



On-Site

Volunteer Services for the Visually Handicapped, Inc.

Providing alternative ways for people with print disabilities to read.

Spring 2008

Director's Corner

As I celebrate my first year as director of Volunteer Services for the Visually Handicapped, I would like to take this opportunity to express my excitement and enthusiasm about the chance to lead this organization into a future that already is gaining



momentum. Although I have been the director of VSVH for just a little over a year, I have been an advocate for blind persons both in workplace and educational settings since the early eighties. As a lifelong recipient of the services of VSVH, I feel very privileged now to be in the director's chair. I know firsthand how helpful and significant this organization has been in supporting my education, professional development and independence. As our mission proclaims, this organization has not only helped me but it has given thousands of individuals alternative ways to read both through braille and audio formats. And, VSVH has been helping many blind and print disabled individuals reach success and independence in their lives for over 42 years.

As we look to the future, we have begun implementing an intensive three-year strategic plan. We are looking to grow our organization by forming new partnerships with notable entities such as Milwaukee Public Schools and Milwaukee Restaurant Association. We are approaching Milwaukee area businesses and organizations with our services so the printed word for blind and print disabled individuals will be just a phone call away.

Before long we will begin using our new name, Audio & Braille Literacy Enhancement Inc. (ABLE), a name that truly speaks to our able staff, able recipients and able volunteers. This team of three is a tremendously ABLE force to behold. Watch for the official announcement of our new name soon!

-Cheryl Orgas
Executive Director

"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more you learn, the more places you'll go."

-Dr. Scuss,
I Can Read With My Eyes Shut!

Annual Volunteer Awards and Fundraising Luncheon

The 2007 VSVH Volunteer Awards and Fundraising Luncheon, sponsored by Industries for the Blind, was a great success! Dynamic, engaging and talented Milwaukee historian John Gurda boosted our attendance as he fascinated us with his knowledge of and perspective on the history of Milwaukee. Thank you, John!

This year's luncheon will be held on **Tuesday, May 20th, at 11:30 a.m. at the Italian Conference Center.** \$40 per person, or \$240 for a table for 6. **Complimentary for VSVH volunteers.**

Our featured guest will be Bob Bach, host and producer of Morning Edition on 89.7 WUWM radio in Milwaukee. Bob, a Vietnam veteran, began his broadcasting career as a disc jockey in Merrill, Wisconsin in 1975. Since then, he has covered news and sports at stations in Milwaukee, including announcing Marquette basketball for 12 years. He can currently be heard from 6 a.m. till 10 a.m. on 89.7 FM.

Bob has won dozens of local, state, and regional awards for his reporting, writing, and producing.

Don't miss this event! Call us at 414-286-3039 for reservations.

Volunteers—The Heart of our Organization

In 2007, our 60 audio and braille volunteers completed 10,688 hours of volunteer braille and or audio transcription services. At \$18.77 per hour, this represents over \$200,000 of monetary value to the organization. These dedicated women and men produced 116,608 pages of braille or audio transcription. This truly is an astounding amount of time and energy, an increase of 20,000 pages compared to 2006. Our board and staff are very grateful for this tremendous generosity.

Our Summer 2008 newsletter will focus the spotlight on our amazing volunteers!

Audio News

For the past five years the National Library Service (NLS) has been developing a digital format for talking books and other written materials. VSVH recently learned that flash memory, a "chip" in a plastic holder the size of a box of playing cards, was chosen for the future Digital Talking Book Program. Flash memory, the same technology used in computer "thumb drives" provides large storage sizes and can be replayed or recycled indefinitely. The regional library for the blind's distribution of digital books and equipment is set to begin late this year.



VSVH has decided to provide digital talking books in a new format called DAISY. DAISY was developed to enable a person who is blind or otherwise print disabled to access the information in a book with the same ease with which a sighted person accesses information in a print book. DAISY formatted books include more capabilities such as the ability to skim books by "navigating" forward or backward by word, paragraph, page, chapter or section heading. DAISY also includes support for a table of contents or index. If the DAISY book includes an index, a reader can find a referenced word or phrase and jump right to that reference in the book itself.

VSVH is adding DAISY books to our services and will soon train volunteers to support this remarkable technology. We are not ending cassette talking books overnight; we are adding new options more appropriate to the current time. Materials currently held by VSVH on tape will be converted to flash format if requested. We are excited about the new technology. Audio quality promises to be much improved; the ability to navigate within a book will be enhanced many times over.

VSVH is fully committed to make the digital transition and ensure that we can continue to respond to a range of technology needs for all the individuals we serve. As we update our computers and technology we will begin a test program to offer the choice of receiving audio materials as a file that can be e-mailed or sent on a CD!

Watch our upcoming newsletters for information on when these additional services are available. I look forward to meeting everyone as I grow in this new and exciting position. In the meantime I am available at 286-3480 to chat or answer any questions you may have.

Richard Robbins
Audio Services Coordinator

Braille Update

2007 in the braille department was an extremely busy one! And we're happy to report, 2008 has continued to be much of the same.



To give you a sampling, we've completed textbooks for Janesville's School for the Blind, and children's books for the Wisconsin Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (WRLBPH) and for the Badger Association of the Blind and Visually Impaired's sixth annual *Badger Braille Games*. We've completed various other transcriptions that include a childbirth instruction manual for West Allis Memorial Hospital, math and reading assessments for Milwaukee Public Schools, the Mosaic Facilitation Guide for one of VSVH's retired board members, restaurant menus, and newsletters for *IndependenceFirst* and the WRLBPH. The list goes on

We just can't thank all our braillists and proofreaders enough for all their hard work. Giving of their time and talent to VSVH is not only a benefit to us, but also to the blind and visually impaired community that we serve. We couldn't provide this immensely valuable service without you! Thank you.

Special thanks go out to *IndependenceFirst* for their generosity in providing VSVH with the ability to purchase another Juliet Pro embosser. What a needed addition to the department! Our new addition has definitely gotten a workout. Thank you, *IndependenceFirst*.

We are planning to schedule our next Braille Department Workshop for this spring or early summer. Changes have been made to the *Instruction Manual for Braille Transcribing*. We will spend time reviewing these new braille formatting rules, and VSVH policies. Each braillist will receive the updates to the Instruction Manual at this workshop. It is extremely important that all braillists attend. More details will follow shortly.

Thanks again for your continued support. We're looking forward to a great year ahead!

Kathy Bruening
Braille Services Coordinator

VSVH Welcomes New Office Manager



Hello, everyone! I'm delighted to begin working with VSVH as your new Office Manager. I have worked for non-profit organizations for most of my life, and came to this organization with recommendations from various people (including my wife, Gretchen Kapperman, who teaches functional and independent travel skills to visually impaired students in Milwaukee Schools). In my first six months here, I've come to realize that I have found a wonderful organization, and a wonderful group of co-workers and volunteers. Together, I look forward to helping the organization grow, and continue our mission to provide alternative ways for people with print disabilities to read.

Matt Scholtes
Office Manager

National Federation of the Blind: NFB-Newsline®

Last fall, we began meeting with the Executive Directors from The Badger Association of the Blind and Visually Impaired and Center for Deaf-Blind Persons to initiate a collaborative to create a local VSVH channel for National Federation of the Blind's NFB-Newsline®, with the generous financial support of Industries for the Blind and in cooperation with Wisconsin Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, so that blind and print disabled individuals locally and throughout the state are informed about services and resources available to them.

Badger Association of the Blind and Visually Impaired has had a prominent place on our local channel with their newsletter, In Focus, and their winter classes. In January, we began announcing Braille Games, co-sponsored by VSVH and Badger Association, an event that occurred on Friday, March 7, 2008. (See article on the back page!)

Our Audio Coordinator began placing synthesized materials, (news articles, local museums, happenings in Milwaukee, etc.) on the NFB-Newsline phone service so that over 1,300 people in Wisconsin would have available over the phone up-to-date information and news.

We will continue our work with Newsline this year, featuring events happening at the Center for Deaf-Blind Persons. As directors of the local area blindness agencies we are excited to explore many more opportunities for utilizing Newsline as a source for getting out much information and many resources to the blind public.

We are also planning to make the local channel accessible to Deaf-Blind and other blind individuals by downloading information to braille note-takers, an option that is possible at the national level. We would be the first local channel to make this option available.

Braille, Scanning, Cassette, CDs of Your Document is Only a Phone Call Away!

Does your business or organization print... anything? Newsletters? Brochures or flyers? Menus? Manuals?

Have you considered that many of your customers would benefit from having these materials available to them in an audio or Braille format?

We can provide you with recorded or brailled copies of these and other items. To get an estimate of cost, please contact one of our staff at 414-286-3039.

Johanna Bureau Legacy

We would like to offer a special note of gratitude to Johanna Bureau of Chicago, Illinois for their generous monetary gift to us.

Though their doors are now closed, their legacy lives on through our commitment to continue providing braille and audio materials for blind and visually impaired people.

Contact Us

Our office is open Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. till 4 p.m. except on days when the Central Library is closed.

You may reach us by phone at 414-286-3039, or Visit our Website at www.vsvh.org, or Email us at info@vsvh.org.



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An insight into Braille

Woman is first blind person to direct transcription service

By ANNYSJA JOHNSON

anjohanson@journalsentinel.com

Posted: June 18, 2007

If Cheryl Orgas had her way, every restaurant in Milwaukee would have Braille menus. The zoo and State Fair would stock Braille maps. And every business, every school and government office, would know whom to call when they need to communicate with someone who is blind or visually impaired.

As executive director of Volunteer Services for the Visually Handicapped, Orgas advocates for those who cannot see. And she has a pretty good sense of what they want.

Orgas, 47, is the first blind person to lead the non-profit Braille and audio transcription service in its 42-year history. Having used its services - and she has, since the first grade - was by no means a prerequisite. But it has given her a unique perspective.

"I have a passion for what this organization does and a deep understanding of what is needed," said Orgas, who joined the agency in January after a 25-year career in social work.

That perspective is only one of the reasons she was hired, said Cheri McGrath, who chairs the agency's board of directors. "Cheryl truly embodies what VSVH is all about," said McGrath, a retired Milwaukee Public Schools teacher who is blind herself. "She's received an excellent education. She's been a success in her profession and her community. She truly encompasses the whole VSVH mission," McGrath said.

Broad services provided

Housed in the Milwaukee Public Library, Volunteer Services for the Visually Handicapped transcribes written materials into Braille or audio, for a fee, for individuals and organizations around the world. It's a Herculean feat made possible, considering its bare-bones staff, with dozens of volunteers.

Contrary to its name, it serves more than the blind and visually handicapped. Clients include physically disabled people who can't hold books and those with learning disabilities who process audio better than the written word.

At 650 translations last year alone, it doesn't begin to fill the need. Publishers produce about 20,000 books a year, according to Marsha Valance, who heads the Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Disabled in Milwaukee. But the National Library Service translates only about 2,000.

"So we go to them for others, particularly for books of interest here in Wisconsin," Valance said.

List of priorities

Orgas' priorities as executive director will be to modernize the agency's technology, increase its client base and raise its profile in the broader community. Over the next few years, clients and the organization will trade their old cassette recorders for digital devices, and computer software upgrades will make Braille transcription more efficient.

While the blind have more access to the written word than ever because of the Internet and talking software, Orgas points out, there are still things that cannot be read by a computer, such as graphic files. And VSVH, she said, can fill that void.

At the same time, Orgas is building relationships in the sighted community with the vision of creating an agency so widely known, a service so ubiquitous, that sighted users think to call before the blind person asks. "It needs to be integrated into everyday life," she said. "I want us to be that next day service, so people will get what they need quickly, whether that's in Braille, a flash card, a disc or e-mail."

Orgas, who grew up in Waukesha, has a long association with the agency. Blinded as a premature infant by the bright lights and oxygen of an incubator, she's used its services since childhood and volunteered there as a teen.

History of agency

The agency itself grew out of a search for Braille transcribers by one of Orgas' earliest teachers, Sister Melmarie Stoll, who taught blind students for 45 years at Holy Assumption School in West Allis before retiring in 2003. Orgas credits Stoll and her own supportive family for instilling in her a sense of confidence that she could achieve what she wanted in life. In hindsight it seems a simple formula: high standards and no coddling.

One of her early memories, she said, is falling down the steps as a child and her mother rushing to her aid. "My father said, 'Oh my gosh, stop babying her. Do you want her to live with us when she's 50?' "

Similar struggles

That's not likely. Orgas resides in Shorewood with her husband, who is also blind, and their teenage son, who sees. Her life is like that of most people juggling work and family. There are meals and homework, meetings and deadlines, and never enough hours in the day to do it all. Like many in the workplace, she lives by computer, e-mail - but with talking software - and the telephone. That's not to say blindness doesn't complicate things. It's harder to get around, obviously.

Then there is the maneuvering around others' misconceptions about blindness. "There's this idea that we're to be pitied or we're superhuman," Orgas said. "We're normal people doing normal things. We're just doing it a little differently."

Orgas, who is engaging and quick to laugh, is always taken aback when people assume she's harboring some great sadness about being blind. "There is so much that life gives," she said, "from being in a relationship to being a mom and working with others.

"Life is so full. I can't imagine not doing it the way I'm doing it."

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Volunteer Services for the Visually Handicapped, Inc.
Central Library Building
803 W. Wells St.
Milwaukee, WI 53233-1436



From the Board Room

VSVH extends an enthusiastic welcome to our newest board members: Harold Mester, E. Vanessa Jones, Dick Barnes, Tom Gauthier, and Michael Schiek. Thank you for your willingness to take on such an important role!

At the same time, we will deeply miss the skills and commitment of Charles Benner, Mark Ryan, and Angela Reilly who left the board in 2006, and Jean Salzer, Troy Hergert, and Alisa Wimmer who left in 2007. On behalf of the patrons, board and staff of VSVH, thank you.

Our 2008 Board roster is as follows:

Cheri McGrath, President

Barbara Althoen, Vice President

Tom Gauthier, Secretary

Michael Schiek, Treasurer

Richard Barnes

Frank E. Gedelman

E. Vanessa Jones

Harold Mester

Elizabeth Waterfall

Marsha Valance –Ex-Officio

A New Name—A New Look!

Volunteer Services for the Visually Handicapped will soon be known as **ABLE** — **A**udio & **B**raille **L**iteracy **E**nhancement, Inc. Watch for the rollout of our new name and our new look!

Braille Games

On March 7th, 2008, the Badger Association of the Blind and Visually Impaired and Volunteer Services for the Visually Handicapped hosted the 6th Annual Braille Games. This intergenerational competition matched experienced, braille-literate adults with children new to braille. Children screamed, jumped up and down, sang braille songs, played Human Braille Cell, Treasure Hunt, and Going on a Trip using their braille skills. Over 60 children, adult volunteers, staff from both organizations and MPS teachers of the visually impaired experienced this exciting event. Every attendee left with their own braille book transcribed by VSVH. Funded by Dr. Samuel S. and Anne W. Blankstein Family Fund II.