

Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired



Winter 2020

Orientation and Mobility Division Update

Volume 23 Number 1

From the Chair

New year, new opportunities for growth, new changes to embrace; welcome to 2020! With this new year being an even numbered year, we also have the AER Conference to look forward to. I encourage you to register and attend the conference. Every two years, AER brings together some of the best professional development available to Orientation and Mobility Specialists; this year's conference is no exception. We will be there to share new advances, reinvest in developing core skills, and celebrating those who have contributed greatly to our field. Additionally, we will be among our colleagues from other branches of service to individuals who are blind and with vision loss. Think of it as a Pot Luck where what you bring is your expertise, questions, and passion. Even if you are just entering the field, or even beginning your studies to enter the field, there is something for you to bring and enjoy.

Looking forward to hearing about all the topics that will be offered in session proposals and poster sessions.

Hoping your new year is off to a fabulous start!

Chris Tabb

Division Announcements

Orientation and Mobility Division 2020 Awards

Don't forget to nominate your stand-out colleagues for one of our esteemed awards!!!

The Orientation and Mobility Division Awards Committee invites to submit a letter nominating a deserving colleague for the **Lawrence E. Blaha Memorial Award**, the **O&M Citation of Excellence for Direct Service**, or the **Sandy Kronick Distinguished Service Award**. Go to bit.ly/aeromawards to review the criteria and determine the best fit for your distinguished colleague. The award presentation will be held at the 2020 AER International Conference July 22-26 in St. Louis, MO!

Nominations for the awards and letters of support should be submitted by April 30, 2020. Submissions should be sent to Nick Leon at nickleon86@gmail.com. Award recipients will be notified and announced by June 1, 2020.

Awards Committee members currently include Justin Kaiser, Christopher Tabb, Gala Brooks, Ana Leffel and Nick Leon, Chair. Please email nickleon86@gmail.com if you're interested in joining the committee or have any questions and comments.

Blasch Scholarship 2020 Competition

The Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Division of AER 2020 DONALD BLASCH SCHOLARSHIP Application period opened February 1, 2020

AER's O&M Division sponsors an annual scholarship competition for students enrolled in AER accredited O&M programs. The scholarship recognizes the vital contributions of the late Donald Blasch to the profession of O&M during his long tenure at Western Michigan University.

Individuals selected for the scholarship receive an unrestricted award of \$1,000.00. Two scholarships are awarded each year (*depending on availability of funds*).

The deadline for receiving applications for the Blasch scholarship is March 16, 2020

All O&M students enrolled in AER-accredited programs are encouraged to apply.

Summer Program Information

ILLINOIS

Summer in the City (June 14-18 or July 12-17) has openings remaining for your students. This 5 night experience in the city of Chicago has provided great growth in the areas of confidence and independence for all who have participated. It is perfect for high school students preparing to live independently someday.

First Jobs program (training week June 29-July2) combines classroom instruction and paid internships (6 weeks paid) to youth ages 16-24 who are blind/VI. We have had internships available in retail stores near the students' home to provide independence and possible competitive employment following the internships. We hope to continue to have opportunities at CRIS Radio and Apple next summer.

Have your students sign up on our website: [Youth Transition Program](#)

Feel free to reach out at any time by email, text or cell.

Best,

Shelle

Shelle.hamer@chicagolighthouse.org

Cell: 847-508-0600

MICHIGAN

Hello Friends and Colleagues! Opportunities Unlimited for the Blind Summer Camp registration forms and employment application forms are now available on the OUB website, www.oubmichigan.org. We are excited to offer several new options this summer:

- Discovery Camp, June 21-26, will be offered as both an over-night camp AND as a DAY CAMP for families who prefer their child just try out camp but not stay overnight.
- On July 3, the end of our Cooking and Jamming Camp will include a FAMILY DAY with activities for parents and siblings, and our campers will cook everyone lunch. Family members are encouraged to observe while their campers work in our kitchen and then have some fun activities together!
- For the first time in a long time, we will be taking an Adventure Trip to Chicago, including 2 nights in hotels in the Windy City. We will practice Big City transportation including taking Amtrak to the city as well as experience the sounds and activities that Chicago offers! We are also planning a 9 day Adventure Trip to the Upper Peninsula around Tahquamenon Falls, Sault St Marie and St Ignace.

Employment applications are also available on our website. We are accepting application from students who are blind or low vision who will be at least 17 years old by June 1. Please see the website for available positions and more information.

We hope to see some of your students and clients at OUB Camps this summer! Please feel free to contact me for more information!

Summer Experience Camp for 16 and 17-year olds

Summer Experience Camp at Leader Dog is a unique opportunity for teenagers who are 16 and 17 and are legally blind. To help teens prepare for the next stage of their lives, we offer leadership development, an introduction to guide dogs, and the opportunity to spend time with peers. GPS devices are incorporated throughout the week in a variety of useful environments, including a college campus. Campers also experience tandem biking, beep kickball, rock wall climbing and more!

Summer Experience Camp will be held Wednesday, June 24-Wednesday, July 1, 2020.

Application deadline is Wednesday, April 1, 2020. [Summer Experience Camp Application](#)

NORTH CAROLINA

IFB Solutions – SEE Summer Camps

SEE Camp Abilities H₂O

Camp Dogwood, Sherrills Ford, NC • (336) 473-2170 • cflynt@ifbsolutions.org

SEE Camp Abilities H₂O is an overnight water sports camp for rising 8th-12th graders who are blind or visually impaired. We'll swim, row, kayak, fish, and splash around from our home base on the shores of Lake Norman, and throw in a trip to the National Whitewater Center in Charlotte for good measure. Novices are welcome, and lifejackets plentiful: all that's required is a willingness to try new things and get wet. We'll have evening activities too. **Cost: Free.**

Co-Ed • Rising 8th-12th graders • Residential • July 5 through July 10, 2020

SEE Adventure Camp

Bryson City, NC • 828-335-1136 • jhardwig@ifbsolutions.org

SEE Adventure Camp is for teens who are blind or have a significant visual impairment, and who are ready to stretch their legs and hit the trail. We plan to hike, raft, climb, swim, and zip in and around the Nantahala Gorge in Western North Carolina. We'll stay in the group lodge at Wildwater Nantahala, and spend time at the Nantahala Outdoor Center as well. **Cost: Free.**

Co-Ed • Rising 8th-12th graders • Residential • July 19 through July 23, 2020

Want to know more? Visit [Summer Camps](#) for full info on our 2020 camps.

Member's Corner

White Cane Day 2019, Staunton VA

By Valery Kircher

While I believe it is important to education about blindness and the long white cane year-round, October is a month where I try to kick it into high gear with White Cane and Guide Dog Day. I found several opportunities to promote and celebrate White Cane Day and what we can provide in Blind Rehab.

I was able to promote White Cane Day on a local television station, WHSV TV 3 by doing an interview for White Cane Day in the studio with Bob Corso discussing misunderstandings of blindness, what services we provide and so on.

On October 15 DBVI held our second White Cane Day Walk with employees, students from VSDB, The Talking Book Center staff and board members as well as city officials, including the Mayor of Staunton, Mayor Dull. Mayor Dull really got into the walk by blindfolding herself and using Human Guide and a cane. She walked all four sides of the block and two street crossings, learning the importance of the cane and the environment she traveled through. The Virginia News Leader joined us for the walk as well and interviewed several of the participants for a story posted later that day online and then the next week was the front-page story in the printed paper!

The final promotion for White Cane Awareness month came completely unexpected later in the month. Staunton Councilwoman Oaks was unable to make the walk and so asked for a chance to sit down and talk with me about White Cane Day and what Staunton can do to better serve citizens who are Blind and Visually Impaired. I suggested blindfolding her and giving her human guide with a cane around downtown while we spoke, and she was very excited! Like the Mayor, she realized quickly how important the cane was as well as walkability of the environment. As we finished our walk, we met up with Chelsea Church, a reporter from WHSV TV 3, who was there to interview the Councilwoman on a separate matter. Chelsea asked if she could do a story on intersections and traveling. I was happy to and we exchanged cards. The very next day she asked me to meet her downtown to film the story! It was a pretty great way to end October and I am looking forward to finding more ways to promote Blind Rehab and the abilities of individuals who are blind!

The links for the stories are below.

Interview on the street with Chelsea Church: [Chelsea Church Interview](#)

Virginia News Leader Article: [Stanton White Cane Day](#)

In studio One on One interview with Bob Corso: [Bob Corso Interview](#)

Off-Road O&M at the SEE Adventure Camp

By Jay Hardwig, MA, COMS
Manager of Programs and Services, IFB Solutions-Asheville

It's the middle of January as I write, but summer is on my mind: how many kids in a raft, how many miles on a hike, and how many marshmallows we'll need to ensure a steady supply of s'mores.

I'm also talking to campers, counselors, and parents, and watching the 2020 SEE Adventure Camp take shape. This will be my fifth year as director of SEE Adventure Camp, a free five-day, four-night camp for teens with blindness and visual impairment. The campers come from around the US, and our goal is to get them off the couch and into the woods – to hike, zip, climb, and raft in the wilds of western North Carolina.

Adults are constantly conspiring to plop kids into the backcountry, and we're no exception. We do it for all the usual reasons: to build confidence and competence, to encourage teamwork, to improve problem-solving skills. Essential traits for all children, but perhaps more critical for the blind and visually impaired. Our campers grow up in a world that is skeptical of their skill. They hear too many messages of blindness as a disability, and live in a world of overabundant caution, with too many *can'ts* in the places of *cans*. Internalize this message, and it becomes all too easy to sit on the sidelines and let the world whirl by unheeded. In hitting the trail, we hope to fight this impulse: to expand possibility, reward curiosity, and nurture the spirit of adventure that beats in every heart.

I call it Off-Road O&M.

And so, we hike, rambling through the Smokies and giving new meaning to the word tree-hugger. (Every now and then, our campers will give a nearby trunk a healthy squeeze, to better sense its size and shape.) And we zip, soaring through the Nantahala River Gorge at speeds approaching fifty miles per hour, on lines up to a half-mile long. As each kid flies from view, and even the sighted teachers lose track of our campers, we tune our ears to the tensile whine of the line, following each zipper's progress by the pitch and volume of the returning sound.

We grunt, grab, and climb, scaling the fifty-foot Alpine Tower, and whoop with joy when we reach the top.

We float down the Nantahala River, our paddles dug deep and true, as the rushing water forms a constantly shifting soundscape. We smell the rich and redolent bouquet of wild waters, of river rocks drying in the noonday sun, and now and then feel the stray spray from the rapids splash upon our cheeks.

In short, we move. With grit, with glee, and with purpose. (And after a long hike, we sit with a fair amount of purpose too.) And when the day's adventure is done, we gather around the fire pit at the group lodge and talk about how we got here, what comes next, and what it means. That's when the real magic happens.

Then we roast one more marshmallow.

Registration for SEE Adventure Camp and our weeklong watersports camp, SEE Camp H2O, is open now, and slots are filling fast. These camps are funded by IFB Solutions and staffed by certified O&M specialists and teachers for the visually impaired. They are the brainchild of Chris Flynt, Director of Programs and Services at IFB Solutions, who lost his own vision to retinitis pigmentosa in early adulthood.

To learn more, visit [Summer Capmps](#) or drop me a line at jhardwig@ifbsolutions.org. This article is adapted from a similar article originally published in *Blue Ridge Outdoors*.)

Western Michigan University
Department of Blindness and Low Vision Studies

As of January 1, 2020, Dr. James Leja has retired from the Department of Blindness and Low Vision Studies at Western Michigan University. Dr. Leja served as professor and chair of the department since 2004, however, his stint at WMU went back much further. Dr. Leja first joined the faculty at WMU in 1986 and taught in the Department of Blindness and Low Vision Studies (back then known as the Department of Blind Rehabilitation) until 1998, when he moved into administration as the Associate Dean for Graduate and International Affairs. He served as associate dean until taking the departmental chair position in 2004. One Dr. Leja's big jobs when he was associate dean was to oversee many of the details in the construction of the new College of Health and Human Services building on Oakland Drive, which opened for business in 2005. A skilled administrator, Dr. Leja was often tapped to lead other departments while still handling the reins in the vision department. While under his leadership, the WMU Vision Clinic expanded its services and began operating in the black, while still offering a venue for teaching students aspects of clinical low vision.

As chair of the department, Dr. Leja has created the opportunity for undergraduates to take Blindness and Low Vision classes in accelerated programs, both at WMU and at Dillard University in Louisiana, thus helping with recruitment for the department. Dr. Leja spent a year as a Fulbright Scholar and Visiting Professor in Taiwan, leading to an ongoing relationship that has led to other faculty members also traveling to Taiwan to teach coursework. Dr. Leja also traveled to Botswana with a faculty member to foster relationships with developing programs there. While chair of the department of Blindness and Low Vision Studies, Dr. Leja saw 850 students graduate and gave out over \$600,000 in scholarship awards. And yet, with all of these accomplishments, the raising of two daughters, and the maintenance of a 40+ year marriage, Dr. Leja still managed to find the time to build his own kayak and spend time sailing with his wife, Peggy. A man who managed to balance home and work well, keep a calm and open demeanor through years of administrative headaches, and lead his rag tag crew to ever greater heights, Jim Leja will be missed at the helm of the department, although he will most assuredly enjoy being at the helm of his sailboat much more! Godspeed Jim!

Upcoming Events

DC-MD AER, in partnership with the Maryland State Steering Committee for Programs Serving Students with Visual Impairments. “Closing the Gap for our Students and Clients”

2020 Annual Conference in Annapolis, Maryland (location TBD) March 26 and 27, 2020

Make sure to check out the upcoming events for clients at Second Sense at 65 E. Wacker Place Suite 1010 in downtown Chicago. Upcoming events include 1 Touch Self Defense and much more! [Calendar](#)

Illinois AER Conference

February 13-14 2020: “2020 Vision: Your Dedication in Focus” IAER Conference

To Register visit <http://iaerconfreg.com/>

The Chicago Lighthouse

* We have a few spaces remaining for our February 23rd **ski trip to Alpine Valley**. Individual instruction and all ski equipment are provided for an exhilarating day on the slopes. Trained ABSF guides assist each participant. Everyone who has participated in the past found the day to be a fantastic experience Register online at: <https://chicagolighthouse.org/youth-transition-application/>
Returning applicants: <https://chicagolighthouse.org/yt-returning-applicants/>

* The Career Fair, held March 13th from 9:30AM to 2PM in Glenview should not be missed. We have an exciting panel of successful people who are blind/VI from a variety of careers ready to share their experiences with your students. We encourage parents and/or school staff to participate in this worthwhile day

Register by March 6th, 2020 at Register online at: chicagolighthouse.org/youth-transition-application

The Michigan AER annual conference will be April 23 and 24, 2020 at the Livonia Marriott.

For Questions email michiganaer@gmail.com

The 2020 Collaborative Vision Conference sponsored by the Wisconsin chapter of AER is May 7-8, 2020 in Stevens Point, Wisconsin. For more information contact Trudy Stachowiak at

trudy.stachowiak@gmail.com Conference Information: [Wisconsin AER Conference](#)

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Visit the O&M website for a list of Committees: <https://aerbvi.org/oandmdivision>

Susan Langendonk, Editor

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