



On-Site Newsletter

Audio & Braille Literacy Enhancement, Inc.
Providing alternative ways for people with print disabilities to read

Spring 2011

Three Cheers for Volunteers!

We are given a special opportunity every April to recognize and celebrate the ways in which volunteers make this world a better place for all of us. Those of us connected in any way to ABLE know very well how critical volunteers are to the success of our mission of providing alternative ways for people with print disabilities to read.

In this issue of *On-Site*, we are pleased to bring you some moving stories of the meaning of volunteerism told by our volunteers in their own words. We are also delighted to highlight two ABLE volunteers whose work was acknowledged publicly through the prestigious awards they recently received.

Hear, too, about the success of the 9th annual Braille Games.

Read on, and join in the celebration!

The 2011 Annual Awards Luncheon & Benefit is Almost Here!



Mark your calendar for Thursday, May 19, 2011

11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Encore Performance by
Milwaukee Public School Students

Their 2010 performance was amazing, and brought
tears to many an eye!

You won't want to miss this year's event!

Phone us at (414) 286-3039 for reservations.

We Celebrate Volunteers Who've Reached Volunteering Milestones!

Braille

- Barbara Althoen – 10,000 hours
- Lenore Tesch – 2,500 hours
- John Kaczmarowski – 1,500 hours
- Cindy Kaczmarowski – 1,000 hours
- Catherine "Kay" Effinger – 500 hours

Audio

- Pat Jipson – 5,000 hours
- Diana Pine – 500 hours
- Bob Balderson – 250 hours



Thank You!!!



Cheryl Orgas presents an award at ABLE's 2010 Awards Luncheon to Sister Melmarie Stoll, whose initiative launched ABLE, formerly known as VSVH.

(((Audio)))

Audio Volunteers Recall: The Agony and the Ecstasy?

Phyllis Mittelstadt

I'm not sure just what year I started reading printed material onto tape. It might have been in the late 1980's, 1990 for sure because that was the year I retired from my job at Concordia University.

I remember learning on and using the old open reel machines for my first stumbling efforts; they were a major challenge. I was so relieved when the switch was made to 4-track cassette recorders. Someday I suppose I will get into the new digital technology, but this is enough for me now.

“I have precious memories of reading stories to my children every evening at bedtime.”

I think there were several reasons for my interest in this work, the first being the convenience of being able to work in my home. But a more important reason was, and still is, my love of reading (and reading aloud). I have precious memories of reading stories to my children every evening at bedtime. Later, the kids all grown, I started reading Scripture lessons in church on

Sundays. Reading educational material is a bit different, though, and often leads me into whole new worlds of knowledge and experience. Not all of my assignments were terribly interesting or appealing to me, but everything I read enriched my own knowledge of the world. Now, 5000+ hours later, I feel I have been so blest to have been a part of all this. God willing, I hope to be doing this for another ten (or more!) years.

Nancy Gill

When I was invited to a meeting about a year and a half ago at the Central Library it was to hear about recording books on a computer instead of the old tape machines. I looked at the others in the group and realized they were all at least 20 years younger than I was. After being

handed booklets and listening to Richard [Robbins, ABLE's Audio Services Coordinator] explain them I felt like I was listening to a foreign language. I went home thinking—no, not for me.

However, after another meeting and having Richard come to my home to set up the Audacity program on my computer for me,

I decided to give it a try. After many frustrating starts and stops and several more visits by Richard to my home I finished a short pamphlet and then a book. Since I have a Mac computer and Richard hadn't worked on them, my grandson and son got many calls for help.

Every book I do gets a little easier and I am proud to have learned to do it. The old saying "you can't teach an old dog new tricks" is wrong. I'm going to be 84 and if I can learn to do it so can you—try it you'll learn to like it! The work is so important to so many that in end the results are well worth it.

“I'm going to be 84 and if I can learn to do it so can you—try it, you'll learn to like it!”



Photo of digital player

Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they just have the heart. ~Elizabeth Andrew

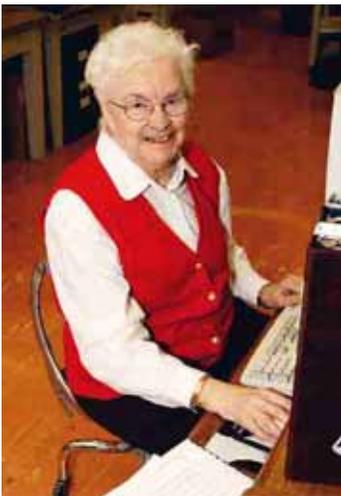
, Brl Braille , Brl

Dot by Dot, Word by Word, 60,000 Pages Later!

ABLE volunteer brailist Audrey Hemmer was chosen as a 2011 *Inspire by Example* adult winner by The Volunteer Center of Greater Milwaukee, a service of the Nonprofit Center of Milwaukee. Congratulations, Audrey, and thank you for all you do for ABLE!

Cheryl Orgas, ABLE's Executive Director, nominated Audrey with the following, which we offer as a way for you to become acquainted with Audrey and the invaluable services she provides:

"As Executive Director of Audio & Braille Literacy Enhancement, Inc. (ABLE) and a life-long blind recipient of this organization, I am honored to nominate Audrey Hemmer for the *Inspire by Example* award. She has given self-sufficiency and independence to hundreds of blind individuals locally and throughout the country by transcribing into braille much needed material otherwise unavailable to these individuals.



Audrey is one of our volunteers who transcribes print material into braille for blind children and adults. Thirty years ago, Audrey read an article about ABLE in the newspaper and decided to become a volunteer in her retirement, a perfect match for her interests. She took a braille class, an intensive

and difficult instruction, demanding commitment, perseverance, and much study. She then became a braille transcriber for ABLE, and during the last thirty years Audrey has given a total of over 18,000 hours—between 15 and 30 hours a week since 1981.

Seeing her here at the office every week, I am awed by her motivation to give to our recipients so steadily and reliably for so many years. In addition to this tireless

commitment, she served on the ABLE Board of Directors for over 19 years.

Audrey also plays a very active role in her church, answering phones for parishioners in need, and helping out as part of the bereavement ministry. She also serves the Milwaukee County Election Commission as a poll worker.

Audrey has transcribed a wide range of material including complex math and science books; developed tactiles so that the diagrams, charts, and pictures on the print page could be seen tactilely by the blind recipients; responded to immediate requests quickly and efficiently with little notice; mentored and trained other volunteers; and, coordinated the activities of other volunteers. Audrey responds generously when a problem or need arises. She takes on the responsibility willingly and successfully.

When we talk about the braille needs of others, she is so invested in producing a finished product that will be useful and helpful to our recipients.

Audrey says: "No matter what you work on [at ABLE], somebody needs it."

Are You Detail Oriented?
Very Well Organized?
Looking for an opportunity to put those
qualities to good use??

ABLE's braille department needs an in-center volunteer who can help assemble braille materials! Call Kathy at 286-5172 for more information.



Cheri McGrath Knows How to Shake it Up, and I Don't Mean Martinis!

Ms. McGrath is one of fifteen Metro Milwaukee women recognized for making a positive impact in Metro Milwaukee.

The United States Postal Service celebrated Women's History Month in March by paying tribute to fifteen women from the Metro Milwaukee Area with outstanding achievements. Cheri McGrath was noted for her tremendous efforts in Abilities Awareness at The 13th "Women Putting Their Stamp on Metro Milwaukee" Awards Event held March 25th at the Italian Conference Center.

Cheri has been a tireless and long-term advocate for persons with disabilities here in the Milwaukee area and throughout Wisconsin as well. She has truly put her stamp on Milwaukee in her work over the years, both in her professional career as a Teacher of the Visually Impaired, as well as in her various roles as volunteer, board member, council member and advocate with numerous different organizations.

In addition to serving on the Audio & Braille Literacy Enhancement Board of Directors, Cheri has volunteered for ABLE, proofreading and assembling braille books including children's textbooks, cookbooks and work-related training materials. These braille books help to bring literacy, information and independence to print disabled individuals throughout the Milwaukee area and beyond, and they allow blind people to take a more active role in their community.

And Cheri should know. Blind since birth, Cheri has received books that were transcribed by ABLE while attending college, graduate school at The University of Northern Colorado, in her job as a Teacher of the Visually Impaired, and in her various community service positions. Cheri worked for Milwaukee Public Schools for 15 years, teaching blind children and helping them achieve literacy and take a path to future success.

Seventy percent of blind people in this country are unemployed. Of the remaining 30% who have jobs, 80% of them know braille. Cheri's volunteering and advocacy for braille literacy is truly an important service to blind people in Milwaukee.

But her advocacy is not limited to literacy. Besides being a regular blood donor to the Blood Center of Wisconsin, she has also volunteered as a Future Milwaukee participant, and has been on numerous local and state organizations serving blind and visually impaired people. Furthermore, Cheri has served on Milwaukee County Transit's Transit Service Advisory Council, advocating on behalf of blind and other disabled individuals who ride the bus.

Indeed, all of Cheri's work, from braille literacy to bus advocacy, helps not only those with disabilities but also the community as a whole. More active, involved, employed and tax-paying persons with disabilities, getting where they need to go and reading what they need to read, means a stronger community for all of us.



Cheri McGrath accepts her award from Karen Schenck, USPS Lakeland District Manager

9th Annual Braille Games

Sponsored by Wisconsin Talking Book and Braille Library, Audio & Braille Literacy Enhancement, Badger Association of the Blind and Visually Impaired and local school districts.

Wisconsin Talking Book and Braille Library (WTBBL), ABLÉ Inc. and the Badger Association hosted the 9th Annual Braille Games on Friday, April 1st, 2011. The event, featuring a carnival theme this year, took place at Gaenslen School in Milwaukee.



“This is a fantastic opportunity for children to socialize with others who also have visual impairments, as well as adults who are blind or visually impaired,” says Enid Gruszka, Managing Librarian, WTBBL. “This intergenerational competition provides a great chance for these young people to improve their braille skills and celebrate the fact that braille opens up their lives to a world of information,

privacy and independence,” says Cheryl Orgas, Executive Director of ABLÉ. “Braille Games strengthens skills through creative, recreational competition and tells a great story” says Becky Williams,

President of the Badger Association. Braille literacy is one of the highest predictors of success as children prepare to enter the workforce. “70% of the blind are unemployed in this country. Of the remaining 30% who



have jobs, 80% of them know Braille.” says Cheryl Orgas.

One of our adult Braille mentors gave the group an inspiring message about braille to start off the event. Regarding his experience, Steve Heesen

says, “It was such an honor to be able to address the group. Oh yeah, it was fun too!” Steve’s workplace,



Industries for the Blind, lent him to us for the day. Industries sent another blind adult mentor as well and so did Wiscraft, another Milwaukee employer of blind adults.

Jane Moran, Teacher of the Blind and Visually Impaired for West Allis-West Milwaukee School District, attending the games said, “We had a wonderful time. What a great idea to have the carnival theme. My kids LOVED it!!!”

Braille Games photos by Richard Robbins

We couldn't provide our services without the generosity of our donors,
November, 2010 – March, 2011. Thank you!!

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You never see a hearse dragging a U-Haul. That's why it's important to plan ahead to support the people and organizations that *you* care about in a manner that would make you proud.

A good estate plan manages your present needs while anticipating the future. By making your intentions clear, you make life easier for your heirs while maximizing the impact of your legacy.

Consider supporting ABLE in your future estate plans, we would love to share our story with you over a cup of coffee!

For more information regarding estate planning, please contact Cheryl Orgas at (414) 286-3026.

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Contact Us

Our office is open to the public Monday through Thursday from 10 a.m. till 4 p.m. ABLE is closed on days that the Central Library is closed. You may reach us by phone at **414-286-3039**, or visit our Website at: **www.ablenow.org**, or email us at **info@ablenow.org**.

Audio & Braille Literacy Enhancement (ABLE)

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Our audio department is looking for an in-center volunteer to assist with the assembly of digital talking books. We're looking for a few good folks with strong computer skills who would like to learn specialized audio editing software. Commitment of four-hour time slots necessary. Call Richard at 286-3480 for more information.

Our Board of Directors

ABLE is so very fortunate to have a board of directors that is engaged, involved and committed to our mission!

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