INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Blind Rehabilitation Service
The Joy of Giving
The Braille Challenge
BANA Update
And much more!!

Editor’s note: AER is pleased to launch its series about Hailey McManus, a high school student who has already chosen her career path— to be a TVI. Inspired by her mother, and AER Member Chantal McManus, Hailey is committed to a future helping the blind and visually impaired. AER is proud to tell her story and we look forward to following her progress.

Busy is not a word encompassing enough to describe the commitment of Chantal McManus to her profession as an itinerant TVI. Passionate, active, and fully engaged might be a start when talking about her professional and personal life.

In addition to being a TVI, Chantal also teaches O&M in four school systems in her home state of Alabama. Helping students from kindergarten through high school learn skills for academic and personal success, whether they are blind or have low vision, motivates her to jump out of bed each morning.

From time to time, Chantal is asked to conduct assessments of students and make recommendations, which she fits into her full schedule whenever she can. As if working in four school systems and consulting are not enough, she is also a contract vendor employee for the Alabama Department of Rehabilitative Services. “The last few years, I’ve been working more with adults adjusting to a recent loss of vision. Usually this group wants to go back to work so I help them learn or improve their skills. When it comes to my school aged students, I help transition them from high school to college, which gives me the opportunity at times to join meetings and talk about the academic accommodations that are

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Save money. Get GEICO.

Get an additional discount on car insurance as a member of the Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired.

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President’s Message

By Patricia Leader, 2010 – 2012 AER President

Welcome to a new year! It is a new year for AER as well. We are beginning the year with enthusiasm, as we step up planning for the International Conference to be held July 18-22, 2012, in beautiful Bellevue, Washington, on Seattle’s eastside. I hope to see all of you there, and I look forward to connecting with you. I know you will enjoy the programming that the International Conference Committee is developing. We have a stellar keynote speaker, Tom Sullivan, who is entertaining and inspiring. We will have technology updates and training, division meetings, and the MacFarland Seminar preceding the conference. Of course, we will be joined by a full exhibit hall with our favorite vendors! You will want to access all the Conference has to offer, along with the sights, sounds, and flavors of the Seattle area.

The economy continues to cause a struggle for most individuals, as well as companies and organizations. AER shares those challenges. The Board is intent on keeping a balanced budget and building the reserves for the future while retaining member benefits.

The Board has eliminated travel, decided not to renew some of our organizational memberships, transitioned to an online format for AER Report, instituted Board Meetings at conferences, and added board meetings by conference call. These are some of the measures that we have implemented; as a result, we finished 2010 with a financial surplus.

For the 2012 budget, we scrutinized minute details of the finances, trimming and paring wherever possible. In order to produce a balanced budget for 2012, we needed to make the tough decision to reduce the Insight budget. Insight will be three issues in 2012, and we will have a format that mirrors that of the AER Report. Issues will be provided online for members, which is consistent with the trend of current technology. The new format will be searchable, indexed, and will allow members to print a copy of the entire journal or merely articles of interest. While this move is critical in supporting budget needs, this change will allow AER to be abreast with current technology trends and to be prepared for those of the future.

Many of us are not comfortable with change but once you try the new Insight format, you should find it useful and convenient. We have a task force that is looking at Insight journal as a member benefit in order to recommend the membership’s needs to the Board. This will allow us to find the most effective way to provide our journal to members.

Another difficult decision that the Board had to make was to eliminate the budget for the Canadian office. We are developing other means to serve the Canadian members, including inviting Canadian members to participate on each division. In addition, AER office staff will work with the Canadian membership and establish a Canadian Council. Some of these changes are uncomfortable, but we are encouraged.

“Don’t be afraid of change. You may end up losing something you like, but you will probably end up gaining something you like better.”

- Unknown

Something that doesn’t change is the value of mentors. Most of us could name at least one person who was our mentor as we began a career in the vision field. I wonder when you last thought about your personal mentor and their significance to you? Have you contacted that person recently through email, a letter, meeting at a conference, or paying them a visit? When did you last let them know how much they influenced you and your career? As I progress in this profession, my thoughts have turned to my own mentor, and the valuable influence on my career. I encourage you to seek out your mentor (as I did recently) and share your feelings openly – let that person know the influence that he or she had on your career path. It is extremely important to recognize our mentors; make sure they realize how important they are and continue to be. One day, you might be that mentor to another colleague -- how wonderful it would be if you were recognized in that role!

“A lot of people have gone further than they thought they could because someone else thought they could.” -Unknown

Patricia Leader
AERBVI President 2010-2012
Planning for the AER International Conference 2012, July 18-22, in Bellevue, Washington, is in full swing!

The Call for Abstracts submission program is now available online! AER is proud to launch a new online program for 2012 making it easier than ever to submit abstracts for consideration.


We are honored to have Tom Sullivan, author, actor, singer, writer and producer, deliver the keynote address during the opening ceremony on July 18, 2012. For more than 30 years, Tom Sullivan has been one of the most sought-after inspirational presenters on the speaking circuit. His interests and insights, his pride and patriotism, his wisdom and passion for excellence have motivated audiences worldwide. Help us welcome Mr. Sullivan as he performs and talks about his challenges, accomplishments, and strength of human spirit.

To learn more about this exciting news and to submit your abstract for presentation, visit the conference website at http://aerbvi.org/2012international/index.htm.

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**AER Member Benefit**

**Long-Term Care Is Your Problem, Feds Decide**

If you think Washington will meet long-term care needs of U.S. AER members, think again. The Class Act, the long-term care insurance program enacted as part of the 2010 overhaul of the nation’s health care system, was dropped in October after most actuarial experts determined it could not remain self-funded for 75 years.

Though Washington has abandoned the problem, you don’t have that luxury. As we get older, the chances continue to increase that you or someone you know will require long-term care. Long-term care is for people who require help with daily living functions, such as getting dressed or going to the bathroom. Long-term care patients have to pay for lengthy nursing-home stays, reside in assisted-living centers, or get assistance from home-health aides.

Medicare won’t cover most long-term care costs, and relying on savings and Social Security benefits over several years would impoverish most middle-class Americans. Meanwhile, less than 3 percent of Americans have private long-term care insurance.

The rates and benefits of long-term care insurance can vary widely based on the carrier. The AER Member Insurance Program provides a team of experts who can answer your questions, help you determine the type of coverage you’ll need, and obtain proposals from multiple long-term care insurance companies. For more information, visit www.ftj.com/AER.
From the Listserv: Driving our O & M Students in our Private Cars

[Editor’s Note: From time to time, AER shares a listserv discussion that may be of interest to a broader range of the AER membership. The following is an edited version of the discussion thread that was held on the O&M list in early January 2012.]

Member from Costa Mesa, CA
In Southern California, we are dealing with the issue of school districts not letting O & M Instructors drive students in our private cars due to liability concerns. CAOMS, the local O & M professional organization, has written letters in support of teachers who have cannot drive their students in their private cars and we have had mixed results. Do anyone nationally have any research or data to support the need of O & M Instructors to have the freedom to use private cars to provide the needed instruction in a variety of environments for our O & M Training Program? Any assistance would be greatly appreciated.

Member from Topeka, KS
I do not know if this will be helpful, but in the one school district I handle, I am permitted to have students in my personal vehicle because I am a contractor. Employees of the district are not. My cooperating TVI, who is an employee, and I thus do some joint lessons in the community with students because we can take the students in my car. Otherwise, the TVI has to make arrangements to use a district vehicle, and these arrangements are often too cumbersome to be practical. For example, I may teach a store familiarization lesson in a local grocery store while the TVI teaches a math and/or reading lesson using a shopping list.

Member from Port Orange, FL
For whatever it is worth, Volusia County School District (Daytona Beach area) allows us to transport students in our own cars, specifically for O&M lessons, as long as there is parent approval documented on the district’s form. The form was created by us years ago, reviewed by the district, and approved. A copy is placed in the student’s file at the school, in my own working folder for the student, and carried with me on each lesson requiring my car.

Member from Frankenmutten, MI
When I was a private contractor, I had a district form as well. The parents had to sign a new one at the beginning of each school year, and it basically stated that they understood I would be transporting their child in my private vehicle. Now I work for a school district, and am one of the lucky few with a district van designated for O&M use. When budgets were getting slashed, I offered to transport in my car, but my boss felt it would not be fair for me to shoulder the liability.

Member from Dayton, OH
As a student in a Master’s program in O & M, I was under the assumption that we O & M specialists must obtain our own liability insurance and in that way we are allowed to drive students in our private vehicles. I guess we would have to check each state and see what the rules of the states are as they probably differ greatly.

Member from Topeka, KS
It is not State policies that will give you a picture of the situation with use of private vehicles. Policies for school aged students will vary from school district to school district, so there could be 100 or more different policies in some States. The same is true of private agencies serving adults. Even as a private contractor, there may be differences from various agencies that contract with you as to what type of transportation is permitted. Such issues can be a factor of specific contracts. This thread did prompt me to check with my own auto insurance agent, however. I already of course carry professional liability insurance, but I am now also in the process of upping my personal liability auto policy from $300,000 to one point five million. One cannot be too careful.

Member from San Diego, CA
Over the last two years S-CAOMS (Southern California Orientation and Mobility Specialists) learned of several teachers in different Southern California school districts who were experiencing difficulty finding a district-approved solution that permits students to leave campus in a private or school-owned vehicle with the teacher as driver, or a district-assigned driver (i.e., students are not allowed off campus for lessons unless the
can’t be introduced because there is no budget, etc. etc. etc. lessons must occur within one class period - or that cab lessons outside the school day’ or ‘past the work day end time’ - or that all that night lessons are not permitted because ‘the instruction is require a parent to transport to receive an IEP driven lesson - or everywhere. I think it’s a bunch of bologna that a district would because of transportation - although I recognize it’s occurring I cannot fathom a district restricting instruction to a student students can choose to transport their student for the lessons. I cannot fathom a district restricting instruction to a student because of transportation - although I recognize it’s occurring everywhere. I think it’s a bunch of bologna that a district would require a parent to transport to receive an IEP driven lesson - or that night lessons are not permitted because ‘the instruction is outside the school day’ or ‘past the work day end time’ - or that all lessons must occur within one class period - or that cab lessons can’t be introduced because there is no budget, etc. etc. etc.

Member from St. Charles, MO
I know many districts in Missouri contract with O&Ms and those O&Ms transport as part of the contracted service. I also know that another district, very large district serving many other districts, does not allow any staff member to transport for any reason any time (from what I was told). I was also told that the O&Ms have access to a school bus to use for lessons but the availability is limited to a condensed day - after the last group is dropped off and before the first groups of students are picked up (start/end times). Additionally, I was told that parents of those students can choose to transport their student for the lessons.

I cannot fathom a district restricting instruction to a student because of transportation - although I recognize it’s occurring everywhere. I think it’s a bunch of bologna that a district would require a parent to transport to receive an IEP driven lesson - or that night lessons are not permitted because ‘the instruction is outside the school day’ or ‘past the work day end time’ - or that all lessons must occur within one class period - or that cab lessons can’t be introduced because there is no budget, etc. etc. etc.

Member from Vienna, VA
I would suggest contacting transportation services at your districts to inquire about staff transporting students or non-employee individuals to see if there are policies that may cover you. I also suggest looking at programs such as School Community Base (SCB), Learning for Independence (LFI), and Transition Services to see what policies they have for getting students into the community or to job sites. You may be able to hop on one of their buses if there is a program at your student’s school and take advantage of their transportation-they do go to some educational sites in the community. These programs have funds coming from somewhere to support them. In addition, I would look into local agencies that offer grants and write up a transportation grant. Often there are transportation companies which can be contracted. This is what we have recently used to get students to our recreation activities. Good Luck!

Member from Wichita, KS
It is apparent from your e-mail, and others concerning this topic, this is an important and complex issue for O&M specialists. Re: using our own vehicle during O&M lessons, along with budget reductions, student safety, and adverse effects in mobility programs, there are several legal concerns. It seems to me, it will be to our advantage, and to our employers’, an attorney is consulted, especially in complicated, risk-involved situations. Options for that could be pre-paid legal services and/or our employer’s lawyer. Our insurance agent needs to be fully aware as well to prevent an unpleasant surprise later.

Marjorie Wood, M.Ed., COMS, AER O&M Division Chair, 2010-2012
I know that’s a lot of info but I felt compelled to share it. I’ve been told that I am “spoiled” in my current district but I would rather say that our parents, the TVIs/COMSs, and the Director advocate extraordinarily hard to ensure the home, school and community of the ECC are met with consistency in accordance with F.A.P.E. and the student’s visual impairment.

It appears that more and more COMS are being told they can no longer use private vehicles for transporting O&M students between training sites. Are you able to have the districts provide the transportation if they won’t allow you to personally transport? In IDEA, O&M training is in the home, community and school and transportation is a related service. Is it possible to have the district cover your transportation? In our district, we have the small special ed. busses with a bus driver scheduled for those students requiring community/off-campus training. The district is getting federal monies for those students who are receiving Medicaid as well. I have also put in the ARD paperwork that the district will provide transportation for O&M lesson and have the ‘blessing’ of the ARD committee signatures.

Are any of these ideas helpful/pertinent to your situation? If not, please let me know as we have a committee that’s working on such issues.

*******

Mike Williams, AER’s contact at Forrest T. Jones, our liability insurance provider, gave the following comment about personal vehicle insurance:

“The answer is that ‘insurance always follows the vehicle.’ If you have insurance through any carrier and you on occasion hauled someone in the vehicle to and from a location for your work, that insurance would cover the people in the vehicle. If, however, that vehicle was being used daily to transport people for work, the company/organization would want to know this and a commercial policy could be issued. There are no riders which can be added which cover your personal vehicle for occasional commercial use or ‘professional’ use.”

AER listservs: another important benefit for the profession – members helping members find answers!
If you attended the AER Regional Conference in Cleveland in October, you know that we fell short of our projected 300 attendees by about 150. Even though the attendance was half of what we expected, the sessions were outstanding according to the feedback we received from those who were there. I can vouch for that because I attended many of the sessions myself and my feedback would have been the same. Even the Sunday morning sessions were well attended, a surprise to the professionals who presented on Sunday morning. My thanks to the AER staff, Bette Anne Preston, Ginger Croce, Barb James, and Marisa Beam, for the tireless work and countless hours they put in before, during, and after the AER Cleveland Regional Conference.

In addition, a very special thanks to the AER Cleveland Regional Conference Program Committee, Dr. William Penrod (Chair), Michael Wigle (Chair of the Information and Technology Division), Donna Brostek Lee, Kevin Hollinger, Brett Page, and Scott Smith for the fine work they did before and throughout the entire Conference.

As I completed my first six months as AER’s new executive director during the Cleveland Regional Conference, I experienced the same thing I did in Boston: the fantastic work and collaboration between the AER staff, the Cleveland Regional Program Committee, and the host AER Chapter from Ohio. Their planning of the three General Sessions and the 50 sessions was excellent. The vendors, the exhibitors, and the sponsors were top-notch and the interaction among those who were in Cleveland was amazing!

When we returned to the office here in Alexandria, VA, we continued our work on the AER International Conference 2012 coming up in Bellevue, Washington, this July. This is going to be a fantastic Conference, and I hope that you and your families are doing everything you can to attend. Bette Anne is working with AER past president John Kelly and the Program Committee on keynote, general and concurrent sessions, activities, hotel arrangements, and other events. Ginger is working on sponsorships and special arrangements, as well as working with our exhibitors and vendors. We are working closely with the Pacific Northwest AER Chapter as we plan for the AER International Conference. COLLABORATION is what it is all about, and I am hoping we can get 1,000 attendees or more to this AER International Conference next summer to continue building the relationships that allow us to collaborate throughout our profession.

RECRUIT, RETAIN, REGAIN, is my motto/theme as your executive director. Membership is the key to any professional association. I value your membership. Without you, we won’t survive these uncertain economic times. We need to improve and add benefits; we need to continue to look at how we are delivering information that is accessible to ALL our members; and we need to form effective partnerships with others where each partner does not lose its distinction and its uniqueness as an organization. President Pat Leader and I are working on this. So, AER members, help me RECRUIT new members; AER members, RETAIN your membership; and former AER members, REGAIN and renew your membership in AER. We are stronger with you than without you!

I have visited with five AER Chapters since coming to AER in April 2011: Colorado, DC/Maryland, Alabama (via Skype), Indiana, and New York State. As the New Year comes in, I have plans already on my calendar to visit Illinois, Kentucky, and the Dakotas. I have learned so much about AER from participating in these chapters, their meetings, and their conferences.

Finally, if you and your families happen to be in the DC/VA/MD area, do stop in and mingle with your AER staff and stay awhile. Marisa, Barb, Bette Anne, Ginger and I would love to have you. And by-the-way, thanks to AER members from Colorado and Illinois who «dropped Lou a line»!

Drop Lou a line
Whether you have a question, an idea, or just want to say hi, he wants to hear from you!
Email lou@aerbvi.org
The Braille Authority of North America (BANA) held its fall meeting November 4-6, 2011, in Baltimore, MD, hosted by the National Federation of the Blind (NFB). NFB President Marc Maurer welcomed the group to its headquarters. As usual, BANA held its Open Forum which was attended by a number of individuals from the community.

BANA’s new slate of officers was approved at this meeting: Frances Mary D’Andrea, chair; Mary Nelle McLennan, vice chair; Jennifer Dunnam, secretary; and Sue Reilly, treasurer will take on their responsibilities beginning January 1, 2012. A new member of BANA, Illinois-based Horizons for the Blind, Inc., was voted in at this meeting.

The past year has been an extremely productive one. The Tactile Graphics Guidelines are currently being finalized for publication. The document is now on the BANA website (www.brailleauthority.org) and can be downloaded. It contains jpeg files for the tactile illustrations. The Formats Guidelines were also approved by the BANA Board. I encourage you to look for information about these new guidelines.

BANA has been extending its outreach by speaking with groups at various conventions. BANA chair Judy Dixon and Past Chair Kim Charlson spoke at the AER conference in Boston this past August. At the Getting In Touch With Literacy Conference in Louisville, KY, the first week of December 2011, Frances Mary D’Andrea and Judy Dixon presented information on the evolution of braille.

On December 7, 2011, BANA proudly honored Joseph Sullivan, President of Duxbury Systems, with its Braille Excellence Award at the opening session of the Getting In Touch with Literacy conference (see “In the News” this issue for more details about Joseph Sullivan). The award was created in honor of Louis Braille’s 200th birthday and was presented in 2009 for the first time. The award recognizes people or organizations that have developed or contributed to a code, have developed code materials or software that supports codes, and/or who represent the highest standards of braille production.

The spring meeting of BANA will be held in St. Louis, Missouri, April 28 – 30, 2012, and it will be hosted by the National Braille Association. We hope some of you will be able to attend as observers.

BANA now has a Facebook page and Twitter account, and a new blog has been established. Please be sure to “friend” and follow us!

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Braille-Authority-of-North-America/120201874707328

Twitter: @BRAuthority

BANA has released the third installment of its articles on the evolution of braille. The third installment will be posted on the BANA website shortly, but in the meantime, you can read the third section here in our AER Report. BANA’s intention is to have all three parts combined into a booklet and made available in hard copy and electronic versions.

Please respond to Lenore Dillon at Lenore.dillon@rehab.alabama.gov with your ideas, successes, and suggestions for promoting the VRT or blind rehabilitation profession.
AER International Conference 2012

July 18-22
Bellevue, Washington USA
On Seattle's Eastside
Hyatt Regency Bellevue

aerbvi.org/2012international
TVI Cont. from page 1

needed,” she explained.

The University of Alabama-Birmingham has a Center for Low Vision Rehabilitation which sends O&M referrals to Chantal for those that cannot be helped by the state or they are in a school without a vision teacher.

Rounding out her professional contributions, Chantal is a leader in the volunteer community supporting those with vision impairments and their families. She is the president of the Alabama Chapter of the National Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (NAPVI), which is known as the Alabama Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (AAPVI) locally. “The last two years have been really wonderful; this group really fits with my background and interests,” she said. “Every time I host an event, which is five or six times per year, I make sure there are blind college students or professionals so that they can help my students and their parents make better decisions for their future by seeing what is possible.”

Her other local contributions include serving on the Board of Directors of the Mountain Brook Gymnastics Foundation, an organization she helped redefine itself as a not-for-profit entity about five years ago. “Mountain Brook is special to our family because both of my daughters started taking gymnastics classes there when they were still toddlers, aged 3 and 4. They eventually joined the gymnastics team, which is how I got more involved with the organization – I became president of the team’s booster club,” Chantal noted. “I’ve been involved now for 16 years. I doubt I will ever get away from it!”

Her daughter Hailey McManus became a coach there three years ago and one of her students is a girl with blindness. [Editor’s Note: See article from Village Living: “Emma Dreams of Balance Beams” http://villagelivingonline.wordpress.com/2011/09/30/emma%E2%80%99s-dreams-of-balance-beams/]

What makes the gymnastics center near and dear to the McManus family now is that it provides gymnastics for all children who may have a disability, from low vision to those with Down’s Syndrome. Inclusivity is its goals and the organization is proud that it can accommodate children from all backgrounds without building special classes around them.

When it comes to Hailey’s choice to pursue a career as a TVI, Chantal believes her influence has been secondary. “Through my local activities and just hearing about my daily life with my students, Hailey has been exposed to this career and its rewards all of her life. Volunteering at the events like the Easter egg hunt or the annual weekend summer conference gave her time to be around the kids and get to know them. Hailey also met my students and saw their progress, which I also talked about at home,” she said.

When asked what first interested her in this career choice, Hailey stated without hesitation, “My Mom. I would not be thinking about this if it wasn’t for her. She is definitely the inspiration. She’s so passionate and so happy. She is always talking about her students and she is so involved in so many organizations. I grew up around it and when I was ten years old I would say that is what I wanted to do. People thought I would change my mind but I didn’t.”

“I found Hailey’s announcement that she would become a TVI as surprising as the next person. I kept waiting for her to change her mind because she was only a sophomore in high school at the time. But she never did,” Chantal stated.

While still in Junior High School Hailey was exposed to career exploration. She began thinking about being a teacher for children who are blind or have low vision. “I started taking electives and that process made me focus on it. It made me realize that this is what I really wanted to do with my life. I started talking to my Mom about it and asking her so many questions.”

Chantal supports Hailey’s choice and has already started helping her check out college programs. “I found that there are only three programs left for undergraduates, and one of those is at my alma mater, Florida State. So we drove there last summer and met with Dr. Sandra Lewis. The great thing is that Hailey can go right into her O&M master’s program at Florida State.”

“I’m not worried about my training or my studies. I will work hard but I really believe that when I get to Florida State, I will be around people that will support and encourage me. I don’t think it will be hard to stay focused and study because this is what I enjoy and love.”

“I support her choice because we need more teachers,” Chantal said. “It’s a great profession and she is following in my footsteps. I also know that Hailey will always have a job. I’m still excited about what I do and I’ve been doing it for 30 years. I think it’s a phenomenal field.”

Looking ahead, Chantal predicts some differences in Hailey’s career experience. “While I have been an itinerant teacher since starting my own practice ten years ago, I think Hailey will be a full time employee somewhere so that she will have benefits. Currently, I receive my benefits through my husband’s employer but I don’t think Hailey will be doing that. I also predict that she will work with children and not adults, like I do. My students are very diverse, ranging in age from 2 to 82 years.”

When asked what she thought would be the hardest part of being a TVI, Hailey answered, “It will be the daily challenges with the students, like how can I make them more independent? Listening to my Mom talk about working with

Continued on p. 12
the different school systems also makes me think that part will be challenging, too.”

Like many teachers, Hailey believes the most rewarding part of her career will be the students. “Being able to walk with them and watching them grow from toddlers to junior high school students, and seeing how far we have come together will be fantastic. I imagine it will be like the little girl I am helping with gymnastics; she is someone I met when she was a baby and I’ve seen her grow and change.”

Has all the attention that Hailey’s been getting due to her career choice affected her at all? “I think it’s great that there is such interest in me and that they are taking me so seriously. It’s cool that people recommend scholarships and activities for my studies. I didn’t think it was such a big deal but everyone’s attention is encouraging me to stay on the path that I chose,” she said.

“If someone in my school asked me about becoming a TVI, I would tell them to speak to my Mom! I would also tell them what it means to be a TVI. If they were really interested, I would give them background information from AER about how blind people can do what the sighted can. I would encourage people to try it. I’ve already had a chance in some classes to discuss this at my high school.”

While watching her Mother’s activities and love for her profession inspired Hailey to make her career choice, what inspired Chantal to make her choice initially?

“I read ‘The Miracle Worker’ as a young teen and I decided that I wanted to be Annie Sullivan,” she stated. Initially, Chantal started out studying to become a teacher of the deaf. A series of circumstances led her to a different program and a new career choice. “I found out that there is a difference between teaching the hearing impaired and the deaf, and I was in the wrong program. I enrolled at Peabody College to enter the correct program, but shortly after that the college filed for bankruptcy,” Chantal explained. “While they were deciding what to do next, I enrolled at Florida State. I was invited to join the well-respected O&M program there, which I found quite an honor. That is how I became a TVI; I never went back to study in the program for teachers of the deaf.”

Eventually, Chantal earned a master’s degree in psychology counseling so that she would be well prepared to deal with all the emotions that can accompany working with families that have a child with a disability. How the family approaches it makes all the difference in whether the child is seen as having a handicap or a person with a disability that needs accommodation.

She never looked back. Likely, neither will Hailey.

Editor’s Note: want to inspire someone to become a TVI? Share this story with them!

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2012 Ferrell Scholarship: Applications due FEBRUARY 15!

Scholarship applications are now being accepted for the 2012 William and Dorothy Ferrell Scholarship, which is awarded biennially to two selected applicants studying for a career in the field of services to children or adults who are blind or visually impaired.

The two $750 scholarship winners will be announced prior to the AER Biennial International Conference, scheduled for July 18-22, 2012, at the Bellevue Hyatt Hotel, Bellevue, WA. Deadline for submitting applications is February 15, 2012, and scholarship recipients will be notified no later than May 31, 2012.

Eligibility Criteria:
1. Applicants for the Ferrell Scholarship must be legally blind (have a visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the best-corrected eye and/or a visual field of 20 degrees or less.)
2. Applicants must be studying at the post-secondary level for a career in the field of services to persons who are blind or visually impaired.
3. Applications must be typed and submitted electronically to AER at scholarships@aerbvi.org.
4. The letters of recommendation and an original, signed proof of vision status must be mailed separately to AER Scholarship Committee, 1703 North Beauregard Street, Suite 440, Alexandria, VA 22311-1717.
5. The deadline for consideration for the 2012 Scholarship is February 15, 2012, so all application materials must be in the AER office by that time.

To download the scholarship application, click on this link: http://www.aerbvi.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=506
New and expanded information on

- The different learning needs of young children who are visually impaired
- Skills to focus on at different ages in the primary development areas of
  » sensory development
  » communication
  » movement
  » manipulation
  » comprehension
- Effective ways of using everyday activities and routines to teach skills and encourage learning, with specific step-by-step suggestions
- Strategies for navigating early intervention services and the transition to elementary school
- Behaviors to promote in children with visual impairments for success in preschool and kindergarten
- Adaptations, assistive technology, and other tools that can help young children in the classroom
Introduction
This article will provide an overview and history of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Blind Rehabilitation Service (BRS). This is the first installment in a series of articles that will describe and detail the scope and breadth of available services now being provided for Veterans and Service members who are visually impaired. Future articles will detail the minimum qualifications, skills and knowledge necessary to become a practitioner within BRS, the steps required to search for and apply for employment opportunities within the federal government, and a review of the policies and procedural structures in place within the VA that serve as guidelines for the provision of care and rehabilitation services within a medical system.

Veterans Health Administration within the VA
The VA is a United States government organization that is aligned in three branches: Veterans Health Administration, that provides health care services, trains new health care providers and supports health related research; Veterans Benefits Administration that provides benefits that accrue to Veterans such as compensation and pensions, education and vocational rehabilitation benefits, etc., and National Cemetery Administration that provides burial and memorial benefits for Veterans and maintains cemeteries. The Secretary of the VA was established as a Cabinet-level position in 1989 – the Secretary of VA, currently Eric Shinseki, is appointed by and reports directly to, the President of the United States.

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is home to the United States' largest integrated health care system consisting of 152 medical centers, nearly 1,400 community-based outpatient clinics, community living centers, Vet Centers and Domiciliaries. Together these health care facilities, and the more than 53,000 health care practitioners who work within them, provide comprehensive care to more than 8.3 million Veterans each year. See the website http://www.va.gov/health/aboutVHA.asp to learn more about VHA programs.

Blind Rehabilitation Service (BRS) is organizationally aligned under VHA Patient Care Services to provide a comprehensive array of blind and vision rehabilitation programs to eligible beneficiaries who are visually impaired. BRS provides care not only to Veterans, but also to Servicemembers with disabling visual impairment, because the Department of Defense does not provide blind rehabilitation care. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is the first national healthcare system to completely and seamlessly integrate rehabilitation services for patients with visual impairments into its health benefits. This ensures that patients receive the finest medical and rehabilitation care, as well as cutting-edge assistive technology.¹

There are approximately 146,000 Veterans in the United States who are legally blind, and more than one million Veterans are estimated to have low vision that causes a loss of ability to perform necessary daily activities. Those figures are expected to increase in the years ahead as more Veterans from the Korean and Vietnam conflict eras develop vision loss from age-related diseases such as macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma.²

History and Background
The roots of VA’s services for Veterans and Servicemembers with visual impairment can be traced directly to the commitment made to the Nation’s war-blinded Servicemembers when President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed a 1944 Executive Order, declaring, “No blinded servicemen from World War II will be returned to their homes without adequate training to meet the problems of necessity imposed upon them by their blindness.”²

In order to meet the demands of this obligation, the adjustment training of blinded soldiers became the military’s duty. In the initial phase, the Army Medical Corps provided blind rehabilitation instruction to newly-blinded Servicemembers at Valley Forge General Hospital in Phoenixville, PA, and Dibble General Hospital in Menlo Park, CA.²

With the conclusion of World War II, the military deactivated their blind rehabilitation program. President Harry Truman subsequently transferred responsibility for the social adjustment training of blinded Servicemembers to the VA. Within a month, all wartime rehabilitation programs for blinded Servicemembers were deactivated by the military.²

The first BRC was established at the Hines VA Hospital, located in the western suburbs of Chicago, IL. Russell C. Williams, a blinded Veteran and former counselor at the Valley Forge Military Rehabilitation Program, was appointed Chief. After four months of intensive staff training, the nine-bed unit admitted the first patient on July 4, 1948.²

Twelve additional BRCs have been created since Hines was first established and are strategically placed within the VA system in order to meet the growing demand for comprehensive care.

¹ BRS Brochure, 2009
² VHA Handbook 1174.04: BLIND REHABILITATION CENTER PROGRAM PROCEDURES, 2009
In the Advanced Low Vision Clinics, patients are also provided with orientation and mobility training as well as the low vision examinations and therapy described above. Principles of independent travel are taught using the long white cane, when appropriate, to enhance the user’s safety and independence. Maximum use of any remaining vision to assist travel is evaluated, and in many cases low vision devices are provided and made an integral part of mobility training. Sensory training classes teach the Veteran how to more effectively use remaining senses, particularly hearing, as an aid in travel. In addition, exercises in mental mapping serve to enhance the Veteran’s orientation while traveling through different kinds of environments. Orientation and mobility instruction in relatively simple routes to increasingly complex routes builds confidence in the ability to travel independently. Technology associated with orientation, route planning and navigation is assessed and may be provided to Veterans, such as global positioning systems, etc. Twenty-two Advanced Low Vision Clinics are currently operating with the VA system.

**Blind Rehabilitation Service Continuum of Care Clinical Programs**

The VA BRS model of care encompasses an array of rehabilitative services, extending from the patient’s home to the local VA care facility, and to regional low vision clinics and lodger and inpatient training programs. All VHA BRS clinical programs are required to be accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities. Clinical blind and vision rehabilitation services may be provided through a variety of BRS programs:

**Low Vision Clinics**

Intermediate and advanced low vision clinics provide clinical low vision examinations, a full spectrum of vision-enhancing devices, and specialized training in visual perceptual and visual motor skills. Eye care specialists and Blind Rehabilitation Specialists work together in interdisciplinary teams to assure that Veterans and Servicemembers with low vision are provided with techniques and technology to enhance their remaining sight and facilitate their independence. Each patient attending the program receives a comprehensive eye examination by a low vision eye care specialist, and a thorough functional assessment.

The Intermediate Low Vision Clinics focus on effective use of remaining vision through the development and use of visual motor and visual perceptual skills. Assessment and instruction with special optical and electronic devices is provided. Ergonomic equipment such as special lighting and positioning devices are provided to assist Veterans in using vision effectively. Therapy may employ the use of visual and ergonomic equipment and new visual skills to address routine daily tasks such as reading, writing, managing finances and medications, housekeeping, and orientation to the environment. There are currently 22 Intermediate Low Vision Clinics located throughout the VA system.

In the Advanced Low Vision Clinics, patients are also provided with orientation and mobility training as well as the low vision examinations and therapy described above. Principles of independent travel are taught using the long white cane, when appropriate, to enhance the user’s safety and independence. Maximum use of any remaining vision to assist travel is evaluated, and in many cases low vision devices are provided and made an integral part of mobility training. Sensory training classes teach the Veteran how to more effectively use remaining senses, particularly hearing, as an aid in travel. In addition, exercises in mental mapping serve to enhance the Veteran’s orientation while traveling through different kinds of environments. Orientation and mobility instruction in relatively simple routes to increasingly complex routes builds confidence in the ability to travel independently. Technology associated with orientation, route planning and navigation is assessed and may be provided to Veterans, such as global positioning systems, etc. Twenty-two Advanced Low Vision Clinics are currently operating with the VA system.

**Vision Impairment Service in Outpatient Rehabilitation (VISOR) Programs**

These programs provide short-term (about 2 weeks) blind and vision rehabilitation. They provide comfortable overnight accommodations for Veterans and Servicemembers who are visually impaired and who require lodging, as well as day programs for those who live locally. Those patients who attend VISOR must be able to perform basic activities of daily living independently, including the ability to self-medicate. In addition to the low vision and orientation and mobility services already described, VISOR also provides training in communication, activities of daily living and advanced technology training such as use of personal computers. The VA has 11 VISOR programs in operation at this time.

**Inpatient Blind Rehabilitation Centers**

The most intense and in-depth rehabilitation for severely disabled blind Veterans and Servicemembers is provided in inpatient programs. Comprehensive, individualized blind rehabilitation services are provided in an inpatient VA Medical Center environment by an interdisciplinary team of rehabilitation specialists. The rehabilitation process can maximize adjustment to visual impairment and blindness, aid in the reorganization of the person’s life, and foster return to a contributing place in the family and community.

To achieve comprehensive rehabilitation, inpatient Blind Rehabilitation Centers (BRCs) offer skill courses designed to assist patients in achieving a realistic level of independence. Participants are supported in developing a healthy attitude toward themselves, their vision change, and the future. Skill areas include low vision therapy, vision rehabilitation therapy (formerly rehabilitation teaching) orientation and

*Continued on p. 16*
Blind Rehabilitation Services
Cont. from page 13

mobility, manual skills (including crafts and household repair) and advanced technology training (including personal computer). BRC staff includes psychologists, social workers, recreational therapists and skilled nurses so that patients have opportunities for personal adjustment, therapeutic recreation, as well as increased health and wellness.

Each BRC offers an independent living program that is designed for Veterans who will be living alone following their rehabilitation. After extensive instruction, the individual is given an opportunity to practice newly acquired skills with daily tasks typically encountered when living independently. This affords the individual with the opportunity to refine skills and abilities to many of these daily activities and tasks before actually returning home.¹

Case Management - Visual Impairment Services Team (VIST) Coordinators

The Visual Impairment Services Team (VIST) Coordinators have responsibility for the coordination of services for severely visually impaired Veterans and Servicemembers. VIST Coordinator duties include providing and/or arranging the provision of appropriate treatment in order to enhance functioning; for example, referrals to BRCs, Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialists, VISOR and low vision clinics. Other VIST coordinator duties include identifying newly identified individuals who have severely disabling visual impairment, reviewing and assuring appropriate benefits, providing counseling, assisting in problem solving, and conducting educational and outreach programs relating to VIST and blindness. Currently the VA has 112 full-time VIST Coordinators, along with an additional 45 part-time VIST Coordinators, providing VIST coverage in all VA medical Centers in the United States.¹

VIST Coordinators develop teams at the local VA Medical Centers and community-based outpatient clinics. These teams are comprised of the VIST Coordinator, healthcare and allied healthcare professionals. The team ensures that blind and visually impaired patients enrolled in the medical center are identified, evaluated, and provided health and rehabilitation services to maximize adjustment to visual impairment. Team members may include, but are not limited to, representatives from Social Work, Ophthalmology, Optometry, Prosthetics, Primary Care, Geriatrics, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Nursing, Audiology, Podiatry, Nutrition, Psychology, Patient Administration and Financial Services and Veterans Benefits Administration.¹

Taking Care to the Veteran – Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialists

Blind Rehab Outpatient Specialists (BROS) serve visually impaired patients in their homes, VA medical centers or clinics, colleges or universities, work sites, and long-term care environments. They are multi-skilled professionals who perform a wide array of rehabilitation services including assessments and training in visual skills, living skills and orientation and mobility. The BROS may also provide pre/post BRC training, and instruct those who may not be able to travel to a BRC. They also provide education and training to family members.¹ Currently the VA has 77 BROS positions throughout the system.³

Combat in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation New Dawn (OND) has resulted in new patterns of poly-traumatic injuries and disability. These polytrauma injuries are often the result of blast and can result not only in blindness, but also traumatic brain injury, amputation and burns. Recognizing the specialized care needs of Servicemembers who subsequently become Veterans with polytrauma, VHA has established a Polytrauma System of Care at selected VA facilities. BROS serve as members of interdisciplinary teams in the VHA’s polytrauma services, contributing their blind and vision rehabilitation expertise to the provision of comprehensive rehabilitation with a team of practitioners providing unique care for each polytrauma patient.

To get more information about BRS programs and services, please review our website at:

http://wwwva.gov/BLINDREHAB

Provision of Technology and Devices

Blind Rehabilitation Service practitioners partner with VHA Prosthetics and Sensory Aid Service (PSAS) so that Veterans may receive all aids, appliances, technology and optical devices that are recommended to enhance their rehabilitation care. Optical low vision devices provided by PSAS must be prescribed by an optometrist or ophthalmologist. Blind and vision rehabilitation professionals may recommend devices and technology that are within their scope of practice to assess and provide instruction. Veterans for whom devices and technology are recommended are taught to use the devices effectively to achieve their rehabilitation goals, and taught to care for and troubleshoot problems with the device. Device issuance criteria are described by VHA policy which may be reviewed at the website:

http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=1786

Next article: Becoming a BRS Professional
INPATIENT BLIND REHAB CENTERS
WEST HAVEN, CT
AUGUSTA, GA
BIRMINGHAM, AL
SAN JUAN, PR
WEST PALM BEACH, FL
CLEVELAND, OH
HINES, IL
BILOXI, MS
WACO, TX
TUCSON, AZ
AMERICAN LAKE, WA
PALO ALTO, CA
LONG BEACH, CA

BLIND REHAB OUTPATIENT SPECIALISTS
TOGUS, ME
BOSTON, MA
MANCHESTER, NH
W. HAVEN, CT
PROVIDENCE, RI
SYRACUSE, NY
NORTHPORT, NY
E. ORANGE, NJ
MONTROSE, NY
NEW YORK HARBOR, NY
PHILADELPHIA, PA
LEBANON, PA
PITTSBURGH, PA
BALTIMORE, MD
WASHINGTON, DC
RICHMOND, VA
WINSTON-SALEM, NC
DURHAM, NC
BIRMINGHAM, AL
CHARLESTON, SC
AUGUSTA, GA (2)
ATLANTA, GA
COLUMBIA, SC
FT. MYERS, FL
JACKSONVILLE, FL
BAY PINES, FL
W PALM BEACH, FL
MIAMI, FL
BROWARD COUNTY, FL
GAINESVILLE, FL
LAKE CITY, FL
ORLANDO, FL
SAN JUAN PR (3)
TAMPA, FL
HUNTINGTON, WV
LEXINGTON, KY
LOUISVILLE, KY
MOUNTAIN HOME, TN
MEMPHIS, TN
NASHVILLE, TN
CLEVELAND-WADE PK, OH
COLUMBUS, OH
ANN ARBOR, MI
HINES, IL
ST. LOUIS, MO
HOUSTON, TX
JACKSON, MS
MUSKOGEE, OK
OKLAHOMA CITY, OK
NEW ORLEANS, LA
ALEXANDRIA, LA
DALLAS, TX
SAN ANTONIO, TX
WACO, TX
ALBUQUERQUE, NM
PHOENIX, AZ
TUSCON, AZ
DENVER, CO
SEATTLE, WA
PORTLAND, OR
AMERICAN LAKE /
TACOMA, WA
SPOKANE, WA
HONOLULU, HI
PALO ALTO, CA (4)
SACRAMENTO, CA
NORTH LAS VEGAS, NV
SAN DIEGO, CA
LOS ANGELES, CA
LONG BEACH, CA
LOMA LINDA, CA
MINNEAPOLIS, MN
DES MOINES, IA

ADVANCED LOW VISION CLINICS
BOSTON, MA
SYRACUSE, NY
BROOKLYN, NY
PHILADELPHIA, PA
BALTIMORE, MD
SALISBURY, NC
ATLANTA, GA
TAMPA, FL
NASHVILLE, TN
DAYTON, OH
SAGINAW, MI
MILWAUKEE, WI
WICHITA, KS
LITTLE ROCK, AR
DALLAS, TX
PHOENIX, AZ
SALT LAKE CITY, UT
PORTLAND, OR
MARTINEZ, CA
GREATER LA, CA
SAN DIEGO, CA
DES MOINES, IA

VISOR CLINICS
BUFFALO, NY
EAST ORANGE, NJ
LEBANON, PA
WASHINGTON, D.C.
RICHMOND, VA
LEXINGTON, KY
BATTLE CREEK, MI
KANSAS CITY, MO
HOUSTON, TX
DENVER, CO
MINNEAPOLIS, MN

INTERMEDIATE LOW VISION CLINICS
WHITE RIVER JUNCT, VT
ALBANY, NY
MONTROSE, NY
PITTSBURGH, PA
MARTINSBURG, WV
HAMPTON, VA
COLUMBIA, SC
OCALA, FL
MEMPHIS, TN
CINCINNATI, OH
DETROIT, MI
MADISON, WI
ST. LOUIS, MO
OKLAHOMA, OK
TEMPLE, TX

ALBUQUERQUE, NM
FORT HARRISON, MT
SPOKANE, WA
UKIAH, CA
LOMA LINDA, CA
LAS VEGAS, NV
SIOUX FALLS, SD
In the valley of the Andean mountain range in central Bolivia lies a city with varying daily temperatures, sights, and international travelers. This is the story of my summer in Cochabamba, Bolivia.

While completing my undergraduate studies in Special Education and Spanish at Illinois State University, I developed a passion for travel and the understanding of cultural differences. As a teacher of the visually impaired (TVI) in Springfield, Illinois, I sought to fulfill my lifelong dream while sharing my skills with children in a less fortunate country. Cochabamba, Bolivia was the perfect place to pay forward the kindnesses I have received in my life; to make a difference.

About a year ago, a current student from the Illinois State University TVI program and I decided to look into opportunities to volunteer our time teaching blind and visually impaired children in a foreign country. Our research led us to the non-profit Sustainable Bolivia organization. Its mission is to link international volunteers with non-profit organizations in an effort to provide education and services that promote independence and community development. One of the non-profit organizations included the Manuela E. Gandarillas Center for the Blind (MGCB) in Cochabamba, Bolivia. This was the perfect opportunity to work with students with visual impairments and to try our hands at communicating professionally in the Spanish language.

Once the decision was made, I spent the following months preparing for my journey to Cochabamba. This included the required vaccinations, fundraising, and refreshing my Spanish. When we arrived in Cochabamba after an overnight flight from Miami and a short commuter flight from La Paz, Bolivia, we were greeted by the director of Sustainable Bolivia and brought to the main office. A few days later, my friend and I met with the director of the MGCB, Nicómedes Flores. He asked us to share our knowledge about the system of education of the visually impaired in the US. It was an amazing experience in Spanish communication and also a great opportunity to build relations between the program in Bolivia and the US.

After two days of presentations, the director requested that we create a “how-to guide” for school integration to be used at the MGCB. We worked with two teachers that specialize in school integration. This was difficult at times because of the language barrier. Fortunately, we were able to overcome that barrier and learn from each other.

The system of education for students with visual impairments in Cochabamba is as follows. Students who only have a visual impairment or who are blind are served in the public schools. If they have multiple impairments, they are served at separate schools. Also, Bolivia has a variety of settings where people with visual impairments can receive services. These include MGCB, which is a public institution, and FAPIZ, a semi-private center that serves people with multiple impairments and instructs professionals in Braille, orientation and mobility, and activities of daily living.

In addition to variances in educational systems, one stark difference is the education and training of professionals in the field of visual impairments. Bolivia only requires approximately three months of training at a center for the blind. They do not have...
university programs for teacher training in this field and do not earn the same types of wages that we do in the United States.

Much of our volunteer experience included information gathering and sharing, as well as supporting the classroom teachers as necessary. Some of our duties were hanging and creating posters, ink-printing Braille, and embossing assignments for students. Each day, students received instruction at the blind center in the morning and then joined their same-age peers in the public school for academics. During the morning, we met Daniela, Adriana and Alejandra, three very silly pre-teen girls. Two were totally blind and one had low vision and all worked diligently on their homework to prepare for their integration into the public school later in the afternoon. After I finished helping one of the students with an assignment, she thought it would be funny to knock on the table and say that there was someone at the door. I very naively walked to the door to answer it and the room filled with uproarious laughter. Apparently mischievous behavior is not limited to adolescent American boys.

In addition to working in the classroom, we had the opportunity to observe different disciplines including activities of daily living, manual skills/artisan work, Braille, orientation and mobility, school integration, and music.

Each day brought with it a new and exciting experience, but it was when I was able to connect with the students and work with them that I felt most comfortable and as though I was fulfilling a purpose. From this experience, I appreciate even more the resources at our disposal in the US and in the state of Illinois. It was challenging at times, but this journey has initiated what I hope to be fruitful and lasting professional and personal relationships with the staff and students working at Manuela Gandarillas.

For more information about volunteering in Bolivia, please go to www.sustainablebolivia.org
Chapter News

Dakota
Plans are well underway for the AER Dakota Chapter’s spring conference, to be held from April 11-13, 2012, in Aberdeen, South Dakota. Sessions will cover a wide array of topics including technology, macular degeneration, music therapy, gerontology, new APH products, and information on Project SEARCH. Conference planners are pleased to announce that Lou Tutt, Executive Director of AER, will be in attendance.

This year’s banquet promises to be memorable with presentations to the winners of the annual Riki Nitz Dakota AER Worker of the Year and to the winner of the first annual Friend of Vision Award. The featured speaker is Keith Bunde, the Director of Student Development at Dakota State University in Madison, SD. He is co-president of the South Dakota Association of the Blind and is a member of the American Council of the Blind. Keith also does training in the area of assistive technology for the blind. For further conference details please e-mail Linda Kraft, lkraft@nd.gov.

Hope to see you in Aberdeen in April 2012!

Illinois
The Illinois AER will hold its conference February 16-17, 2012, at the Hyatt Regency Woodfield in Schaumburg, IL. All of the details can be found at the chapter’s website http://il.aerbvi.org. IL-AER is thrilled that Lou Tutt, AER’s Executive Director, will be a featured keynote.

Kentucky
The Kentucky AER annual conference will be held at Cumberland Falls, KY on March 21-23, 2012. This year’s keynote speaker will be AER Executive Director, Lou Tutt. For more conference information please contact KAER President, Jane Thompson at jthompson@aph.org.

Pacific Northwest
By the time this is published plans for the upcoming International AER convention in July will be well under way. As host Chapter, the Pacific Northwest Chapter wants to make your visit a memorable one, showcasing the best of the Pacific Northwest. The Seattle area is rich in history and a major cosmopolitan area, headquarters for some of the world’s best known products and just a fun city to enjoy.

First, Bellevue is a city east of Seattle, just across Lake Washington. Once a sleepy little community, it has grown into a metropolitan area in its own right and with its own identity. The location for the upcoming convention is directly across the street from Bellevue Square, an upscale shopping center with theaters, restaurants, and interesting people. And, the crosswalk from the hotel to the shopping center has an audible pedestrian signal!

The conference is titled “Sharing the Vision – Shaping the Future.” This nationally-respected conference will offer a wide range of relevant and engaging ideas and insights with colleagues.

Penn-Del AER
Penn-Del AER will hold its annual conference April 18 – 20, 2012, at the Holiday Inn in Grantville, PA. The conference is titled “Shaping the Vision – Shaping the Future.” This nationally-respected conference will offer a wide range of relevant and engaging opportunities for attendees to enhance their skills, to network, and to share ideas and insights with colleagues.

Professional Credit Hours will be offered for Pennsylvania Department of Education Act 48. Interested persons will be offered Certificates of Attendance for Certified Rehabilitation Counselor Credits (CRC) and for Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals (ACVREP).

In addition to numerous concurrent and posters presentations from prominent local and national speakers, the conference will offer three impressive
general session presentations. The Keynote address will be given by Dr. Judith M. Dixon, Director of Consumer Relations at the Library of Congress, National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS). Dr. Dixon also currently serves as Chair of the Braille Authority of North America (BANA).

Penn-Del AER Service Award, Elinor Long Award, and Scholarship Merit Award

Nominations are currently being accepted for two prestigious Penn-Del AER awards: The Penn-Del AER Service Award and the Elinor Long Educator of the Year (ELEY) Award. The Penn-Del AER Service Award will be awarded to a professional who serves the education and/or rehabilitation needs of individuals with visual impairment in Pennsylvania or Delaware, and who has demonstrated outstanding contributions and performance in the field. The ELEY Award is named after Ms. Elinor Long, who dedicated her career to developing and supporting programs for students with visual and dual sensory impairment in Pennsylvania. This award will be bestowed to a professional in the field of education of students with visual impairment in Pennsylvania or Delaware. We strongly encourage everyone in the field to nominate a fellow Pennsylvania or Delaware professional who warrants such recognition.

In addition, we are offering a merit scholarship award to recognize one outstanding university student who is majoring in one or more of the following certification areas: Low Vision Therapy, Orientation and Mobility, Rehabilitation Counseling, Teacher of Students with Visual Impairment, or Vision Rehabilitation Therapy. This year’s recipient will be gifted a $1000 award and their AER transitional year membership fee. Applicants must be admitted to an undergraduate, graduate, or doctoral program and live or work within Pennsylvania or Delaware. Applicants need not be enrolled in a program within the states of Pennsylvania or Delaware.

All three award recipients will be recognized on April 19, 2012, at the Awards Banquet held during the Penn-Del AER Spring Vision Conference.

For additional information on the conference, the service awards and student scholarship announcements, and other happenings in our chapter, please visit our website at www.penn-delaer.org

Contribute to AER’s Image Library!

AER is building an image library and we are inviting our members to contribute! We are seeking images and videos showing vision professionals doing what they do best … serving those who are blind and visually impaired.

We will use the material to recruit people to the profession, for membership materials, and in other promotional efforts.

We are looking for photos and video of members providing services such as assistive technology, O&M training, low vision therapy, education services, braille instruction, rehabilitation therapy, and all the other services AER members provide.

We will need permission from the subjects in order to use the material for promotional purposes. AER will provide release forms to those who submit items.

Please send your photos (.jpg format, please) and videos (up to three minutes) to ginger@aerbvi.org. You can mail the graphics and videos on a CD Rom to AER Graphics, 1703 N. Beauregard St., Suite 440, Alexandria, VA 22311-1744.
Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC)

Created By Dr. Susan Jay Spungin

Across
3 - What must the TVI do to most effectively in order to include the ECC throughout the day
6 - What is needed for the student who is visually impaired to access the core curriculum
8 - What component mentions environmental cues
10 - How many components was the original ECC
13 - In what periodical did the first article on the ECC appear
14 - What can be seen as the biggest deterrent for the TVI to teaching the ECC
17 - What component mentions spatial awareness
18 - What component mentions keyboarding
21 - Who is the most long lasting advocates for the child with visually impairment
22 - What component mentions maintaining eye contact

Down
1 - What does ECC often needs to be aligned with
2 - What is the new component added making the number increase from 8 to 9
3 - What area of learning many visually impaired students are missing
4 - What is used as another name for the ECC
5 - What component mentions advocacy
7 - What component mentions hobbies
9 - What component mentions clothing
11 - Who developed the concept of the Expanded Core Curriculum
12 - What is the new name of the component replacing visual efficiency skills
15 - What component mentions maintaining eye contact
16 - What does the ECC hope to access for the blind student
19 - What component mentions work habits
20 - Most popular delivery service model
Thank You Cleveland!

AER extends sincere appreciation to the speakers, volunteers and attendees who experienced a great weekend of education and fun during the AER Regional Conference 2011 in Cleveland last October. Members of the Ohio Chapter were gracious hosts and provided wonderful information and advice to delegates. We also salute the AER Information & Technology Division for their efforts in developing programming for their division’s Conference Within a Conference.

In particular we wish to recognize the hard work of Bill Penrod, chair, and fellow members of the AER Regional Conference Program Committee for Cleveland:

Chair - Dr. William Penrod, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL
Donna Brostek Lee, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI
Kevin Hollinger, Francis Howell School District, Saint Charles, MO

Paula Mauro, Ohio State School for the Blind, Columbus, OH
Scott Smith, Hines VA Hospital, Lombard, IL
Michael Wigle, Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Cincinnati, OH

The Evolution of Braille: Can the Past Help Plan the Future?
Part Three of a Three-part Article from the Braille Authority of North America (BANA)

The Challenges Ahead
Previous installments of this article traced the changes in braille and print production methods over the past decades and discussed some of the challenges caused by the interaction of current codes with current production methods. This final section discusses the history of efforts to resolve these issues and briefly outlines possible solutions.

With the proliferation of better and more efficient technology, the relevance of braille as a reading and writing medium is frequently questioned. Technology has made it easier than ever for people who are blind to access a wide variety of texts, to create print documents, and to be more productive at work and home. Some people report that they can read faster with speech than with braille—and they probably can. But are those same people continuing to use braille? Have the ways braille readers use braille in their daily lives changed so dramatically that it should impact the development of braille codes?

The answer to both questions is a resounding yes. While the ways people are using braille have changed over the years, braille remains a viable and crucially important medium for communication. Speech access allows for quick skimming of information, but braille gives access to text in a manner that allows the reader to read independently and to see the spelling of words, the format of documents, and the symbols used. For these reasons, it’s imperative that the codes are kept up to date so braille users can read and write accurately.

For many years, BANA has continued to make small changes to the braille code where absolutely necessary. Our consideration for the impact on braille readers, teachers, and transcribers, BANA has acted conservatively in making changes. However, the “small fixes” made over the years have, in some cases, increased the complexity and ambiguity of the braille code. An example of how an effort to make a seemingly simple change to the code led to bigger complications was illustrated in the second installment of this article. To resolve many of the shortcomings of the current braille code outlined in the previous installments, serious efforts at code restructuring have taken place in the past two decades. A more comprehensive approach was needed to create flexible solutions for the changing needs of braille users.

Unified English Braille
The first of these efforts was the Unified English Braille (UEB) code project, which was initiated in 1992 by the Braille Authority of North America (BANA). The impetus for this effort was a memorandum sent to the BANA Board in January, 1991, by Abraham Nemeth and Tim Cranmer. In this memo, Drs. Nemeth and Cranmer expressed their concern over the “proliferation of braille codes” with different symbols for common characters. They stated: “For a long time now, the blindness community has been experiencing a steady erosion in braille usage, both among children and adults. This trend shows no sign of abatement, so that there is now a clear and present danger that braille will become a secondary means of written communication among the blind, or that it will become obsolete altogether.” Later in their memo, they cited “the complexity and disarray” of the braille codes then in use, and they asked BANA to give the braille code a major overhaul to improve its usability and flexibility. They stated clearly: “It is time to modernize the braille system.” Based on the recommendations in this memo, BANA established a committee to explore the development of a unified code.

The original intent of the unified code project was to explore the possibility of bringing together three of the official braille codes that are used for various purposes: English Braille, American Edition (literary material), Nemeth Code (mathematics and scientific notation), and Computer Braille Code (computer notation). In 1993, the project was adopted by the full International Council on English Braille (ICEB). The project was expanded in scope to explore the possible unification of the braille codes that are used for those purposes in all seven ICEB member countries: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Nigeria, South Africa, United Kingdom, and the United States. Work to develop a unified code was conducted primarily by braille readers in those countries with input from transcribers and educators.

At the time the project began, the braille codes used for English literary purposes were similar, though not identical, in most English-speaking countries. Because of this, substantial preservation of that code was one of the basic goals in the development of UEB. However, the codes used for technical purposes in the other ICEB countries were very different from those used in the BANA countries, so that UEB can be regarded as bringing together the braille codes used in different countries as well as those used for different kinds of notation. The only notation specifically exempted from consideration under the UEB project was the music braille code, which was already and still is a well-accepted international code.

In the initial stages of UEB development, one of the most pressing issues to be decided was the placement of numbers. In the U.S., numbers in the literary code were written using the four dots in the upper portion of the cell while in math and science, numbers were written in the lower portion of the cell.
For a consistent code, one method for writing numbers had to be chosen, using either the upper or lower part of the cell.

In addition to these two possibilities, a third way of writing numbers was considered. Called “dot 6” or “Antoine” numbers, this system forms numbers by using the same dots as upper-cell numbers with dot 6 added. In this system, 1 is dots 1-6, 2 is dots 1-2-6, and so on. The zero departs from this pattern. Dot 6 numbers are still widely used in France, Germany, and other European countries.

To decide which system of numbers should be used, the committees, both in the U.S. and internationally, looked at the ramifications of using upper numbers, lower numbers, or the dot 6 numbers. Using lower numbers would mean changing all of the punctuation signs or having a special mode for numbers. The number sign would still have been needed in most cases because numbers standing alone could easily be misread. Use of Antoine numbers would mean losing ten frequently-used contractions, and many people reported that they were slower to read. Upper numbers had the advantage of being familiar to everyone and not conflicting with punctuation. In an analysis conducted using literature that contained frequent numbers, numbers were found to come in contact more frequently with punctuation than with letters. After intense debate, the familiarity of the standard upper number system with its advantage of keeping current punctuation was judged to be more important and suitable, especially for the general reader. Based on this rationale, the upper number system was selected for all purposes within UEB.

A full discussion of all characteristics of any code would be beyond the scope of this article. However, the primary changes in UEB from the current literary code used in the U.S. are:

1. Spacing: Words that are currently written together such as “and the” must have a space between them as they do in print.

2. Less ambiguity: Nine contractions are eliminated: “ally,” “ation,” “ble,” “by,” “com,” “dd,” “into,” “o’clock,” and “to” because of translation difficulties and confusion with other symbols.

3. Punctuation: A few punctuation marks are different (for example, parentheses are two-cell sequences of dots 5, 1-2-6 and 5, 3-4-5). This change follows a new systematic pattern developed for creating symbols in UEB. In addition, symbols are included for different types of brackets, quotation marks, dashes, and others to show the braille reader exactly which symbol is used in the original text.

4. Indicators: Bold, underline, and italics each have their own indicators. There is a method using three capital signs to show a long passage of uppercase text.

5. Math symbols: Numbers are shown in the upper portion of the cell as they are now in literary braille; operational symbols such as plus and equals, which do not exist in current literary code, have been added and are different from those in the Nemeth code.

In 2004, the international community voted that UEB was sufficiently complete to be considered an international standard and for braille authorities of individual countries to vote on its adoption for their respective use. To date, UEB has been adopted in six of the seven ICEB countries, including Canada. The United Kingdom voted in favor of UEB adoption in October, 2011.

**Nemeth Uniform Braille System**

The decision to write numbers in the upper portion of the braille cell had a major impact on the technical aspects of the development of UEB. Dr. Abraham Nemeth, the developer of the Nemeth Code for Mathematics and Science Notation, recently completed development of a code that uses lower numbers throughout called the Nemeth Uniform Braille System (NUBS). Like UEB, it is also designed to represent literary, math, and computer information—combining all three codes into one unified system. While this system proposes changes to some parts of all three codes, it makes no changes to current literary braille contractions.

The primary changes from the present literary braille code would be:

1. **Numerals:** Numbers in all contexts occupy the lower part of the cell; these are referred to as “dropped numbers.”

2. **Use of modes:** There are two modes—*narrative*, for normal literary material, and *notational*, for numeric and technical material. Notational mode is invoked with the number sign (dots 3-4-5-6) or by the "begin notational mode indicator" (dots 5-6). Notational mode is terminated by a dash or a space when the space is not within a string of numbers or a mathematical expression. Notational mode can also be terminated by a hyphen or a slash, and when these characters are not followed by a space, they are preceded by a dot 5. Contractions are not allowed in notational mode.

3. **Punctuation:** Proposed changes in punctuation include new symbols for parentheses, brackets, quotation marks, and the dash. Because the NUBS symbols for parentheses (dots 1-2-3-5-6 and dots 2-3-4-5-6) could be confused with the words “of” and “with,” a punctuation indicator (dots 4-5-6) must precede each parenthesis when used in narrative mode. The semicolon, exclamation point, and question mark remain unchanged, but require a punctuation indicator in notational mode to distinguish them from digits. The period, the comma, and the colon are completely different in the two modes.

4. **Type indicators:** There are some changes in the technique for capitalization and for implementing italics and other types of emphasis.

*Continued on p. 26*
The Evolution of Braille Cont. from page 25

Similarities Of the Codes
Both proposed codes employ the use of “modes.” It should be noted that even the current literary code uses modes, although they are not often referred to in this way. For example, when the word “dance” is written in contracted braille, it uses three cells (d, dots 4-6, e). When a number sign is placed before these three cells, their meaning is completely different; that is, it becomes the number 4.5. It can be said that the number sign has invoked a “numbers mode.” Similarly, the use of a letter sign before a “c” changes the “mode” so that “c” means “c” instead of “can.”

Although modes are not a feature requiring much notice in current literary code, the concept is inherent in the code. Modes do not create conflict within a code if their application is systematic. Part of the problem with current codes, however, is that the concept is not applied systematically, and creates conflict and ambiguity. Both UEB and NUBS were designed to be systematic in their application of modes and symbol construction.

At a Crossroads
As clearly indicated in the previous parts of this three-part article, braille in the United States must change to keep up with current trends in publishing and technology. It must also be more flexible and responsive to changing conventions of text. Two new braille codes have been developed, one of which has been adopted internationally. Both codes were developed with an effort toward retaining as much of the current literary braille code as possible; both codes have the reduction of ambiguity as a guiding principle to facilitate ease of learning and production. Easier facilitation of forward and backward translation would make it simpler for the user to create print documents and would also make the “on-the-fly” translation required for accessing the screens of computers and mobile devices much more accurate and reliable. It could also significantly reduce the cost of producing paper braille, which could have the effect of making much more braille material available for readers.

BANA will soon be at a critical juncture. It appears we have several choices as to how to proceed:

1. We can continue to tinker with the current codes we have, potentially making them less easy to use and more ambiguous;
2. We can adopt UEB, as have all of the other ICEB countries;
3. We can adopt NUBS;
4. We can do nothing at all to change braille, realizing this might cause braille to become obsolete.

The BANA Board recognizes that to preserve the viability of braille, changes must be made. The BANA Literary Technical Committee believes that continuing to make small changes to the current code will place braille readers and transcribers in an ever-worsening spiral of ever more complicated braille codes. The committee recommends that BANA adopt a system such as UEB or NUBS that was designed to be extendible, flexible, and consistent.

BANA is conducting an impact analysis that will look at the costs and benefits of making changes to the current system of codes as well as the costs inherent in not changing. The impact on transcribing and embossing various materials, training of new teachers and transcribers, the retraining of current braille teachers and transcribers, costs for creating e-texts, and other critical factors are being considered.

Any major change in braille would necessitate careful planning and implementation. New code books would be needed, as well as training sessions for transcribers and teachers. A phase-in period would be necessary with diligent attention to the needs of all braille readers—from the very youngest who are just learning to read and write to the reader who has known and loved braille for many years. The most important consideration of all is to keep braille as practical, usable, and flexible as possible in the future as it has been for the past 150 years.

As BANA examines the past and considers options for the future of braille, we encourage you to share your ideas, concerns, and suggestions with BANA Board members. Please visit www.brailleauthority.org and share your thoughts with us.

References
For more information about the history of current braille codes, UEB, and NUBS, please see the following references and resources.
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   http://www.iceb.org/cranem.html
2. ICEB resolution 1 from the 2004 General Assembly:
   http://www.iceb.org/gares04.html
3. BANA’s Braille Unification efforts:
   http://www.brailleauthority.org/unification/unification.html
4. Sullivan’s monographs on the ICEB page:
   http://www.iceb.org/ubc.html
5. The UEB Rule book on ICEB page:
   http://www.iceb.org/ueb.html
6. UEB training materials available on:
   http://www.ability.com/roundtable/aba/ueb.php
7. The NUBS code book on brl2000 page:
8. American Council of the Blind (ACB) Resolutions 2001-27:
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10. BANA’s UEB and NUBS research:
    http://www.brailleauthority.org/research-ueb/research-ueb.html
    http://www.brailleauthority.org/nubs-samplerresponses.pdf

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Editor’s Note: AER Report talked with Nancy Niebrugge, Assistant Vice President of Programs and Services and Director of The Braille Challenge® at The Braille Institute, about The Challenge, ten years of evolution, and how it impacts the lives of the blind and visually impaired.

Why is The Braille Challenge® important?
It is important because it celebrates literacy, highlights Braille, and it gives kids the opportunity to socialize and celebrate Braille in an environment where they are not the only kid in school that reads Braille—they are not the “different” student in this situation. The Challenge reinforces that Braille is important and why, and the participants can see how they are doing against other children. It motivates them to practice their Braille and to do more Braille homework.

For society, The Challenge plays an important role because it highlights Braille to the sighted public and presents it in a different light. It shows that the kids are excited about Braille and what they can really do with Braille skills and their increased literacy levels.

How does The Braille Challenge help kids into adulthood?
Unfortunately, there is no data to support this but I do have many anecdotal stories. Teachers or parents say to me that since the child was in The Challenge, it changed him or her. Participation in The Challenge instilled confidence, and it motivates the children to try new things. We don’t know if it goes on to motivate them to become better Braille readers, but it is a motivator to reach for further accomplishments. There is research indicating that better Braille readers fare better in the employment arena and we hope that The Challenge is contributing to this trend.

How long have you been with The Braille Challenge?
Since it began over ten years ago! I first became involved in 2000, and I have been the director of the program for the last six years. I started as the Communications Director then I moved on to the Braille publishing department. After moving to the publishing department, I was responsible for the group that created the original contests. I now direct the entire Braille Challenge program.

What has been the biggest change in The Braille Challenge?
I just attended the 2011 Literacy Conference, and I learned to

The Braille Challenge® is an academic competition unlike any other. This two-stage contest is designed to motivate blind students to emphasize their study of braille, while rewarding their success with a fun-filled, but challenging, weekend of events. We work with agencies and individual teachers from across the United States and Canada to encourage their students to participate in the preliminary round.

Contestants may take the Preliminary Contest anytime during the first two months of the year in one of two ways:
1. Students gain the fullest experience by attending one of the many Braille Challenge regional events in their own state or region. One of the blind service agencies and/or schools near you could be hosting their own Preliminary Challenge.
2. Students may also take The Challenge individually if the contest is administered by a teacher of the visually impaired. Either way, everyone can be a part of the Preliminary Round.

Once the contests are scored, the top eligible students are invited to Los Angeles, where they match skills against the top Braille readers in the nation at the National Braille Challenge.

2011–2012 Braille Challenge—Dates to Remember:
Registration Period:
November 1 - December 16, 2011
Preliminary Contest Period:
January - March 16, 2012
“Teacher of the Year” Award Nomination: Deadline March 23, 2012
Notification of Contest Results: May 1, 2012
The Braille Challenge® Finals: June 22-23, 2012

For more information on The Braille Challenge, visit http://brailleinstitute.org/Services/The_Braille_Challenge.aspx
my great satisfaction that the program is now institutionalized. It is being practiced by so many other professionals and agencies across the country that it is programmatically a “known entity” and it is seen as a real positive for kids today.

I never saw that coming a decade ago. When we conceived it, we worked hard to make it interesting and fun, as well as a media event to bring attention to Braille. We never conceived that it would be something so ubiquitous. I meet more and more people in our profession who know what it is and I don’t have to explain it as often. I meet people who say, “I have 14 kids in my contest this year.” We are past the point of having to explain it. It makes us want to make it better.

**How has The Braille Challenge changed you?**

It’s propelled me to want to create more programs that have a similar philosophy, where we develop something that is fun, motivational, and an adjunct to the core skills kids need. We aren’t teaching Braille; we are reinforcing a core skill that the kids need to master. It’s changed me in that I now want to create programs that reinforce other skills for the blind and visually impaired; it’s motivated me to want to do more.

**How many kids were in the first Braille Challenge?**

The first one was local and it was for kids from Southern California. We had 60 – 75 kids participate locally. This was before it was extended past the one time challenge. Our president spoke to the Carroll Center president and she said, “What if our kids do a challenge and then our best go against your best?” That is how The Challenge really began, and by the fourth year, we had added the final competition nationally. It was outside interest that inspired us to expand the program.

**What is something about The Braille Challenge people don’t know but they should?**

What we are seeing is that it is billed as a literacy competition or a contest, and it does that, but we see a social competency factor that is huge. It builds community and this has as much value as literacy. Parents get to meet other parents of blind children and they appreciate the connection. The transcribers meet the kids that they may transcribe textbooks for so it’s a great social connector in the community of Braille. That’s the thing that I want people to know: The Braille Challenge builds community and connections.

**What would you like to add that we haven’t discussed?**

One of the things I found interesting is that the area growing the most is the emerging reader population. For years, the largest group of contestants was the junior high aged kids. That group has now been surpassed by the Apprentice group, which is designed for first and second graders. Since we allow students to take any level of the contest at the preliminary stage, we are seeing more older students taking the entry-level contest, both is contracted and uncontracted braille. This tells us The Challenge is attracting more emerging Braille readers who are becoming just as motivated to improve their skills as the top academic students.

### Get Connected via Facebook!

AER has joined the social media craze and has established a group Facebook page open to all members.

If you’re a Facebook member, search for the page by typing AER – Assn. for Education & Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired in the search field to join the group. If you’re not a Facebook member, it’s easy to set up a page at www.facebook.com.

Members are encouraged to use the page for general discussions about the field of serving those who are blind and visually impaired and to share news and information about individuals and organizations.

AER keeps you posted on the latest news from the association and include links to interesting articles and information.
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**Christy Shepard**

A recently retired CTVI, Christy worked as an itinerant teacher of students with visual impairments for 35 years in Cypress-Fairbanks ISD and prior to that was a special education teacher for 2 years in Aldine ISD. In 1974, she received her Bachelor of Science in Special Education with 5 teaching certificates (one in deficient vision) at the University of Houston. In 1989, she received a Master of Science in Occupational Education (with an emphasis in Training and Development) at the University of Houston.

Christy has been a member of AER since its inception, and before that, she was a member of AEVH. “I have met so many interesting people within AER that have helped and encouraged me during my active teaching years. Over the years I have seen AER grow and offer more learning opportunities for members with the online publications and webinars. The networking at conferences has been very helpful to me.” Christy said.

Currently, Christy serves on the AER Board of Directors as the District 2 Representative.

She is also serving as the chair of the Professional Development Committee, which is in the process of setting up the program for the MacFarland Seminar for the 2012 International Conference in Bellevue, WA. Additionally, the committee has been developing topics and finding presenters for the Mangold Distance Learning Webinar Series.

Christy has served on the AER nominating committee, and in 2010, she served as the chair of the Silent Auction committee for the International Conference in Little Rock. She also facilitated sessions at the regional conferences recently held in Boston and Cleveland.

She continues to be active in Texas, serving as treasurer for the past 11 years as well as the membership chair for the past 4 years. Christy explained her dedication to the Texas chapter: “I love seeing the networking between the members at the local level. Our conferences have been well attended. One of the best results of our state conference is members learning from other members. With so many new teachers coming into the field it’s exciting to see them attending the conferences and learning from the experienced professionals.”

Christy has been facilitating classes for new teachers earning their certification in the field of visual impairments through Stephen F. Austin University for several years, and she received the Sammie K. Rankin award for outstanding Texas member.

**Joyce Strother**

Joyce Strother is a teacher of the visually impaired, is a certified orientation and mobility specialist, and coordinator of children services for the St. Louis Society for the Blind and Visually Impaired. She received her BS from MacMurray College at Jacksonville, IL, in elementary education and education of the hearing impaired. Joyce also took education of visually impaired certification classes from Lindenwood University at St. Charles, Missouri, and received her MA from Western Michigan University in orientation and mobility.

A member since 1995, Joyce considers the network of professionals that share valuable information through presentations, webinars, research, articles, mentoring and so much more, the most valuable aspect of AER membership. She is serving as Instructional cluster division representative, chair of the division communication task force, and itinerant personnel division chair for AER.

“It is an honor to represent the educational divisions on the AER board. Your board members and staff are hardworking and a joy to work with. I am looking forward to an exciting conference in Bellevue, Washington this summer,” said Joyce.

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*Winter 2011/2012*
What AER Benefit Do You Value The Most And Why?

Jennifer Ottowitz, CVRT  
Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist  
Vision Forward Association  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

The AER membership benefit that I value most is the International Conference. It provides an opportunity to increase our knowledge and understanding of a variety of subjects, further develop skills, learn about new assistive technology, and identify a wealth of resources that will assist us with providing quality services to our students, clients, and consumers. It provides an opportunity to showcase our research and share our knowledge with others as presenters. Most importantly for me, it also provides an opportunity to network with other professionals from around the world. By gathering folks from all disciplines related to vision and serving all age groups, it provides opportunities to learn about and connect with a variety of professionals which can help build a bridge that will greatly enhance our delivery of service throughout the lifespan.

Ms. Coby Livingstone, MA, OTR/L, CVRT

There are several AER member benefits that I value: webinars on current topics; ability to use Hadley Courses for CEUs; and outreach to members in a variety of ways, like requests for manuscript reviewers, surveys, interest group listserves. The webinars are the best. I am currently unemployed and I can easily access the webinars without the extra effort of taking a test after I watch the webinar.

AER Suggestion Box

Have an idea or suggestion for AER?  
Let us know!

Contact us via email at:  
info@aerbvi.org.
Value The Most And Why?

Karen E. Blankenship, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of the Practice
Vanderbilt University

My most treasured benefit of AER is the community of practice it affords me. I love that all members are eager to continue their learning in order to better serve children, youth, and adults who are blind or visually impaired. We come together formally during our regional and international meetings but we come together more often informally through a question, concern, or a possible learning opportunity. As the past chair of the Itinerant Division, I witnessed firsthand the passion for the field and the desire to be the best practitioners possible. The quality of the teacher is one of the key indicators for improved student achievement and that is exactly the shared vision of AER staff and members. AER makes me a better professional!

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Solution to Puzzle on Page 30

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In The News

Frank Clepper Named President & CEO of Envision
Envision, a service and employment provider for people who are blind or low vision based in Wichita, Kansas, has named Frank Clepper as president and chief executive officer. He was selected by the Envision board of directors and will begin in February 2012. Envision, Inc. is comprised of Envision Industries, Envision Vision Rehabilitation Center, Envision Foundation and Envision Xpress located at 16 military installations throughout the United States.

BANA Honors Joseph Sullivan with Braille Excellence Award
The Braille Authority of North America (BANA) honored Joseph Sullivan, President of Duxbury Systems, with its Braille Excellence Award on December 7, 2011, at the opening session of the Getting in Touch with Literacy Conference in Louisville, KY. BANA created this award in honor of Louis Braille’s 200th birthday and awarded it for the first time in 2009. Mr. Sullivan is the second recipient of this prestigious award that recognizes people or organizations that have developed or contributed to a code, have developed code materials or software that supports codes, and/or who represent the highest standards of Braille production.

As the chief architect of the original Duxbury Braille Translator, now the world’s premier Braille translation software, Joseph Sullivan has made a remarkable and lasting contribution to the production and availability of Braille, yet his contributions and commitment neither begin nor end with this accomplishment. Through his decades of professional work and extensive volunteer service, he has not only increased world-wide access to Braille and expanded the ability to produce Braille, but he has consistently focused on expanding our field’s capacity to produce quality, accurate Braille. The current version of the Duxbury Braille Translator now supports 130 languages.

David Ekin Receives Service Award
David Ekin, president of the Society for the Blind & Visually Impaired, was presented the 2011 “Marcus Velazquez Service Award” in October by the St. Louis Deafblind Task Force for his efforts to improve quality of life for people who are deaf-blind.

Fred Gissoni Retires
Fred Gissoni retired from the American Printing House for the Blind (APH) on December 30, 2011, after 60 years of working in the field of blindness. He was with APH for 23 years. Born blind, Fred used products from APH beginning with the early years of his education. Later, he became such an important and knowledgeable force in advancing access to services and to technology for those who are blind, that APH created a blog with tips, articles, and resources for blind and visually impaired people and named it “Fred’s Head” in his honor.

Countdown to AER International Conference
As of February 1, 2012, there are only 168 days to the beginning of the AER International Conference 2012! See you in Seattle (see Calendar on page 37 for more details).
## Calendar of Events

For more information about upcoming events, or to have your event listed, visit our website at [www.aerbvi.org](http://www.aerbvi.org) and click on the “Conferences” section.

### February


### March

Mar. 16-17: North Carolina AER Chapter Conference on Visual Impairment--"Listening, Learning, Living: Working Together for Successful Outcomes"
Sponsored by NCAER, NC Division of Services for the Blind, The Gov. Morehead School for the Blind, NC Dept. of Public Instruction, the NC Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, and the Vision Impairment Program at NCCU - for more information, visit their website at [www.ncaer.net](http://www.ncaer.net)

Mar. 21-23: Virginia Chapter AER Spring Vision Conference, Williamsburg, VA - visit our website at [http://virginia.aerbvi.org](http://virginia.aerbvi.org) for more information!


Mar. 29-31: Texas AER Chapter Annual Conference - Check our website at [www.txaer.org](http://www.txaer.org) for more information.

### April

Apr. 11-13: Dakotas AER Chapter Annual Spring Conference, Aberdeen, SD - More details to come!

Apr. 18-20: Penn/Del Chapter AER Spring Vision Conference
Please visit our website for additional information.

### May

May 4-5: FAER State Conference/AFB Leadership Conference, St. Petersburg, FL
Join the Florida AER Chapter as they hold their 2012 Annual Conference in conjunction with the AEF Leadership Conference, formerly the Josephine L. Taylor Leadership Institute. For more information, visit their website at [http://www.flaer.org/Events.html](http://www.flaer.org/Events.html)

May 14: New Jersey AER Chapter Annual Spring Conference, Princeton, NJ - More details to come!

May 14-15: Arkansas AER Chapter 2012 Conference, Wynnham Hotel, North Little Rock - Check our website at [http://ar.aerbvi.org/index.htm](http://ar.aerbvi.org/index.htm) for more information!

### June

June 27-29: COMA (Central-Eastern O&M Association)
Visit [www.aerbvi.org](http://www.aerbvi.org) for more details!

### July


### November

New from AER

An Illustrated Guide to Cane Repair and More

By Lynn J. Gautreaux

A terrific resource showing simple steps for repairing and modifying canes and AMDs, requiring minimal tools and supplies. Includes photos and step-by-step instructions.

Order at www.aerbvi.org or, call 877-492-2708 (US and Canada)
An appreciation of nature and enjoyment of the outdoors is not limited to only those who can see, but nature trails that offer interaction with the natural environment are quite limited for people who are visually impaired or blind. Well-designed environmental education programs, such as New Jersey’s Sensory Awareness Trail, can offer a look at nature through all the senses.

This trail is the subject of a report in the current issue of the journal *Insight: Research and Practice in Visual Impairment and Blindness*, a special issue exploring recreation, sports, and play for people with visual impairments.

People who are blind and visually impaired often have limited access to physical activity or recreational opportunities. This special issue presents interventions that can remove social barriers, ensure safety, and improve the lives of the visually impaired by encouraging physical activity through sports, exercise, and interaction with nature.

With the Sensory Awareness Trail at the New Jersey Forest Resource Education Center, environmental educators created a multi-sensory curriculum that meets New Jersey Core Curriculum content standards. It was adapted from an existing environmental education program, Project Learning Tree, which offers a curriculum that any state could adapt to site-specific needs.

Exploration of the New Jersey forest site is encouraged through multi-sensory awareness activities of listening, smelling, touching, and tasting. On guided tours, participants are taught to listen to the sounds of running water and animals, to smell the forest scents of leaves, bark, and berries, and to feel the sun, wind, and soil textures.

The physical layout of the trail includes 5-foot-wide crushed gravel paths and raised wooden walkways stable and well-drained enough for wheelchair access and for those with balance issues. A 36-inch high guide rope with tactile indicators is set on posts every 10 feet along the trail. Benches, kiosks and outdoor classrooms offer breaks along the 1.5 mile loop of the trail. The trail offers a safe outdoor environment where orientation and mobility skills can be developed. The interactive, hands-on activities encourage independent travel and exploration.

The trail opened in 2001, and about 2,500 people of all abilities put it to good use each year. Of course, the multi-sensory trail is not limited to those with visual impairment. Sighted visitors are encouraged to close their eyes, walk along the guide rope, and use their other senses to take in the sounds, smells, and other natural wonders of the trail.

Find this article and others from Insight’s Fall 2011 issue online at [http://www.aerbvi.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=2204](http://www.aerbvi.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=2204). Word, text, and pdf versions are also available.
HELP WANTED

ARIZONA
Itinerant Teacher for the Visually Impaired
*Arizona State Schools for the Deaf and the Blind (positions available statewide)
QUALIFICATIONS: College/University Degree in Education with coursework specific to visual impairment and blindness. State of Arizona Teaching Certificate with appropriate endorsement for each position ('Teacher O&M requires ACVREP Certification in addition to of ADE certification). Must be able to pass FBI and State background check.

DUTIES: Serve as a member of Multi-disciplinary Evaluation Teams to determine eligibility for special education and to identify individual needs of referred or assigned students. Participate as a member of the IEP team in developing appropriate goals and objectives and in determining appropriate services, accommodations and modifications for each assigned student. Design and provide specialized instruction to each assigned student based on the IEP. Work with the classroom teacher(s) to implement modifications and accommodations as specified in the IEP. Provide technical assistance to classroom teachers, on-site staff, parents and students in understanding the impact of the sensory impairment. Track and document student progress on IEP goals and communicate progress to all members of the IEP team including parents on a regular basis including quarterly progress reports. Must be able to learn and utilize electronic and non-electronic IEP/MET programs.

This position includes travel to local school districts, and in remote areas will require extended travel. Schedule and calendar developed based on students and district(s) assignments and are subject to change.

Areas are: Page, Prescott Valley, Yuma, Lake Havasu, Phoenix Metropolitan Area, Greater Tucson Area.

SALARY: $31,250-$47,468 annually

BENEFITS: include medical, dental, vision, long-term disability, state retirement, sick and personal

CONTACT:
Jacquelyn Smith
HR Representative
PO Box 88510
Tucson, AZ  85754
Phone: (520) 770-3269
Fax: (520) 770-3603
Email: Jacquelyn.Smith@asdb.az.gov

FLORIDA
Orientation and Mobility Specialist
*Lighthouse Central Florida - Orlando, FL
QUALIFICATIONS: Successful completion of an approved orientation and mobility program which includes study in such areas as the history of O&M, the psychological effects of blindness, identification of common eye diseases, sensory devices and travel techniques; and a practicum in orientation and mobility. Have or be eligible for ACVREP Orientation and Mobility Certification (if not certified, agrees to become certified within 2 years of hire date). Valid driver’s license OR means of reliable transportation. Pass criminal background checks.

DUTIES: Instructor would be itinerant, serving a multi-county area, which includes: Orange, Osceola, and Seminole Counties (Greater Orlando area). Caseload consists mainly of adults: vocational and seniors, with periodic training of teens and children. Instructor is also expected to facilitate community awareness, participate in community sensitivity training, actively participate and appropriately advocate for the implementation of universal design principals through Central Florida’s recreational, work, and theme park facilities.

SALARY AND BENEFITS: Salary – Negotiable based on experience and certification

Benefits: Full benefits package including Health, Dental, and Life Insurance, Paid Holidays, Vacation, and Sick time with eligibility for 401 (k) after one year employment with employer match of up to 6%.

Contact: Interested applicants please send the following: via electronic, mail, or fax:
1. Resume
2. Copy of professional licensure(s) OR demonstrated (future) eligibility for licensure(s)
3. Letters of recommendation:
   a. If currently enrolled in University
      Program letters from:
      i. Major Professor (orientation & mobility)
      ii. Internship supervisor (if currently interning – orientation & mobility)
      iii. Major professor (other) OR employer (other)
   b. If currently employed or recently graduated from a University:
      i. Major professor (orientation & mobility)
      ii. Internship supervisor (Orientation & mobility)
      iii. Confirmation of eligibility for ACVREP certification exam (or completed exam)

Information should be addressed to:
Kimberly Pawling, Ph.D., COMS, CVRT
Director Education & Rehabilitation Services Lighthouse Central Florida, Inc.
215 East New Hampshire Street
Orlando, FL 32804
fax: 407-898-0236
phone: 407-898-2483 ext. 238
Email: kpawling@lcf-fl.org
Massachusetts
Assistant Education Director - #601
*Perkins School for the Blind - Watertown, MA
Assistant Education Director - #601
Department: Secondary Program
Schedule: Full-time, 12 months

Perkins School for the Blind was the first school for the blind chartered in the United States in 1829. For over 182 years the staff at Perkins have been providing quality services to students and clients who are blind, visually impaired, deafblind and multi-impaired. As the programs and services at Perkins have grown, their focus has evolved and extended beyond our campus and into many different communities throughout the United States and around the world. Located near Boston and Cambridge, our programs provide educational training opportunities for students from birth to 22 years of age and services for adults in residential, day and community-based programs. All of our programs and services strive to enable each student and client to develop his or her greatest potential and maximum independence.

Under the general direction of the Education Director, the Assistant Education Director will assist in the design and implementation of educational services for students with visual and multiple impairments as a member of a collaborative administrative team. Assist in the development and implementation of programs for assigned students. Provide supervision to assigned teachers and related service providers. Facilitate and assist with staff training and communication.

Responsibilities: Assist in the development and implementation of programming for students who are visually impaired and multiply impaired. Assist students to reach their maximum potential in areas of academic performance and vocational, social and independent living skills. Observe classes and hold regular supervision meetings for assigned staff. Ensure that program and staff are compliant with all regulations promulgated by licensing authorities. Assist in the development, adaptation and implementation of curriculum aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework and the Expanded Core Curriculum. Assist in the coordination of the MCAS test and Alternate Assessment Portfolios. Assist the Local Education Authority (LEA) in developing individual education plans (IEPs) and oversee the implementation of programs. Plan and conduct ISP’s, Service Plan Reviews and Case Reviews. Develop transition plans and compile reports based on the students’ IEP’s. Develop individual class groups for assigned students, work with supervisory team to plan class groups and adjust students’ schedules as necessary. Work with the residential team and Health Services to coordinate the programs for assigned students. Work with the supervisory team to screen applicants and hire qualified staff. Assist in the coordination of the program budget. Serve as representative of the Program on various campus-wide program committees. Assist in the implementation of goals from the IEP that relates to independent living, social and recreational skills. Maintain communication with students, parents, staff and other school departments. Assist in the development and implementation of systems to ensure the safety and well being of students and staff in the program. Assist in staff training, including training in using computerized programs for IEPs and student information and records. Serve as a member of the evaluation team and provide leadership and decision making regarding the acceptance of new students into the program. Manage and supervise employees in the Educational Programs. Assist in the overall direction, coordination, and evaluation of these units. Carry out supervisory responsibilities in accordance with the school’s policies and applicable laws. Responsibilities include interviewing, hiring, and training employees; planning, assigning, and directing work; appraising performance; rewarding and disciplining employees; addressing complaints and resolving problems. Perform other related duties and tasks as assigned.

Minimum Qualifications: Masters degree from a recognized college or university in Education with concentration in visual impairment, intensive special needs or related field. Massachusetts DOE License as Program Director, Principal or Special Education Director or willingness to obtain certification within two years required. Certification in First Aid and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR), Automated External Defibrillator (AED) and Crisis Prevention and Physical Intervention (CPII). Three (3) years staff supervision and teaching experience with individuals to maximize their orientation and preparing them to enter the work force. Along with the rehab process there may be the need to enable visually impaired individuals to maximize their orientation and mobility skills. To accomplish this successfully you will have to develop individual training plans for each client.

To apply please submit a resume and short statement of interest to careers@perkins.org.

Ohio
Rehab/O&M Instructor
*Rehab/O&M Instructor
Cleveland Sight Center - Cleveland, OH
Qualifications: Skills and Experience in Rehabilitation is required. Ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing. Ability to think clearly in stressful situations. High stress tolerance and physical stamina required and flexibility of schedule. Must occasionally be able to lift up to 50 lbs.

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How to apply: To apply for a position at Perkins School for the Blind, please visit our website, http://www.perkins.org/careers/

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Virginia
TBVI
*Allied Instructional Services - State of Virginia
Qualifications: AIS is a private contracting company that provides vision and O&M services to local school divisions and agencies throughout Virginia. AIS currently has immediate openings in the Norfolk and Richmond areas, with more openings expected.

Continued on p. 42
Job Exchange  Cont. from page41

Must hold a Collegiate Professional License with endorsement in special education, vision impairment, and successful teaching experience working with students that are blind or visually impaired.

Excellent human relations, interpersonal communications, conflict resolution, organizational and planning skills are required.

Applicant must have a comprehensive knowledge of Federal and State mandates and requirements as related to the provision of educational services and supports for students with visual impairments.

Applicant must have comprehensive knowledge of characteristics of individuals with visual impairments and other disabilities to include developmental, cognitive, socio-cultural influences and health related problems.

Must have the ability to recognize and respond to individual student differences. Must be able to work in a collaborative and cooperative manner with parents, co-workers, school staff and service providers. Must have experience with window based computer and related software applications. Must have a valid driver’s license.

Orientation and Mobility Certification preferred but not required.

DUTIES:
1. Develops and maintains a classroom environment or work station conducive to effective learning.
2. Evaluates students on a regular basis and assists student in maintaining appropriate classroom behavior.
3. Provides students with visual impairments remediation to enhance academic skills and to enable students the ability to function maximally in the general education classroom while providing visual adaptations and modifications of instructional strategies and techniques.
4. Keep abreast of current instructional and educational trends, methodologies and materials for working with visually impaired students.
5. Obtains large print or Braille textbooks.
6. Interprets specific eye conditions and results of functional vision assessments and assist in making environmental adjustments in the school.
7. Participates in the development and writing of Individual Educational Programs, (IEP’S), according to guidelines.
8. Attends meetings as requested, including staff meetings, departmental meetings, child study, eligibility, and reevaluation, and maintain accurate records and minutes from meetings.
9. Prepares for students assigned and shows written evidence of preparation upon request of the immediate supervisor.
10. Establishes high expectations for students by employing a variety of instructional techniques and instructional media.
11. Fosters understanding and acceptance of visually impaired students by administrators, general education teachers, related service providers, peers and parents by conducting staff developments, being an advocate and teaching self advocacy to students.
12. Maintains and monitors all specialized equipment including Braille writers, canes, etc.
13. Performs other school duties and related assignments as required.

GENERAL DEFINITION AND CONDITIONS OF WORK: Duties performed typically in a school setting. Performs professional work providing teaching to students in a specialized subject. Work requires frequent standing, sitting, walking, vocal communication for expressing or exchanging ideas, hearing to perceive information at a normal spoken word level and visual acuity for preparing and analyzing written or computer data.

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In Memoriam

Pete Wurzburger
Submitted by Nita Crow of the California School for the Blind

Our beloved orientation and mobility community has lost one of its pioneers. It is with great sadness we report that Pete Wurzburger died on the morning of December 15, 2011. Pete started the orientation and mobility (O&M) program at San Francisco State. He taught orientation and mobility skills to school age children in the 1960s at a time when most children with visual impairments were not receiving this training. He felt strongly that learning these skills at an early age helped students to live more independent lives as adults. He also was an advocate in teaching O&M to students who were multi-handicapped and visually impaired. Pete helped developed the marshmallow tip, a cane tip that is now used around the world. He was renowned for his sense of humor and love of a good joke, his thoughtfulness and caring for all of his students and colleagues, his stash of cheap wine to celebrate the end of a work day, and his innovative and “can do” attitude to teaching. Pete leaves behind countless people who will mourn his loss. He also leaves behind a profession that is stronger, more accepting, inclusive, and knowledgeable due to his loving hand. We will miss you Pete.
New, Updated Version Now Available

O&M specialists and other vision professionals will find the skills, techniques and sequence of instruction presented in this book helpful in instructing individuals with vision loss who want to regain the ability to travel independently. The book describes human guide, self-protective, directional familiarization and cane techniques, along with strategies for indoor and outdoor travel, including those required for crossing streets, planning routes and using public transportation.

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Envision Conference 2011 was approved for 27 ACVREP continuing education hours.

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More information: aer@aerbvi.org

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