

BayLines

Winter, 2020



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Note from the Editor
by Bob Hachey

Welcome to *BayLines*. I hope you are all enjoying the relatively mild winter weather. Unfortunately, my cancer has returned and I'm back on chemotherapy. But it appears to be working well once again.

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, I must continue to ask and plead for contributions to our newsletter. That could be either an article or an idea. I'd be happy to turn good ideas from our membership into articles. Enjoy the rest of *BayLines*!

Save the Date

Please join us for BLIND Day 2020 which will be held in the Great Hall of the State House on Tuesday, March 31. On BLIND Day a wide variety of blind and visually impaired persons as well as representatives from our service providers gather for lunch and advocacy. We advocate for funding for the agencies that provide many of the services which help us to be independent and improve the quality of our lives. They include the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind, the Braille and Talking Book Library, Perkins, the Carroll Center, and others. Here's your chance to meet with your elected officials to advocate for these items. Volunteers will be provided to guide you to the offices of your representatives and senators.

If you are unable to join us, please consider contacting your representatives and senators regarding these issues. Watch our email lists for details on this year's state budget and our priorities. Anyone needing assistance in registering for BLIND Day should contact me.

Worcester Launches a New Volunteer Assistive Technology Training Program by Nona Haroyan

The ELVES Program, which stands for Electronic Learning Vision Easy Solutions, provides instruction for anyone with a vision or reading disability to better use their iDevices when using the accessible features of Voiceover, Zoom, and the screen reading software JAWS.

I had been with the Vibrant Program from its launch in Worcester in March of 2017, as an iDevice instructor. Eight months ago I left Vibrant to independently train at the Worcester Public Library, in the Talking Book Library room.

I enjoyed my time with Vibrant, but felt there were gaps in service that needed to be provided to clients. I thought expanding services to include: trouble shooting technical issues, learning how to operate specific apps, and helping them find easy solutions to make their device work best in their daily lives, could be beneficial.

I wanted to create a less formal program that would address short term issues, questions, and problems individuals had, as well as more in-depth instruction. Basically, I hoped to provide a place where anyone could come to learn or have a technical problem solved. Where there is no structured, no specific curriculum set, or time pressure, but just a place to learn at their own pace, in an easy and fun learning environment.

In May, another former Vibrant Trainer, Donna Ellis, joined me at the Library, and The ELVES Program was officially launched. We currently have 11 students at all levels, from basic to advance. Lee Anne Hooley, Director of the Worcester Talking Book Library, has been incredibly helpful and encouraging, giving us a space to

train. For some students who are more advanced, conducting a lesson over the phone or through Facetime, has also been an option.

Over the past 7 years the TBL, under then Director Jim Izatt, developed a series of assistive technology workshops, which our own David Kingsbury conducted. Through the years they were extremely successful, and in 2018 the BSCB honored Jim at our Spring Convention for his efforts. But as needs have changed, what patrons and friends of the TBL now want are one-to-one training sessions, rather than a group lesson setting. Creating a new technology program in the TBL space has seemed a natural progression.

In addition to technology training, advocacy has become very important to us. Donna is working with a local foundation to assist them with their website to ensure that it is fully accessible with both JAWS and Voiceover. I am working with a public high school student to help guide him and his family through the placement process so that he may be allowed to go to The Perkins School. Whether informing our students about services, agencies, products or organizations that can aid them, encouraging self-advocacy has become an essential part of The ELVES.

We are very encouraged and gratified to know that agencies have gotten positive feedback about The ELVES Program. Recently we were approached to provide iDevice training for MAB's Milford Low Vision Support Group and to participate in a new Pilot Program that MCB and the Polus Center for Social and Economic Development have established.

The ELVES are happy to be of service and have fun with the learning process along the way. We look forward to what our students have in store for us!

**Seeing Hope:
A Profile of Tim Cumings
by Katherine Stevo and Ms. Bonsey**

[Editor's note: This profile of long-time BSCB member and leader Tim Cumings was written by a local high school student with a bit of assistance from her teacher.]

“Ooooh, what a sexy voice,” exclaims Tim Cumings, an assistive technology trainer at Perkins School for the Blind. While he is reacting to the new computer’s voice, announcing the files on the desktop, his fingers furiously move across the keyboard as he familiarizes himself with the technology in front of him. Tim sits at the desk unaware of the three paper cat cutouts clinging to the elegant chandelier above his head, the doves attached to the lamp at the right of the desk, the glow in the dark stars scattered across the ceiling, and the nine Christian Science Bibles lining the sides of the desk. The novelties belong to Anne Cook, Tim’s seventy-eight-year-old blind client that he is training to use the assistive features on her new Microsoft computer. He sits in Anne’s computer room, the smallest room in her grand house located in Wellesley, Massachusetts. It is a far cry from his sparse cubicle located in the Perkins Watertown office, where he and two other trainers meet their boss once a week to receive their assignments.

Wearing a royal blue sweater with a white collar popping out from underneath, Tim’s top perfectly complements his khakis. His outfit matched better than that of a sighted person. Feeling for the mouse, he first grabs the Christian Science Monitor mug that was placed next to the bibles before quickly locating it. This afternoon, Tim is implementing the settings on her new computer, replacing the ones that Anne lost when her old computer died last week. He opens up Firefox to set Anne’s home page again to the Christian Science Monitor, so that she can continue to listen to the articles

that she once read on paper before becoming blind two years ago.

Tim presses the tab button moving the cursor over the four-by-four grid of icons in the computer's settings. As the voice reads aloud the name of each menu, he quickly realizes that the computer is equipped with Windows 10 and the newest version of the Firefox browser, which he is not very familiar with. Tim does not know how to set a homepage on this newest computer. "Okay. Okay. Okay. Give me a moment. Let me just get my notes," says Tim, to Anne, who is seated in a wooden chair to the right of him. He goes to the hallway to get his notes from his backpack. Tim walks back into the computer room as his white frosted penguin-like hair, just barely misses the door frame. The notes are on a recorder that is grey, no bigger than the size of a hand, and has five thumbprint-shaped buttons on its surface. Plugged into the side of the recorder are his headphones, similar to the ones found in the front pocket of a plane. Jerry Berrier, a long-time friend of Tim and his former supervisor at Perkins School for the Blind says, "He finds something that works for him and sticks with it. His note-taking device is a Note Sense, an old technology that stopped being manufactured ten to twelve years ago." He returns to rocking towards the computer murmuring, "Okay. Okay. Okay," after every instruction is read aloud. As Tim presses each key on the keyboard, JAWS, the narration software which he had previously installed on Anne's computer, announces, "H - O - M - E," through the speakers on either side of her computer. He starts by searching the internet to find directions on setting a homepage, but can't find anything. Having tried on his own for thirty minutes, he quickly calls Jerry for help.

After explaining the problem and listening intently to Jerry's advice for a minute, Tim suddenly bursts into an uncontrollable laughter, which quickly progresses into wheezing, and then a choking cough. Tim laughs so hard as he rocks back and forth, he

causes the chair to creak. After Tim catches his breath he says, "That shows how long it's been since you have updated Firefox," responding to Jerry's outdated advice. With his coworker being of no help, Tim returns to his trusty note recorder on his lap. Now forty-five minutes into attempting to set the homepage, Anne decides to start some mid-day yoga, while Tim works. She stands up from her chair and snaps into Tree Pose. She reaches up to the sky and then back down in a state of zen as the computer announces every tab that Tim's cursor is passing over in the Firefox settings. While Anne is engrossed in the world of yoga, "Day, ti, ext, so," is being read aloud one after another as Tim searches through the menu items, not even needing to hear the full word of each heading. Suddenly Tim sings, "Heeere we go, here we go," after finally finding the homepage tab, breaking Anne out of her trance as she quickly applauds him, while standing up from the ground coming out of the Lotus Position. "You never give up Tim; you really never do," Anne declares as she takes a seat on her chair.

As a blind person, Tim faces daily challenges not only in his job, but also his life. However, he has never let being completely blind since birth stop him from trying to do anything. Born prematurely, he was given the nickname, Tiny Tim by the NICU nurses, which later evolved into Timmy. Tim suffered from Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP) due to excessive amounts of oxygen administered to him to aid his breathing in the NICU. The oxygen helped him survive, but it also caused his blindness. He was not alone, as an epidemic of ROP occurred during the time of Tim's birth in the 1950s. Growing up in Scituate as one of four boys, Tim's parents did not treat him differently than his brothers. When his brothers learned how to ride a bike, Tim did as well. He would even wakeboard with them in their backyard pond, almost every day after school. His parents never wanted him to be isolated in a school for people who are visually impaired, like Perkins School for the Blind. "When I was six, my family moved to Winchester so

I could enroll in a program in Medford. The program allowed me to attend regular school for half a day and spend the other half, meeting with trainers who taught me to navigate the world as a blind person,” recounts Tim. While the trainers at his school only worked with children, Tim solely works with elderly people who have recently become blind. “Is the guy behaving himself?” Anne asks, referring to the voice that reads her emails aloud.

“He is working for me. Whenever it talks and doesn’t shut up you can just hit the control key,” explains Tim. “But nothing happened when I did that,” Anne shoots back. “I think it is because...” Tim trails off as he swivels around in his chair to face Anne who is standing directly behind him, and says, “We have discussed this before. When you have fifty thousand things open at once, even this new computer gets a little overwhelmed.”

Tim turns around to face the computer as Anne giggles behind him. He has the computer read aloud the first ten emails, to make sure that her inbox is working again, as it had mysteriously deleted all her emails last week. “It looks like all of your emails have come back,” Tim proudly announces to Anne. “And I have taken out about eighty of them!” Tim halts his typing and turns to face Anne behind him. “EIGHTY!”, Tim shouts in disbelief. “Well you have over ten thousand,” he points out while laughing. “I know. I am doing it inch by inch, and I am making some discoveries too. I delete eighty and one hundred more come in the next day. I am popular now let’s face it.” “I know. I know.”

Having moved to Wellesley from California three years ago, maintaining her many friendships was Anne’s biggest challenge, as she became blind shortly after her move. Before Anne lost her vision, she communicated with her abundance of friends through weekly phone calls and emails. “When I became blind, I didn’t know how to call and email my friends. I began to feel very isolated and depressed. I thought my life was over, but then I met

Tim, and he showed me how I could use technology to restore aspects of my life that I thought were gone forever, with the loss of my vision,” recalls Anne. When Anne met with Tim for the first time, he brought her an iPhone. She had never used an iPhone before, only a flip phone. “When Tim first showed me how to make a phone call on the iPhone I couldn’t do it. He explained the ten second process to me over and over again, while guiding my finger across the glass screen. Each time I thought I finally understood how to make a call, I was proved wrong when I attempted to do so without Tim’s guidance,” says Anne. At the end of her second session with Tim, Anne had still not made a single phone call. Anne hung her head in embarrassment before revealing, “That day was my breaking point. I handed Tim the phone because making a call was impossible for me. I told him I was giving up forever.” The very next day Tim showed up at Anne’s house unannounced, determined to help her make a phone call. Tim admits, “I know how much technology has changed my life and I know how much it can change other people's lives. It may be hard for people to grasp the concepts I am teaching them for the first time, but if they stick with it, eventually they catch on.” Anne says, “I am so grateful for Tim because he never gave up on me, even when I had given up on myself.”

Just as Tim finishes setting up Anne’s new computer, she brings up a new issue that had arisen. She noticed that on her new computer many duplicates of her contacts were created. Tim swiftly opens the contacts list, having already memorized the motion. He didn’t need the computer to read out every tab that the cursor was hovering over. “I have three guidelines for you, Tim, when you are deleting my contacts. Delete it if I don’t know the person, they have duplicates of their contact, or if they have passed away,” explains Anne. The process begins slowly. Tim tabs over each contact one at a time, not finding any duplicates. However, once he hits the twenty-seventh contact, it is all trouble

from there. “Now we're talking!” shouts Tim, as a beaming smile takes up most of his face. “There is a Donnie dot Miller at Gmail dot com as well as a Donnie Miller at Principia dot com. Which would you like me to keep?” Anne remembers, “Oh, yeah. He told me to start only using his Principia email so why don't you go ahead and delete the other one?” He presses the delete key in the top right-hand corner of the keyboard before he continues to the next contact. “Whoa what a name! Should I delete the Gmail or Yahoo account for the Sven Wieck contact, and it looks like it is Swedish too because it has dot S E at the end of the email?”, inquires Tim. Anne responds grinning, “Yes, he is Swedish.” “So which vone do you vwant me to keep?” “The Gmail one please!”

“The Gmail vone. Okay. I vill delete the other vone and keep the Gmail vone.” Tim cracks up at his own accent, sticking out his neck with a permanent beam on his face. Anne's reception of chuckles follows shortly after, “I think we need a cookie break, Tim. I am going to grab us some from the kitchen downstairs. I'll be back in a minute.” With an ever-growing smile, unable to become any larger, Tim shouts, “Oh yay! I can't wait!”

Tim's team at Perkins, Perkins Solutions, is comprised of people who are sighted, legally blind, and completely blind. When Jerry, Tim's former boss, assigned clients to everyone on the team, Tim would normally be given the “special” clients. Jerry states, “I always used to send him to the more difficult clients, including the ones that had emotional issues because I know that he has an uncanny ability to get along with people. He accepts everybody and he doesn't get upset.” This skill is what makes Tim who he is. Jerry explains, “When you work with people who have lost their sight, there is a great advantage to being blind because it gives the clients hope, and they observe you, and think, ‘Oh, maybe I can really deal with this.’”

Tim and his wife of twenty-three years, Cheryl, have a podcast called Cooking In The Dark. They get thousands of listeners every month. Each podcast starts with Tim introducing Dale, their blind friend who does the cooking in Texas. "I am going to introduce to you the man who proves to us every week that you don't need sight to cook dinner tonight: Dale Campbell!"

This slogan is followed by an applause which is later edited in by Tim, the audio developer for the podcast too. Every week after they finish recording the podcast, he edits all the audio before posting it to their website for the masses to listen to. The podcast is not just popular in the United States; Tim has received letters of gratitude from the Philippines and Australia. The letter from the Philippines was from a father who had just recently lost his vision. He used to connect with his daughter through cooking, but after he lost his sight he thought that he had lost that connection as well. After listening to Tim's podcast, he realized that just because he was blind did not mean he could not cook. While Tim and Cheryl do not actually do any cooking, they host and provide comical entertainment. As Dale finishes explaining how to tell if a burger is cooked medium well by touching its top with the spatula for a bouncy firmness, Tim asks him, "Speaking about bouncy. Did you hear how hard the ball bounced off of Steph Curry's face last night when he missed a pass?" Dale chuckles, "I heard that he might even have a concussion!"

Tim normally meets with three clients a day, each for two hours, but today he has a lighter schedule and is only meeting with Anne. He quickly finishes the two cookies that Anne brings up to him from the kitchen. With crumbs visible on his shirt, Tim exclaims, "Dang, Anne, you really have a knack for baking! Enough of me eating. Let's get back to the contacts now." The computer announces nine different Susan contacts in a row. Tim exhales, "Guess that shows how old we really are. You don't hear of too many Susans nowadays." Anne just shakes her head

chuckling next to Tim. He returns to what is now a rhythmic motion of him pressing the enter key as soon as the last name of each contact is read aloud. Shaking her head again, Anne tells Tim, “It is a good thing you are here to help me because I didn’t even know where to start when I realized I had so many duplicate contacts.”

When Tim started college at Boston University, he was required to take a technology class which he dreaded. At the time, technology was not inclusive for everyone, especially people who were visually impaired. Tim says, “When I learned about this requirement, I asked the registrar how I could get out of it. Her answer: minoring in a language.” So Tim did just that, minoring in French while majoring in communications, avoiding the technology class. “I wanted to be on NPR as the next Ari Shapiro or Steve Inskeep,” Tim reminisces. Although this didn’t come true, he still has *Cooking In The Dark*.

“It wasn’t until ten years after I graduated college, that I went to my first assistive technology class, where I was taught how to use a computer,” stresses Tim. He continued to attend these classes and learned how to use a computer well enough to be hired at Eversource Energy, an electricity company. For twenty years he worked at Eversource as a customer service phone representative. He was the first blind person that the company had ever hired. While at Eversource, Tim would take one hundred calls a day. He answered questions mostly from people who were moving and either needed to set up or discontinue electric or gas services. He also took calls regarding billing, but Tim says it was “mostly people complaining about their bills.” Six years ago, Jerry Berrier called Tim to notify him of an opening at Perkins, as an assistive technology trainer. Tim emphasizes, “When I heard of the opportunity, I instantly became excited and knew I was ready to switch jobs. Technology is so important to me because it is not only what gave me the chance to work at Eversource and the

reason I am employed at Perkins, but because it is what allows me to live a somewhat normal life. Technology has transformed my life and I was excited for it to impact my clients' lives in the same way."

"I think that's it! We went through all the contacts," Tim announces in an eager tone. "Now for the fun part. I'll show you how to make a new contact." When Tim teaches Anne anything new about her computer, he always leaves a file containing typed instructions on her desktop, in case she forgets what he taught her. Tim opens Microsoft Word, then holds down the command key and presses "T". This motion creates a new document. "To create a new contact, you first have to open the contacts menu on your computer. To do that quickly, press the spacebar while you are holding down the command button. Then type in the word contact and press enter. You will then be in the contacts menu. To create the new contact press "N" twice. From there you can tab through and fill out the different categories of information," Tim says this aloud to Anne while typing his directions in the document. As Tim explains each step to Anne, she confirms to him that she understands by saying, "Okay. Okay," after each direction.

"Why don't you give this a shot?" Tim asks. "Let's switch places. I will stand up and walk behind the computer chair and then you can take a seat in front of computer." Anne waits until she cannot hear Tim moving any longer. She stands up to take Tim's now vacant seat in front of the computer. Tim then sits to the right of the computer, where Anne previously had been. Anne starts by holding down the command button and presses the spacebar. She completes all of Tim's directions perfectly. "Very nice Anne! That was amazing. I am sure you will have this memorized soon because based off of the number of contacts you have, you must meet a new person every day," Tim jokes. "You are not wrong," Anne agrees.

Last week, when he called his bank to check his charges, Tim found out his credit card had been compromised. All of Tim's money is in that one account. Although the credit card company sent him a new card overnight, he was still left stranded without one. Every week Tim and Cheryl have a mail reader come to their house, and he was not able to come back any earlier than his regularly scheduled time. Tim recounts, "Even though I could feel the numbers on the credit card, I couldn't feel the expiration date and security code. My credit card was also linked to my Lyft account, so I had to take the bus for three days until my mail reader came. Taking the bus was challenging for me because Google Maps can only guide me up to within fifteen feet from the stop." While technology is still progressing to be more inclusive of visually impaired people, it is still far from perfect. However, Tim points out that within his lifetime, "Assistive technology has improved leaps and bounds." Tim admits, "Ten years ago, who would have thought that you could have a phone with a glass screen that a blind person could use? It wasn't even conceivable." Although there is still more improvement needed in assistive technology, Tim says, "If there is any time I could pick to be blind, this is the time."

Tim says to Anne, "I think that is all we have time for today," when he is confident that she understands how to create a new contact. "Thank you for all your help Tim. I haven't been able to send an email for the past couple of days because I didn't know which of the duplicate contacts was correct. You understand how frustrating it is to not be able to contact your friends. I am truly grateful for all of your help. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you," Anne responds with gratitude. Tim's lasting effect on his clients is recognized. Jerry says, "If you ask Tim what he does for a living, he will tell you that he trains people to use assistive features on their devices. In reality, that is only a fraction of what Tim does. He shows people who have recently become blind that even when they think their life is over, they can still continue living even

after the loss of their vision. He convinces people that you can still do the tasks that you once did. Tim gives people hope because this is the only life he has ever known how to live.”

Right before Tim departs, he gives Anne a homework assignment that is due before they meet again at the same time next week. “Try deleting two hundred emails by the time I come back.” Anne replies, “I can delete two hundred, but I can’t promise that I won’t have a thousand more.” Tim laughingly says, “Try your best.” He retrieves his iPhone from his crossbody bag and then toggles through his apps until he gets to Lyft. With the swift press of two buttons, “Two minutes” is announced by the phone’s monotone voice, indicating that the Lyft Line carpool ride will be arriving shortly. Tim takes his folded stick out of his bag, snaps it into place, and heads out of Anne’s house to wait in her driveway. As promised, Tim’s ride arrives two minutes later, pulling into Anne’s driveway. When the driver realizes that Tim is blind, he immediately unfastens his seatbelt and bolts out of the car to help him. However, he is too late; Tim is already comfortably seated in the car with his seatbelt fastened. By the time the driver reaches the closed door, he can only hear Tim say, “Hi! How are you doing?” to his fellow passenger.

On the Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship **by Bob Hachey**

When I think about elections, I often ponder upon how fortunate I am to be an American citizen. While I believe that things are far from perfect here, I also believe that America is one of the better nations in which to live, especially for persons with disabilities.

One of the imperfections I see in American society is the lack of participation in our political process. Election officials are often very pleased with a voter participation rate that is anything north

of 50 or 60 percent! That sounds like a very low bar to me. I believe that low rates of voting leads to a government that is less likely to meet the needs of the people.

If you voted in the March 3 primary here in Massachusetts, I want to thank you for expressing your views. I hope that everyone who reads this article will be voting in the next primary on September 1, which will feature a contest for senator between Ed Markey, and Joe Kennedy and that you will vote in November.

BSCB continues to work to see that all citizens who are blind or visually impaired have the opportunity to vote privately and independently. We will be conducting another voter survey after the November election and will continue to share survey results with the Secretary of State.

While voting is an important aspect of citizenship, that is only the first step. Other steps involve making your views known to local, state and national leaders on a regular basis. How many of you act upon our legislative action alerts? How many of you reach out to elected officials for assistance with other issues? Whether it's advocating for blindness services or dealing with an issue that is important to you or members of your family, this kind of participation in our political process helps hold elected officials accountable to you and in a more general way to WE THE PEOPLE. If you are passionate about an issue, consider starting or joining a group that is working on that issue. BSCB and ACB have taught me that there is power in numbers.

I am convinced that increased participation in all aspects of our political process can make America a better place for all of us. Finally, I wish more of us would try to develop constructive dialog with others with whom we might disagree politically. I have made recent efforts in this area and have found that there is usually common ground somewhere along the line. America will also be a

better place if we can find a way of doing a better job of working together.

BSCB Chapter Reports
Compiled by Bob Hachey

Boston Chapter

The Bay State Boston Chapter of BSCB is active and well. In the spring, we will be honored to be donating goodie bags to the BSCB conference. In 2020, we once again will have access to meeting space at the Roxbury YMCA. We enjoy a warm sense of community. Recently, two of the Boston chapter members attended the twelfth annual Martin Luther King Jr. business and community breakfast at the Roxbury YMCA. The Boston chapter holds their meetings at the Roxbury YMCA. We attended the breakfast as a way of being a part of the community and giving back to the YMCA. The theme of the breakfast was appreciation of others and love. Reverend Liz Walker was the keynote speaker. Her theme was love, small gestures of caring, and being thankful to be present in the day. Many local officials were present. Mayor Martin Walsh, Commissioner of Boston Police, William Gross, and Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley all spoke about the diversity and strength that Boston strives to create through building partnerships with its community members such as the YMCA. All of the speakers including the business award members, who we were sitting next to, were eager to embrace our presence. As we reflected on our morning, we definitely felt the love and joy of being a part of the Roxbury YMCA family. We look forward to seeing everyone on the first Saturday in February, May, August, and November in 2020.

Central Mass Chapter

The central Mass. Chapter is a lively group indeed. We had a great holiday lunch at the Oak Barrel Tavern in Worcester, and were treated to homemade cookies by Debbie Dymek and Karen

Crowder. We will be having a potluck in February at Sharon Strzalkowski's apartment building, graciously organized by Debbie Dymek, and sure to help break up the winter just a bit!

The director of Mass. Office on Disability will be our guest speaker in March, and those who attended the fall conference know that she is a lively and informative speaker. We are trying to get someone from the Worcester City Manager's office to speak to us in June about the many changes happening in our area, especially because of the new ballpark that is being built. Thanks to Jim Izatt for working with that office. It may be that some advocacy needs will emerge from the discussion that we have with the City Manager's office.

We are investigating new ways to come to Boston area events, as our long time driver Cindy has had to retire. We have two possible drivers at this point, and of course there is always Uber and Lyft.

Guide Dog Users of Massachusetts

It has been a busy few months for GDUM; here are a few highlights.

Back in January, we had our annual holiday party where we had our traditional Yankee swap for the dogs. We had music, food, and good times. One of the popular gifts being passed around was a miniature "Trump" doll for the dogs to chew on. I ended up with that gift and it is my dog Merrick's favorite toy to date. He loves to growl at it. I swear I did not train him to do this.

We will be having our annual meeting on April 4th from 1-3:30 at the Perkins Braille and Talking Book Library. For our keynote speakers, we will have representatives from Chewey.com who will be talking about their products and services and their efforts to make the services more accessible to all. For those of you who do not know, Chewy is an online retail store for pets of all types that

delivers to the home. For more information about Chewy, go to www.chewy.com.

At this annual meeting, we will also be voting for a new slate of officers, so please come and vote and learn about Chewy, their services, and their efforts to improve accessibility.

Finally, stay tuned for more details but in May GDUM along with the assistance of Dr. Clara Williams from Blue Pearl Veterinary Hospital will offer free eye exams to our guide dogs. More details on this to come soon.

If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me at carl@carl-richardson.com or via phone at 857-284-1384.

Charles River Chapter

CRC conducted its usual fall and winter activities. Our fall meeting took place on October 5, 2019. Our guest speaker was Kristyn Leigh, Manager of Perkins ICanConnect Program.

ICanConnect, also known as the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program, is a national program with local contacts that provides free equipment and training to people with both significant hearing and vision loss, to help them connect with friends, family, community, and the world. Kristyn described this program in detail. She included descriptions of a wide variety of equipment and refreshable braille displays.

Our traditional holiday party was once again held at John Brewer's Tavern. We shared good food, fellowship, and had a Yankee swap emceed by Lee Berrier. Our next chapter meeting will take place sometime in the spring. Stay tuned for details.

MCB Worcester Office Will Be Moving

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind's Worcester office will be moving to a new location later on this year. Apparently, there are two possibilities in play at this point, one in Worcester and another in Southborough. We were informed that the Southborough location is now the leading contender to host the Worcester office. The Board of BSCB is extremely concerned that the Southborough location would cause a hardship for any blind or visually impaired employees or service recipients, as we cannot drive cars. At the end of January, Sharon Strzalkowski, president of the central Mass chapter of BSCB wrote this letter to the Commissioners of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, the Division of Capital Asset Management, and MCB.

Other EOHHS services offices that serve the poor and disabled have been or will be moving to locations that offer less expensive rents and far less access to the offices for those who cannot drive or who cannot afford to own a car. BSCB is firmly against this trend and we'd like all of you to send emails to the three commissioners whose email addresses appear below and request that all such services offices are located in buildings that are accessible to both public transit and paratransit. If left unchecked, this trend could affect all regions of the Commonwealth.

Commissioner Carol Gladstone Division of Capital Asset Management carol.gladstone@state.mass.gov

Commissioner Mary Lou Sudders Executive Office of Health and Human Services Marylou.sudders@mass.gov

Commissioner David D'arcangelo MCB david.darcangelo@state.ma.us

Dear Commissioner Gladstone and Secretary Sudders,

I am writing to you as president of the central Mass. Chapter of Bay State Council of the Blind, under the auspices of the Board of Directors of this organization.

It has come to our attention that efforts to find a new location for the Worcester Mass. Commission for the Blind office are intensifying at this point. Our central Mass. chapter is a group of legally blind consumers who regularly benefit from the many services of the Mass. Commission for the Blind. Indeed Worcester has the largest population of legally blind people in central Mass. We want to express our need for an accessible office if a move is to be made.

For us, a primary element of accessibility in addition to ADA compliance is that the location be on public transportation, with both bus and paratransit availability and with easy access to ridesharing capabilities. As a former employee of the Mass. Commission for the Blind, I can attest that the Worcester office has many customers who come in for adaptive technology training, help with filling out forms, meetings with counselors, and help in obtaining needed equipment such as white canes when one is suddenly broken.

Those blind people who are beginning to look for jobs can practice using public transportation and have the opportunity to participate in face-to-face mock interviews. These supports help people with disabilities return to competitive employment and are consistent with the employment goals of the Governor's Model Employment Initiative.

Elders and their families can receive support from social workers and those in crisis have a place to go for assistance. An office in an area that is not accessible will make such tasks impossible, and they cannot be replicated on line.

Another effect of inaccessibility is that legally blind job candidates would have a very difficult time getting to an office outside of the public transportation loop. This could discourage qualified candidates from considering employment in our region of the Commonwealth.

We strongly believe that accessibility must be a major consideration in any bid that you are contemplating, and that the blindness community should be consulted before a definite decision is made.

Thank you for listening to these concerns and for making decisions that will both be fiscally sound for the agency and Commonwealth and user-friendly for the many blind consumers who need the services that MCB has to offer.

Sincerely,

Sharon Strzalkowski, President
Central Mass. Chapter
Bay State Council of the Blind
Brian Charlson, President

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