

Carol Castellano and Kathy Gabry, Editors

December 2009

CAROL CASTELLANO BECOMES NATIONAL PRESIDENT

By Joe Ruffalo, President, NFB of NJ



POBC-NJ President Carol Castellano has long served as an officer in the National Organization of Parents of Blind Children. This past spring, in an unexpected turn of events, Carol became NOPBC President! Included in her new responsibilities is presiding over the week-long annual NOPBC conference at National Convention. All reports indicate that the conference in Detroit was a great success.

Carol has now become a globe trotter, representing NOPBC and working on behalf of blind children at the National Convention in Detroit, the State Convention of the NFB of Iowa, the Children's Vision Summit in Missouri and the Getting in Touch with Literacy conference in California. We are proud and happy to have Carol spreading our positive message about blindness throughout the land.

This Kid's Got Rhythm!

By Kathy Gabry, Secretary, POBC-NJ

Matthew Whitaker, the youngest child of POBC-NJ members Moses and May Whitaker, is just 8 years old and already a gifted pianist and drummer. Matthew is enrolled in the Comprehensive Music Program for Young People in The Filomen M. D'Agostino Greenberg Music School at The Lighthouse International in New York City. The Lighthouse doesn't usually accept such young students, but in Matthew, they have seen something exceptional. He started playing the piano at age 5, the drums at 7, and the bass guitar just three months ago. At the Lighthouse, Matthew studies these instruments, as well as Braille music, other percussion instruments, music theory, and dance. He's also participated in several performances, and spring and fall concerts. On October 8, 2009, Matthew was the youngest member to perform with the Lighthouse Jazz Ensemble in a concert called "A Vision of Jazz" celebrating World Sight Day. Visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETJ5sovVh-Y> to see him in action at this concert.

Matthew is also a member of the Young People Jazz Ensemble at the Harlem School of the Arts, where he was recently accepted to study jazz and gospel styles for the piano and drums. And, as if he wasn't busy enough, you can find Matthew drumming for the youth choir at New Hope Baptist Church, in Hackensack, the third Sunday of each month.



Our Spring Seminar's Coming Up

POBC-NJ will be presenting a seminar for parents and teachers of blind children in the spring. This full-day event will feature speakers and workshops for the adults and a fun-and learning-filled program for the children. Look for details in the next issue of *In Touch*.

BRaille AWARENESS DAY

By Mary Jo Partyka

On October 24, approximately 35 people gathered at the Grace Lutheran Church in Perth Amboy to celebrate Braille Awareness Day. The purpose of the day was to highlight the importance of Braille and how it increases opportunities for literacy in education, employment and daily living skills. In addition to listening to lively music, participants had the opportunity to do a craft involving Braille, played games where they had to read Braille to win a prize, and heard testimonials from people who learned Braille and how it helped them in their lives. We raffled off a Louis Braille Commemorative Coin and garden tools, and the day was very successful. In addition to sandwiches, we had cupcakes with the letters brl on them and many other delicious desserts. Several parents of blind children attended and discussed the struggles they are having trying to get their children Braille instruction.

The event was sponsored by the National Federation of the Blind of New Jersey's Division to Promote the Use of Braille (NJ PUB). Hope to see you at our next event!

SIGN UP FOR THE BRaille READERS ARE LEADERS CONTEST!

The Braille Readers Are Leaders contest is on! Braille readers from all over the country are still signing up. Don't be left behind! Sign up today for either the K-12 or adult contest. AND to sweeten the pot, the NFB of NJ will have its own additional prizes. All New Jersey Braille readers who participate in the program will be entered into a drawing for a Louis Braille coin. There will be one winner in the K-12 division, and one winner in the adult division. So register now, and start reading!

Dates to Remember

- Register by Nov. 1 to get a Braille Readers Are Leaders T-shirt
- Contest reading period: Nov. 1, 2009-Jan. 4, 2010
- Reading logs and entry forms are due Jan. 22, 2010

Don't forget that you can form a Braille Readers Are Leaders team with your friends to be eligible for an additional prize! Happy reading and good luck in the contest!

For more information, visit www.nfb.org/bral or contact Natalie Shaheen by phone at (410) 659-9314, ext. 2293 or by e-mail at nshaheen@nfb.org.



A Heartfelt Thanks to Our 2009 Donors

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NEWS FROM NATIONAL

By Carol Castellano, President, POBC-NJ and NOPBC

Exciting initiatives are going on on the national scene that will address some of the very real issues that face blind children and their families today.

- First up — the shortage of teachers of the blind. The National Federation of the Blind (NFB) has launched a major recruiting effort to interest potential teachers in the field of teaching blind/visually impaired students. If you would like to become a part of this effort, or know someone who would like to become involved, contact us at blindchildren@verizon.net.
- Next, research has shown that many partially sighted students do not receive the opportunity to attain full literacy skills, due to incorrect identification of their literacy needs. A major part of the problem is due to fundamental problems with the assessments currently in use.

In response to this serious situation, the NFB, the National Organization of Parents of Blind Children (NOPBC), and a panel of researchers and teachers of the blind from across the country have created a new assessment tool which is currently being piloted. If you would like your partially sighted child to participate in the pilot study or if you are a teacher of the blind and would like to try out the new assessment tool, contact us at blindchildren@verizon.net.

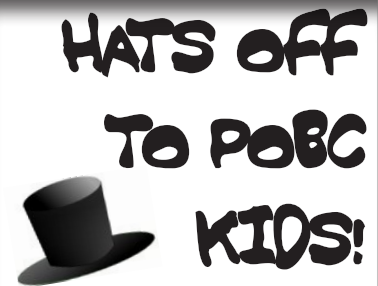
- Last, but not least, in an effort to gain information that will be of real use in the education and development of blind/VI children, the NFB Jernigan Institute convened a panel of researchers, teachers of the blind, and parent leaders to discuss the direction of research on Braille. Our first event, sponsored by NFBJI, the National Center for Severe and Sensory Disabilities (NCSSD), and the Bresnahan-Halstead Center on Disabilities, will be “Research in the Rockies,” a research summit on braille reading and writing that will take place in June in Denver.

COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

Applications are now being accepted for the 2010 NFB Scholarship Program. Thirty scholarships totaling \$100,000 will be awarded to blind college and graduate students from the U.S. and Puerto Rico. Find out more at www.nfb.org/scholarships. The deadline for applications is March 31, 2010. Questions may be directed to NFB Scholarship Committee Chairman Mr. Anil Lewis by e-mail at Scholarships@nfb.org, or by phone at 410.659.9314, ext. 2415. And FYI: By applying for a national scholarship, you are also automatically considered for an NFB of NJ scholarship.

2010 YOUTH AND ADULT WRITING CONTEST

The annual youth and adult writing contests sponsored by the Writers’ Division of the NFB are open January 1 to April 1, 2010. Adult poetry and fiction contests are open to all entrants 18 years and over. Youth poetry and fiction entries will be divided into three categories: first through sixth grades, seventh and eighth grades, and ninth through twelfth grades. Prizes for contest winners range up to \$100 for adult categories and up to \$25 for youth categories. Contact Robert Leslie Newman, Newmanrl@cox.net, for more information.



SHAFEKA HASHASH, 16, New Milford, was one of six people honored at “Covering the Bases, a Night Out with the Trenton Thunder,” hosted by the NJ Department of Human Services’ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Trenton Thunder Baseball Team, to promote full community inclusion and awareness of the potential and achievements of individuals who are blind and visually impaired.

MIHIR DOSHI, 8, Somerset County, was the only student from NJ qualifying to enter the Ninth Annual National Braille Challenge in Los Angeles last June. Mihir competed with 60 other blind/visually impaired kids from around the country in this academic competition.

JON GABRY, 20, Kearny, recently exhibited his artwork at the Red Horse Gallery in Freehold and the Mona Lisa Gallery in Maplewood. His work is currently on display at Arts Unbound in Orange.

Tell us the good news about your child and we’ll feature it in the next issue of In Touch! Send your info to: specialk38@aol.com.

NEWS FROM CBVI

The 2009-2010 school year is in full swing. During October's "Blindness Awareness Month," the Education Unit at the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired hosted three teacher workshops at the Parsippany Hilton, the Conference Center at Mercer, and the Mount Laurel Marriott. More than 200 teacher and therapists from public and private schools in all of New Jersey's 21 counties attended. Many attendees were teachers who have a blind or visually impaired student in their class for the first time. Special thanks to the education staff at each regional office, the Meyer Center, the Orientation and Mobility staff, the VR College/Transition staff, student Shafeka Hashash of New Milford as the keynote speaker at the Northern Region conference, and Dr. and Mrs. Dharmesh Doshi of Belle Mead, parents of Mihir Doshi and keynote speakers at the Central Region conference.

The Meyer Center is sponsoring a "Netbook" pilot project in 2009-2010. In August 2009, 10 high school students throughout the state received a Netbook with software applications such as JAWS and Microsoft Office, a scanner, a braille display, a CD drive and a backpack. Students are receiving instruction on how to use the Netbook and will be giving the Commission feedback about their experiences. The Netbook is a fraction of the cost of a BrailleNote, and much more versatile. We await feedback!

Lastly, the Commission has received Education IDEA-ARRA funds, which it plans to use to increase Braille production, provide training to teachers, parents and teacher-aides, and purchase additional technology for students.

*~ Submitted by Amy Ricciardi, Coordinator of Education Services
NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired*

Summer Program 2009 : Accessing Opportunities

Summer 2009 was great fun for many New Jersey children who are blind or visually impaired and their families who participated in Accessing Opportunities, the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired's summer program. This summer program was developed for children to provide experiences in the areas of recreation, independence, socialization, and instruction. The theme for this year's summer program was Accessing Opportunities as it provided opportunities for children to experience and acquire new skills.

The summer events were held throughout the state of New Jersey, and transportation was provided for families. During the events, students rode and groomed horses, participated in wall climbing, team building, swimming, boating, fishing, archery, baseball, basketball, tennis, segway riding, dancing, and much, much more. Parents were also included in all of the fun, and many parents learned some new dance steps. The events were held at Camp Ockanickon (Physical Education Day), East Brunswick Hilton (Dance Party Workshop), Trenton Thunder Baseball Game, and Black Bear Resort (Family Fun Day). New friendships between both children and parents were developed, and old friends were able to have fun together.

Information for "Summer 2010" will be in the mailed in January 2010!

*~ Submitted by Christine Hinton, Program Development Specialist
NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired*

Did you know...

The NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired is celebrating its **100th anniversary** in 2010.

Many parents and teachers have expressed concern regarding **CBVI services for children ages birth to three**. Following is the official CBVI policy for children in this age group:

"Early Intervention clients, ages birth to 3, will be seen by education staff at a minimum of twice each year and may be seen more often based upon need, to be determined by the assigned instructor and supervisor. In a year, the maximum number of visits is not to exceed eight.

"These simple guidelines allow for flexibility and are based on the need of the consumer and their family."

A year ago this month, POBC-NJ announced in these pages that Camp Marcella was no more. For 50 years, the NJ CBVI had leased the camp for \$1 a year from the NJ Camp for Blind Children, and provided a summer camp experience for blind and visually impaired children throughout the state.

In response to that article, we received a letter from the president of the camp board, informing us that Camp Marcella would still be operating, but that it would be run by Easter Seals. Through several telephone conversations and a meeting with members of the camp board and Easter Seals personnel, we learned that significant changes would be taking place:

- They were planning to serve 90 children a week (this was later revised to from 50 to 60).
- Certain weeks would be set aside for blind/VI children; the rest of the weeks would be for children with multiple disabilities (not blind/VI), the children that Easter Seals traditionally serves.
- They were opening up camp to children and adults from other states.
- There would be a tuition cost to the family of approximately \$1000 for a 6-day session and \$2000 for a 12-day session.

Needless to say, many parents were disturbed to hear these developments. In the end, very few blind/VI children attended the program. Our understanding is that Easter Seals will not be running the program next summer and that the camp board and the Commission might be returning to the negotiating table. We will keep you informed as we hear any new information.

~ Submitted by Carol Castellano

BULLETIN BOARD

TOOLS TO TEACH SPATIAL CONCEPTS

Aniceta Skowron, Ph.D., has designed manipulatives to teach spatial concepts in math, science, engineering, O&M, and art, and she is interested in sharing them with students who are blind. Check them out at: <http://www.geometro.net>. She also offers a hands-on workshop with her materials.

BLOG ON NJ LAW FOR SPECIAL NEEDS

Cole Schotz is pleased to announce the launch of their blog that includes the latest news and updates on estate planning for NJ families with kids with special needs: www.njspecialneedschildrenlaw.com.

PROGRAMS AT THE MET

The Metropolitan Museum of Art welcomes individuals of all abilities to view the collection and participate in educational programs. For info or to make an appointment, please call voice 212.879.5500, ext. 3561, or TTY 212.570.3828, or visit www.metmuseum.org.

ACCESSIBLE PROGRAM GUIDES

The NJ Theatre Alliance offers a schedule of accessible performances at theaters throughout NJ. Discounts apply at various times of the year. Call or e-mail to get on their mailing list: www.njtheatrealliance.org, 973.540.0515.

Please Send Us Your E-mail Address!
Please update your e-mail address with us so that we can send you important messages and alerts on a timely basis. Also, we will soon be putting this newsletter up on our website, www.blindchildren.org. Let us know if you would like to stop your paper copy and instead receive an e-mail link to access the newsletter online. Send a message to blindchildren@verizon.net.

HELP PLAN THE POBC SPRING SEMINAR!

We welcome any volunteers and all ideas! To get in on the fun, e-mail carol_castellano@verizon.net.

HOLIDAY SHOPPING ONLINE

SEEDLINGS BRAILLE BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

is dedicated to increasing the opportunity for literacy by providing high quality, low-cost children's literature in Braille. For a catalog, call 800.777.8552 or go to www.seedlings.org. Seedlings also offers free Braille books through the Book Angel program.

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BLINDBARGAINS.COM The latest deals and bargains on items for the blind and visually impaired. www.blindbargains.com

www.everythingbraille.com Braille instruction, tactile graphics, Braille fund and games, and more!

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NOW YOUR DREAMS of finding "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Holidays" in Braille on a delicious chocolate bar can be a reality at **The Chocolate Vault**. 800.525.1165 or www.chocolatevault.com

FOR ID TAGS for kids and athletes, go to www.roadid.com. Runners, bikers, and walkers wear ID tags on their shoes. These tags could be beneficial for our children, too, in the event of an emergency.

www.sensorycraver.com has some great toys, arts and crafts, and therapy products.



Please Join Us
for the NFB of NJ Holiday Party!

Saturday, December 19, 2009
1:00 - 5:00 p.m.

Crowne Plaza Hotel * 36 Valley Road * Clark, NJ

Cost: \$25 per adult and \$10 for children under 12

Make your check payable to NFB of NJ
and please include a separate sheet
with the attendee names and phone number/s. Mail to:

Joe Ruffalo
NFB of NJ
254 Spruce Street
Bloomfield, NJ 07003

All payments must be received by December 15, 2009.
For additional information, please call Joe at 973.743.0075.



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