

# The WhiteCane

The magazine of the Iowa Department for the Blind



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first blind CrossFit  
Level 1 Trainer

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## |from the editor

**A**ttitudes . They really do make a difference in the outcomes we seek in our lives. Because we have the ability to challenge our own negative thoughts when they arise, the power rests in our hands to cultivate positive attitudes. This issue of the White Cane magazine explores attitude adjustment in action and the beneficial results obtained when both individuals and groups entrain constructive thoughts on the journey to our chosen goals.

— Rick Dressler

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I would like to introduce two new members of the Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB) leadership team. The attitude of service to blind Americans of these two individuals has already resulted in valuable accumulated experience and accomplishments and we are excited to integrate them into the agency.

In September, Kim Barber assumed the position of Independent Living Program Supervisor. No stranger to IDB, Kim was employed as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with the department from 2005 to 2007. Her work with the agency allowed multiple clients to obtain jobs and increase their level of independence. From 2007, Kim was employed as a Business Development Specialist for the ISE Program with Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services where she delivered direct services to help many clients establish successful self-employment ventures. She has a BA degree in Human Resource Management from William Penn College in 1988 and earned a Master's degree in Vocational Rehabilitation counseling from Drake University in May of 1996. Kim has also completed Deaf-Blind certification at Northern Illinois University.

Emily Wharton began her employment with IDB as the new Technology Director on October 28. IDB veterans may re-

member Emily because she graduated from our Orientation Center in 1998. Em-



ily earned her BA in English from Drake University in 1997 and her Master of Fine Arts in Writing from Hamline University in 2005. She has earned national certifications in Literary Braille and Orientation and Mobility. Since 1998, Emily has worked at BLIND, Incorporated in Minneapolis, Minnesota and has been leading that organization's technology unit since 2002. During her tenure with Blind, Inc. Emily developed award winning curriculums for Braille and Assistive Technology, managed information technology services, and served as the center's accessibility expert. In recognition of her work in developing a new method for adults to learn Braille, Emily received the 2012 Touch of Genius Prize for Innovation from the National Braille Press. The following year, she was presented with the 2013 Jacob Bolotin Award by the National Federation of the Blind for her outstanding contribution to Braille Literacy.

Please join me in welcoming both Kim and Emily to the agency.

Sincerely,  
Richard Sorey



# IDB's White Cane Day Celebration

## October 15 open house marks national observance

The U.S. Congress designated October 15 as White Cane Safety Day in 1964. This annual observance has become an important opportunity to recognize the accomplishments of blind and visually impaired Americans while honoring the simple, highly effective tool used by them to get around in their daily lives. Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB) staff, members of the public, and special guests came together at an open house featuring exhibits, presentations, panel discussions, and building tours—reminding all Iowans of the excellent rehabilitation services available in our state.

The afternoon began with exhibits highlighting the wide range of IDB's services. A presentation about the history of the long

white cane was followed by a reading of the 2013 White Cane Safety Day proclamation signed by Governor Terry Branstad. Two panel discussions followed. A travel-oriented panel consisted of three blind individuals from different walks of life. They answered questions on how the long white cane helps them navigate the world and achieve their goals. The second panel focused on employment issues for those with vision loss from both the employee's and employer's perspective. Excellent insights were shared by representatives from Hy-Vee, the Iowa Department of Human Rights, and Nationwide.

It was a great afternoon at IDB. We look forward to next year, the 50th White Cane Safety Day. ♦



Rehabilitation teacher Vivian Ver Huel spoke about teaching travel techniques to visually impaired Iowans.



IDB Director Richard Sorey welcomed guests and read the Governor's proclamation of White Cane Safety Day.



IDB's Rick Dressler shared some film footage of early cane travel classes on the State of Iowa's Capitol grounds.



Deena Cross and Marcella Edmonds worked the Iowa Department for the Blind's Library exhibit.



IDB's Michael Barber demonstrates the usefulness of iOS and other devices to Kaari Kreitlow of Mason City.



An employment panel included Heidi Smith and Lynsie Hanssen of the Iowa Department of Human Rights.



Linda Stone of Marshalltown shared some humorous personal experiences during the travel panel discussion.



Audience members asked many good questions during Q&A sessions after each panel.



Michelle Fischbach, Talent Acquisition Manager from Nationwide, comments during the employment panel.



Iowa Commission for the Blind board member Joe Van Lent listens to the employment panel discussion.



# Bettina Dolinsek, first blind CrossFit Level 1 Trainer

## Constantly varied, high-intensity, functional movement brings results



Left to Right: Bettina Dolinsek and Randy Landgrebe spent time with CrossFit pioneer Greg Amundson in California; Randy checks Bettina's weight training form during a workout; Bettina with husband, Cody Dolinsek.

Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB) Field Operations Secretary Bettina Dolinsek (known as “B”) sat at her desk a couple of years ago feeling conflicted. Here she was head of the department’s Employee Wellness Committee wondering how she could encourage other employees to exercise and be active when she was feeling so overweight and sluggish herself. She decided the best response was to get moving.

Library Program Administrator Randy Landgrebe had been a CrossFit enthusiast for a number of years and wanted to share his expertise with other staff members. B took Randy up on his offer to join in daily CrossFit workouts in IDB’s basement gym.

After overcoming her own initial resistance to the challenging workouts, B experienced positive physical and mental results and she “got hooked.” Randy worked with her closely, using a process of description and touch to convey the ideas and form necessary to perform movements safely and effectively. B says the journey to her goal has been a process of facing and overcoming fears, “I’ve literally been through blood, sweat and tears.” “Shaking like a leaf,” thinking she could not

perform CrossFit’s varied moves such as box jumps, pull ups, and handstands, she pressed on with Randy’s support. He saw something in her—“the internal athlete” that longed to be released.

As her experience with the CrossFit philosophy and community deepened, she realized that she would like to become a trainer like her coach. Already steeped in the IDB philosophy that the blind can achieve anything they set their mind to, B’s efforts culminated in a recent trip to undergo the testing necessary to be certified as a Level 1 CrossFit Trainer at NorCal CrossFit in San Jose, California. The rigorous process includes group classes with breakout workout sessions. Randy accompanied B, serving as her accommodation.

CrossFit, as a company, took great interest in Bettina’s journey, granting her a scholarship for the trip and featuring her story in company publicity as she succeeded in her goal of Level 1 CrossFit certification.

When asked how she felt to be the first blind person to achieve this goal, B said, “I found a passion and

*| Continued on Page 22 |*

## Learning Life's Lessons

By Barb Weigel  
IL Project Specialist



Becky Criswell with an early Independent Living client.

**O**n August 15, 2013, Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB) staff bid farewell to longtime employee, Becky Criswell. From its inception, Becky has been a part of the department's Independent Living (IL) program. But Becky's connection to the agency goes back to her childhood. Her father, Jim Witte, worked at IDB's Orientation Center as a travel instructor. Becky has fond memories of Center students coming to their home for supper, followed by a night of card playing. As a life-long horse lover, she would pretend their white canes were stick ponies and she would gallop all over the house with them. She would then "stable" them somewhere, but nobody seemed to think this helped with the "roundup" of their canes when it was time to go home. Becky remembers attending events at the Orientation Center such as Halloween parties, complete with dunking for apples and other games. She also recalls a wild game dinner, with strange things on the menu like snake, and wonderful holiday parties with singing, storytelling, and fun around a huge, beautifully decorated tree in IDB's Rec Room.

Not surprisingly, when the little girl grew up, she went to work at the department.

Unbeknownst to her, Becky was one of the first four people hired to be a Rehabilitation Teacher who would help implement the Independent Living program in 1980. Department leadership had recognized the need for a division to assist elderly Iowans with vision loss to continue to function in their own homes.

Those four teachers traveled throughout the state teaching skills such as the use of a typewriter, dialing a rotary phone, and the use of talking calculators and clocks. Some of today's modern conveniences such as talking wrist watches did not exist yet. Closed Circuit Televisions (CCTVs) were just appearing on the market and were large and difficult to transport. Much like today's teachers, they promoted the use of the Iowa Department for the Blind's library services. However, it involved using record players and records rather than the digital books we have today.

The establishment of the Independent Living program brought a surge in the number of referrals to the agency beyond the initial ten clients. The number grew from approximately 500 per year to well over 900. This growth was largely due to an increase in the number of older individuals referred. Prior to the IL program, older individuals comprised only about one-third of the department's total annual referrals. In ten-year's time, that grew to about two-thirds and has held pretty steady ever since.

When asked what she liked most about her job as a teacher, Becky said, "I truly enjoyed working with individuals as they developed the skills of blindness and regained the confidence they needed to live life on

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their terms. I met a lot of wonderful people along the way, and I can safely say that I learned so much from them – life lessons that I hope will continue to carry me forward. I got to witness first-hand the power found in a positive attitude, a zest for life that never wanes regardless of age or circumstance, a strong spirit, an openness to change, and courage to push through fears.”

In 1990, under Creig Slayton’s leadership, Becky was promoted to Independent Living Supervisor. At that time, the program had grown to include 6 Independent Living (IL) Teachers, 6 Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Teachers and 3 support staff.

In 1994 job classifications merged so there were no longer separate groups of IL and VR teachers. This affected changes in funding that prevented the division from filling vacancies. The merger left the Independent Living program with a total of 9 rehab teachers traveling the state.

Becky said, “A constant challenge has been the delivery of a meaningful level of service while continuing to respond to a high rate of referrals. The IL program has always considered the provision of training in blindness techniques as a core service – the one that provides the greatest positive impact to those served and one that is not provided elsewhere.”

Under Becky’s leadership, IL teachers began providing group training experiences, including Senior Orientation and later with the addition of community-based training. When asked what she likes most about the program, Becky said, “IL directs its services to, and places as a priority, that segment of the population that can be so easily overlooked and often marginalized by the rest of society. In so doing it is constantly fed and renewed by the very beauty and strength of the human spirit that it helps bring forth.

As a supervisor it really has been my privilege to be part of a team that is highly motivated, extremely dedicated, very creative, willing to be flexible with each other—with their clients—and with me, and that never loses faith in the abilities and value of those they serve. The Independent Living staff are all experts, very professional in their conduct (but at the same time able to make those important personal connections), and solid in their belief that it is okay to be blind. This positive philosophy of blindness is so fundamental to their approach to work that it can almost be taken for granted, but its importance is something they never overlook.”

Becky leaves IDB with over thirty years of service at the department. In her retirement, she plans to do a little traveling, complete some projects at home, explore new interests, and renew old ones. This includes more time with her beloved horses. Becky will be greatly missed and is wished all the best in her much deserved retirement! ♦

*For more information on other independent living services, call (800) 362-2587 or e-mail [barb.weigel@blind.state.ia.us](mailto:barb.weigel@blind.state.ia.us)*



Nami Wallace, Jim Witte, and Becky Criswell at the 100th Anniversary of the IDB building in 2012.



## Broadening Horizons with the Right Attitude

By Betty Hansen  
Deaf-Blind Specialist

John Davis is Peterbilt of Council Bluff's new inventory control maintenance worker. He polishes the chrome on the merchandise, re-folds clothing items, and dusts and polishes display shelves. "He is a great employee," parts manager Rick Tames reports. "I wish all of my employees were this dedicated."

John Davis's story starts a little over a year ago when his position was eliminated at a car dealership where he had been working for 3½ years. With a strong work history, John was sure that he would find employment rather quickly, but learned that it is not so easy going it alone. After applying unsuccessfully for every type of job imaginable in the Omaha-Council Bluffs area—from fast food establishments to car dealerships to big box stores—John contacted the Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB) under the advisement of the local Iowa Workforce Development office. Terry Osterhaus, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor at IDB, met with John at his home. As they got to know each other, Terry quickly assessed John's work ethic and skills and the two men formulated a plan to continue the job search. One concern that John had was how to respond to questions on applications asking if he had any disability that might prevent him from doing the job. Terry introduced him to the Ruby hand-held electronic magnifier, a device that could help him perform many tasks visually and can be used to read print. John used the Ruby to fill out job applications. He continues to use the magnifier in his work at his current job.

"It was a long year," John explained, "not having control of your finances, to not even having health insurance. Such



John Davis and Rick Tames of Peterbilt of Council Bluffs

circumstances impacts how a person perceives life. I'm older than most of the younger workers who are applying for the same job. They can do more work in a shorter amount of time. While working with Terry, I received the support and advice from him I needed, which in turn helped me change my attitude from 'I'm not so sure how to go about this' to 'I can do this'."

A short time after meeting Terry, John was introduced to another IDB team member, David Lenz, Employment Specialist. David worked in tandem with Terry on the job search. "I really appreciated their team work," John recalls. It was not long before a strong job lead came along—David Lenz had ties at Peterbilt of Council Bluffs. "I drove by Peterbilt many times over the years without giving it a second thought," Davis noted.

"David introduced me to Rick Tames, parts manager at Peterbilt of Council Bluffs. I filled out an application and was pretty much hired before the formality of talking to the corporate office was completed. I started working the Tuesday after Memorial

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## Talking Tech w/ Michael Barber

### The Choice Is Yours: Two Note Takers Compared

Over the last 22 years, I have had the opportunity to experience many different note-taking devices ranging from the Braille 'n' Speak from Blazie Engineering to the BrailleNote and BrailleSense. Each machine has its own distinct advantages and disadvantages. I have used them for both work and leisure activities. What follows is a blow-by-blow comparison of two recently updated note takers, the BrailleNote Apex and the BrailleSense U2. The views I express in this article are mine alone and are derived from my own personal experience test driving these two devices. I invite you to look at the comparisons I offer below and make your own informed decision.

#### Features and Findings

- Price - If you purchase online, the price of the BrailleNote Apex QT or BT is \$5,495.00. The price of the BrailleSense U2 QT or BT is \$5,595.00. Local dealers may offer different pricing.
- QWERTY Keyboards - The QWERTY keyboard on the BrailleSense U2 QT has somewhat larger keys than the original BrailleSense QT which provides greater ease of typing. Additionally, the keys are configured in more of a USB keyboard configuration, with an Alt key to the left of the spacebar and another Alt Key two keys to the right of the spacebar. It also has a Windows key where one would expect that gets the user back to the main menu every time. The arrow keys are in the familiar upside-down T configuration, and the Enter Key is where one would expect it to be. The QWERTY keyboard on the BrailleNote Apex has smaller keys which are more difficult to type on and are not configured in the same fashion as I have described above. It is more difficult to locate the arrow keys, the slash key, the Delete key, the Enter Key, and so forth.
- The keys on the BrailleSense U2 QT and BT keyboard are quieter than those on either of the Apex units.
- Battery Life - The battery depletion on the BrailleNote Apex is much more rapid than that of the BrailleSense U2. For example, if I have both units fully charged and let them sit overnight, I will find that the BrailleNote Apex will lose at least 20 to 30% of its charge while the BrailleSense U2 will show a minimal loss of perhaps 2%. I should note here that the BrailleNote Apex can be put into a "deep sleep" mode which drastically improves battery charge conservation.
- Both units have a removable battery.
- The BrailleSense U2 can read Word 2007 or 2010 files which use the .Docx extension. The latest version of KeySoft 9.3 released a little over a month and a half ago has enabled the BrailleNote Apex to do the same.
- Both note takers will read PDF files.
- Both note takers have both built-in Bluetooth and wireless capability.
- Onboard GPS Receiver and Compass - The BrailleSense U2 units have an onboard compass and GPS receiver. The BrailleNote Apex does not. Users must have a

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Bluetooth capable GPS receiver for the Apex. There is no compass with the Apex. Both units will still require the Sendero Maps software.

- LCD Display - The BrailleSense U2 BT unit has the LCD display while the BrailleSense U2 QT and BrailleNote Apex units do not. The LCD display on the BrailleSense U2 BT unit is flippable allowing for deaf-blind and sighted communication.
- Onboard Memory - The BrailleNote Apex has 8GB of onboard memory while the BrailleSense U2 boasts 32GB of onboard memory.
- iPhone Interface - The BrailleSense U2 units will only interface with version 6 of the software while the BrailleNote Apex will work with both versions 5 and 6.
- 18 and 32-Cell Displays - The BrailleSense U2 BT and QT only come in 32-cell models. The BrailleNote BT and QT come in either the 18 or 32-cell models.
- NLS Talking Books - Both units will play the NLS Talking Books.
- Learning Ally Books - The BrailleNote Apex is currently able to play these books. The BrailleSense U2 does not now have this capability but will soon, according to HIMS-Inc.
- Both units are capable of sending and receiving e-mail.
- Both units have web browsing capability.
- Having used both units, I can safely say that I believe the BrailleSense unit is the more stable unit. I have found that one must reset the BrailleNote unit much more often than the BrailleSense unit.

## Conclusions

My experience at work tells me that most Iowa Department for the Blind clients use note takers for taking notes, reading Learning Ally books, and perhaps sending and receiving e-mail. They may also use them for web browsing when they are away from their laptops. The fact that both units have the ability to connect to wireless networks using built-in wireless cards is a shared advantage. If a student needs to read a PDF file quickly, both units will also serve that purpose. For the student or employee using a QWERTY keyboard, the BrailleSense U2 QT would seem to be the unit of choice because of the Windows-style keyboard configuration that most users are more familiar with. Add to that the fact that the keyboard is arranged so there is more room for their fingers to work without being so crowded like they may be with the BrailleNote Apex QT. But (and this is true whether or not one uses the QWERTY or Braille keyboard), the feature that makes the BrailleSense U2 my unit of choice is the superior battery life. If a user is in a setting where they are away from electric power for most of the day, the BrailleSense U2 is going to operate longer than the BrailleNote Apex. Couple with that the fact that the BrailleSense U2 comes with 4 times the memory on-board and that solidifies my preference of it over the BrailleNote Apex. ♦

## Beth Hirst, Assistant Library Director retires



Beth Hirst poses with an appropriately themed baseball cake at her retirement party June 14, 2013.

**B**eth Hirst recapped her 34-year career at a recent retirement gathering in the Assembly Room at the Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB). After working her way up through the ranks in the Iowa Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped to the position of Assistant Library Director, Beth served as State Coordinator for Accessible Instructional Materials, managed the audio recording program, Braille production, and the Instructional Materials Center, and regularly hosted the Elizabeth Perowsky Workshop and Luncheon that honors Library volunteers. Through the years she put to use her excellent writing and proofreading skills as a contributing editor of the Open

Door Library newsletter and the White Cane magazine. Displaying depth of insight and a philosophic bent, her pithy articles for those publications reflect her creative and original outlook on life. Beth shared a personal mission statement that well sums up her philosophy:

*I believe: That with imagination, I can create whatever I can envision; that an attitude of optimism creates a positive environment and draws in good people, things, and situations; that life is meant to be joyful.*

*I choose to lead: With encouragement; with trust and an open mind; with integrity and respect.*

*I intend to act as a role model at all times, recognizing that I may never know what influence I may have on another; therefore, I choose to be a positive influence.*

Beth headed up a “small but mighty” staff that valued her leadership. There always seemed to be something going on. She was going full speed right up until her last week. From June 19-21, 2013 Beth attended the first-ever Braille Summit at the Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, Massachusetts, the oldest school for the blind in the United States. Her contribution was a presentation on Braille Production that can be viewed online at <http://www.perkins.org/news-events/news/first-ever-braille-summit.html> (the video is labeled “Braille Production”). It is an excellent summary of the work she has been involved in and a unique view of how the Braille production process works at IDB.

Beth retired on June 28, 2013. She is wished safe travels as she spends quality time with family, friends, and relatives. ♦



# A Tribute to Susie Stageberg

by Rachel Bussan

Editor's Note: Reader Advisor Susie Stageberg retired on September 20, 2013 after 13 years of service.

Hello, I am Rachel, Susie Stageberg's counterpart, the Iowa Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped's other Reader Advisor. Susie was the one who trained me for my job. I would say that she's still training me. I could go into our job duties, but that's just the nuts and bolts of work. Susie taught me things that were way more important. She changed the way I see blind people, and she helped make me a better person.

One of the first things a new employee at the Iowa Department for the Blind goes through is training in the Orientation Center. There, the employee attends classes while wearing sleepshades along with blind and visually impaired adults [Orientation Center students]. The goal is to teach you that people who are blind can do the same things as people who are sighted. I left Orientation believing that.

But Susie taught me that living life as a blind person is not "extraordinary" or "special." In fact, calling Susie one of those words is one of the fastest ways to make her mad. She's a working mom with a husband, four kids, and a sense of style that I will never, ever be able to replicate. A good example of this would be the Diaper Story.

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Reader Advisors Jody Aldini, Susie Stageberg, and Rachel Bussan

## From the Librarian

I believe that individuals who use the Iowa Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (ILBPH) have a right to the same level of services that users of public libraries do. I also believe that individuals who use the ILBPH have responsibilities equal to those using public libraries.



I have been a public library user for fifty years. I have never had to wait longer than three weeks for library materials I requested. On the other hand, I have probably paid several hundred dollars in fines for overdue, lost, or damaged materials over the years. During that time, I have had to rely on my memory to recall the books I have previously checked out—no public library computer saves, or should save, records of everything a user borrows. Libraries for the blind and physically handicapped universally keep "has had" records for their patrons. Is this a service or an invasion of privacy? Is this good patron service or residual custodialism? The Iowa Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped will be exploring these issues, and more, in the future.

I welcome your feedback as the Library continues to enhance its services to you. We believe all Library users deserve great customer service and top-notch materials. Let me know what it is you need and want from your Library!

*Sincerely,  
Randy Landgrebe*

# BOOKLIST

## Books that delve into "Attitude"

Created by Rachel Bussan,  
Reader Advisor

**BR10241, LT5223,  
DB41029**

***Tapping the Charcoal*, by  
Kenneth Jernigan et al.**

Authors discuss alternative ways of doing routine tasks and achieving dreams, the need for discipline for blind children, and the process of gaining the respect of others. This is part of a series called Kernel Books, which is available in all formats.

**BR14467, DB/RC55216**

***Freedom for the Blind: The Secret Is Empowerment*, by  
James H. Omvig**

A blind attorney and rehabilitation professional outlines ways blind people can enrich and improve their lives and careers. Omvig promotes the development of new philosophies and strategies that challenge traditional methods of rehabilitation for blind persons in the United States.

**DB/RC55481**

***Coping with Vision Loss: Maximizing What You Can See and Do*, by Bill G. Chapman**

Describes the function of the human eye, major causes of vision loss, coping techniques and equipment, educational aids, and sources for assistance when dealing with vision loss.

**BR16647, DB/RC66055**

***Self-esteem and Adjusting with Blindness: the Process of Responding to Life's Demands*, by Dean W. Tuttle**

Analyzes blindness within the context of development of self-esteem and the adjusting process to social and/or physical trauma.

**BR8172, DB31066**

***Walking Alone and Marching Together: a History of the Organized Blind Movement in the United States, 1940-1990*, by Floyd W. Matson**

A history of blind people's individual and collective accomplishments, and what they have thought, felt, said, and aspired to.

**BR19185, DB72232**

***Undaunted by Blindness: Concise Biographies of 400 People Who Refused to Let Visual Impairment Define Them*, by Clifford E. Olstrom**

Director of the Tampa Light-house for the Blind presents

four hundred biographies of notable blind people in various occupations and from different historical periods. Includes profiles of Irish composer Turlogh O'Carolan (1670-1738), American publisher Joseph Pulitzer (1847-1911), and Cuban ballerina Alicia Alonso (b. 1921).

**BR14512, DB/RC51505**

***Touch the Top of the World: A Blind Man's Journey to Climb Farther Than the Eye Can See*, by Erik Weißenmayer**

In this adventure-packed memoir, the author recalls rebelling against becoming blind by age fifteen. Relates acquiring a passion for mountaineering and developing the character traits that enabled him to succeed. Covers his climbing exploits and his wedding on top of Mount Kilimanjaro. ♦

*To request these or other titles contact your Reader's Advisor at (800) 362-2587.*



"The moment you doubt whether you can fly, you cease for ever to be able to do it."

--J.M. Barrie, *Peter Pan*



# Where I Have Been

by Rebecca Swainey  
Braille Teacher (Retired)



Editor's Note: Orientation Center Braille teacher Rebecca Swainey retired this past summer. Below are Rebecca's reminiscences of 34 years of service.

**I**t hardly seems possible so many years have passed since I first walked through the front door at 524 Fourth Street in Des Moines. It was January 1979 and I had come in response to a newspaper ad. I had called and learned the position was for a Reader Advisor in the Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped of the Iowa Commission for the Blind. Until that point I had never heard of the Commission. However, I had worked through high school as an assistant in my hometown public library and recently received teaching certification from Simpson College. So, I decided to apply.

After testing my ability to alphabetize and my knowledge of authors and titles, Librarian Duane Gerstenberger and Director John Taylor hired me that very afternoon. I enjoyed the work, which was done manually at that time. I pulled book cards from rotary tub files and noted them in the patrons' files to be sent out, then re-filed the cards when the books were returned. As much as I liked the work, I had been upfront with everyone at my interview that I was expecting my third child in July and would not be able to return in the allotted six weeks. I was strongly encouraged to call when I was ready to work again.

In January 1981, I received a call from Sine Olesen, the new Librarian, asking if I would consider returning. I was delighted to

say "yes." I was assigned the first station, with patron files from A-G. The second station covered H-N and the third was O-Z. At the third station was a woman named Dot-tie and we joked a lot about Dorothy in Oz. Among the many patron files I managed were those of the Center's Braille teacher, Louise Eads, and the Home Ec teacher, Cynthia Bartz (now Qloud).

In December of that year, the Orientation Center began an alumni newsletter. Typing teacher Beulah Bartlett gathered, edited, and produced the newsletter as well as keeping all records and statistics for the Center. She also took care of the clerical work—reservations, ticket sales, and attendance records—for the annual alumni banquets—all duties I would eventually take over.

A look through those old newsletters brought back many memories of events both large and small that have marked the passage of the years.

In July of 1982, Nancy Norman became Interim Director of the Iowa Commission for the Blind following the resignation of John Taylor. Like me, she came to the agency knowing nothing about blindness. She made it clear from the beginning that she knew how to run an agency, but when it came to issues concerning blindness she would defer to her staff for their knowledge and expertise. She also quickly ended a standing policy of staff formally referring to one another by Mr., Miss, or Mrs. by announcing "I don't know about all of you, but I'm Nancy."

In May 1983, John Wellman, Polk County Public Defender, replaced Richard Crawford of Sioux City on the Commission Board.

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In the summer of 1983 the Commission's latest publication was announced—a new Braille manual entitled Learning the Braille System: Touch and Go by instructors Revanne Duckett and Louise Eads—a textbook we continue to use to this day.

In April of 1984, Cynthia Bartz moved into one of the staff apartments.

Creig Slayton's first day as the newest member of the Orientation staff was kicked off on April 2 with the staff playing a practical joke on the students by announcing plans to hire a sighted person for the purpose of giving tours—to give things a more professional polish. After a huge verbal explosion, students were laughingly told “April Fool.”

Students received clearance to hear President Reagan live at Veterans Auditorium.

In May 1985, plans were announced for a 60th Anniversary Celebration of the Commission—1925-1985—a three-day event to be held in the fall.

Remodeling of Home Ec began in June and was completed in time for showing during the anniversary. Dave Hauge, industrial arts instructor, along with Center students, built what is now known as “the shop kitchen”, designed to match the other three kitchens built by the contractor.

Our film “Moving On” was entered in several film contests and scored impressive ratings.

The Des Moines Skywalker ran two articles featuring the Commission's programs and things blind guys were doing in Des Moines.

Beulah Bartlett announced her intention to retire after 18 years as the typing teacher. That November, the Orientation Alumni Banquet theme focused on Beulah and her husband, Don.

In December 1986, one article read “Farewell to Beulah” and another announced “Typing Marches on: Rebecca Henning (nee Swainey) Enters.”

In 1987, Governor Branstad downsized Iowa's state government and the Commission was put under the Department of Human Rights along with several other smaller agencies. Many consumers and staff felt strongly that the Commission needed to be a distinct presence with more direct access to the Governor. This led to several individuals fighting long and hard, spending many hours at the Capitol arguing our case. Notable among them was Kristal Hagemoser, a Center student. Through their efforts, the Commission became “The Iowa Department for the Blind” on July 1, 1988—returning us to the desired direct relationship. Staff of the Department joined together to sign a ‘Declaration of Independence’ to demonstrate the importance placed on this status. The declaration was later enlarged, framed, and placed in a prominent position near the Assembly Room.

In June of 1989, Larry Sidwell became the newest VR counselor covering the northwest corner of the state.

In September 1990, the first “Orientation on the Road” was held in Dubuque. Instructors were Jim Witte and Cynthia Bartz (Cip) from the Orientation Center, rehabilitation counselor Verdell Schmale, VR teacher Marcia Bauer, and Independent Living teacher Vivian Vahling (Ver Huel).

On September 21 and 22, the Department hosted a Deaf-Blind Conference. Betty Hansen, along with many others, worked hard putting it all together. During the conference, presentations were given by two Center alums: Kristal Hagemoser (Platt) spoke on genetic counseling and Sandy

# Gearing Up for College with Ready – Set – Go

by Laurie Merryman  
Technology Specialist



Ready-Set-Go participants packed many experiences into just a few days as they explored the world of college life.

Late summer is a time for most kids on break to relish their last days of freedom. However, eleven blind and visually impaired teens chose instead to embark on an experience called Ready – Set – Go. Held on the campus of Iowa State University from July 31 through August 3, 2013, the conference was designed by the Iowa Department for the Blind's (IDB) Transition Program staff to give participants a taste of college life while touring the campus and meeting with ISU staff. Several blind college students were also guest presenters at the conference and shared their own experiences of how they adjusted to the world of higher education.

Topics covered during the conference included:

- Services available at the disability services office
- Access to print materials and options for getting books in alternative formats

- Options for using technology to take notes
- Challenges of the freshman year – how college differs from high school
- Involvement in social activities and balancing social life with the demands of attending school
- Establishing good relationships with college instructors
- Advocating for college needs

The teens also got the opportunity to experience first-hand several facets of college life—getting around campus, experiencing a college library, attending class in a lecture hall, riding the bus system, living in a dorm, eating in the cafeteria, and taking advantage of a campus fitness facility.

This was the first year the IDB Transition program offered the Ready – Set – Go Conference and both participants and planners pronounced it a huge success. ♦



# |business enterprises

## Market time

By Roger Erpelding  
BEP Program Administrator



**Dependable**

### Business Enterprises Program

The Business Enterprises Program (BEP) provides opportunities for legally blind Vocational Rehabilitation clients of the Iowa Department for the Blind to manage their own businesses – operating vending machines, road side vending sites, or snack bar/catering services. These businesses can be found in federal, state, county, municipal, and private locations throughout Iowa. BEP operators are dependable, professional, and adaptable. Whether you are considering a new career path or seeking vending solutions for your location, BEP provides solid options.

For more information about getting involved or doing business with Iowa BEP, contact:  
Roger Erpelding, Program Administrator  
515-281-1338, or in Iowa call 800-362-2587  
email: roger.erpelding@iowadfb.state.us

**Professional**



**Adaptable**

New panels for the BEP traveling marketing display were featured in the exhibits for the White Cane celebration.

In the summer of 2012, the staff of the Business Enterprises Program (BEP), several blind BEP managers, and Terry Smith from the Blind Entrepreneurs Initiative met to develop a five-year strategic plan. Marketing our program is definitely a part of this effort. In fact, Goal 5 of the plan states, “Increase the visibility of the Business Enterprises Program by developing a multifaceted marketing approach.”

Strategy 1 of this goal states, “Develop a web-based marketing approach that markets the program and allows for the presence of individual operators.” In response, the Elected Committee of Blind managers appointed a three member subcommittee to work on this strategy. Steps taken so far include development of a list of all blind managers and their preferred contact

information, and developing fresh web text that will emphasize the positive aspects of managers as independent business people. This is in accord with strategy 2 which states: “Update the department’s Business Enterprises Program web page.”

Strategy 3 states: “Develop new targeted marketing materials in both print and electronic formats.” This has involved taking new pictures of several managers and their updated facilities. We have also begun the process of updating our brochures for distribution. Spanish language versions of some of the Iowa Department for the Blind’s promotional literature were delivered to IDB recently, including the translated BEP handout.

Strategy 4 involves an ongoing effort at our annual manager’s meeting to network with each other to increase our visibility through

marketing. This may involve “cold calls” on business who have vending or food service, networking among managers to exchange referrals, and distributing marketing materials. Our next meeting of managers is on October 4, and as a result, the strategic plan is on our agenda.

There are many ways to market our program beyond networking with each other and mutual cooperation between managers and department staff. Strategy 5 involves reaching out to others with a call to action. “Encourage all operators to join and get active with the Iowa Automatic Merchandising Association (IAMA).” IAMA is a vending industry group that is part of a national organization. IAMA (Iowa Automatic Merchandising Association) is a state council of NAMA (National Automatic Merchandising Association). IAMA is dedicated to

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providing timely and relevant information concerning the trends and changes in the vending industry. Not just an opportunity for program expansion, it's an excellent forum for others in the industry to become acquainted with our program and our role as independent businesspeople in the community.

In addition to this, there are two national consumer organizations which involve Randolph-Sheppard blind managers. Each group holds a national convention, as well as a national conference. Joining one of these groups helps blind managers learn about other state's programs, and prospects and problems of blind managers throughout the country--another way to market.

Each manager will vary in their marketing approach. Some will be quite satisfied with their current locations and facilities in our program, and will minimize their outreach efforts. Others will always "want more" and will use an aggressive approach to promote the program and their individual business acumen to garner additional locations. In many cases, this will involve total independence from our program. The manager will reach out and call on businesses, respond to bid opportunities, and purchase their own equipment

and stock. These motivated managers use our program as a "springboard" to better their lives.

Consider the methods of Carl Drees, blind manager for the Wallace Building with an accompanying vending route. He has reached out into the community to obtain several sites outside of our program. And he has used a number of methods to achieve this goal.

One of the firms Carl obtained vending at was in response to a bid proposal for teachers' lounges and one junior high school in West Des Moines. Although he no longer services this account, these locations gave him excellent experiences in dealing with the school district, and how to win a bid as proposed in an RFP.

National Bankruptcy came Carl's way in a different manner. His wife went to work for this firm, and when they needed vending, Lori had a ready answer. Although this firm has not grown as large as first expected, Carl can use this firm as a base to help establish his reputation in providing excellent customer service and product.

Carl obtained vending at MorphoTrust in a third marketing manner. They do a lot of work with the Iowa Department of Transportation; Carl provides vending at their

driver's license station in rural Ankeny. They saw Carl's vending at DOT, liked it, liked Carl, and the process moved forward. This firm is currently served by beverage and snack vending. As this firm grows, cold food may be added, as there are few food options in the area of this firm. Employees receive free coffee, so when Carl began to supply ice coffee products in his beverage machine, the company gave him an equivalent to what it costs them to give their employees this free beverage.

Carl has used the Yellow Pages, word of mouth, direct mail, and cold calls over the years. He checks the local business record for possible leads. He also brings product samples with him when he makes contact.

Before coming into our program, he ran a locksmith business, followed by years of entrepreneurship in a small town bar. Carl's advice? "Market yourself, whether in service or product. The service will keep them coming back, because you can buy product anywhere. People will do business with those they know, like, and trust."

Does marketing work? When measured by results and success, the answer is a definite "yes!" ♦

Tigges, rehabilitation counselor for south-east Iowa, presented information on the diseases of the eye.

In 1991, the newly remodeled co-ed gym was completed.

In March of that year, we experienced a deep sense of loss at the passing of Joe Balderston. Joe had been one of four rehabilitation counselors covering the state in 1959 and had served as counselor and supervisor of counselors until his retirement in 1979.

In August 1993, the Center remained in operation despite having the Ruan Grand Prix race course running along two sides of the building. However, sanitation concerns shut us down later that month when we experienced the effects of the “Flood of ‘93.” The city’s water crisis left the building with no water for showers or flushing toilets.

In 1995, first home ec teacher Ruth Schroeder reminisced of the early days of the Center and commented on Jim Witte’s retirement.

Sandy Tigges became the new Orientation Program Administrator.

In January 1996, Larry Sidwell joined the Orientation Center staff.

In June 1999, newest Orientation Center staff member, Mark Edge, was introduced.

That summer, Center students toured the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition in Kansas City on a trip I arranged.

Jim Crawford’s “Ode to a Tie,” written to follow the Alumni Banquet’s theme “Ties to the Center,” clearly demonstrated why he was our poet laureate.

In 2001, Dave Hauge became the Center’s Rehabilitation Referral Specialist.

In 2002, Ric Frambach took over the shop classes.

In 2005, the Rec Room was remodeled.

During August 2006, Dr. Tim Cordes gave an inspirational presentation at College Days.

August 2007, plans were announced for remodeling the third and fourth floors. Both floors were gutted and the Assembly Room used for storage and Library operations, resulting in cancellation of the annual Orientation alumni banquet for both 2007 and 2008.

November 2008, Orientation students moved into apartments at AIB as more of IDB was torn up for remodeling.

April 2009, students moved back from AIB. Remodeling was completed in June.

October 31, 2009, Alumni Banquet was once again held as part of the Golden Anniversary Celebration—this turned out to be the last Orientation Center banquet held to date.

The last Orientation Newsletter came out at that time.

Winter 2010, the first edition of the White Cane Magazine came out in its current format. I served as the Orientation Center’s Contributing Editor.

April 2012, an all grown-up Nami Crawford Wallace, daughter of Jim Crawford, joined the Orientation staff.

July 2013—Having taught many students and seen many changes in the Department, I realized the time had come for me to move on. I retired on July 5, 2013.

On July 19, 2013, Tracy Mosman became the next Orientation Center Braille instructor. Best wishes to you Tracy! ♦



By Linda Slayton

The word “attitude” has acquired a bad reputation for very little reason. It has become one of the scapegoats of society. “Dude, lose the ‘tude” and “Missy, you’d better drop the attitude” represent a connotation the word does not fully deserve. Admittedly, we all sometimes have bad attitudes about things, but they exist simultaneously with other attitudes that are extremely positive. The fact of the matter is that telling someone not to have an attitude is like saying “Stop breathing.” The problem is not with the meaning of the word, it is with the one-sided negative usage society has recently delegated to it. As with the word “blind,” “attitude” is simply a word. It is our own interpretation that defines what quality it acquires when we use it.

It somehow seems significant that “attitude” and “blind” are words that carry preconceived notions having little to do with their actual meanings. It is also significant that when initially dealing with my blindness, these two words became instrumental in helping me learn to live with and accept it. Becoming blind is a fear that many people share.



Based on this fear, my attitude toward blindness was negative before I ever started losing my sight. Losing my job, my ability to drive, and suddenly having to ask for help on so many levels only heightened my sense of despair. My attitude toward blindness was that there was not anything much worse that could happen to you. That was before I learned more about both attitudes and blindness.

Someone once pointed out that using the word “blind” instead of “visually impaired” does not really change anything. This concept made a big impact on me and how I felt about being blind. I can use any word I want, but, basically, the meaning remains the same. Either word means lacking the full use of vision. Our eyes do not function the way they are supposed to function. It is not about the word, it is about the facts. The way to change our circumstance is to change our attitude. Once our attitude is in line with the facts, then we are ready to make progress toward the choices that bring us to the life we want. Some may be thinking that the life anyone wants does not include blindness. I say it is still about attitude. No one, blind or sighted, has everything they want in life, but as the song “Soak up the Sun” says, “It’s not having what you

want; it’s wanting what you’ve got.”

Working toward positive attitudes and, more precisely, positive attitudes about blindness starts with listening to one’s inner dialogue. Those same negative sentiments that society uses also become embedded in our own minds. It is only through self-awareness, experience, and insight that we come to understand that both blindness and our attitude toward it reflect more than our perceptions. They reflect our ability to succeed. It’s like the song “High Hopes” in which an ant seeks to do the impossible by moving a rubber tree plant. “Everyone knows an ant – can’t – move a rubber tree plant.” Except he did! ♦

*Linda Slayton is a freelance writer living in Des Moines. She can be reached by email at [lcslayton@yahoo.com](mailto:lcslayton@yahoo.com)*



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Day. I like that it is only four miles from my home town, and I like the company's atmosphere. I didn't realize how intricate and valuable the trucking business is to the area. These truckers rely on good, quality products and Peterbilt provides just that. I am proud to be a part of their lives. There are so many people there whose name I haven't learned yet, but I look forward to meeting them all. One of the greatest perks is meeting the truckers' pets. Peterbilt allow the pets to come onto the showroom floor. The pets are as important to the truckers' business as the parts needed to keep the truck on the road; they are a part of the family. I feel so fortunate to meet the extended family," said Davis.

"The Iowa Department for the Blind has my recognition and respect. The IDB knows how to work with individuals with vision loss. As I started working with the Iowa Department for the Blind, I realized that I need to raise my effort and horizons if I'm to succeed. The Iowa Department for the Blind's employment specialist found the right employer match for me. I am working 42-43 hours right now and plan to cut back on the hours during the winter months before returning to the 40-plus hours per week work schedule next spring. Peterbilt is a great company to work for, they are very flexible with my work schedule, and they've given me the opportunity to work at a challenging and rewarding job." ♦

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I went after it. One thing I've always said is that you can either lead a mediocre life or a full life and it's up to you. That may mean that the journey's hard and the journey's long but if you have the means within yourself to do it, then go for it."

Her certification gives B the option to teach at a CrossFit gym or open one herself, a goal she holds for the future.

B's accomplishment has generated some media attention. Follow these links: <http://whotv.com/2013/08/28/no-limits-the-blind-crossfit-trainer/>  
<http://whotv.com/2013/08/31/blind-training-participants-crossfit-blindfolded/>  
<http://journal.crossfit.com/2013/10/bettina.tpl>

This story comes to a bittersweet ending for fellow staff and local friends. Both these inspiring individuals leave IDB at the end of November for new adventures. Bettina will join her husband Cody in Texas, where he continues graduate studies. Randy is moving to California to be with his fiancé and pursue further his CrossFit passion. We wish them both the best! ♦

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Once upon a time, I was waiting in line for the bathroom, when I noticed a teenage girl talking to her mom. She wanted to know why there was Braille instructions written on the changing table. I told her that was so a blind person knew how to operate it. The teenager was stunned that a blind person could even change diapers. It seemed weird to me that she was so surprised. Susie survived diaper duty four times over. That's just an ordinary (and smelly) part of being a mom. I hope to keep conveying that sense of ordinary—that a blind person doesn't have to be special to achieve everyday tasks or do anything that they want, really.

The rest of what Susie taught me has nothing to do with blindness, and everything to do with being a better person. She taught me to be brave, to fight for what mattered to me even when my opponents were formidable. She taught me how to laugh at a tough situation instead of scream. She taught me that some people could be trusted. I thank her for all of it. I will miss her, but if she calls and asks for books without spiders, so help me, I will send her a new copy of Charlotte's Web every week for a year. ♦

# NOTES

## Director

Richard Sorey

Richard.Sorey@blind.state.ia.us

## Deputy Director

Bruce Snethen

bruce.snethen@blind.state.ia.us

## Commission for the Blind

Next meeting: Saturday, March 8, 2014,  
10:00 a.m.

Director's Conference Room, IDB

Peggy Elliott, Commission Chair

Sandra Ryan, Member

Joe Van Lent, Member

## Mission:

The Iowa Department for the Blind is the means for persons who are blind to obtain for themselves universal accessibility and full participation in society in whatever roles they may choose, including roles that improve Iowa's economic growth.

- We would love to come speak about blindness at your club or organization's next meeting.
- We also provide training workshops on blindness at your school or office.
- If you have never seen our building and want to learn more about our services and what we provide in our building, we'd love to give you a tour.

Email us at [information@blind.state.ia.us](mailto:information@blind.state.ia.us) or call us at (800) 362-2587 for more information.

# UPCOMING EVENTS

## February 8, 2014

### Iowa Braille Challenge

#### IDB Building, Des Moines, IA

The Braille Challenge® is the only academic competition for blind students in the United States and Canada and encourages blind children of all ages to fine-tune their braille skills. The state contest for Iowa will be held again at the Iowa Department for the Blind in Des Moines, co-sponsor of the event with the Iowa Educational Services for the Blind & Visually Impaired (formerly the Iowa Braille School). For more information, contact Karen Cunningham, (515) 281-1283, [Karen.Cunningham@blind.state.ia.us](mailto:Karen.Cunningham@blind.state.ia.us).

## March 8, 2014

### Iowa Commission for the Blind Meeting

#### IDB Building, Des Moines, IA

Director's Conference Room, 10:00 a.m.

## April 11, 2014

### Elizabeth Perowsky Luncheon and Workshop

#### IDB Building, Des Moines, IA

Volunteers are a precious resource. During this day-long workshop and luncheon, our volunteers will be honored for their service and reminded just how valuable we think they are!

For more information, contact Karen Schweitzer at (515) 281-1241, [Karen.Schweitzer@blind.state.ia.us](mailto:Karen.Schweitzer@blind.state.ia.us).

More upcoming events and details at [www.idbonline.org/news](http://www.idbonline.org/news)



Iowa Dept. for the Blind  
524 Fourth St.  
Des Moines, IA 50309

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## The White Cane Magazine

<http://www.idbonline.org/publications/white-cane>

The White Cane is available in many formats on our web site:

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- Adobe Acrobat (pdf)
- Audio (mp3)
- Braille format (BRF)
- Text-only document (docx)

