The Department hosted a breakfast open house at the State Capitol on March 18 to reach out to state legislators and provide them with information about the IDB, its services and its clients.

Legislators who attended the two-hour event were greeted by IDB staff and clients and learned about the number of blind Iowans registered with the Department in each county, plus how benefits from the Department's services reach beyond blind and visually impaired and into the communities.

"They see how it affects real people, and I think they don't get to see that very often," said Sandy Tigges, director of the IDB Orientation Center.

| Continued from Page 20 |

dollars, and the books take just a few hours to make.

Kleinow has also found other creative ways to make his life easier with Braille. He made an address book out of recipe cards. Now when he wants to look up a phone number he can thumb through his loose-leaf book and read the Brailled alphabetized information. He

uses the pinochle cards he Brailled to play cards with friends.

Now Gene is designing a special wallet to sort his currency.

"I like to come up with new things," he says. "I like to work with my hands, always have."

"I think it's good for him," says Pat. "It keeps his mind engaged, which he needs to

do."

Kleinow, who has been married to Pat for 50 years, started learning Braille two years ago. His teacher at the Department, Jennifer Hutson, introduced him to the reading and writing code, which he also uses to label items and take notes.

"It's always thinking outside the box for Gene," said Hutson. ♦

# NOTES

## Director

Karen Keninger

karen.keninger@blind.state.ia.us

## Deputy Director

Bruce Snethen

bruce.snethen@blind.state.ia.us

## Commission for the Blind

Next meeting: June 22, noon

Sandi Ryan, commission chair

Steve Hagemoser, member

Mike Hoenig, member

## Governor's Office Liaison

Brian Jennings

brian.jennings@iowa.gov

## 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

## 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. Luncheon with keynote from a local financial executive begins at noon.

## May 18

### Independence for the Northland

#### Winneshiek Medical Center, Decorah

Northeast Iowa residents can learn more about the Department and the Northland Area Agency on Aging during this workshop from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. The public event will provide information and training on living independently after vision loss. There will also be information about hiring older Iowans and caregiver support. More information available by calling IDB at (800) 362-2587.

## June 26

### Tactile art with Ann Cunningham

#### IDB building, Des Moines

This free workshop for the blind and visually impaired, led by nationally known tactile artist Ann Cunningham, is designed to show participants how to use a variety of materials and experience activities including sculpture and painting. Participants will gain a greater appreciation and understanding of art, as well as develop a unique mode for self-expression. More information is available by calling IDB at (800) 362-2587.

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

## *Did you know...*

- Vision loss does not mean a person can no longer be a productive employee
- Blind and visually impaired workers can help your business succeed
- There are services and technology available to help an employee maintain productivity

During a luncheon, finance executive Richard Crawford will talk about the challenges and successes he has faced as a blind person.

Following the luncheon, access technology vendors will demonstrate and display the latest in devices for the blind and visually impaired, which make it easier for them to use a computer, operate a cell phone and function competitively in the workplace.

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

## find out more at the **Blindness Works Conference**

April 21, 2010  
11:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Clarion Hotel  
707 Fourth St.,  
Sioux City, Iowa

**Early registration is \$20 by April 9.  
After April 9 registration is \$30.  
Registration includes luncheon.  
Afternoon session is free.**

**Contact Liz Shore at (515) 281-1340  
or [liz.shore@blind.state.ia.us](mailto:liz.shore@blind.state.ia.us)**

FREE MATTER FOR THE BLIND