



Welcome to the September 2020 issue of the Voice

Staying in the Game:

How Your Professional Association is Moving the Ball Down the Field

Since rejoining the AER staff as your Interim Executive Director this past March, it seems like we've been putting out one fire after another and working our way through so very many strange days given the new COVID realities, the need to put this Summer's biennial conference on hold, and on and on. I have been asked lots of questions during this period of tremendous transition and change, but one question that I get frequently has to do with AER's ongoing work to address major public policy issues. Probably the only other question I am asked with as much regularity has to do with AER's relationships with other organizations in our field. This makes perfect sense to me because you cannot talk about progress on policy without also talking about the health of our interactions with our partners and colleagues. So, I thought I'd take just a few moments to share with you just a few of the highlights from the activities we've undertaken on your behalf.

Division 1 on Leadership and VSA:

For as long as I can remember, and I expect you, too, our Division on Administration and Leadership (Division 1), has been in serious need of rehabilitation. This is nobody's fault; there are lots of reasons why this particular group has not had the attention and status that it deserves, or which would benefit the entire AER membership. I am so grateful to such good people, like Betty Davidson who is the de facto Division chair, and Karen Ross, and Dorinda Rife, and the rest of the Division's ad hoc steering committee for the energy they've been recently investing to reignite the Division's pilot light. To help with this effort, I reached out to my friend and colleague, Lee Nasehi, CEO of VisionServe Alliance (VSA), to see what possible AER/VSA partnership opportunities there might be given that the whole reason for VSA's being is to support and cultivate leaders in our field.

I am so pleased that Lee, Betty, Karen, Dorinda and I have been able to lay the groundwork to welcome AER members, and Division 1 enthusiasts in particular, to VSA's Fall conference. Naturally, we're thinking primarily about virtual attendance these days, but we're not limiting

our imaginations or the options at this point. We have worked together to conduct a survey of the more than 165 AER members who have formally indicated their interest in being active in a reenergized Division 1. I think the results of the survey clearly show us how a well-supported AER Division dedicated to leadership development could so deeply enrich our association and our field.

Cogswell-Macy and NFB:

As I hope each of you are well aware, I am the principal author of all of the blindness-related provisions of the landmark Alice Cogswell and Anne Sullivan Macy Act (CMA) which is currently pending in the U.S. House and Senate. This is an effort our entire field has been behind now for a number of years and will likely need to continue to push in future Congresses. You should also know that the NFB has been consistently hostile toward the CMA, even passing a resolution during their Summer convention a few years back declaring their opposition toward the bill. Any number of us have been trying to work with the Federation to see if it is at all possible to address any specific concerns of theirs.

While I wish I could tell you that we have met all of their needs, I am pleased to report that recent conversations involving myself and other national leaders committed to the CMA, along with representatives of the NFB, have proven to be productive. They were kind enough to prepare and share with us a roster of particular legislative language changes they would like to see made to the bill text, and they have also documented specific policy objectives in the CMA with which they take issue. The most significant matter concerns the CMA's promotion of the Expanded Core Curriculum and the place of low vision services and devices among the special factors to be considered during the IEP process along with the braille presumption.

I honestly don't know that this is a subject that we will ever be able to resolve because it appears to be a substantive difference between all of us and the NFB and not merely a wordsmithing problem. However, having worked on the CMA for so long and not seen this kind of collegial interaction, I myself am gratified to be part of what at least currently looks like meaningful dialogue.

Low Vision Devices Coverage Progress:

So hopefully everyone knows that, since 2008, the federal Medicare-administering agency, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), has been refusing to offer any coverage for assistive technologies, low vision devices per se, which happen to incorporate a lens regardless of the device's other features. I am the author of the pending congressional legislation to establish a Medicare demonstration project, a bill enjoying the endorsement of just about everyone in our field, to at least begin to move the needle on this perennial issue.

Well, one of the biggest barriers toward any progress on this policy objective we've faced has been the failure of our community to reach consensus with the physicians groups, the device

manufacturers, clinicians and others about precisely which low vision devices should be in or out, who gets to prescribe them, what training in their use should be provided and by whom, and on and on. Apparently last October, the physicians groups asked that all stakeholders sit down yet again to see what agreements might be possible. Learning that I had rejoined one of the organizations in the blindness field, the chair of this stakeholder group reached out to me to seek my active involvement. As doing so both taps into my past work and would be of tangible benefit to AER members, I said I would agree to participate in the discussions.

While this is “one small step” to report, it is nevertheless a “giant leap” relatively speaking to be able to say that the groups have finally settled on a general definition of the scope of low vision devices for which Medicare coverage should be available. This definition is a combination of the VA’s understanding of such technologies and a definition in the ADA I authored a long time ago making critical legal distinctions between low vision devices and ordinary eyeglasses or contacts. The stakeholder group continues to meet, and our next steps include the drafting of specific regulatory and/or legislative proposals for the groups to jointly pursue.

Aging Asks:

While I was still working for AFB in 2018, I had the privilege of working with our current AER President, Neva Fairchild, and with Dr. Priscilla Rogers on the beginnings of comprehensive legislation to address the full scope of habilitation, rehabilitation, prevention, secondary disabilities, social isolation, public awareness, evidence-based practices, and on and on having to do with aging and vision loss. In 2018, AFB was still the hub of activity for a national agenda on aging and vision loss, an activity that AFB no longer spearheads but which is now being facilitated by VisionServe Alliance (VSA). Neva continues to be very involved in this effort for sure, especially with most recently pulling together a compelling story telling piece to paint the clearest possible picture of the problems for policymaker and other audiences.

Particularly with regard to the structure and funding of services, however, I, along with the public policy staff of several of the participating groups, have begun the work of harvesting the legislative language from our past proposals and filling in the remaining gaps with new draft provisions with the goal of producing a Cogswell-Macy-like message bill for eventual congressional introduction. What is particularly exciting is that the work AFB began has really taken off now that VSA is cracking the whip, and the breadth of organizations actively involved leads me to hope for bigger things down the road.

Other than past discrete campaigns to increase funding for the Older Blind Program or to secure Medicare coverage for vision rehabilitation services, I can’t remember a previous time when our groups all came together around a set of comprehensive policy objectives on aging and vision loss and ponied up resources to get the job done. And the fact that we have added a number of new organizational partners that were not as engaged previously is yet another good sign.

Anyhow, that's just a tiny sample of all that's been going on where public policy and vision loss are concerned. I want to thank you once again for your commitment to membership in your professional association. Your member dues not only help us provide you with meaningful member benefits; your support continues to help us change the world in ways that are both large and small. In a very literal sense, we could not possibly do it without you!

Mark Richert, *Interim Executive Director, AER*

President's Corner

Greetings from the Great State of Texas!

In my first letter to you, the members of AER, I just have to say how honored and humbled I am to serve as your President. When I joined AER in 1991, I never dreamed that I would be a part of the leadership of our Association, let alone President. If you are a new member, be ready! Thirty years from now, you may be filling these shoes. I hope that each of you feel as proud as I do to be a part of this field (or as Carl Augusto would say, "the blind biz"). It is a special calling all of us have answered and whatever brought you to your career in the education or rehabilitation of people with visual impairments, my hat is off to you! Most of us travel varied and crooked roads to where we are today, and as a woman who is blind, when I reflect back on how I got to where I am today, there are so many wonderful people who were open to giving me an opportunity, so many chances to change my strategies for success, and lots and lots to learn. You are one of those wonderful people to someone, if not to me. I know each of you have an interesting story to tell. I hope you tell your story to people with whom you work so that they catch the spark of your passion for their ultimate success. Whether it's a colleague, a student or an adult in training, encourage them to tell you their story so that you can share with them those valuable lessons that fit their needs that you have learned along the way. I believe that it is through listening to each other that we all grow personally and professionally. Everyone has something to teach us if we pay attention.

I hope you have had a chance to benefit from the fantastic Summer Learning Series, a variety of virtual continuing education sessions open to AER members. They have been full of valuable information and because they are offered at various times throughout the week, there has been at least a chance to fit them into your already busy schedules. More opportunities will continue in the Fall and if you have a topic you would like to share with your colleagues, be in touch with the AER staff. My thanks to all who have contributed to the success of these virtual opportunities to connect and learn.

The newly seated International Board of AER met last Friday, August 28, to form and conduct business. We will meet again in September and October for training and planning for a

productive and successful two years. I feel sure the time will fly by, but it is my hope that at the end of my term, AER will have been a source of support to you, our members, and a force for positive change for people who are blind or visually impaired in our world. If you would like to talk to me individually or as a group, please reach out using the contact information below.

Continue making lemonade, wherever you are, and reach out if you need a juicer or some extra sweetener! Stay well, stay sane.

Neva Fairchild, *President, AERBVI*

News You Can Use

Summer may be ending, but it's not the end of our AER learning series! We are now officially launching the AER Fall Learning Series! Join your fellow AER members for these upcoming AER Members-Only Webinars!

Effect of Tactile Walking Surface Indicators on Alignment for Crossing

Robert Wall Emerson

Date: Wednesday, September 9, 2020

Time: 3:00 - 4:00 pm Eastern time

Cost: Free for AER Members

Registration: https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZcsdOuupzwoE93Y-J_ZclZtZLOHJzR0DXXx

CEU: 1 hour professional development credit, ACVREP-certified

Some crossing situations have alignment cues that provide wrong or misleading alignment information. Some crossing locations have confusing information about where to stand in order to cross. This session, presented by Robert Wall Emerson, will offer a description of final results from research into use of tactile walking surface indicators to reduce confusion about location and alignment information at potentially confusing crossings.

Demographic Changes in the Profession of Orientation and Mobility Since 1983

William Wiener, Eileen Siffermann, Bruce Blasch, William Penrod, and Ximena Burgin

Date: Tuesday, September 15, 2020

Time: 11:00 am - 12:00 pm Eastern time

Cost: Free for AER Members

Registration: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZckduugqTggGdckvp42QN6m1U4mD7LMsslT>

CEU: 1 hour professional development credit, ACVREP-certified

This session, presented by William Wiener, Eileen Siffermann, Bruce Blasch, William Penrod and

Ximena Burgin, will present the results of a national survey of orientation and mobility specialists to explore current demographics, verify important competencies and project future directions.

Improving Transition Outcomes for Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired

Janell Turner

Date: Wednesday, September 16, 2020

Time: 1:00 - 2:00 pm Eastern time

Cost: Free for AER Members

Registration: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYldeurrz8iGNdEsEndT-JbEzcwoftrXUoL>

CEU: 1 hour professional development credit, ACVREP-certified

With the passage of WIOA in 2014, there is more emphasis on the provision of services to students with disabilities to improve transition outcomes. How does this apply to our students who are blind, visually impaired, or deafblind? What do we know about practices that lead to more successful outcomes for our students? This session, presented by Janell Turner, will **provide information to help answer these questions and more.**

Keep up with our entire calendar of online events here: <https://aerbvi.org/professional-development/conferences/>

Committee Updates

AER Accessibility Committee Report, August 2020

Major Goals of the Committee/Task Force: Increase accessibility across all AER activities

Update on Committee/Task Force Plans/Projects to achieve goals:

1.
 - a. Connected with Nell at the American Anthropological Association. Nell has created a wonderful set of resources for infusing accessibility into conferences and events. That resource can be viewed [here](#). We are currently working on a plan to share these resources with AER.
 - b. We connected Nell from AAA with Megan Doty. Is possible Nell can present as a part of the AER professional development series.
 - c. We are working on more detailed feedback about AER website accessibility.
 - d. Rachael to present on 9/21 on the topic of basic document accessibility.

Committee/Task Force Concerns: The professional development series has been wonderful, but we discussed with Megan the importance of making sure all presenters understand AER's high standards around accessible presentations. Several blind AER members have commented that there are videos

played without audio descriptions. Megan was going to review the policies for ensuring accessibility.

AER Bylaws and Structure Committee Report, August 2020

Major Goals of the Committee/Task Force: To prepare amendments to the Bylaws and changes in AER Policies and Procedures for consideration by the AER Board and Membership.

Update on Committee/Task Force Plans/Projects to achieve Goals: Defining timeline needed for any possible action that needs to be taken by AER. No committee action at this time is needed.

Committee/Task Force Concerns: No concerns at this time have been brought up to this committee.

Committee/Task Force Motion(s): No motion is being added to the AER Board from this committee at this time.

AER Continuing Education Committee Report, August 2020

Major Goals of the Committee/Task Force: Assist AER with the development and implementation of online professional development.

Update on Committee/Task Force Plans/Projects to achieve goals:

Committee has met twice to develop standards and procedures for approving online professional development sessions. The first meeting (7/22/20) provided an overview of the committee goals and the status of AER's current professional development offerings. We also discussed procedures for managing these online sessions. The issues of security, fees, managing CEUs and certificates, etc. will be an ongoing topic.

At that first meeting, everyone was assigned one recorded session to review. Kay Ratzlaff provided a draft rubric. The Rubric included (1) Accessibility (2) Audio/Visual Evaluation (3) Organization and Delivery and (4) Knowledge of the Topic.

At the next meeting (8/10/20), the committee decided that the presenters needed additional guidance on creating accessible PowerPoints/presentations and the rubric needed tweaking.

Tasks were assigned: Adam Wilton is updating the previous Accessibility Standards for PowerPoints (that was originally done by Ike Pressley).

Kay Ratzlaff, Karen Blankenship, Nancy Toelle, and Sylvia Perez are refining the Rubric.

Kay is also scheduled to talk to APH, Leanne Grillot, about a partnership between APH and AER to offer remote professional development.

Next steps:

A. After reviewing the videos, it became evident that the time it took to review each of these was too great a commitment for a small group of people.

We need additional people from different divisions that are content experts in that area. They can then verify if the content is valid, current, and necessary. In order to entice reviewers, we will work with Megan to see if AER can offer ACVREP or CEUs to the reviewers for each session reviewed.

B. Find ways to automate or at least streamline the issuance of certificates and tracking CEUs. It is conceivable that individual sessions could have 100+ people in attendance.

C. Develop a fee structure with advantages given to existing members and ways to entice new members with these sessions. We can advertise that each session has been vetted and is relevant.

AER History and Memorial Committee Report, August 2020

Major Goals of the Committee/Task Force:

Document and compile a memorial list of individuals who have passed away during the current biennium and prepare the biennial Memorial List to be read at the opening session of AER's 2022 international conference.

Assist the organization and its chapters and divisions in communicating historical information to the membership.

Organize and manage the content and presentation of history segments at the 2022 international conference.

Maintain a Facebook page—recently retitled AER Tapestry: Commemorating Our Past, Inspiring Our Future—for materials and news related to the history and activity of AER.

Report of the 2020–2022 AER History and Memorial Committee:

History Articles in AER Voice in 2019 and 2020 - We are exceptionally pleased that AER leadership invited us to author and publish a series of history articles in AER's new newsletter, The Voice. The committee has written and published the many articles for the enewsletter:

AER Memorial List, 2018–2020 - Several years ago, we established an online reporting form using Google Docs to allow AER members to notify us of the passing of individuals who have contributed to the work of our field. We will continue to maintain careful documentation of the individuals added to the resulting list and construct the biennial AER Memorial List that will be presented at the opening session of our next biennial conference, which, we trust, will be in 2022 in St. Louis.

History Segments at the 2022 AER International Conference - The History and Memorial Committee will continue to research and assemble ideas for history segments to be presented at the general sessions of the 2022 AER Conference. Our plan had been to use the 35th anniversary of the establishment of AER as the context for the 2020 segments; we will retain those drafts and determine an approach as the 2022 conference develops.

H&M Facebook Page - With the “blessing” of AER leadership, our committee has refocused the Facebook page that had been established to commemorate AER's 30th anniversary. The goal is to give it a broader focus, sharing the history of our profession and of AER specifically and remembering those who helped make it great. In addition to the 30th anniversary photos, the site will host important historical photos and documents and recognize the shoulders on which we stand. We will continue to add current info and images as well.

Julie Hapeman, committee co-chair, led the work on this and invited all AER members to suggest a new name for the updated page. From members' responses, the H&M Committee chose the name AER Tapestry: Commemorating our Past, Inspiring our Future. Thanks to Anna Williams Leffel for suggesting the new name.

Now that the refocused page is up and running, we invite AER members to submit photos (with permission of the subjects) and anecdotes. The H&M Committee will manage the posts, including alt-tagging every photo, so that people will get new posts in their newsfeeds. If you—members of the AER Board of Directors—have a photo, a story, or an idea, please share it with us at AERHistory.Memorial@gmail.com!

Committee/Task Force Comment: Members of the 2020–2022 History and Memorial Committee are dedicated to the work of documenting and sharing the rich and respected history of AER and of our profession. One of our members stated in her acceptance of the invitation to serve on the committee, “I hope to continue to document and share our rich history for years to come.” Another committee member wrote, “This is, indeed, important work for our organization. It is so important to remember the shoulders upon which we stand.” We are committed to these tasks.

Welcome AER New Members who Joined in August

Join us in welcoming the newest members, who joined AER in August 2020. We are so glad to have you! [New AER Members](#)

AER New Member Spotlight

Welcome new AER member, **Kittie Cooper**, who joined us at the beginning of the year!



Kittie Cooper is an educator, composer, and performer who has taught in many settings, general and special education. Currently, she teaches music at Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind and is pursuing a master's degree in special education (with a concentration in teaching students with visual impairments) at George Mason University. Much of her work at VSDB has been in developing a curriculum for music literacy for students with visual impairments. She is also a performing guitarist and electronic musician.

Employment Opportunities

Check out the new positions that are available in the field. Here are some exciting jobs that are posted via the AER Job Exchange:

[Teacher of the Visually Impaired](#)

Ogden & Morgan, Utah
Utah Schools for the Deaf and Blind

[Vice President of Government & Community Affairs](#)

Remote, requires travel to Louisville, KY and Washington, DC,
American Printing House for the Blind (APH)

[Early Childhood Classroom Teacher](#)

Albuquerque, New Mexico
New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Early Childhood Program

For more jobs that are available, please visit: [Job Exchange](#)

What's Cookin' AER

September is upon us, and you know what that means? Pumpkin Spice! This month we are sharing a Pumpkin Cake recipe that literally takes like Fall bliss!! You will thank me later.

INGREDIENTS FOR THE CAKE

Cooking spray
2 c. all-purpose flour
2 tsp. ground cinnamon
1 tsp. kosher salt
1 tsp. baking powder
1/2 tsp. baking soda
1/4 tsp. ground nutmeg
1/4 tsp. ground ginger
1/2 c. (1 stick) butter, softened
1 c. packed brown sugar
1/2 c. granulated sugar
4 large eggs
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
1 (15-oz.) can pumpkin puree

FOR THE FROSTING

1 (8-oz.) block cream cheese, softened
4 tbsp. butter, softened
2 c. powdered sugar
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
Pinch kosher salt
Crushed gingersnaps, for topping

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Line a 9"-x-13" baking pan with parchment and grease with cooking spray. In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, cinnamon, salt, baking powder, baking soda, nutmeg, and ginger.
2. In a large bowl using a hand mixer (or in the bowl of a stand mixer), beat butter and sugars together until light and fluffy. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Add vanilla and pumpkin puree and beat until incorporated. Add dry ingredients and mix until just combined.
3. Pour batter into prepared baking pan and smooth top. Bake until a toothpick inserted in middle comes out clean, 30 minutes. Let cool completely.
4. Meanwhile, make frosting: In a large bowl using a hand mixer (or in the bowl of a stand mixer), beat cream cheese and butter until smooth. Add powdered sugar and beat until no lumps remain, then add vanilla and a pinch of salt.
5. Lift cake out of pan by parchment paper and place on serving platter or cutting board. Frost cake using an offset spatula and top with crushed gingersnaps.

The AER Voice is a monthly newsletter that serves as an information hub for members; and offers an easy and dependable way of keeping current. This electronic newsletter includes AER updates, events, special announcements, useful tidbits and much more.

If you have news, resources, information, recipes or any updates that you would like to share with the membership, please send it to AER at news@aerbvi.org. Deadline for the September issue is 8/26/2020.



5680 King Centre Drive | Suite 600 | Alexandria | VA | 22315 | 703-671-4500 | 877-492-2708 toll free | 703-671-6391 fax
| aer@aerbvi.org
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