



Welcome to the December 2020 issue of the Voice

Pride, Gratitude and Hope: Three Things AER is All About!

I am so thankful to be part of a talented AER staff team, determined Board leadership group, and committed membership community. I'm proud of the work we're doing to write the next chapter in AER's history, and because we have each other, I'm confident in our future as an association and as a field. But one thing that I will always be so very proud of thanks to my work with AER, both those many years ago and now during this transition season in AER's life, might seem a bit small to others but means the world to me. Someday my name is going to be on a plaque somewhere listing all the names of the Executive Directors of AER and our predecessor groups, AAWB and AEVH. And I don't mind telling you that it can make me a bit misty-eyed when I think about the other names that mine will be next to, names of friends and mentors and challengers and supporters I've know for nearly all of my adult life—names like Kathy Megivern, the longest serving AER ED; Denise Rozell, whose seat at AFB I took when she left AFB to join AER; Lou Tutt, whose gifts of inspiration and motivation continue to be legendary; and Janie Blome, whom all of us have known, respected and cherished for decades as a faithful contributor and friend to our field. Really? I get to be numbered among them??? Amazing. Thank you.

Very recently, AER hosted a gala event to honor AER award recipients, to take some time to reflect on what has been an unbelievable, confusing, and even sometimes painful year. And yes, we also celebrated each other and took some intentional time to build up one another. If you missed it, don't worry; we'll be making the recording of the evening available to everyone very soon. But for now, I want to share with you the remarks made by my friend, our friend, former AER Executive Director and life-long advocate for people with vision loss, Lou Tutt. I hope you'll listen to him deliver these remarks for yourself, but I also thought reading these words and reflecting on them would be meaningful for all of us.

Lou Tutt, Former AER Executive Director

Hello! I'm Lou Tutt, past Executive Director of AER, proud, thankful and hopeful current AER member, and happily retired after a long and productive career in our community since 1971. I wanted to take just a few moments with you to reflect on where we've been, how we're doing, and why there's every reason for hope on the horizon.



Yes indeed, this year of 2020 has been so heartbreaking for so many, so stressful for all of us, and so difficult to navigate. And yet, maybe in its own way, maybe 2020 is a painful year in which all of our collective vision for who we are and what we want to be and what we're truly capable of has gotten much clearer. I bet just like you, I have been so impressed as teachers, O&Mers, administrators, and all of our professional colleagues have broken new ground, innovated, responded with flexibility and a can-do spirit, and pressed ahead with determination and grace. I am so proud of you! And yet, I am not surprised; breaking new ground, adapting, changing, and doing whatever it takes is exactly what our professional field and our community has always been about. I am so grateful to call you all as my colleagues and friends and to have had the opportunity to stand shoulder to shoulder with you for so many fun and tough and trying and happy and successful and transformational years.

As I look to our future, yes, there is a lot of work for all of us to do. AER has a lot of work to do to be sure that AER members are effectively served, and that AER can even more fully take its place at the table as the national, indeed international, leader that AER is today. Our field needs to stop just talking about diversity and inclusion and start to take meaningful action to accomplish this long-over-due imperative. Our field needs to look and talk and live a lot more like the students and clients we are committed to serve. But we also need to actively promote harmony and partnership among our various professional disciplines even as we reaffirm our unity of purpose. Let's push into 2021 and beyond with an uncompromising commitment to have each other's back, to hold each other up, to break down the silos that we have allowed for far too long to separate us into special interest groups, and let's intentionally bring folks into our tent, even those with whom we might disagree and debate now and then. Diversity is just as much about ideas as it is about demographics.

As I continue to watch our younger and newer colleagues and friends take their rightful place at our table, I am so excited about what the future holds. And as I reflect on my

fellow seasoned sisters and brothers, I am confident in the legacy of excellence that so many of you are leaving for all of us. Yes, I am filled with pride, thankfulness and hope. Why? Because we have each other. And just imagine- think of all the folks with vision loss and the parents and the professionals whom we have yet to get to know and welcome to our table. Just imagine what we can learn from them and how much we can be of service to them. Thanks to the Internet, we've known for a while that the world has become a much smaller place. But because of this tough and tumultuous year, we now know so much more about how we can connect with our neighbor next door and our neighbor on the other side of the planet. Let's make the most of this opportunity.

God bless you. I'm so proud of you. I'm so grateful for you. And because of you, I'm so hopeful for all of us and our future together. You have heard lately that BLM stands for Black Lives Matter. Well, I want you to also remember that BLM can also stand for blind lives matter. So once again, thank you for your commitment to those who are blind and visually impaired. My dear friends, be well.

Mark Richert, *Interim Executive Director, AER*

President's Corner

Happy Holidays!

I am elbow deep in Thanksgiving preparations as I write this, so please pardon my mess. By the time you are reading this Thanksgiving will only be a distant memory of stuffing ourselves (pun intended) and sleigh bells will be ringing. The Board has been hard at work this fall and I have a few things I want to share with you.

Kathryn Botsford has been appointed Treasurer, Jill Brown has been appointed to assume the duties of the Past President and Tiffany Wild has been appointed District 6 Rep. Now, we only need to replace the District 1 Rep with Kathryn's move to Treasurer. District 1 is Alaska, Arizona, British Columbia, Colorado, Hawaii, New Mexico, Northern California, Southern California, Nevada, Northern Rockies (Idaho, Montana, Wyoming), Northwest Territory, Oregon, Pacific Northwest (State of Washington), Utah, and Yukon Territory. If you are interested in serving on the AER International Board, and you live in one of the Chapters above, have Board experience at the Division, Committee or Chapter level, and you are a good communicator, please reach out to me by emailing nfairchild@afb.org or calling 972-897-4171.

We are establishing a History & Memorial page on our website and have also voted to put the minutes of our meetings on the website in an effort to increase transparency. In 2021 the Board will meet monthly, beginning in February so that we can address the needs of the Association in a timelier manner than we can by meeting quarterly. In December, we will be considering and approving the 2021 budget. We are also recommencing the search for a permanent Executive Director with a thorough review of the job description and establishing a process to be followed.

Last, but certainly not least, I want to thank all who attended the Community Reunions. We celebrated AER Award recipients, we learned about topics relevant to our mission and we solicited feedback from anyone who wanted to share. Your feedback will drive the goals developed by the Board for AER in 2021. It took a village to pull these three events together and my hat is off to all who had major or minor roles in making them an undeniable success! Without our staff, Mark Richert, Michele Basham, Megan Doty, Elly Du Pre & Crista Earl the ongoing continuing education sessions, the community reunions, and the everyday operation of AER would not be possible. Please join me in thanking them for all they do.

Blessings to you and yours during the holidays and may 2021 be a year filled with promise for AER and those we serve.

PS When you contemplate making year end donations, please consider AER.

Neva Fairchild, *President, AERBVI*

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News You Can Use

AER Peer Review Team

Click here to learn how YOU can become an AER Peer-Review Team member! [AER Peer Review Team Commercial.mp4](#). Contact megan@aerbvi.org for more information.

New IL OIB-TAC Course

We have a new FREE course: [Orientation and Mobility for those Who Have Multiple Health Impairments](#). Orientation and mobility services are essential for individuals who are blind or have severely reduced vision. When individuals also have coexisting comorbidities or are older, some professionals wonder if these individuals can benefit from orientation and mobility services. This course reviews what orientation and mobility services are and

describes how they can benefit individuals who face additional mobility impairments like those who need to use a walker, support cane, wheelchair, or may have limited strength or stamina. This course is available for 1.25 hours of CRC, ACVREP, and NBPCB credit. For questions about this and other NRTC courses, visit our [Frequently Asked Questions page](#), or contact Simon Marcy at smarcy@colled.msstate.edu.

January Webinar:

Please save the date for the IL OIB-TAC January webinar with American Printing House (APH) on Friday, January 15 at 2:00 PM (CST). In this webinar, learn about the APH ConnectCenter hub serving the field of blindness and visual impairment and how your agency can partner with APH to improve your connections. Registration is required. For more information and to register, visit our [Community of Practice event page](#).

Stephanie Ludi, PhD, Professor, Co-Director of Research In Software Engineering Lab

Dept. of Computer Science & Engineering, University of North Texas

Teaching Computer Science and computational thinking to K12 students has gained momentum in recent years, with nationwide support via the CSForAll initiative started by the Obama Administration. CSForAll should mean for all students, including students with visual impairments. Since 2007, I have conducted research to support educators and their students with visual impairments in middle and high school in Computer Science and related areas such as Robotics. Part of this work includes creating software to provide access to programming to students with visual impairments. My current work involves redesigning block-based tools such as Scratch in order to make it accessible for students with visual impairments. We have a lot of technical work completed to provide screen reader support and keyboard navigation. At the same time, we want to provide appropriate design in order to make such a system intuitive and meets the needs of teachers and students. In support of this, we want to interview TVI's who have worked with students with visual impairments in the area of computer programming in last five years.

I am conducting research that ultimately seeks to improve access to programming tools for students with visual impairments in grades K-12. As a first step, we want to explore the experiences that students have when learning to program from the perspective of teachers of students who are visually impaired, as well as the experiences subject matter teachers have in working with students with visual impairments in class. We want to interview TVIs, computer science teachers and other teachers who teach similar subjects who have had or who have students with visual impairments in the last five years.

The interview would take 20-30 minutes, and you will be compensated with a \$50 Amazon gift certificates (US residents only).

If you have any questions or wish to participate, feel free to contact me at: stephanie.ludi@unt.edu

Chapter Updates

Virginia AER is delighted to announce the 2021 Barbara McCarthy \$1500 Scholarship!

Applications are now available on the Virginia AER website. **Submissions are due by January 15, 2021.** The scholarship recipient will be honored in a virtual presentation at Virginia AER's 2021 February TEA Notes online celebration gathering. [The application can be found here.](https://aerbvi.org/about/chapters/virginia/resources/) (<https://aerbvi.org/about/chapters/virginia/resources/>)

Virginia AER Stipends and grants of \$400 are awarded quarterly. In this creative survival season of COVID, apply for funding support to launch your ideas into reality! [Link to grants.](https://aerbvi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2018grantapplication1.docx) (<https://aerbvi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2018grantapplication1.docx>)

AER Board Member Spotlight

In this issue of The Voice, we want to continue our introductions of the newly elected Board of Directors. Continue reading to learn more about Laurie Watson, AER's Canadian Representative and Dr. Olaya Landa-Vialard, our new President-Elect!



My name is **Laurie Watson**. I currently reside in Toronto, Ontario. Born and raised just outside of Montreal, Quebec, I have also lived in the provinces of New Brunswick and British Columbia. I spent two years teaching in Canada's North, in Nunavik. I appreciate having had an opportunity to participate in BLV service delivery in the US, at the Washington State School for the Blind, where I spent a few months as an O&M intern.

I look forward to a new and very different school year as a TSVI and COMS from within Canada's largest school district, and to connecting with all AER members in our virtual

landscape.



Olaya Landa-Vialard, Ph.D. is a National Leadership Consortium in Sensory Disabilities Fellow and Graduate of Texas Tech University. She was a Co-PI for the Early Learning Visual Impairment Services Training Advancement (EL VISTA) program at Illinois State University. She has been a Bilingual Educational Diagnostician for Students with Visual Impairment/Blindness/Deafblindness/Multiple Disabilities, TVI, University Professor, Bilingual Family Engagement Coordinator for the Illinois State Deafblind Project, Project Reach, currently serves as an Adjunct Instructor for multiple university VI programs, and is currently the Director of APH ConnectCenter Programs.

AER New Member Spotlight

Welcome new AER member, Elizabeth Welfl, who joined us in September 2020!



My name is Elizabeth Welfl. I am 34 years old and live in Spearfish, SD, with my husband and our son. Prior to settling down in South Dakota a few years ago, I lived in many big cities across our country, as well as a brief residence in Paris, France. I have a B.A. in Selling & Sales Management from Purdue University. Currently, I work for a sports consultancy group that focuses on college football. Previously, I worked for the PGA TOUR for 7 years.

I am pursuing a Masters in Special Education with Specialization in Visual Impairment through the University of North Dakota. My goal is to become a Teacher of the Visually Impaired in Western South Dakota and Eastern Wyoming. My 18-month-old son has cortical visual impairment. He has inspired me to help other kids with VI.

Recently, I was appointed to the South Dakota Advisory Panel for Children with Disabilities. I am very excited to make a positive contribution to our wonderful Special Education programs in the state of South Dakota.

Welcome AER New Members who Joined in November

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

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 Visually Impaired Children (Sign On Bonus!)

Brunswick, Maine

Catholic Charities Maine (Brunswick, ME)

Teacher of Visually Impaired Children (Sign on Bonus!)

Portland, Maine

Catholic Charities Maine (Portland, ME)

Developmental Vision Specialist – NMSBVI Infant Toddler Program

Albuquerque, New Mexico

New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Infant Toddler Program

Teacher of the Visually Impaired

Newton, Massachusetts

The Carroll Center for the Blind

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

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 so 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 January issue is 12/20/2020.



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