

MINNESOTA

# *State Services for the Blind*



2006 ANNUAL REPORT

## Message from the Director

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We are pleased to present the 2006 State Services for the Blind (SSB) Annual Report celebrating the partnership with our State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC-B), customers and other stakeholders. All of us working together with a common vision is what makes the partnership "A Formula For Success." We thank you for your involvement, support, and commitment!

This 2006 SSB Annual Report continues the approach we began in 2005, focusing on the services provided and the impact they have on the daily lives of blind, visually impaired and DeafBlind Minnesotans—from their perspective.

I would like to share with you some important highlights of our partnership over this past year:

- 96 customers obtained or retained paid employment at an average hourly wage of \$14.86.
- SSB served over 3,000 seniors this year who were looking to be more independent in their homes and communities—an all time high!
- *Minnesota Monthly Magazine* was added to the local channel of NFB-Newsline®.
- Gifts to the Communication Center amounted to \$269,869. Of this, \$97,663 was earmarked for the Senior Outreach Program.
- The interagency agreement with the Minnesota Department of Education for the production of braille and audio recording of instructional materials for Minnesota's K-12 students was extended for two more years.
- SSB partnered with the Minnesota Secretary of State in outreach to inform and train the public in the use of the accessible voting machine, the AutoMARK, providing the opportunity for blind and visually impaired persons to vote privately and independently for the first time in their lives.
- SSB completed the first year of a five-year, in-service training program for staff in the areas of DeafBlindness, low vision, and cultural competency.
- SSB conducted the first ever customer satisfaction and needs assessment survey of every SSB customer with a dual-sensory impairment. The results will be used to evaluate and plan services and collaborative activities with other agencies also serving individuals with a dual-sensory impairment.
- SSB piloted a new customer satisfaction survey for SSB customers who have completed adjustment to blindness training.

On behalf of SSB staff, thank you again for your partnership in this endeavor. Working together we make a positive, profound and lifelong difference in the lives of blind, visually impaired and DeafBlind Minnesotans.



Charles (Chuk) Hamilton, Director  
State Services for the Blind



Much of the work of the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC-B) is done in committees and task forces which work closely with State Services for the Blind to improve services to Vocational Rehabilitation customers as well as children, seniors, and/or the DeafBlind. In Federal Fiscal Year 2006, these committees provided substantive input on areas including:

- Customer satisfaction;
- Services to children, seniors and the DeafBlind;
- Minority outreach;
- Communication Center services; and
- Vendor measures and outcomes.

In addition to their specific focus, all committees participated with SSB in revising the agency's Goals and Priorities for 2007. This year, among other activities, the SRC-B, in collaboration with SSB management, created a framework for a comprehensive needs assessment. Along with changes at the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) came changes in RSA's expectations regarding state plans, particularly in the area of needs assessments to be conducted by states. SSB staff and SRC-B members met several times by phone with RSA to work out state plan updates that would meet the new requirements on a tight timeframe. The resulting comprehensive needs assessment follows the guidance provided by the Council.

It has been my great privilege to serve in the capacity of Chair of this Council for the past two years and to work with people so hardworking and committed to the cause of providing high-quality rehabilitation services for blind, visually impaired, and DeafBlind Minnesotans.

I would like to thank Chuk Hamilton for his leadership and the staff at SSB for their untiring support.



Jennifer Dunnam, Chair,  
State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind



*Front row* — Jennifer Dunnam, Steve Jacobson, Fannie Primm, Jan Bailey

*Middle row* — Michael Malver, Lynette Boyer, Rebecca Kragnes, Liz McDevitt

*Back row* — Jean Martin, Chuk Hamilton, Bonita Kallestad, Carol Leaders, Elizabeth Bruber

*Not pictured* — Toni Amundson, Connie Lee Berg, Jim Collins, Rod Haworth, Sam Jasmine, Judy Sanders, Coralmae Stenstrom

Rebecca Kragnes used to cast her vote with the assistance of two election judges from two political parties.

"The privacy issue was massive," Kragnes, Vice Chair of the Minnesota State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC-B), said.

Now with the introduction of AutoMARK voting technology, the only assistance Kragnes will need is to be told where in the polling location the new AutoMARK voting system is located.

State Services for the Blind partnered with the Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State to help the blind and visually impaired to vote the same way that sighted citizens do—independently and in private.



The AutoMARK voting system, installed in 3,500 polling places throughout the state in time for the September 2006 primary elections, was funded with \$35 million through the federal Help America Vote Act.

"This is something SSB feels very strongly about," said State Services for the Blind Director Chuk Hamilton. "Voting independently and in private is a right that sets us apart from citizens of many other countries."

The new voting system was the topic of a 55-minute interview broadcast on the Radio Talking Book Network featuring Minnesota Secretary of State Mary Kiffmeyer, Hamilton and State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind



**Rehabilitation Counselor Charlotte Czarnecki demonstrating AutoMARK**

Chair Jennifer Dunnam. Mark Vidas, a Radio Talking Book broadcaster and a Minneapolis election judge, moderated the interview.

"It's so exciting," Kiffmeyer said. "People will be able to vote privately and independently. It's the first time in Minnesota it's going to be available."

"Eight outreach staff provided dozens of demonstrations of the new technology throughout the state last summer so that blind and visually impaired customers could try out the AutoMARK and get used to it well in advance of the primary elections," said Kent Kaiser, Communications Director for the Secretary of State.

"I loved it," said Kragnes, who used the technology at three separate demonstration events. "The AutoMARK technology takes less time and is so much better. I felt so empowered."

Work began on the selection of the technology in 2003, according to Kragnes; and a selection process that involved several Minnesota blind and visually impaired advocacy organizations left her with a good feeling.

"With all the organizations serving the blind it is rare we would be in agreement, but this

is the one issue where we worked cooperatively and came to agree that AutoMARK provided most of what we wanted," said Kragnes.

"The Secretary of State's Office deserves credit for taking the demonstrations into high-rise senior apartment buildings and introducing residents to the new technology," said Steve Jacobson, Minnesota State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind, who also participates in the Voting Machines Options Working Group, established by the Minnesota Legislature in the 2006 session. That working group, which is independent of the SRC-B, will make recommendations regarding additional options for voting equipment that is in compliance with the Help America Vote Act. "The Secretary of State's Office has done a good job with this."

Jacobson reports that the use of the AutoMARK technology during the primary elections was low but smooth, and that preliminary surveying is in progress. As more people learn how easy it is to use AutoMARK, Jacobson believes users will increase.

"It has been very well received by voters," said Kaiser, "and we anticipate the fine-tuning will be mostly in training."

AutoMARK could be marketed to individuals who have impairments other than blindness that limit their ability to vote, he said. "What about a voter whose hand shakes, and their marks end up in two ovals? My mother has arthritis in her hand and marking the ballot is a physically painful experience. She could be a candidate for the AutoMARK technology and the ease of its touch-screen," he said. ■■■



## AutoMARK isn't perfect

Both Minnesota State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind board members Rebecca Kragnes and Steve Jacobson agree that AutoMARK is not accessible to at least one potential voting constituency: the DeafBlind in Minnesota.

"The touch-screen and headset options are not workable for DeafBlind voters," said Jacobson. "We hope for a braille interface."

"There are no good sources of data for how many voters in Minnesota are DeafBlind and therefore would not be able to use AutoMARK," said Cathy Carlson, Administrative Services Director, SSB.

At one time the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration estimated that .0146% of Minnesota's population, ages 21 and older, would be considered to be DeafBlind. If that is right, then about 498 Minnesotans over the age of 21 would be considered to be DeafBlind.

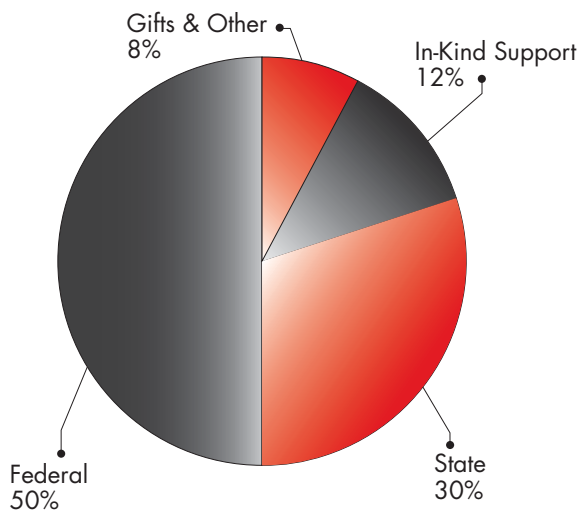


# State Services for the Blind—2006 Budget Breakout

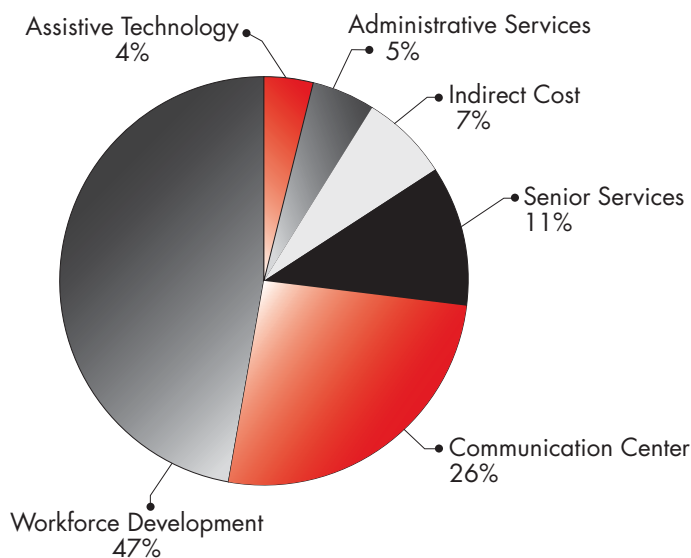
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<b>Federal Funds</b>		<b>Percentage of Funds to Total Funding</b>
Basic VR	\$7,729,000	
Supported Employment	\$79,000	
Training Grant	\$55,000	
Independent Living	\$54,000	
Older Blind	\$510,000	
<b>Total Federal Funds</b>	<b>\$8,427,000</b>	<b>50%</b>
<b>Total State Funds</b>	<b>4,940,000</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>Other Funds</b>		
Gift/Bequest	\$323,000	
Special Revenue		
Communication Center	\$263,000	
Business Enterprises	\$752,000	
<b>Total Other Funds</b>	<b>\$1,338,000</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>Total In-Kind from Volunteers</b>	<b>\$2,004,200</b>	<b>12%</b>
<b>Total All Funds</b>	<b>\$16,709,200</b>	<b>100%</b>

**SSB Funding Streams—  
Fiscal Year 2006**



**SSB Funding Distribution—  
Fiscal Year 2006**



# Workforce Development Services Unit

**F**or customers such as Cindy Holthusen, Kotumu Kamara, David Lasky, Marlys Benedix, and John Lee Clark, the Workforce Development Unit of SSB ensures delivery of rehabilitation services individuals need to prepare for, seek, gain or retain employment. Services take many forms and may include:

- vocational assessment and counseling;
- training in adjustment to blindness, braille, use of assistive technology, job seeking skills, and vocational skills;
- job placement assistance; and
- job adaptation assistance.

It's all about the customer. The customer and counselor work together to include the right mix of services into an 'employment plan.' A newly blind customer, for example, may need the full spectrum of services, including assessment, cane travel, braille, and adjustment to blindness training, before enrolling in an educational program that will lead to employment. A future baker may need to

develop vocational skills, perhaps through the Minnesota State Colleges and University System, and learn about professional food-related organizations. Yet another customer may need the assistance of a human reader to facilitate test-taking at school. All services a customer may require to reach a specific career goal are reflected in their employment plan.

Rehabilitation counselors in 13 field offices, including 12 WorkForce Centers, as well as a network of private vendors across Minnesota, provide these services.

Also included in the Workforce Development Unit is the Business Enterprises Program (BEP).

BEP provides training and support to blind Minnesotans so they can become self-employed. These small businesses include operating snack bars and counter operations, providing vending machine services in multiple locations and combinations of vending and counter operations. BEP blind vendors operate businesses at the Capitol, in state office buildings, at rest areas and travel information centers statewide, on multiple MnSCU campuses and in some private industry locations. Professional, technical and clerical staff provide training, management assistance and technical support to these legally blind vendors. ■■■

## Workforce Development Unit Statistics—

	FFY2006	FFY2005	FFY2004
Number of Paid Closures	96	125	103
Weekly Salary Change Application-Closure	\$159.88	\$208.27	\$173.27
Average Wage per Hour	\$14.86	\$13.38	\$11.29
Number Served	1,140	1,219	1,311

### Cindy Holthusen—SPOTLIGHT

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**dy Holthusen**

For much of her life, Cindy Holthusen felt like a guinea pig for every new idea and assistive device that came along for

individuals with a vision loss. Today, as a rehabilitation counselor at the St. Cloud WorkForce Center, others are benefiting from Holthusen's professional and personal experiences. As a rehabilitation counselor, she

assists individuals with a variety of disabilities to prepare for employment and forges relationships with employers as part of her job placement duties.

Although she has been on the job less than one year, Holthusen's duties extend into the Sauk Rapids and other area public schools twice a month where she counsels students from 18-21 years old with a variety of physical and mental disabilities in career planning and basic job seeking skills.

Holthusen's story began when she was in fifth grade in Thief River Falls and realized she was losing significant vision rather quickly. "I sat in the back of the class in the 5th grade and by the end of the school year I couldn't read the blackboard," she said.

She first became aware of State Services for the Blind when she was studying to be a social worker at Bemidji State University. SSB helped fund her education and provided her with the low-vision aids—such as a CCTV and magnifying glasses—she required to succeed in college. In 2000, her degree in social work resulted in a job at St. Cloud Children's Home as a youth counselor in a secure residential intensive treatment unit. "It was a very stressful job, but my skills really developed there," she said.

Four and a half years later, Holthusen met with Stan Keith, her SSB counselor, and discussed other career options. She asked Keith how he got his job as a vocational rehabilitation counselor—and learned that although the field of vocational rehabilitation counseling is different from social work, her skills would be a natural fit for pursuing this career goal.

Before long, with the support of her SSB counselor and John Hotz, a professor in the Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling program at St. Cloud State University, Holthusen was in graduate school studying to be a vocational rehabilitation counselor! SSB's support of Holthusen's graduate school program included the computer technology and training she needed to compete with her sighted

*“State Services for the Blind was very good to me. I don't see how I would be where I am today without them.”*



peers. "Stan told me, 'You're going to graduate school, you're going to need a computer,' " she said.

SSB also provided the access technology expertise which enabled Holthusen to successfully complete her internship and begin her employment at Complete Career Services, a St. Cloud-based private placement agency. Two years and two degrees later, Holthusen

achieved her goal of working as a vocational rehabilitation counselor at the St. Cloud WorkForce Center where she is employed by Rehabilitation Services, a branch of the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development.

Keeping focused on further developing her counseling skills is a priority for Holthusen, as is staying active, working out at the

health club, and spending time with family and friends.

As for being a guinea pig, today others are learning from Cindy's years of experience. "It was 'Here, try this. Here, try that,'" she said. "Not every device is going to work for every person. It's important to get to know the individual and really assess their needs and what will work for them. I would like to think that's what I bring to this job." ■■■

## Kotumu Kamara—**SPOTLIGHT**

**P**rogressive blindness began for West African native Kotumu Kamara as a child. With limited English-language skills, she faced twice the challenges. But today, she is a University of Minnesota student—and a member of the 2006 Scholarship Class of the National Federation of the Blind.

One of the first skills Kamara learned at service provider

BLIND, Inc. was how to access local transportation. "That was a good thing," she said. Today, the Northeast Minneapolis resident is a whiz at catching the Metro Transit no. 6 bound for the University of Minnesota.

Kamara, originally from Liberia, knows all about bridging distances. She left Guinea in 2003 to join family members living in Brooklyn Park. She worked



**Kotumu Kamara**

## Kotumu Kamara—SPOTLIGHT *continued*

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“*I am originally from Africa. I have struggled through many difficulties through my journey from a senseless civil war as a newly blind person. From my experience I have learned that those who face great struggles become great learners. I am proud to be here today, and I will continue to be a learner and a giver...*”

with a social worker who connected her with State Services for the Blind and was introduced to Rehabilitation Counselor Charlotte Czarnecki.

Czarnecki, who realized simply getting around was going to be a top priority for Kamara, told her about cane travel training available through both BLIND, Inc. and Vision Loss Resources.

Kamara selected the nine-month residential training BLIND, Inc. offered.

“The training was very tough for me, but they saw my weaknesses and understood my fear of stairs,” she said.

“At first, it was pretty tough to move around. In Guinea, I was moving around with people I know.” In addition to learning cane travel skills and managing the local transportation, she learned JAWS®, a popular screen reader, home management skills, and techniques for banking and shopping. Classes were held from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, but the learning didn’t stop there. You were expected to apply your skills in your apartment, which she shared with another BLIND, Inc. student.

In Guinea, Kamara earned a high school diploma in French, and two years ago she was encouraged to study for a GED as preparation for entering the University of Minnesota at a competitive level. Now with her GED behind her, she is taking 15 credits at the University of Minnesota and will be a sophomore in the spring. She hasn’t declared a major yet, but is leaning toward international studies with a minor in French.

Financial aid pays for her tuition, and SSB takes care of all the technology Kamara needs to learn. “I stay in regular communication with Charlotte regarding my laptop computer, when I need braille paper, or if there are any problems,” Kamara said. She also uses the services of live readers for test-taking through the University’s Disability Services, a unit of the Office for Equity and Diversity.

There is no lack of people or activity in Kamara’s life. Family values and friends are very important in Africa, Kamara said, and she spends much time with her brother and sister-in-law, niece and nephew in Brooklyn Park, taking the Metro Transit to their home when they can’t pick her up. She also spends time listening to music, dancing, and reading people’s real-life stories.

“People are nice here, and it is easier getting around,” she said. Her next bridge to cross will come next year: Kamara has plans to apply for citizenship. ■■■

### David Lasky—**SPOTLIGHT**

**A**s David Lasky, 87, candidly states, blind and visually impaired Minnesotans can do one of two things: "You can sit and be idle, or with the training of State Services for the Blind, continue working and being productive."

Like many, his loss of vision progressed on a continuum that began in kindergarten in 1920s Minneapolis. His teacher thought something was amiss; and University of Minnesota test results determined he was near-sighted. At that time, he was placed into a 'sight-saving class,' a school-based program for visually-impaired children. "The teacher would read out loud to us, and it basically functioned as a home room," he said.



**David Lasky**

Lasky was in a sight-saving school program throughout grade school—studying braille for about six months—and junior high school, then mainstreamed in his senior year at Edison High School.

His family, originally from the Iron Range, moved to North Minneapolis in 1921. He grew up as a normal kid, he said, playing basketball and skiing. Lasky, the last of six children spanning 19 years, has lived in St. Louis Park for 48 years.

While he was in his 60s, Lasky was being treated for a digestive problem, and the prescribed prednisone attacked his vision. In the 1970s, he went to State Services for the Blind and took a rehabilitation program, receiving training and recommendations on using equipment to facilitate reading. His loss of vision progressed slowly. During this time, he was also building the Lasky Company, a family-owned property management business. The Lasky Company has owned, operated and managed commercial and residential properties in the Twin Cities area for more than 30 years.

Through the years, he has sought the counsel of SSB and used many assistive devices and technology packages, including JAWS® for Windows, and returning those he found not overly helpful. His most



### David Lasky—**SPOTLIGHT** *continued*

recent favorite is Reading Edge, a stand-alone reading machine that scans printed material and reads it aloud in a synthesized voice.

“What is important to me is that without the equipment and training from State Services for the Blind, I would not be able to function in business. It is a helluva investment.”

Lasky is also a customer of the Minnesota Library for the Blind & Physically Handicapped in Faribault. “I can order the books I want,” he said.

Today, he successfully conducts business for 17 Lasky Company properties using the phone, computer, mail, e-mail and fax. “Without the equipment and training SSB made possible, I’d be in big trouble,” he said.

Lasky notes he pays income tax and sales tax on many items he purchases for his business. “The State of Minnesota would get a lot more return on their investment if they could train thousands more like me. The State would have made a helluva investment.” ■■■

### Marlys Benedix—**SPOTLIGHT**

She stole the hearts of public-sector employees when she began running the lunch counter five years ago at the Minnesota State Retirement System (MSRS) building in Saint Paul. Now Marlys Benedix wants to retire and start a new life in Bemidji. They’re not going to let her get away without a party.

Benedix has spent the last five years helping to keep MSRS employees happy and healthy. As the Business Enterprises Program operator running the lunch counter and maintaining the vending machines, she has ladled out more bowls of soup, sold more sandwiches, and sliced more servings of



**Marlys Benedix**

pizza than she can count. When large meetings or training classes are scheduled, she'll often be asked to help cater.

Over the years, she has noticed people's preferences change from bread and desserts to summer salads, fresh fruits and organics, even though it's more expensive. One thing hasn't changed: The MSRS folks do like their candy.

"My customers are a conservative bunch, and they tend to buy the 'old faithfuls' like Snickers and Milky Ways," she said. "They're a generous group of people who've appreciated what I have done, and that's a good feeling."

State Services for the Blind's Business Enterprises Program (BEP) develops self-employment business opportunities for legally blind vendors, consisting of small businesses that provide goods and services in public buildings and private industry. The businesses include counter operations and vending machine operations, although the majority are vending machine operations. The size of a business may range from machines in one building, a combination of a counter operation and vending machines or a route having machines at many different locations.

Although Benedix has been at the MSRS location since 2002, she has been with the program for about 12 years, having worked at the Capitol,

and State Agriculture and Administration buildings after her over-the-counter training at SSB's Midway office.

One morning in 1980, Benedix woke up and couldn't see. Her loss of vision was due to an inflammation of the iris, called iritis. Working with Ralston DuBois, an SSB counselor in the SSB Brainerd office at the time, she spent six months at the Lighthouse for the Blind in Duluth learning cane travel skills and how to access the local bus system. She studied only uncontracted braille (the alphabet, punctuation and numbers), because as a young girl the tips of her fingers were frostbitten. Lack of sensitivity in her fingertips prevented her from advancing further.

### **Business Enterprises Program Statistics—**

	<b>FFY2006</b>	<b>FFY2005</b>	<b>FFY2004</b>
Sales Volume	\$7,925,910	\$8,337,949	\$8,598,921
Average Net Profit*	\$38,317	\$38,139	\$35,709

\*Modified methodology based on Rehabilitation Services Administration interpretation.

### Marlys Benedix—**SPOTLIGHT** *continued*

Her affiliation with the BEP began in 1994, and she has watched the program undergo many developments. There is definitely more technology to the job—and more red tape, she said. “I think the federal program is getting tougher and tougher for vendors, there are so many new things,” she said.

Although she’s not anxious to leave MSRS and her many customers, life is taking over.

Benedix spent about a week in the hospital with her third bout of cancer; now she doesn’t have the strength she once had. Her customers took up a collection for her, she said. Last summer, she tore her rotator cuff while

lifting a case of pop. That accident not only left her in a lot of pain, but forced her to end her dart league and blind-bowling league play.

Yet another reason to retire: Her parents live in the small town of Laporte, in Hubbard County. While her father is still doing well healthwise, she said, her mother is not. She also has a daughter and son-in-law in the area and is hoping to get into a senior apartment in Bemidji next year. She is looking forward to volunteering, perhaps in a nursing home, and learning e-mail and Internet basics on the computer.

Officially, she leaves MSRS December 15, but there’s

good news for her favorite customers: She will be sharing hours until February or March of next year with a newly assigned BEP operator. Of the transition, Benedix said, “It’s good for the customer to know who the vendor is.”

So for now, Benedix’s standing order for a 5:30 a.m. Metro Mobility pick-up still stands: the driver picks her up from home, takes her to the MSRS building for the daily meet-and-greet and tend-to-the-lunch crowd, then the 1:30 p.m. ride back home.

“It’s hard to leave,” she said. “They all seem to like me.” ■■■

*Marlys Benedix has spent the last five years helping to keep Minnesota State Retirement System employees happy and healthy.*



## John Lee Clark—**SPOTLIGHT**

**W**hen John Lee Clark applied to State Services for the Blind for services, he was already a published poet and accomplished chess player. However, he wanted to teach at the college level and to do that he needed to learn to use technology to communicate. Clark is DeafBlind. He was born deaf and, as a result of Usher's Syndrome, has also lost his vision.

Fortunately, Clark had several critical factors in his favor. He is a proficient braille user. He already had some computer knowledge using sighted techniques. Clark used a computer with the background set in black and the text set in white and large size. But even that presented some difficulties. "It was not the best way because I was very blind, and reading was often a matter of guesswork. I would often misread words, and that sometimes caused problems. And there was the physical strain in trying to read the screen with my nearly useless eyes."

He had a strong desire to learn to use braille-based technology, and he had an

SSB counselor determined to find a way for him to reach this goal.

SSB was acutely aware of the challenges of teaching a DeafBlind person to use assistive technology and had been trying to find a solution. One of the biggest challenges was finding an access technology trainer who is proficient enough in American Sign Language (ASL) to train a person who is DeafBlind. Currently, these skills do not exist in one person. Clark and his counselor talked about options for training, and he agreed to be the SSB test case. Combining the tactile ASL skills of an interpreter who is familiar with computers and with the basics of screen reader technology with the training skills of a technology trainer plus Clark's desire to learn braille-based screen reading technology, the experiment worked! Clark became proficient in the use of assistive technology to the level needed to compete at the college level. He also learned to use a screen-braille communicator so he could communicate with hearing-sighted people.



**PacMates**

Another key piece of assistive technology Clark learned to use was a PacMate—a personal digital assistant with a braille display attached. "I download books onto it and read books, and it holds my calendar and contact information among other things. It is very portable," says Clark. SSB provided Clark with the PacMate, a critical tool for college students, as well as extensive training in how to use it. Again, he was the test case in a successful experiment in how to train a person with no hearing and no vision in how to use assistive technology for the blind.

Today, Clark is actively pursuing a degree in DeafBlind studies at Metropolitan State University with the goal of becoming a college professor. He has also paved the way for other customers of SSB who are DeafBlind to learn to use assistive technology and computer with their sighted and/or hearing peers. ■■■

**B**lind, visually impaired or DeafBlind Minnesotans age 55 or older wishing to regain or maintain their personal independence—as Elizabeth Rubio and Doris Schnobrich did—are served by Senior Services. Staff of this unit provide three levels of services, according to the needs of the customer:

- general information;
- direct provision of needed services exclusively by SSB staff; and
- more extensive training and other services by SSB staff and/or external vendors.

In the more intensive services, the customer receives help via a plan for needs ranging from braille and cane travel instruction to money and household management skill development. SSB staff and private contract vendors provide senior services to individuals or groups. SSB has been expanding the number of locations, or “hubs,” across the state where citizens can visit to receive services and try various aids and devices available to them. ■■■

## Senior Services Unit Statistics—

	FFY2006	FFY2005	FFY2004
Number Served	3,199	2,896	2,962
Number of Hubs Across the State	26	22	15
Average Number of Group Meetings/Month	13	13	15

## Assistive and Adaptive Technology Services

**A**ssistive and Adaptive Technology Services support the Workforce Development and Senior Services units in delivering technology—such as screen-reading or enlargement software, braille output devices, and system interfaces—so their customers have access to computers, other technology devices, as well as access to the printed word at work and in their daily lives.

Assistive and Adaptive Technology Services reviews and helps develop accessible web-based products for the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development and other entities. For example, access technology staff reviewed Workforce One, a customer and case-management system used by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development and partners; registration application at Minnesota WorkForce Centers; and an online payroll application for the Minnesota Department of Finance, to ensure that they are accessible to blind customers and state employees. They also beta test hardware and software products for assistive technology companies across the country.

Assistive and Adaptive Technology Services also conducts R&D in new technology that will assist all customers in being productive and independent citizens. They are working with one company in bringing new digital technology—and a clear, clean signal—to the Radio Talking Book.

A Chief Technology Officer and five SSB Access Technology staff provide services statewide.

## Elizabeth Rubio—SPOTLIGHT

Elizabeth Rubio, self-described perpetual student, relies on assistive aids for independent, lifelong learning and finds a faithful, well-traveled companion in guide dog Dallara.

In the early 1980s, Rubio returned to Minnesota from Phoenix—and doing some heavy lifting. She left behind a broken marriage, and brought her four children and cataracts with her.

“That’s when my long relationship with State Services for the Blind began,” she said. “Lyle Lundquist took me under his wing, and he knew I needed to work to support my family. He was very good.”

At that time, Lundquist assisted Rubio through SSB’s vocational rehabilitation program. After initial testing by SSB, the use of special glasses, and access to audio textbooks, she enrolled in the

University of Minnesota aiming for an education degree specializing in English as a Second Language. In time, and as a result of the rehabilitation services she received, Rubio earned her degree and became a teacher; eventually her case with SSB was closed.

Unfortunately, the promise of what Rubio called “a miraculous cataract removal” didn’t last, and she eventually developed secondary cataracts and glaucoma. “The vision in my right eye is not good, but the left eye is good. I have a 15 degree angle of vision, or tunnel vision,” she said.

Several years later, having left teaching for a position at Dayton’s, Rubio went back to the University on her own to study teaching children with visual disabilities, then linguistics. By this time, her oldest son was in college and the others were in their teens.



**Elizabeth Rubio**

It was 2003 when Rubio had occasion to access State Services for the Blind a second time. She had relocated to Zumbrota to be near a daughter and grandchildren, and given that Rubio was no longer seeking employment, she worked with Rochester-based SSB Senior Services Rehabilitation Counselor Diane Swanson. Swanson introduced her to low-vision aids, including ZoomText, magnification and reading software. “Diane was absolutely wonderful,” she said.

Travel was difficult, and Rubio recognized she needed to develop mobility



## Elizabeth Rubio—**SPOTLIGHT** *continued*

skills. Swanson introduced her to two service providers, Vision Loss Resources, and BLIND, Inc. and Rubio opted for Vision Loss Resources' (VLR) full-residency program in the Twin Cities.

While at VLR from September to December of 2005, she took training in

braille, cooking, adjustment to blindness classes, computer skills and learned about JAWS®.

Kelly McCrary, VLR Program Manager, instructed her in cane travel and her favorite, woodshop. She also had one special goal in mind: "I always had the long-term objective of obtaining a guide dog," she said.

"But the college dorm-like accommodations at VLR weren't all that comfortable for a 63-year old woman," she said. Rubio was anxious to return to Zumbrota where

one daughter lives. VLR left it open for her to return at some point.

"The people at State Services for the Blind and Vision Loss Resources are really top-notch. They don't work at the top of the pay scale, but they all exhibit genuine affection and patience for their students and customers," she said.

Swanson arranged for her to get a computer at home, a full-spectrum reading lamp, and a color CCTV, which she uses all the time. She also enjoys listening to the Radio Talking Book and spends considerable time studying ancient history, religion, and philosophy independently from her home in Zumbrota Towers, senior housing. She also makes use of the Minnesota Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped collection.

In the spring of 2006, she finally realized her wish for a guide dog: Rubio attended the California campus of Guide Dogs for the Blind. The school, supported by

private donations, accepts visually impaired students from throughout the United States and Canada for training with a guide dog free of charge.

After four weeks in residency at the San Rafael campus, she returned to Minnesota with Dallara, named after the Italian designer and manufacturer of race cars. "The training was beneficial for me but very rigorous," she said.

Dallara's puppy raiser was also a race car driver, and the well-traveled guide dog has traveled to Indianapolis for the Indy 500. "Dallara is totally mellow and doesn't mind the sun or being outdoors. The training facility in California is fantastic in matching people with dogs," she said.

Now with her daughter in Zumbrota, a son in Richfield, Minnesota, two children in California, and five grandchildren with a sixth on the way, her cane travel skills and Dallara keep her in good stead. ■■■

“The people at State Services for the Blind and Vision Loss Resources are really top-notch.”

### *The Minnesota Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped*

The Minnesota Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped in Faribault provides direct library service to eligible Minnesotans who are legally blind or visually handicapped; physically disabled; or reading disabled. More information may be obtained by calling the Library at 800.722.0550, or SSB at 800.652.9000. Patrons can search and order materials through a web-based online catalog located at <http://klas.com/mnbph>.

#### *The library offers:*

- Cassette, braille, and large-print magazines
- Descriptive videos
- Cassette, braille, and large print book titles; books for lifelong learning, but not textbooks
- A newsletter is available in large print and braille, on cassette, or via e-mail.

### Doris Schnobrich—SPOTLIGHT

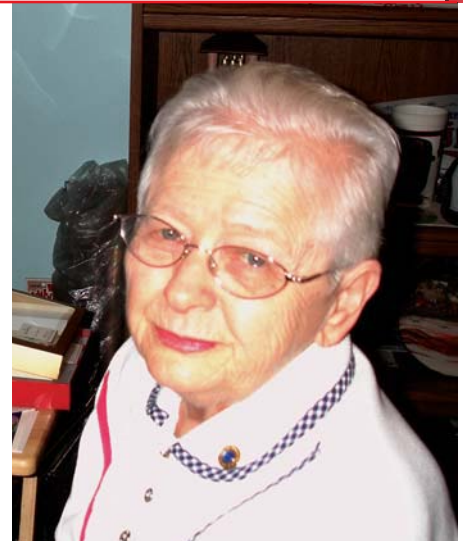
Thanks to SSB and assistive devices, progressive vision loss hasn't stopped 80-year-old Doris Schnobrich from bowling with fellow "Prime Timers", playing her favorite card game or baking sweets for her sweetie. Schnobrich and her husband Stan Schnobrich have celebrated their 61st wedding anniversary, and this active octogenarian is not about to slow down.

Lifelong New Ulm resident Schnobrich's vision problems began long before cataract

surgery two years ago. Macular degeneration forced her to stop driving in 2001, which put an end to volunteer work with Meals on Wheels.

"My husband Stan and I used to deliver meals together," she said. "But eventually I couldn't read the names and addresses, and it was too much to have Stan drive and do everything else," she said.

At a local Knights of Columbus meeting, Schnobrich met active members of the



**Doris Schnobrich**

National Federation of the Blind's Riverbend Chapter, who eventually led her to Lyle Lundquist of the Senior Services Unit at State Services for the Blind.

## Doris Schnobrich—**SPOTLIGHT** *continued*

Schnobrich met with Lundquist several times. He demonstrated a talking wristwatch and timer to her, and encouraged her to visit the Mankato WorkForce Center to see some closed circuit televisions, or CCTVs.

*“The magnifying glasses and CCTV helped tremendously with my reading.”*

library. Reading material is placed on a tray under a light, then magnified—up to 24x—onto a TV screen. Since images are projected onto a screen, the user can see more than is possible through a hand-held magnifier. CCTVs are also called ‘reading machines’ and their best use is for reading.

“Stan was very enthusiastic about the CCTV,” she said, “and when the demonstration was over, he turned to me and said ‘We’re getting one.’” Schnobrich says she can see indoors and outdoor, but to recognize

individuals, “they have to get right in my face.”

“The magnifying glasses and CCTV helped tremendously with my reading,” she said.

Schnobrich maintains an active lifestyle and continues housekeeping tasks with the help of assistive devices. Special knobs are placed on the oven and washing machine settings, “so I know where the oven temperatures and permanent press setting are, and I can do these things without Stan being there all the time,” she said. “I don’t prepare big meals anymore, but I do bake cookies and desserts because Stan is a sweet-eater.”

The Schnobrichs married in 1945 and ran a dairy farm about four miles outside of New Ulm, where they raised cows, pigs, chicken, and some sheep. Schnobrich also worked for over 23 years as a lab tester at Kraft Foods, but retired when Stan quit farming in 1983.

The couple’s son and daughter live in Iowa but a

grandson, his wife and three great-grandsons live in New Ulm and are frequent visitors to the Schnobrich home.

The Schnobrichs don’t travel as much as they once did but they love to play cards, especially the German card game of Sheephead.

“We play for nickels so you can’t lose too much in an afternoon,” she said.

Schnobrich also bowls in a Prime Timers (over 50) league, and she and Stan will sometimes bowl on Wednesday mornings “just for fun.”

Now fully adjusted to her vision loss, Schnobrich is trying to persuade friends in a similar situation to contact State Services for the Blind or simply visit the New Ulm Public Library. Thanks to an innovative “Low Vision Project” at the library, a variety of products and services are on display and available for demonstrations to anyone interested. ■■■



## Low Vision Project

New Ulm SSB customer Doris Schnobrich might not realize this, but she was the inspiration behind New Ulm's Low Vision Project.

"Doris had magnifiers, but there wasn't consistent follow-up to see what else she could be using. She wasn't aware of alternative cooking and housekeeping techniques and felt like bowling wouldn't be worth it anymore," said Charlene Childrey, President of the Riverbend Chapter, National Federation of the Blind.

Today, Schnobrich can do laundry thanks to tactile markings, and she can bowl at her local bowling alley with the assistance of removable guide rails. And now more residents of Brown, Sibley and Nicollet counties have closer-to-home access to information, assistive devices, and technology through the Low Vision Project, a new collaborative effort between State Services for the Blind; National Federation of the Blind Riverbend Chapter in New Ulm; New Ulm Public Library; and New Ulm Lions Club.

In the collaborative, State Services for the Blind provides the equipment, including a color magnifier; computer

with ZoomText (software that magnifies and reads out loud), several keyboard styles, headphones, regular or trackball mouse, and training by appointment.

"We have had a busy time this summer with the Low Vision Project," said Carolyn Baird, New Ulm Public Library Director. The library, which is fully accessible, has volunteers who assist with referrals to SSB; delivery of materials to nursing homes, senior housing and patrons who are homebound. The library also offers online catalog and reference materials; and reference service via phone and e-mail. They also provide storage for the equipment and, just like books on tape or large-print books, will loan magnifiers, easy-to-read 20/20 pens designed for those who are visually impaired, and other equipment for a two-week borrowing period.

The New Ulm Library is also marketing the Low Vision Project through a website: [http://www.newulmlibrary.org/low\\_vision\\_services.htm](http://www.newulmlibrary.org/low_vision_services.htm)

One advantage to the Low Vision Project is that individuals who demonstrate the equipment and assistive devices are themselves blind. "One individual told us, 'This

makes me feel more like this will work, and my life won't be over if my vision diminishes,' " Childrey said.

So far, Low Vision Project volunteers have demonstrated equipment to more than a dozen people, including a 7th grader, individuals in the workforce, and seniors. When you include family members, Lions, and other interested community members, that number rises to 20 to 25. Volunteers help individuals select the equipment best suited to their needs; identify vendors; and work to secure funding, if needed. They've also advocated for a low-vision instructor at the River Bend School. The New Ulm Lions help with funding the CCTVs.

More and more residents are becoming aware of the presence and services of the Low Vision Project, according to Childrey. "Over time rapport gets built, and we're helping people get connected to this community," she said.

"We are pleased to be involved with the Low Vision Project and seeing the impact it has on blind and visually impaired residents of New Ulm and Brown County," said Chuk Hamilton, SSB Director. "We'll see if this is a service model that can be used across the state."

Imagine a public library where the collection and services are customized exclusively for blind, visually impaired, DeafBlind and print handicapped Minnesotans. The State of Minnesota already has one. It's called the Communication Center, and it's located at State Services for the Blind's Saint Paul Midway office. Through transcription and reading services, customers have access to the same print media as sighted Minnesotans.

## The Center:

- lends transcribed textbooks for Kotumu Kamara and hundreds of other Minnesota students of all ages, and leisure reading books (braille or tape);
- lends and repairs special radio receivers and
- lends and repairs cassette players through the Library of Congress Talking Book Program.

The Center broadcasts a 24-hour radio reading service—the Radio Talking Book (RTB)—through a closed-circuit radio network that includes six Greater Minnesota outreach sites:

- Fergus Falls,
- Mankato,
- Duluth,
- Rochester,
- St. Cloud, and
- Grand Rapids.

These outreach sites allow the Center to broadcast local news from publications such as the *Fergus Falls Daily Journal*, *Mankato Free Press*, *Duluth News Tribune*, *Rochester Post-Bulletin*, *St. Cloud Times*, *Grand Rapids Herald-Review* and others. RTB is also streamed on the Internet with a password.

The complete program schedule for the RTB is available online at the State Services for the Blind's website: <http://www.mnssb.org/>

A short sample of their offerings includes

- *Night Journey*, mysteries;
- *Money Matters*, personal financial management from *FW*, *Kiplinger's Personal Finance*, *Money*, *Your Money*, and the money section of *USA Today*;
- *Kiosk Internationale*, international news and commentary from foreign publications, including *New Internationalist*, *International Herald Tribune*, *New Statesman*, and *World Press Review*; and
- *Religion Update*, *American Jewish World*, *Christian Century*, *Free Inquiry*, *Reporter*, *The Lutheran*, *National Catholic Sojourners*, *Twin Cities Christian*, *U.S. Catholic* and others.

## Communication Center Statistics—

	FFY2006	FFY2005	FFY2004
Braille Pages Provided	765,313	756,904	686,838
Radio Talking Book Receivers Placed	6,459	6,611	7,056
Audio Equipment Maintained and Circulated	20,488	21,011	21,710
Number of Customers Accessing Audio Services	13,965	14,190	15,232

Communication Center customers can choose their time to get their news through two 24-hour audio newspaper reading services accessed with a telephone: Dial-In News for metro-area newspapers and NFB-Newslines® for Minnesota for some local and over 200 national newspapers. This particular service is

supported, in part, by funds from the Minnesota Department of Commerce's Telecommunications Access Minnesota fund.

The Center provides all of these audio, print and digital communication services through SSB staff and a network of over 650 volunteers, including Judy

McGuigan and Verna Rausch. Volunteers—highly valued for their contributions to the Center and blind Minnesotans—are honored each year with recognition events held at a variety of venues, such as the James J. Hill House, Landmark Center, and Como Park Zoo and Conservatory. ■■■



**Judy McGuigan**

### Judy McGuigan—SPOTLIGHT

McGuigan has recorded books for the blind for the past 26 years. It began with a “seed” planted in 1970—shortly after the birth of her daughter.

McGuigan read an article in *Good Housekeeping* about a woman who overcame empty-nest syndrome through a new interest—reading to the blind.

McGuigan volunteered for school and church activities while her own kids were growing up, but by the time they reached junior high school, she knew they wouldn't want her to be quite so close anymore. So ten years after reading that

*Good Housekeeping* piece, McGuigan passed the Communication Center's oral reading exam and became a volunteer textbook reader.

Because she majored in chemistry at the College of St. Catherine, textbooks on the topic became McGuigan's specialty. But her illuminating words were also recorded on a broad range of topics—from 8th grade-level science to university-level management finance.

McGuigan tries—sometimes very hard—to understand what she's saying. “I know I'm reading English, but when I string some of these

Judy McGuigan may not care much for author Patricia Cornwell, but her love of reading and crisp delivery has brought to life plenty of other mysteries and thrillers. And she enjoys the occasional break after reading all those textbooks.



## Judy McGuigan—**SPOTLIGHT** *continued*

words together, sometimes it makes no sense. It's a real challenge to make material you don't understand interesting and meaningful to the students you're reading for."

Profiled in the late 1980s for a Communication Center publication, McGuigan recalled one young chemistry student whom she suspects relied heavily on her audio textbooks: "Each year he was in college I did the bulk of his chemistry books. I fully expect someday for someone to tap me on the shoulder and say, 'I'd know that voice anywhere!' especially that young man who has listened to so many hours of my voice."

McGuigan read textbooks for a decade before expanding her repertoire to include mysteries recorded for 'Night Journey', a Radio Talking Book program that

airs Monday through Friday at 9 p.m. She still remembers the first mystery she recorded: A book by Elliot Roosevelt in which his mother, Eleanor, is portrayed as an amateur detective.

McGuigan passes on writer Patricia Cornwell: "I live alone and find her writing too violent." Currently she is reading "Through a Glass, Darkly," a mystery set in Venice, written by Donna Leon.

McGuigan's husband was partially deaf, so she is acquainted with the challenges of living with disability. And in an ironic twist of fate, McGuigan lost an eye to melanoma in 1994. Though now fully adjusted, she is grateful for the support she received from her colleagues at the Communication Center.

"They were wonderful, and I can't say enough about the support I received at that time," she said. "Lots of people have only one eye, but I appreciated all the Communication Center did for me in terms of adjustment."

Today McGuigan spends three hours a week at the Communication Center, recording textbooks on Wednesdays and mysteries on weekends. She also sings in her church choir and works for a St. Paul-based real estate company that develops affordable housing.

McGuigan considers her work at the Communication Center an important service in many ways. "That is why I've stayed as involved and committed for so long. It's my way of sharing my love for reading with someone who will benefit from it." ■■■

*"That is why I've stayed as involved and committed for so long. It's my way of sharing my love for reading with someone who will benefit from it."*

## Verna Rausch—**SPOTLIGHT**

**V**erna Rausch likes to keep busy. When not enjoying season tickets to the Gophers, she is a Hennepin History Museum researcher and an inspired tutor at Kenny Community School. And for the past 14 years, she has been volunteer “talent” at the State Services for the Blind’s Communication Center.

Speaking in her signature low, rapid voice, Rausch won’t be leaving the Communication Center anytime soon. “I intend to volunteer for as long as I can drive myself over there.”

Many years ago while on a visit to Milwaukee, a friend introduced Rausch to the services that city provided to the blind and visually impaired community. Translating musical scores into braille was her friend’s specialty.

Rausch returned to Minneapolis and met Ellie Sevdy, Audio Supervisor, who commented on her distinctive voice. Rausch’s interest was piqued and the application process began.

Volunteer textbook readers are highly skilled individuals

who pass a stringent oral reading test before being accepted by the Communication Center, according to Ellie Sevdy. All applicants are tested on reading and pronunciation skills, as well as their proficiency in a variety of topics, ranging from art, music and foreign languages—to chemistry, math and science.

Rausch’s specialty was biology. She retired from the University of Minnesota in 1984 after a 38-year career in Health Sciences, laboratory methodology and pathology. Her career has followed her right into the recording studios at the Communication Center.

Today, Rausch records textbooks or specifically assigned chapters exclusively in the medical subject area, including anatomy, massage therapy and physiology. In her busy schedule, Rausch commits to a once-a-week recording session, where a finished 58-minute reel takes her about two and one-half hours to prepare.

The Communication Center provides training in formatting

and in operating professional recording equipment. Staff working with volunteers and the recording process must also pass the oral reading test and maintain a high level of skill. Ongoing training, development and evaluation take place continually to improve the performance of volunteers.

Now living in South Minneapolis, Rausch is giving back to the community on several fronts. She spends one day a week responding to inquiries at the Hennepin History Museum. She tutors second and third graders at Minneapolis’ Kenny Community and helps teachers with their needs. She visits with nephews in the area, cheers her beloved Minnesota Gophers and attends State



**Verna Rausch**

## Verna Rausch—**SPOTLIGHT** *continued*

Services for the Blind's volunteer recognition events.

In her 14 years as a volunteer, Rausch has seen

the Communication Center undergo changes in staff, adjust to policy changes, and improve the recording booths. Through it all, one constant

remains: "My work is helping someone with limited vision develop their career, and I take pride in that." ■■■

## Ashley Brueske—**SPOTLIGHT**

**B**raille—thousands and thousands of hard-copy pages—and two Summer Transition Program sessions put Maple Grove student Ashley Brueske on the University of Minnesota's academic track.

Brueske was born with underdeveloped optic nerves, a condition known as optic nerve hypoplasia, one of the most common causes of visual impairment in children. As a child, she lived on the East Side of Saint Paul, then at age 7 moved with her family to Maple Grove.

Although she recalls reading practice with her kindergarten teacher, Brueske can't quite put her finger on just when she started learning braille. "My mom told me that when I was little, she hired someone to come to our house and place labels on

the furniture, but I really don't remember that. It may be so, because I just recently found an old, beat-up label that said 'drawer'."

When Brueske was 11- to 15-years-old, she attended summer sessions at Minnesota State Academy for the Blind, where she learned proper cane travel techniques, orientation and mobility training and the best ways to navigate in the community. "One summer, there were braille training exercises, but by then I didn't really need it," she said. "My relationship with SSB probably began when I was younger than grade-school age, but my heaviest use was during my high school years," she said.

Although the original source of her braille textbooks was transparent to Brueske—she simply knows she got it throughout her K-12



**Ashley Brueske**

education—Braille Supervisor Mary Archer confirms that when Brueske was a student, State Services for the Blind provided her with thousands of pages of braille.

Knowing braille well is absolutely essential in providing the foundation of literacy for children who are blind or visually impaired, she said. "The reason braille is so critical is that it is a means of reading and writing, so that kids know how to spell, write and communicate as well as sighted kids," Archer said.



Proficiency in braille also has implications for the workforce and the ability of workers who are blind to command higher income-earning jobs. Among the population of blind employees in the United States, significantly more are braille readers employed in professional positions earning higher wages.

Itinerant teachers of visually impaired students initially request materials be made available in braille, Archer explained. "When we receive requests for braille, we research to see if we have the book in our collection or if it is available somewhere else. If not, we transcribe it," she said.

To help prepare for college, Brueske attended two Summer Transition Program sessions held in the summers of 2004 and 2005, funded in part by State Services for the Blind. The Summer Transition Program is a two-week residential program for students who have completed the 10th grade that provides experiences to address the transition needs of students who are blind, visually impaired, or DeafBlind.

"It was very expensive to stay in college dorms for two weeks

each summer," she said, "so I was thankful for the support of SSB, and I checked back with my counselor on my experiences." Job shadowing opportunities and essential skills for attending college, and visits to Minneapolis Community and Technical College, University of Minnesota and St. Olaf College were among the activities included in the Summer Transition Programs.

Today, Brueske is a University of Minnesota freshman considering a psychology major; her tuition is waived and SSB pays for her room and board, student fees and books. She experiences campus life while navigating with a cane. Although she has a little vision in her right eye, Brueske is totally blind in her left eye.

At the U she is making a transition from hard-copy

## Program improves e-text services for the blind

The field of text publishing is evolving rapidly, as is the technology used to convert materials into appropriate alternative formats for Minnesota's blind and visually disabled students.

Recognizing this, more than 30 professionals participated in a two-day program on the creation of electronic texts for students with disabilities in November 2006.

Sponsors of the program were State Services for the Blind (SSB), the University of Minnesota and the Association on Higher

Education and Disability (AHEAD).

Topics presented included the effective use of e-texts by students; best practices in production and distribution; and working with publishers to address copyright and security issues. Participants received "hands on" training on the creation of e-texts from print material.

"Partnership efforts such as this workshop increase our collective understanding of the complexities we face and the viable solutions we can apply," said Chuk Hamilton, SSB Director.

## Ashley Brueske—**SPOTLIGHT** *continued*

braille in favor of the Kurzweil program, which is available on her dorm-room computer, she said. Kurzweil is a software product in which scanned printed documents and digital files—including e-mail and electronic books—are converted from text to speech and read aloud.

"A move from hard-copy braille to voice output options is a natural progression for college students because the

information is coming so thick and fast, and students have to keep up," Archer said.

The University's Disability Services Office also provides support to Brueske: textbooks scanned using the Kurzweil program, placement test assistance, and when a class location was changed at the last minute, an access (sighted) assistant was able to direct her to class.

Outside of class, Brueske loves to sing. She is a member of the University's concert choir and sings at a Lutheran church. She visits her family often on the weekends and is involved with Job's Daughters, an organization for young women. And in a few years, all those many pages of braille could lie at the foundation of Brueske's clinical psychology career. ■■■

## Anessa Kemna—**SPOTLIGHT**

**F**or years, SSB has supplied the braille. But necessity and speed have made Anessa Kemna a better braille reader, and she knows a lot about speed. She just returned to Minnesota with three bronze medals after competing in the International Paralympics Committee Swimming World Championships held in Durban, South Africa.

The elements that have made Kemna a highly proficient braille reader have also made her a world-class

competition swimmer: necessity, speed, and of course, practice.

Kemna, now a University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD) freshman who grew up in Orono, recalls her early braille training in kindergarten and first grade at Orono Elementary School. "A year to a year and a half of intense braille study would probably be enough to understand the basics," she said. "You have to have the necessity to learn, and that would give



you the speed to become a better reader. I read whatever I could get my hands on for leisure throughout school."

For years the Braille Unit at State Services for the Blind was busy filling her requests.

When Kemna was young, she had limited vision. "My vision was good enough to get around when I was young," she said. Kemna, who uses a cane, took orientation and mobility training in school. She progressed in acquiring the literacy skills she needed to compete with students in the Orono Public School system. While attending elementary school, she used a combination of braille, large print and intensive magnifiers, she said. By the time she reached fourth grade, she used braille about half the time. In high school, it was mostly braille and some technology. During her three years of high-school level Spanish, all her language materials were brailled.

Now that she's a UMD student, she uses mostly technology to read class assignments. In fact, like State Services for the Blind braille customer and University of Minnesota student Ashley Brueske, Kemna also has a computer equipped with the Kurzweil

program and a scanner in her dorm room. The Kurzweil program vocalizes the input from the scanned inkprint.

Kemna, an English major concentrating on creative writing, is currently studying composition, world literature and philosophy. She also takes violin and enjoys music and singing. The Spanish language wasn't her first preference for college language study. Next year, she wants to take French to broaden her language skills, and eventually Italian and Russian. "Just not all at the same time," she said.

Playing goal ball for a Courage Center team took her to several states for tournaments. Competitive swimming took her further afield—to Argentina in 2002 and Greece in 2004—and became a passion for her when she became totally blind as a young teenager. In Durban for three weeks for the International Paralympics Committee Swimming World Championships, she competed in nearly every event, she said, including the 100-yard sprint, freestyle, breaststroke, butterfly, 200-meter individual medley, and 400-meter freestyle swim. She

placed third—three times—and came home to Minnesota with the bronzes. Back on campus, she swims with the North Shore Swim Club.

As a university student, Kemna puts a mix of services to their best use for her. She maintains a customer-counselor relationship with SSB's Shelly Frohrip, UMD's Disability Services Office provides test accommodations and adapts some materials for her use, and she also requests tapes and CDs from the Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic, based in Princeton, New Jersey.

*“SSB was very helpful to me,” she said. “I may have been able to muddle through without them, but life would be a lot more complicated.”*

SSB also pays for her student fees and books; her tuition is waived.

“SSB was very helpful to me,” she said. “I may have been able to muddle through without them, but life would be a lot more complicated.” ■■■



## Mission

To facilitate the achievement of vocational and personal independence by Minnesotans who are blind, visually impaired or DeafBlind.

## Philosophy

- Blindness is a natural part of the human experience, a characteristic, like the hundreds of others which, taken together, mold each of us into a unique human being.
- People who are blind are a cross-section of society as a whole, mirroring society in every way with the same hopes, interests and desires, the same dreams, abilities and potential as everyone else.
- Most all the physical limitations associated with blindness can be overcome by learning and using alternative techniques for doing without sight what you would do with sight.
- With appropriate education, training and opportunity, persons who are blind can achieve in the world of work, can be independent in their home and community, can have and take care of a family, can be a tax paying and participating citizen and can be in every way a contributing member of society who can compete equally with his or her sighted neighbors.
- Everyone has different dreams and expectations, attitudes and aptitudes, potential and possibilities—so an important ingredient to our programs is customer choice.
- Our job is to encourage high expectations and independence and provide the services needed to achieve customer goals while respecting customer choice. Success depends greatly on the effort and commitment by the customer.

## Greater Minnesota

<b>Bemidji</b>	218.333.8206	<b>Hutchinson</b>	320.234.0384	<b>Moorhead</b>	218.236.2422
Toll Free	888.234.1257	Toll Free	888.234.7832	Toll Free	800.657.3755
TTY	218.755.4422	TTY	320.587.4740	TTY	218.236.2206
<b>Brainerd</b>	218.828.2490	<b>Mankato</b>	507.389.6070	<b>Rochester</b>	507.285.7282
Toll Free	800.657.3779	Toll Free	800.657.3821	Toll Free	800.366.2715
TTY	218.828.2734	TTY	507.389.3257	TTY	507.280.2886
<b>Duluth</b>	218.723.4600	<b>Marshall</b>	507.537.7114	<b>St. Cloud</b>	320.255.4800
Toll Free	800.657.3752	Toll Free	800.366.4813	Toll Free	800.366.5420
TTY	218.725.7759	TTY	507.537.6061	TTY	320.202.6401
<b>Hibbing</b>	218.262.6754	<b>Monticello</b>	763.271.3777		
Toll Free	800.657.3824	Toll Free	888.737.6237		
TTY	218.263.2962	TTY	763.271.3745		

## Metropolitan Area

<b>Blaine</b>	763.792.3900
TTY	763.785.5987
<b>Brooklyn Park</b>	763.536.7535
TTY	763.536.6005
<b>Bloomington</b>	952.346.4313
TTY	952.346.4043
<b>St. Paul/Minneapolis</b>	651.642.0500
TOLL FREE	800.652.9000
TTY	651.642.0506
TOLL FREE TTY	888.665.3276
<b>West St. Paul</b>	651.554.6246
TTY	651.554.5914
<b>Woodbury</b>	651.275.8672
TTY	651.275.8653



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of the Minnesota Department of  
Employment and Economic Development.**



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This information is available in alternative formats such as braille, large print, audio tape and computer disk by calling  
■ 651.642.0500 ■ TTY 1.651.642.0506 ■ Toll Free: 800.652.9000 ■ Toll Free TTY: 888.665.3276 ■