

BayLines

Winter, 2016

BayLines



**Bay State
Council of the Blind**

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BSCB E-mail Lists:

BSCB-L is an open e-mail list for discussion of topics of interest to BSCB members and friends. To subscribe, send e-mail to bscb-l-subscribe@acbofma.lists.org.

BSCB-ANNOUNCE is a moderated one-way e-mail list used to disseminate pertinent announcements to members and friends of the Bay State Council of the Blind. To subscribe, send an e-mail request to: bscb-announce-subscribe@acbofma.lists.org.

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From the Editor

Some of you may have noticed that BayLines has not been produced in an audio format for the past few issues. We are no longer able to produce BayLines in cassette format. However, we would like to begin producing BayLines on audio compact disc. The discs will be playable on either a CD player or a computer.

If you wish to receive future issues of BayLines on CD, please contact me as soon as possible after you read this note.

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President's Message Looking to the Future by Brian Charlson

Newsletters almost always focus on what has happened in an organization's recent past. While much of this newsletter does that, I wanted to bring you some thoughts about what can happen in the future. That is, what can happen in the future if we all work together as an organization and as people who care about the lives of people who are blind and visually impaired?

When I was very young, like all of you reading this newsletter, I attended school. During the regular school year, I attended the same public schools as my brothers and sisters. During the summers, I frequently attended the Oregon School for the Blind. The fact that I had the opportunity to attend public school even though I was blind was in great part as the result of many adults, both blind and sighted, advocating that I have that option. Even the programs I attended at the Oregon School for the Blind were

possible do only as the result of people advocating that they be funded and that the state continue to offer the specialized services of a school for the blind.

The provision of quality education for those who are blind and visually impaired continues to require advocacy by those who understand their importance. We, here in Massachusetts, can be thankful that our children can take advantage of the Perkins School for the Blind when they need intensive specialized instruction and can attend schools in their own communities with the support of highly qualified Teachers of the Visually Impaired. We adults need to keep a close watch on these services to assure that they remain relevant and are properly funded. We need to remember that when we were children, others took the time to see to it that we were cared for.

As a young teenager, I got my first job. While I didn't enjoy assembling fishing lures, it did allow me to make a bit of money of my own and learn what it meant to hold down a job. It firmly set the stage for my future as I worked in canneries, assembled kidney machines, and worked for both city and state government. Today's youth need the same exposure to the value of work. The Carroll Center for the Blind, Perkins School for the Blind, and the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind are working together to offer Prevocational Employment Services (PETS). We blind and visually impaired adults who are part of the work force need to offer our services as role models and mentors if we are to have any chance to reduce the 70% unemployment rate our community has experienced for at least the past 50 plus years.

As I sit here at my desk writing this message on my computer, I am reminded of the importance technology has played in my life. While at school, at work and at home, my education, employment, and personal independence have come, in large part, through these machines and the training I received in their use. Today's

college student, office worker, and stay-at-home Mom or Dad, continue to rely on technology. We, as advocates need to remember that without our continued vigilance, these products can and will change in a way that could deny us their use. Think of the stove that has only a touch screen to change the temperature; the treadmill without a means for a blind or visually impaired person to so much as turn them on or off; the high school exam that can only be passed if you can use the computer it is taken on; the web page that can allow you to take courses online or purchase almost anything if you can only find a way to select and press the “submit” button. Without our continued advocacy, those accessibility features we have fought so long and hard for can simply fade away.

There isn't a day that passes that I am not reminded of the benefits I have received as the result of the advocacy efforts of others. When I take advantage of The Ride; when I download a book from the Perkins Braille and Talking Book Library; when I go out with friends to see an audio described movie; when I am sworn-in as a member of a jury; I am thankful for the efforts of others.

We, the members of the blindness community need to remember the part we need to play in our own future and the future of others. We need to take the time to make a difference and I, for one, think we can. The future looks bright and the Bay State Council of the Blind is an important part of that future.

BSCB Board Briefs by Bob Hachey

(Editor's note: This summary begins with the June 2015 BSCB board meeting.)

In June, the board approved the following funding allocations:

\$1,000 for tax preparation; \$1,000 for our BSCB 2015 scholarship recipient; \$300 for ACB Forum raffle tickets; and a \$125 donation to the Disability Law Center.

We began planning for the Fall Conference in November and the Spring Convention in March. Bob Hachey gave a report on the Work Force Innovation Opportunity Act. This law was passed in 2014 and an ACB committee recently commented on implementing regulations. Bob informed the board that his term as Chair of the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind Rehabilitation Council ended in March. The current chair of this council is Bruce Howell.

In August, the board allocated up to \$300 for White Cane Safety Day at the State House in October. Planning continued for the Fall Conference and the Spring Convention. We also got a report from the Budget Committee.

In September, the meeting began with Marcia Dresser resigning as President due to health reasons. Board members expressed their deep appreciation for all that Marcia has done for both BSCB and ACB. Brian Charlson then assumed the role of BSCB President until our next convention as he was First Vice-President. Marcia Dresser then assumed the role of Immediate Past President replacing Bob Hachey. Bob will remain on the board in an ex officio capacity as BayLines Editor. The board elected David Kingsbury to serve as First Vice-president. The board also elected Jim Denham to assume the Director slot vacated by David Kingsbury. BSCB received a donation of \$279.48 from the United Way. BSCB also received proceeds of \$655 from the Brenda Dillon Memorial Walk, which took place during the ACB Convention in July. Steve informed the board that "Council Connection," our monthly internet radio show would soon be available as a podcast. (Editor's note: "Council Connection" is now available as a podcast. You can find it using either a PC,

tablet or SMART phone.) The board created a fund raising committee.

In October, Rick Morin informed the board that BSCB had received 16 donations totaling \$755 in memory of Marcia Dresser who passed away in late September. Jim Denham gave a comprehensive report on plans for our Fall Conference. Planning also moved forward for the Spring Convention.

The board donated \$300 to the Disability Policy Consortium. In November, Rick Morin commended Jim and Caroline Denham for garnering a number of generous donations to help cover the cost of our Fall Conference. The board allocated \$500 for the 2016 Braille Challenge, and \$500 to make Marcia Dresser an ACB Angel. The Angel Program is an ACB fundraiser which allows affiliates to memorialize members and friends who have recently passed away. The board also donated \$100 to the ACB Holiday Auction, and \$200 to Our Space Our Place. Brian reported on a recent meeting of Guide Dog Users of Massachusetts. One of the main topics for this meeting was issues related to discrimination against guide dog users by taxi and shared ride companies. A committee to deal with this issue in more detail was established. Rick reported on MBTA plans to cut costs. It was feared that the MBTA might seek to eliminate the RIDE premium service area, but it looks like that will not happen in the near term. It is likely that fares for both the RIDE and fixed route services will increase in the next fiscal year.

In December, the board allocated funding for four BSCB members to attend the Legislative Seminar. The board congratulated Jim Denham for excellent work on our very successful Fall Conference. BSCB received enough sponsorships to cover the entire cost of the conference, which was very well attended. The board established a Publications Committee to include production of BayLines, management of our website, production of an

updated BSCB brochure and other issues to be determined as needed. The board received lengthy reports on the Spring Convention and the 2016 budget from Frank Ventura. Phil Fernandes was commended for his hard work on our website, which has been improved in recent months.

In January, the board heard another lengthy report from the Spring Convention committee. Brian informed the board that MCB would continue to cover homemaker placements as part of vocational rehabilitation. BLIND Day 2016 will take place at the State House on March 24. The board received reports from the Ride Sharing and Taxi, Publications, and Social Committees. We also received an extensive end-of-year financial report for 2015.

As of December 31, 2015, BSCB had total assets of \$139,854.57, and BSCB incurred an operating loss of -\$4,609.84 for the year.

Save the Date: BLIND Day, 2016

BLIND Day (Blindness Legislative and Informational Networking Day) will take place on Thursday, March 24 at the State House, Grand Staircase from 11:00am to 2:00pm. Lunch will be provided for all who register in advance. Watch for details on BSCB lists and the MCB Information Tape.

BLIND Day is a great opportunity for all of us to inform our state representatives and senators of the importance of local blindness services provided by the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind, Perkins, and the Carroll Center. BLIND Day represents a collaborative effort on the part of many consumer and provider organizations. Fiscal Year 2017 will likely be a difficult year for any organization which receives state funding, so please help us ensure that our services are properly funded.

Federal Department of Transportation Explores Consensus-Based Initiative to Make Flying Easier for Individuals with Disabilities

by Eric Bridges

WASHINGTON, December 2, 2015 – U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx today announced that the Department has hired a neutral convenor to consider the feasibility of a negotiated rulemaking to develop additional rules to ensure equal access to air transportation for air travelers.

Specifically, the Department is exploring a negotiated rulemaking to:

- ensure that the same in-flight entertainment (IFE) available to all passengers is accessible to passengers with disabilities;
- provide individuals dependent on in-flight medical oxygen greater access to air travel consistent with federal safety and security requirements;
- determine the appropriate definition of a service animal;
- establish safeguards to reduce the likelihood that passengers wishing to travel with their pets will be able to falsely claim that their pets are service animals;
- address the feasibility of accessible lavatories on new single aisle aircraft;
- address whether premium economy is a different class of service from standard economy as airlines are required to provide seating accommodations to passengers with disabilities within the same class of service; and
- require airlines to report annually to the Department the number of requests for disability assistance they receive and the time period within which wheelchair assistance is provided to passengers with disabilities.

“I am committed to ensuring that our air transportation system is accessible for everyone, and it is important that people with disabilities be at the table every step of the way, collaborating with airlines and other interested stakeholders in crafting rules that will improve air travel accessibility now and into the future,” said Secretary Foxx.

Under the Negotiated Rulemaking Act, a neutral convenor assists an agency in determining whether to proceed with a regulatory negotiation, and, if so, to determine the scope of the issues that are appropriate for a negotiated rulemaking process. The Department hired Richard Parker from the University of Connecticut School of Law to assist it in making this determination.

Should the Department decide to proceed with a negotiated rulemaking, it will invite interested parties likely to be significantly affected by the regulation to work with each other and the agency on an advisory committee to reach consensus recommendations on the appropriate resolution of the issues before the committee. If a consensus is reached, the Department will issue a proposed rule consistent with that consensus for public comment under established rulemaking procedures.

- See more at: <https://www.transportation.gov/briefing-room/dot-explores-consensus-based-initiative-make-flying-easier-individuals-disabilities#sthash.POLzTFHF.dpuf>.

I Want My Talking Cable Box Now! **by Bob Hachey**

This one is for all of us who are not Comcast customers.

Many of you know that Comcast customers who have the x1 cable box already have talking cable boxes. That means they can independently peruse the cable guide, choose and watch on demand programming and utilize all of the features of the digital video recorder. Thanks in large part to Tom Wlodkowski, Vice-President of Accessibility for Comcast, their customers have had talking cable boxes for over a year.

Ever since my friends who are Comcast customers got their talking boxes, I've been suffering from talking cable box envy. For the most part, I am happy with my cable provider, but boy do I want a talking cable box. I know I could switch to Comcast, but I'd much rather get my cable provider to do the right thing. All of the larger cable providers including Verizon, Charter, and Time Warner must provide talking cable boxes by July of this year according to Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulations.

Here is what we should be doing to get our cable providers to comply with these regulations. We should be flooding our providers with requests for speech access to on screen information. Tell your provider that you are looking forward to the day when you have independent access to all of the on screen information that is available to seeing customers. Remind your providers that they are required to provide this access by July of 2016. Ask the customer service representative if he or she has ever heard of speech access to on-screen information. Finally, ask that your request be elevated to a higher level of customer support. Given that July is not far away, one would think that these providers already have plans to comply with the new regulations, but I have seen no evidence that such planning is taking place. Try telling your provider that you would be interested in testing any prototype hardware or software that is currently in the works.

If your provider fails to offer speech access to the TV screen by July 1, then it is time to file a complaint with the FCC. A few years ago, Eric Bridges and I wrote a detailed “how to” guide for filing such complaints. If any of you would like a copy of this article or have questions, please feel free to contact me. BSCB and ACB are here to help all of you ensure that you get the access that is your right.

Look at All the Information at Our Fingertips by Bob Hachey

While there is still work to be done (for an illustration, see the previous article), I am both delighted and impressed by the plethora of information to which we who are blind and visually impaired now have access. How many of you remember the days when we had to write high school and college papers on our braille and then rewrite them on a typewriter? I recall the long days and nights of typing when I prayed for no interruptions. I can now find on the internet much of the information for which I used to need sighted readers.

Over the past ten years, the growth of independently accessible information has been nothing short of exponential. Let’s begin with the Braille and Talking Book Library, which has provided us with accessible reading materials since the early 1930s. The advent of the digital talking book has allowed the National Library Service (NLS) to offer a much larger collection of books and magazines to patrons. Books that used to take years to become available to the blind are often now available within six months. The advent of NLS’s digital player and many for sale portable players has improved NLS services tremendously.

Next, let’s look at NewsLine, which is available to all NLS patrons. NewsLine provides hundreds of newspapers and magazines, as

well as job listings, grocery fliers, and news of interest to the blind and visually impaired. All of NewsLine's offerings are available via the phone or online. NewsLine users can read newspapers just like a sighted person, including the ability to quickly move between articles and sections.

Next, let's take a look at BookShare, which is available on the internet at www.bookshare.org. BookShare has produced a large number of offerings, which are scanned by volunteers and put on their website in text and audio formats. The fee to use BookShare is \$50 per year. College students and students of the Hadley School for the Blind may have this fee waived.

Finally, let's take a look at smart phones. These devices now offer accessibility right out of the box with no need to add screen-reading software. These devices offer easy access to internet radio, podcasts, Kindle books, games, and much, much more. I was at a restaurant a few days ago and it was rather noisy. Instead of asking my wife to read the menu over the loud crowd, I pulled out my iPhone and earbuds and read the menu using the KNFB Reader, which turns hardcopy print into spoken text.

Do we have access to all of the information available to sighted persons? No, not yet. However, the gap between what we have and what is available to those who can see the printed word is much smaller than it was ten years ago. I look forward to the day when that gap is a thing of the past. I'm not sure I will be around when that day comes, but I am convinced, now more than ever before, that day will come.

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