



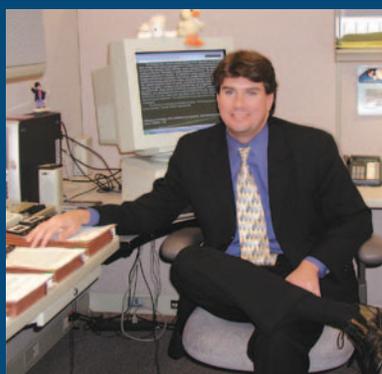
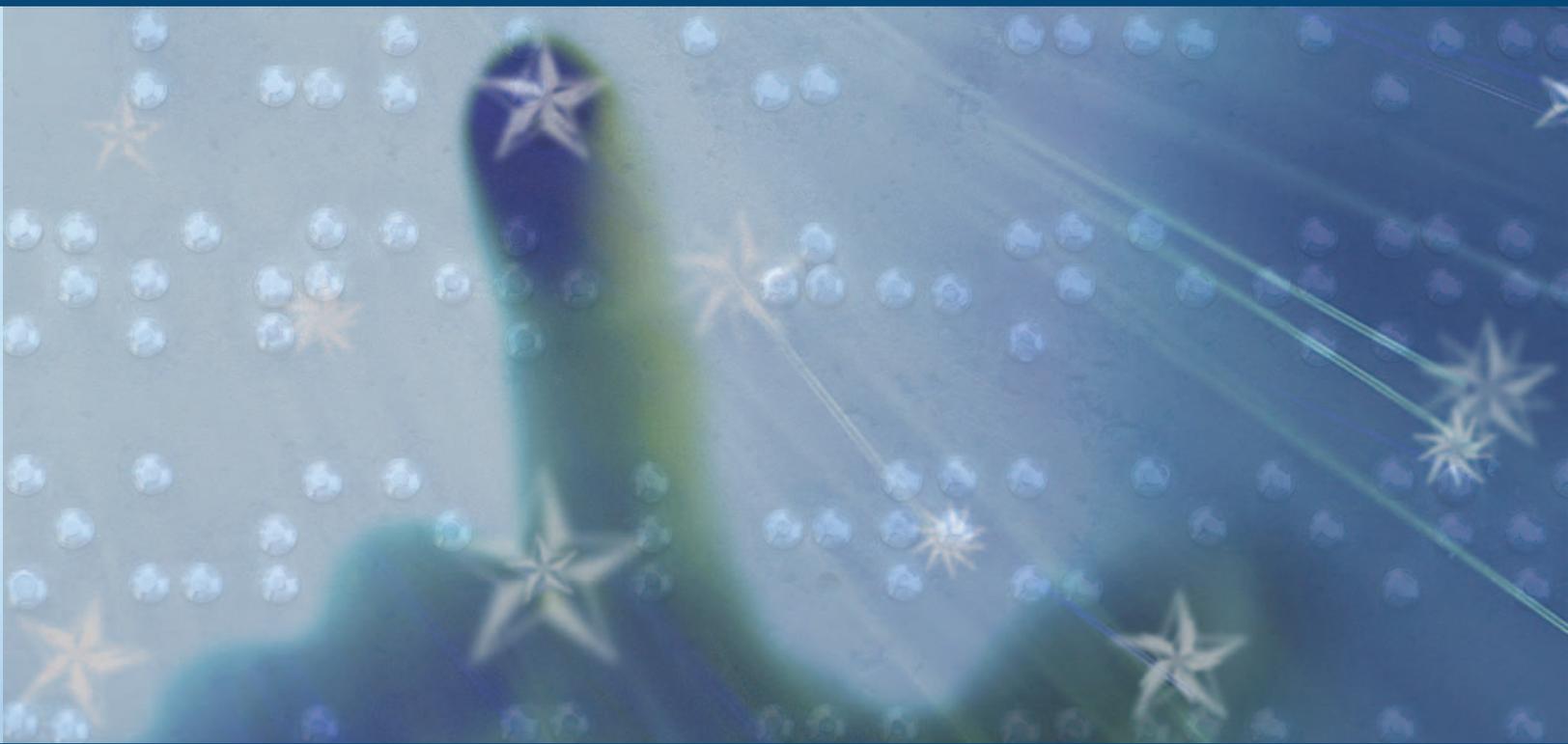
M I N N E S O T A

State Services for the Blind

2 0 0 5

A N N U A L

R E P O R T



A Formula for Success





Message from the Director

We are pleased to present the *2005 State Services for the Blind (SSB) Annual Report* celebrating the partnership with our customers and 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 report is a departure from the past. While reporting progress and outcomes is still necessary and important, the focus is the services SSB provides 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 the past year:

- 125 customers obtained or retained competitive employment.
- SSB intensified marketing and outreach activities. The Senior Outreach Project, designed to aggressively market the services of the Communication Center and Senior Services, has contacted every ophthalmologist and optometrist in Minnesota as well as others in the human service arena.
- SSB has re-established information and referral services to children and their families. We have created a newsletter and developed new marketing and website materials. The web address is www.mnssb.org/children and it includes such topics as early childhood, education, advocacy, support for families, and book and video games.
- Gifts to the Communication Center doubled from 2004 to 2005, from \$200,000 to over \$500,000. One very large gift was provided by an estate.
- The Legislature allocated stable funding for the SSB-administered, telephone-accessed newspaper and magazine reading services, known as NFB-NEWSLINE® and Dial-In News. This resulted from the hard work of the National Federation of the Blind of Minnesota to get the bill introduced and passed. Support also was provided by the American Council of the Blind of Minnesota, the United Blind of Minnesota and others.
- SSB staff, with the support and involvement of the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC-B), Community Rehabilitation Programs, individual contractors, consumer advocates and others developed the first Assistive Technology Trainer Standards in the country. These standards include testing on software in the blindness and visual impairment field as well as a requirement for training in adult education. This contribution to the field of rehabilitation will be shared with other agencies.

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



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

Chair's Message

The State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC-B) worked effectively in partnership this year with SSB on a number of activities. For example, in FFY 2004 the SRC-B participated in the development of an adjustment-to-blindness training program for staff at SSB, and this year we participated in its implementation. At the beginning of the year, members of the Council joined SSB staff in a two-day training covering basic information about the many aspects and issues of blindness. Now, all new SSB staff will receive similar training, and some staff will receive more intensive training on blindness by attending four weeks of classes at adjustment-to-blindness centers. This training represents a very important and positive step toward improved services to blind, visually impaired, and DeafBlind Minnesotans.

Much of the work of the SRC-B is done in committees and task forces which work closely with SSB to improve services to Vocational Rehabilitation customers, children, seniors, and/or DeafBlind individuals. In addition to assisting with the activities of the various SSB units, all committees participated in revising the agency's goals and priorities for 2006.

In June 2005, Bonita Kallestad, Carol Leaders, Chuk Hamilton, and I attended one of a number of training sessions held around the country for State Rehabilitation Councils (SRC's) and sponsored by the Rehabilitation Services Administration. Topics included a history of rehabilitation in the United States, an overview of the rehab act, VR principles and policies, and the role of the State Rehabilitation Council. Breakout sessions covered annual reports, recruiting members and building effective partnerships. We networked with other SRC's and learned how they operate. We also passed on information about what has worked well for us as a Council. What we gained from this experience will be of great assistance to us in our work, and we hope these trainings will continue in subsequent years.

Major changes occurred in the structure of Rehabilitation Services Administration in 2005, including the closing of the ten regional offices and the Office for the Blind. This council has joined other SRC's, agencies, and consumer groups from around the country in registering concerns about the restructuring of our federal partner agency. We have expressed our strong support for RSA to remain distinct among federal programs and to be well-staffed with people knowledgeable about rehabilitation policy and practice, responsive to the needs of people with disabilities, and funded sufficiently to meet those needs. The SRC-B will continue to make our voice heard for the protection of rehabilitation services which are so critical for the blind, visually impaired, and DeafBlind people of Minnesota and the nation.

This annual report clearly indicates what a positive year it has been for State Services for the Blind. It has been a distinct privilege to be involved in the forward direction of SSB. On behalf of the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind, I commend all the staff of SSB for their hard work and dedication to improved services for blind, visually impaired, and DeafBlind Minnesotans.



Jennifer Dunnam, Chair
SRC-B



Seated, left to right - Chairperson Jennifer Dunnam, Roseanne Faber, previous Chairperson Rod Haworth

Standing, first row, left to right - Jim Collins, Jean Martin, Lynette Boyer, Coralmae "Coke" Stenstrom, Elizabeth Bruber

Standing, back row, left to right - Steve Jacobson, Sam Jasmine, Rebecca Kragnes, Carol Leaders, Chuk Hamilton, Bonita Kallestad

Not pictured - Toni Amundson, Gloria LaFriniere, Liz McDevitt, Wally Hinz, Eric Smith, Eric Kloos



Mission and Philosophical Statements

The mission of State Services for the Blind is to facilitate the achievement of vocational and personal independence by Minnesotans who are blind, visually impaired or DeafBlind.

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, mirroring society in every way with the same hopes, interests and desires, the same dreams, abilities and potential as everyone else.

Most 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.

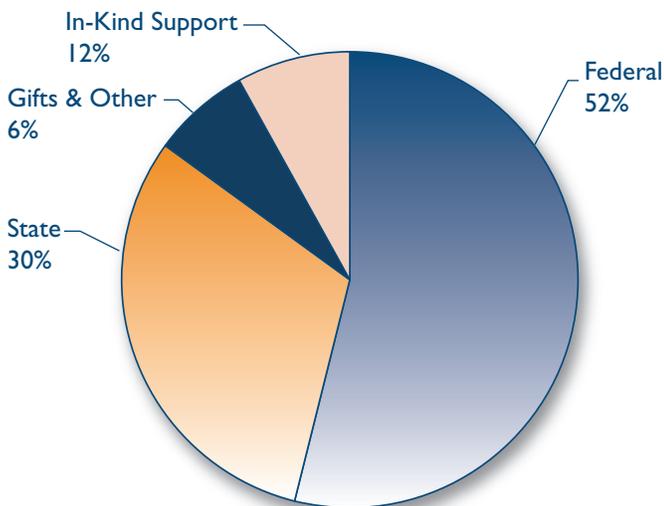
Everyone has different dreams and expectations, attitudes and aptitudes, potential and possibilities – so an important ingredient to our programs is customer service.

Our job is to encourage high expectations and independence and provide the services needed to achieve customer goals while respecting customer service. Success depends greatly on the effort and commitment by the customer.

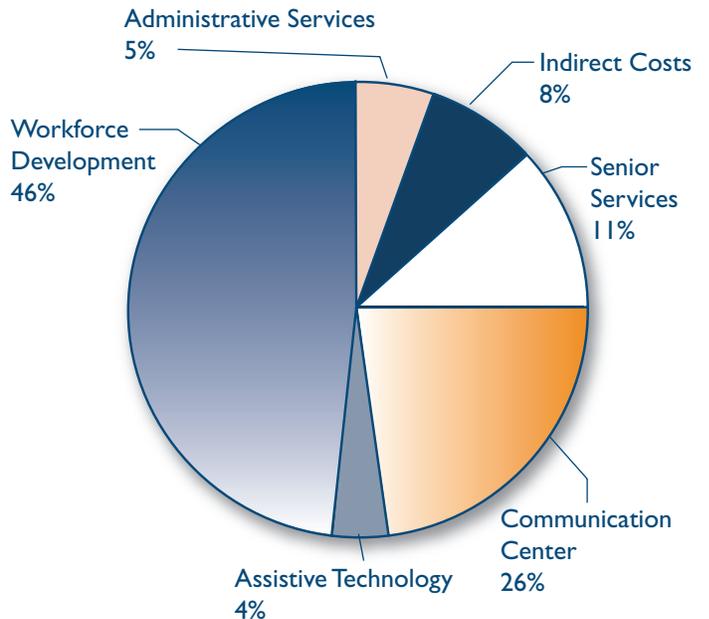
State Services for the Blind 2005 Budget Breakout

		<i>Percentage of Funds to Total Funding</i>
Federal Funds		
Basic VR	\$7,255,000	
Supported Employment	\$105,000	
Training Grant	\$34,000	
Independent Living (IL)	\$55,000	
IL Older Blind	\$529,000	
CFL Grant	\$475,000	
Total Federal Funds	\$8,453,000	52%
Total State Funds		
	4,862,000	30%
Other Funds		
Gift/Bequest	\$216,000	
Special Revenue		
Communication Center	\$113,000	
Business Enterprises	\$748,000	
Total Other Funds	\$1,077,000	6%
In-Kind Support		
In-Kind Support from Volunteers	\$1,917,800	12%
Total All Funds	\$16,309,800	100%

**State Services for the Blind
Funding Streams FFY 2005**



**State Services for the Blind
Distribution FFY 2005**



Workforce Development Unit

The counselors and staff of the Workforce Development Unit, partners in the Workforce Center System, ensure eligible individuals receive the rehabilitation services they require to prepare for, seek, gain or retain employment. Vocational assessment, guidance and counseling are provided to assist the individual to determine a realistic career goal. To reach the career goal, the individual is provided training to function independently as a person with a vision loss, training in skills related to the specific career goal, job-seeking skills, job placement assistance and assistance with job site accommodations. Rehabilitation counselors in 14 field offices (including 13 WorkForce Centers) as well as a network of private vendors across Minnesota, provide these employment-related services.

WFC locations are:

Duluth, Hibbing, Bemidji, Brainerd, St. Cloud, Hutchinson, Mankato, Rochester, Blaine, Burnsville, Monticello, Bloomington, and Woodbury.

Workforce Development Unit Statistics

	FFY2005	FFY2004	FFY2003
No. of Paid Closures	125	103	126
Weekly Salary Change Application-Closure	\$208.27	\$173.27	\$142.81
Average Wage per Hour	\$13.38	\$ 11.29	\$ 12.00
Number Served	1,219	1,311	1,374

Spotlight

Craig Roisum



St. Louis Park, MN – On his third day at BLIND, Inc. Craig Roisum dug himself out of the pity hole. A group of students from his class asked him to join them at William’s Uptown Pub in Uptown.

“But I can’t see,” he said.

“That’s OK. We can’t see either.”

“That’s when I finally realized this can be done.”

Roisum, a St. Louis Park resident, was a successful plant mechanic for 16 years. He owned a research and retail business in East Grand Forks while working as a boiler

Story continued on page 7 ►

What is Usher syndrome?

Usher syndrome is an inherited disorder characterized by moderate to profound hearing impairment, which is present at birth or shortly thereafter, and progressive vision loss. It is the major cause of deaf blindness. Between 10,000 and 15,000 people in the United States have Usher syndrome.

What is retinitis pigmentosa?

Retinitis pigmentosa (RP) is the name given to a group of inherited eye diseases that affect the retina. Retinitis pigmentosa causes the degeneration of photoreceptor cells in the retina. Photoreceptor cells capture and process light helping us to see. As these cells degenerate and die, patients experience progressive vision loss. Many patients with retinitis pigmentosa retain a small degree of central vision throughout their life.

(Definitions from www.blindness.org)

plant mechanic for the Grand Forks Air Force Base.

After 9/11, his business took a nose-dive. His position at the Air Force Base ended in 2003, and once diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa and Usher syndrome, his vision grew progressively worse. He had been avoiding doctors, driving when he knew he shouldn't, wondering whether to cash it in and come back to the Twin Cities.

When Roselee Siegler, rehabilitation counselor in SSB's Workforce Development Unit, told him he had no business being behind the wheel of a car, he felt his life spinning out of control.

Roisum remembers April 6, 2004 as his last day of driving. He stocked up on groceries and said good-bye to the near-hits. "I didn't know where my life was going," he said.

That was before he was introduced to BLIND, Incorporated (www.blindinc.org), an adjustment to blindness learning center located in Minneapolis that provides a number of services to customers

of State Services for the Blind. Training includes instruction in alternative techniques for daily living, cane travel, braille, assistive technology and industrial arts.

Siegler encouraged him to visit BLIND, Inc. and Roisum quickly found himself enrolling as a full-time student at the Minneapolis residential school in July 2004. For the next nine months, Roisum, all the while wearing sleepshades, learned cane travel, braille, home management and computer skills, and careers and life skills. He made a card table out of cards. "Industrial arts class was my favorite, because I saw some production out of it," he said.

That year, BLIND, Inc. students procured a Christmas tree for the holidays and in place of a star, topped the tree with sleepshades.

By that time, Roisum was confident enough to begin part-time study in geology at the University of Minnesota, and to stay active in BLIND, Inc.'s Buddy Program, a mentoring program for children ages 9 to 13.

Roisum, among hundreds of others throughout the country, applied for a National Federation of the Blind scholarship in 2005. His persistence paid off. At the conference, he was awarded a \$7,000 scholarship and a NASA Goddard Space Flight Center Contractors Association Internship. He'll head to the Goddard Space Flight Center just outside of Washington, DC next year.

"I met with six mentors at the annual conference in Louisville," he said. "It was an overwhelming and powerful experience."

There is a saying I've told my son: "You build your boat, and you float it." What this means is that you take responsibility for your life. Life is like a boat; it takes good, sound framework to float. If it doesn't have that, it will sink. I had a great boat once; it was sunk by blindness, but I had a great life preserver... I will be successful. When my boat is finished, it will survive the stormiest seas. (Braille Monitor, August/September 2005) ■

Assistive and Adaptive Technology

The Assistive and Adaptive Technology (AAT) unit of SSB provides blind and visually impaired customers, employers, vocational rehabilitation counselors, WorkForce Center staff, and others with a variety of technology services. These services primarily relate to computer access and use by blind or visually impaired persons.

The unit conducts in-depth technology evaluations with customers who need access to technology to meet the goals of their Individual Plans for Employment. These evaluations result in technology and/or training recommendations to rehabilitation counselors and customers. In addition, the unit's five assistive technology specialists assist employers who have employees whose jobs are in danger due to the loss of vision. The AAT unit also supports at least one accessible PC in the Resource Area of each WorkForce Center. While employment-related customers are the main priority, the unit also works with children and seniors as time permits.

In addition, the unit operates the Computer Resource Center for the Blind, an evaluation and demonstration center for available technology. This is where the majority of evaluations take place. Various training classes are also conducted here.

Finally, the unit works with the Department of Employment and Economic Development, other state agencies, and various other entities around the state to determine if computer applications and/or websites are accessible to and usable by blind and visually impaired persons. Advice is also given concerning the state's Technology Access Clause, a requirement of all procurements of technology and software by the state of Minnesota.

*Jeffrey
Madsen*



West Central, MN— What do State Services for the Blind and Jimmy’s Pizza, a regional pizza chain with over 30 stores in Minnesota, have in common?

That’s a softball: Both deliver.

SSB customer and MBA entrepreneur Jeff Madsen owns Jimmy’s Pizza in West Central Minnesota. The chain’s newest and largest store, located in a strip mall, will turn one year old in May 2006.

Madsen formed the Lake Area Management and Development Corporation, set up the store and ordered equipment. Today, Madsen is responsible for scheduling 25 employees, marketing, and corporate bookkeeping. “I do everything,” he said. “In this franchise, you are the entrepreneur.”

By all accounts, the locals love their cheesy regular crust and deep dish pizza, pasta with red sauce, and garlic bread. “Word of mouth has been pretty good,” he said. “With eight other restaurants in town, there’s competition.”

But if it weren’t for the delivery of SSB services and support of rehabilitation counselors Stan Keith and John Hamilton, Madsen might not be focusing on business innovations like his five-minute pizzas and special ovens. “I wouldn’t be at where I am today,” Madsen said. “They were great, especially when it came to providing accommodations at school.”

From his high school days to his pursuit of higher education at Minnesota State University-Mankato and Southwest Minnesota State University in Marshall, Madsen has had the back-up of Keith and Hamilton in getting the accommodations he needed to be successful in school--and access to Zoom Text, computer, enlarged books and magnifiers.

In 2000 Madsen earned a bachelor’s degree in business management from MSU-Mankato, and in 2003, he completed his MBA.

He still keeps in touch with rehab counselor Hamilton: “I didn’t need help with a business vision, because I had that. After graduate school, I called him, and even if I just had a bad day, I could get his advice over the phone.”

These days, Madsen says, the calls are less frequent. He is busy running Jimmy’s, his case is closed, and besides – he has a business anniversary celebration to plan. ■

*Loretta
Renick*



Duluth, MN— Diagnosed with diabetic retinopathy at 53, Loretta Renick was concerned that her age would prevent her from training and succeeding in a career. Today, with support from State Services for the Blind, Loretta is working three days a week at Duluth Lighthouse for the Blind and taking a QuickBooks class.

Loretta’s fears were unfounded: Even older workers with vision problems can attain their career goals. But the then-and-now journey of Loretta’s experience carries its own unique twists and turns.

Loretta was a college student in the mid-1970s when vision problems first became apparent. Her diagnosis didn’t stop her from working with developmentally and mentally disabled individuals – until 1979 when her vision worsened. “Crossing the street was a problem,” she said. “I started having trouble seeing cars and knew I needed cane travel so drivers would be aware.”

Last spring, Loretta called on George Gross, Senior Services Unit.

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Gross connected her with three months of training at Duluth Lighthouse for the Blind, where she learned computer skills, cane travel, and grade I Braille. She looked for work as a receptionist through Job Service and newspaper ads. But as any jobseeker knows, it's not easy to break into a new field with no experience. That was Loretta's problem, too.

Enter Shelly Frohrip, vocational rehabilitation counselor in SSB's Workforce Development Unit, who suggested specific training that would be invaluable to a receptionist or administrative assistant. This time, Loretta went to MRC FlexWork Duluth, and with the assistance of a magnification program on the computer, trained about 20 hours a week for three months in WordPerfect, Access and Excel.

All those hours spent on a computer have paid off for Loretta. Just last August she was offered a position as a receptionist/secretary at the Duluth Lighthouse, working 16 hours, three days a week — a perfect schedule.

With any vision loss comes some degree of lifestyle change. Loretta has cut back — but not eliminated — canning and gardening. “With diabetes, you need good food. It's very important what you put into your body,” she said. “Growing carrots was difficult; they're very small and have to be thinned. “When I would hoe I couldn't tell the difference between the weeds and the real deal.”

She listens to books on tape and pursues Bible studies with the help of ZoomText, magnification and reading software for the visually impaired. Loretta is able to take the bus to work, malls and the Duluth Public Library—but not everywhere. “The bus takes longer, but I just build that into my schedule.” Her spouse, 20-year-old daughter and 16-year-old son pick up some of the driving duties, too.

Loretta has found the financial software program QuickBooks, through MRC FlexWork, to be a challenge, as will becoming totally blind. “Some people have asked if I'll get a seeing eye dog,” she said. “That's a possibility down the road.” ■

Duluth Lighthouse for the Blind

Duluth Lighthouse for the Blind provides a number of services to customers of State Services for the Blind, as well as Adjustment to Blindness training for staff. (www.lighthousefortheblind-duluth.org) MRC FlexWork Duluth provides employment and training services for people with disabilities, dislocated workers, people who are economically disadvantaged, and others who face special training or employment barriers. (www.mrc-mn.org/duluth.shtml)

What is Diabetic Retinopathy?

Diabetes affects your body from head to toe. The most common and most serious eye complication is diabetic retinopathy, which may result in poor vision or even blindness.

Retinopathy is the medical term for damage to the tiny blood vessels (capillaries) that nourish the retina, the tissue at the back of your eye that captures light and relays information to your brain. These blood vessels are often affected by the high blood sugar levels associated with diabetes.

Nearly half of people with known diabetes have some degree of diabetic retinopathy, and your chances increase the longer you have the disease. Initially, most diabetics experience only mild vision problems, but the condition can worsen and threaten your vision. Diabetic retinopathy is a leading cause of legal blindness among adults in the United States.

The threat of blindness is frightening. But with early detection and treatment, the risk of severe vision loss from diabetic retinopathy is small. You can take steps to protect your sight if you have diabetes. These include a yearly eye examination and steps to keep your blood sugar, blood pressure and blood cholesterol under the best possible control. (Source: mayoclinic.com)

Workforce Development Services also includes the Business Enterprises Program (BEP). BEP provides the training and certification of legally blind Minnesotans to operate small businesses in public buildings and private industry as provided in Federal and State law. While the majority of these small businesses are vending machine operations, blind operators also run snack bar counter operations or small lunchrooms on federal, state, county and city properties throughout Minnesota. Following training and certification, the BEP staff provides professional management direction and administrative support to the licensed blind vendor to ensure their long-term success.

Blind operators help pay for administration of the BEP and for capital expenses through a set-aside fee from their profits. Additionally, the BEP operators actively participate in the management of the program through input from the Operator Management Committee, an elected group of licensed blind operators. The current Chair of the Operator Management Committee, Scott Eggen, is an SSB success story.

Scott Eggen



Underwood, MN – Scott Eggen and Chuk Hamilton go back a long way.

As a boy growing up near Fergus Falls, Scott remembers Chuk as his SSB counselor. He was familiar with the Business Enterprises Program from an aunt and uncle who ran a concession-newsstand in the Saint Paul Post Office during the 1970s. And following a few career turns, Scott began BEP training--and by then Chuk Hamilton was the director of the BEP.

Today, Eggen runs his own vending enterprise at Moorhead State University and as Chair of the BEP Operator Management Committee, travels to the SSB Office several times a year--where he runs into SSB Director Hamilton.

Eggen had a head for business. At Alexandria Technical College, he studied auto parts and sales management, and he spent three years employed in the auto parts

Business Enterprises Program Statistics

	FFY2005	FFY2004	FFY2003
Sales Volume	\$8,337,949	\$8,598,921	\$8,533,620
Average Net Profit*	\$ 38,139	\$ 35,709	\$ 35,464
No. of Businesses	55	57	59
New Businesses	2	0	1

*Modified methodology based on Rehabilitation Services Administration interpretation.

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business with an eye of becoming assistant manager. But he always toyed with the idea of having his own business. After persuasive pitches from his St. Paul relatives and an extra year in the auto parts business mulling over his options, Scott decided to come to the city and begin months-long BEP training with Tom Nicklawske, a BEP staffperson and trainer for more than 25 years.

Basic business curriculum is what BEP is all about, according to Eggen, and all vendors are certified following successful completion. “Vendors learn all aspects of running a small business, including bookkeeping, taxes, marketing, and basic maintenance and repair of the vending machines,” he said.

His first assignment in 1985-86 brought him close to his hometown of Underwood: Minnesota State Community and Technical College-Fergus Falls.

“I really sunk my teeth into the food service center and vending equipment and spent 10 years there,” he said. Today, Eggen can be found stocking and re-stocking, maintaining and repairing 100 pieces of vending equipment on the campus of Minnesota State University-Moorhead, where he has been a familiar figure since 1996.

He also keeps informed on students’ snack preferences (“Energy drinks are a coming segment. Water peaked a few years ago.”) as well as changes in the vending industry, like meter readers that help BEP business owners track sales. Or the 677 Hot Drink Center, which offers 12- and 20-ounce sizes of expanded hot-beverage flavor offerings.

Eggen has been involved in the BEP long enough to see many changes in the way academic

institutions, particularly MnSCU campuses, have provided food service to their students. “Buildings aren’t as large anymore, and lunch counter service has gone the way of vending operations,” he said.

What hasn’t changed?

“Mountain Dew has been the top-selling drink for 20 years.” Students are also grabbing Snickers and Cheetos snacks.

And maybe soon a \$2 Red Bull. ■

More on: BEP Operator Management Committee

As Operator Management Committee chair, Eggen spends a fair amount of time studying proposed federal legislation that could affect the BEP. “We don’t have a designated day at the Capitol, but we’re definitely seeing changes in the way we’re funded,” he said.

The Operator Management Committee represents a diverse group of 60 BEP operators in Minnesota. The state is divided into six districts; there is one committee representative per district, and two at-large members. Committee members serve two-year terms and four years maximum. Four times a year the committee meets at the 2200 University Avenue office to discuss budget and operator equipment issues. In 2006, the committee will meet the third Friday in January, April, July and October. Meetings are open to the public. For more information, contact Stan Nichol, BEP Supervisor, 651-642-0462 or 1-800-652-9000; or email: stan.nichol@state.mn.us



Senior Services Unit

The Senior Services Unit assists blind, visually impaired and DeafBlind Minnesotans, primarily age 55 and above, to regain or maintain their personal independence. Rehabilitation counselors and support staff statewide provide services across three levels of customer need:

1. General information sessions;
2. Direct provision of needed training and other services exclusively by SSB staff; and
3. Direct provision of needed training and other services by SSB and an external vendor.

Services range from braille and low-vision instruction to cane travel and household management skills development. Senior services are provided to individuals or groups of Minnesotans by SSB staff and private contractors. Staff set up meeting places, or “hubs”, in many communities.

Senior Services Unit Statistics			
	FFY2005	FFY2004	FFY2003
Number Served	2,896	2,962	2,565
No. of Hubs Across the State	22	15	15
Average No. of Group Meetings/Month	13	15	16

Bev Dahlgren

Austin, MN – Among an Austin, Minnesota group of five ladies who lunch, 78-year-old Bev Dahlgren is the youngest. But this isn't your typical gathering of red hatters or gin-rummy regulars. The common thread is that all are graduates of State Services for the Blind's Group Adjustment to Blindness class.

Dahlgren suffered from rapid vision loss in her left eye and more gradual age-related macular degeneration in her right eye.

Simply stated, the macula is the tiny area in the middle of the retina responsible for seeing fine detail. As we age, the macula can become damaged, causing a gray or blank spot to appear in the center of the visual field. Age-related macular degeneration is the leading cause of vision loss in Americans over 50.

Encouraged by Diane Swanson, an SSB rehabilitation counselor based in Rochester, Dahlgren attended an introductory class in Albert Lea, and then continued with the full-strength version offered in Austin last spring for five hours one day a week for eight weeks.

Now she describes herself as a "big-time advocate."

In fact, her experience was so positive, she has offered to attend future introductory classes as an "alum" to talk about her transition and to help others who are struggling to decide if the 40-hour class is right for them.

"No matter how well intentioned people are, what is most important about this training is that it gives you a chance to talk about what you're experiencing with someone who really understands what you're going through," she said. Attendees are introduced to talking watches and clocks and many other adaptive devices and techniques, like threading a needle without sight, to help them resume managing their daily lives.

"The training really gives you a sense of the possibilities," she said. "I use a talking calculator to balance my checkbook, and I'm able to do so much more. I've firmly put the 'I can't do that' statements away in the drawer."



Dahlgren makes use of other information services, such as the Radio Talking Book, and combines talking books from the Communication Center with audiobooks available at the Austin Public Library. Her deteriorating vision has left her husband in charge of the driving, and she doesn't use her computer anymore, although adaptations and training are a possibility.

But this self-directed woman is ready to share her SSB experience with others. "I can't think of a single criticism of SSB or the services I received. The training was about as fantastic as it gets!" ■

Gerald Kennedy

Paynesville, MN – Gerald Kennedy struggled through wrenching emotions when he lost his eyesight in his early 60s. The Paynesville resident came out of a back surgery nearly blind due to Ischemic Optic Neuropathy, a condition resulting from decreased blood flow to the optic nerve. And at the time, he didn't know anyone who was blind.

Today, after the support of Senior Services Office Director Lyle Lundquist and rehabilitation counselor Sylvia Diers; the companionship of Dakota, his 78-pound, 20-month-old guide dog; and an adjustment in attitude, Kennedy is back in the saddle.

Riding and training horses on his hobby farm.

Handling bales of hay and hiring ferriers.

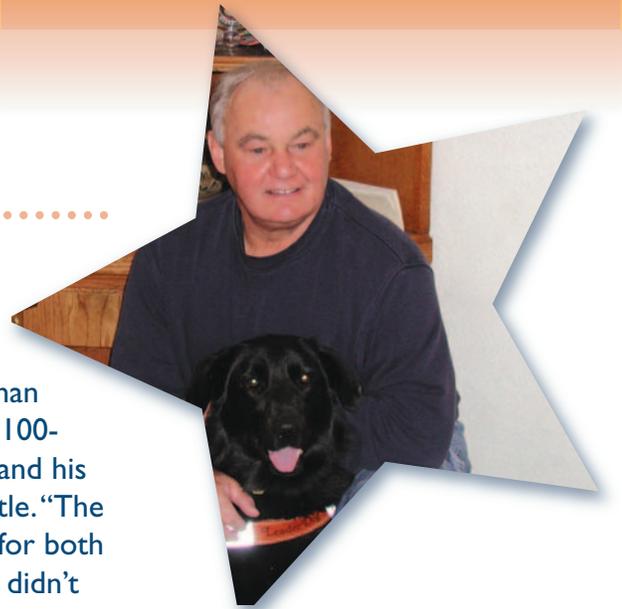
Chalking up three miles a day on the treadmill.

And learning Spanish using language tapes.

Kennedy was a retired UPS division manager in the Twin Cities – a self-described fun-loving Irishman enjoying retirement and a 100-acre lake home where he and his wife raised horses and cattle. “The blindness was devastating for both of us, and for a long time I didn't know where to turn,” he said.

In time he sought services from the St. Cloud office. Diers arranged mobility training, and taught him how to walk anywhere with the help of a talking compass. Kennedy learned other skills that would improve his self-sufficiency, such as cooking. “I learned how to cook a hamburger and fry an egg. Sylvia is one patient lady, and Lyle is super. He's just quite a guy.”

A visit from the Lions Club put him on a two-year track for a guide dog. In April, Kennedy traveled to a guide-dog facility in Lansing, Michigan and began a month long training with a Golden Labrador. “Unfortunately, the dog had emotional problems and during training, I fell on my chest on a retaining wall,” he said.



The fall not only bruised his confidence but landed him in the hospital for a day. Kennedy considered whether he should return to Minnesota. “But the journey and the red tape were so long, I decided to finish,” he said. “I graduated very high, and now I have Dakota.”

Kennedy also spends time listening to books on tape and the Radio Talking Book. “The tapes have really enhanced my intelligence,” he said. In January he plans to begin grade one braille.

For Kennedy, the long, early stressful days of his blindness have been replaced by productive, thoroughly active days, thanks to Lyle and Sylvia. “I have been fortunate to be surrounded by the most wonderful people,” he said. ■

Communication Center

The Communication Center acts as a public library and transcription center for blind, visually impaired, DeafBlind, and print handicapped Minnesotans. Through transcription and reading services, customers may access the same print media as their sighted peers.

The Center transcribes and lends textbooks and leisure reading books (Braille or tape), and lends and repairs special radio receivers and cassette players (through the Library of Congress Talking Book Program). Under an agreement with the Minnesota Department of Education, the Center also provides brailled and taped textbooks to Minnesota students in grades K-12.

The Center broadcasts a 24-hour radio reading service through a closed-circuit radio network that includes six Greater Minnesota outreach sites: Fergus Falls, Mankato, Duluth, Rochester, St. Cloud, and Grand Rapids. These sites allow the Center to broadcast local news within these communities.

The Center provides two 24-hour audio newspaper reading services, Dial-in-News (metropolitan newspapers) and NFB-Newslines® for the Blind (some local and over 200 national newspapers). Supported in part by the Minnesota Department of Commerce's Telephone Access Minnesota fund, these services are accessed using a touch-tone telephone.

With funds made available through a strong public/private partnership, the Center provides all of these audio, print, and digital communication services through state staff and a network of over 650 volunteers.

Communication Center Statistics

	FFY2005	FFY2004	FFY2003
Braille Pages Provided	756,904	686,838	651,183
Radio Talking Book Receivers Placed	6,611	7,056	7,113
Audio Equipment Maintained and Circulated	21,011	21,710	22,028
No. of Customers Accessing Audio Services	14,190	15,232	14,258

Bebe Baldwin

Minneapolis, MN—“I can’t say enough about the Communication Center. It has made it possible for me to do the things I love to do,” said Bebe Baldwin, a customer of the Communication Center for more than 20 years.

In 1981, Bebe, who describes herself as “a voracious reader,” became legally blind. To imagine herself in a bookless world would be unthinkable. “I was in the workforce and wondering how I was ever going to manage. Then someone gave me a news clipping about the Communication Center and that was the beginning of a long and beautiful relationship.”

Bebe retired as a Presbyterian minister in 1991; however, she continues to write and teach with the support of the Communication Center. Volunteers in the Audio Textbook Section record many books that allow her to stay current with her profession. “I choose books

for professional and leisure reading as well as enrichment and continuing education, and to support my research.”

She is working on a book about women’s lives, perhaps two years from completion.

She volunteers with disability groups, including the Presbytery Disability Concerns Task Force, a consortium representing over 70 metro-area Presbyterian churches, working on access and full inclusion of those with disabilities within the church. “A ramp in the church just isn’t enough anymore,” she said.

An advocate for Presbyterians for Disability Concerns (PDC), Bebe speaks on social issues involving people with disabilities. In 2004, she was selected for the Nancy Jennings Award, presented by the PDC, for her role in supporting and advocating for the gifts, rights, and responsibilities of people with disabilities in church life.



Her volunteer activities bring her in contact with people from other states, although her direct experience with state-provided services to individuals who are blind is exclusive to Minnesota. “I had a conversation with an individual from Kentucky who praised the services available through Minnesota State Services for the Blind,” she said. “I know SSB is held in high regard nationally.”

With so many things going on in Bebe’s life, it’s easy to see how she can’t fit the Radio Talking Book into her schedule. But equipped with a talking clock and Braille watch, this Downtown Minneapolis resident will make all her appointments on time. ■

Eric Falk

St. Paul, MN— Eric Falk, a nine-year enforcement officer with the Minnesota Department of Human Rights, investigates charges of discrimination. He commutes from Edina to his St. Paul-based office. He is a husband and father of two.

Eric is also blind, and plainspoken about State Services for the Blind: “Minnesota is the best state to grow up in if you’re blind. I would never have made it without SSB.”

When he was 10, Eric worked with SSB counselors and

live readers, and used equipment available to keep his education on track. The Communication Center recorded his school materials.

He earned an English degree from the College of St. Olaf in Northfield and followed up with a law degree from the University of Minnesota. SSB helped him get his first law job.

Eric’s heaviest use of the agency came during his years of schooling and job search.



Today, his use of Communication Center services supports his varied, eclectic interests, from fiction to Civil War battlefield tour guides and rulebooks for war games. ■

The mission of State Services for the Blind is to facilitate the achievement of vocational and personal independence by Minnesotans who are blind, visually impaired or DeafBlind.

Mohamed Samaha

Minneapolis, MN—Nineteen-year-old Mohamed Samaha has fond memories of cross-country ski outings for youth led by State Services for the Blind counselor Curt Johnson—and of steaming, hot chocolate.

“It was awesome,” he said. “I think I participated in these outings twice. All the parents and family were invited. They had cross-country ski trainers and hot chocolate. It was really great, although I haven’t been skiing since!”

Today, Mohamed, who lives in Northeast Minneapolis, takes Metro Transit bus number 10, then transfers to the 16 as he heads for classes at the University of Minnesota. But without the early, ongoing support of State Services for the Blind, he could be telling a different story.

Mohamed was born with vision so poor that he was declared legally blind. Through SSB, he was given a computer when he was very young. The Communication Center recorded some of

his textbooks at Edison High School in Minneapolis and at the University of Minnesota through the Post Secondary Enrollment Options.

“SSB really gave my education a jumpstart,” he said. His computer is loaded with JAWS and magnifying software. The huge monitor SSB provided has since been replaced by a 19” model, and like many university students, he now uses a laptop.

Mohamed is a full-time sophomore, leaning toward a major in finance or business, and making use of the services offered on campus to students with disabilities.

“There are many students with disabilities at the University of Minnesota – so many that they almost have to do something,” he said. “I chose the university because of the services they provide.”

A distance runner on the Edison High track team, Mohamed gave up the demands of the sport



to devote more attention to his studies. And when he is not studying psychology, statistics, management or meteorology, he likes to hang with his friends at the gym, go bowling, or out to eat.

Although Mohamed was born in Minnesota, his parents – Minneapolis restaurateurs – are from Egypt. He enjoys traveling there to visit many relatives with his parents, two older sisters and a twin brother.

“They don’t do as much for the blind in Egypt,” he said. “The services aren’t as organized or well coordinated,” he said. “But I’d like to go back and see if I can help change that.”

Samaha means happiness, giver of happiness, or magnanimity in Arabic. A youthful SSB success-story to watch. ■

What is Post Secondary Enrollment Option?

High school juniors and seniors may take courses at eligible post-secondary institutions. Students must meet admissions requirements but do not pay for tuition, fees, or books. They earn high school credits, and if students continue their education beyond high school, colleges or universities may choose to transfer their completed coursework through PSEO as college credits. More than 7,000 Minnesota students were in the PSEO program last year, according to the Minnesota Department of Education.

Disability Services

Disability Services at the University of Minnesota is a unit of the office of Multicultural and Academic Affairs. Students with disabilities are considered students first, and they are expected to participate fully in academics and student life. Many services are offered, such as accommodations for testing and exams, access to adaptive technology, interpreter services, adaptive sports, and employment resources. For more information, see: <http://ds.umn.edu/index.html>

Morgan Budreau

Apple Valley, MN—Morgan Budreau, 11, is so adept at reading braille, she can instantly ‘spot’ mistakes in braille books, laughs Monica Hummer-Budreau, her mother.

Her skill at speed, accuracy, proofreading, spelling and reading comprehension has brought her national fame: Morgan placed second in the freshman group at the June 2005 National Braille Challenge, and attended the welcome dinner held for the families at Gladstone’s Universal in Universal City, California. The highlight of the trip was when she performed the song ‘Backflip’ with special guest Raven-Symone of ‘That’s So Raven’ and ‘The Cosby Show’ fame:

“I wanna see you backflip
Cartwheel, don’t be cuttin’
corners on me...”

Morgan was 4 years old when a job transfer brought her family from Avon, Indiana to Apple Valley. She had been legally blind since birth, diagnosed with Leber’s Congenital Amaurosis. Teachers in school district 196 urged Morgan’s parents to make a connection with State Services

for the Blind. “I called SSB and a staffperson came out to visit. SSB was extremely supportive,” said Monica.

Morgan’s blindness is no impediment to her love of books and reading. The American Girls series, Little House on the Prairie books, nonfiction titles on presidents, and *Dog to the Rescue*, a young-adult title on heroic acts performed by dogs, are among her favorites. From November 1 to February 1, Monica tracks the number of pages of extra-curricular material Morgan reads for the Braille Readers are Leaders contest, sponsored by the National Federation of the Blind. Morgan has placed in the top 3 from kindergarten through fourth grade. In 2004-2005, she read over 6,000 pages—and is entering the contest again for 2005-2006.

“She just took to this like a duck to water,” said Monica.

Outside of the classroom, and away from the books and braille competition, Morgan is learning Spanish from a tutor, studying classical piano and the drums using the Suzuki method (she has perfect pitch), and taking swimming lessons.



Armed with her National Braille Challenge winnings, a \$1,000 savings bond, Morgan returned to Minnesota with her mom, father Brian, and 6-year-old brother Mitchell following the national braille competition to a congratulatory card from SSB. “But it was Raven, who graciously went from table to table visiting with the families, that caused Morgan to gasp a little. I think that almost had more of an effect on her than the competition,” said Monica.

“Morgan is a bright, shining star” said Monica, an early childhood education student support assistant in the district. “SSB should be proud of their work. It is such an important thing that they’re doing with the blind.” ■

Ginny Paulson

Fergus Falls, MN—Ginny Paulson remembers the first live broadcast of the Lions Reading Program in Fergus Falls as if it were yesterday, not April 1, 1991.

“It was amazing,” said Paulson, chair of the board of the Lions Reading Program. “We had a husband-and-wife reading team, and a few of us were standing quietly in the doorway. I have no way of knowing how many listeners there were that night, but the realization that we were on the air, that everything really worked, was a very powerful, powerful experience.”

Today, a loyal cadre of volunteer readers (“There is no paid staff,” said Paulson) prepares and delivers live broadcasts from the Bethlehem Lutheran Church from 7 to 8 p.m., every Monday through Saturday. In those early broadcasting years, volunteers were scheduled to read two to three times a month. Some volunteers prefer to take the summer months off, and some

‘snowbirds’ aren’t available, said Paulson. But over time, word of mouth and a front-page Daily Journal story written in August 2005 by a reporter who had never heard of the radio reading service, drew new interest and more volunteers. Now there are 60 to 65 volunteers, ages 16 to 90, who read once a month.

And some volunteers really go the distance to help others keep up with the news. “One volunteer drove from Perham—40 miles one way—to volunteer,” she said. “He just wanted to do something.”

Their listening audience, 200 to 250 blind or visually impaired Minnesotans living within a 45-mile radius of Fergus Falls, may be invisible but they do make their opinions known.

“We get some feedback from our listeners and have made changes based on listener requests,” said Paulson. “We’re careful not to read duplicate stories from the Daily Journal and the local papers,



we summarize sports, and read obituaries, although we may edit them down because sometimes they can be long.”

One listener told Paulson: “I like the way you sound so clear.”

Clarity of delivery is desirable, and volunteers are tested before going on the air. There are a lot of Finnish descendents in the area, said Paulson, and if readers have any familiarity of Finnish and can pronounce a few words, all the better. “Radio Talking Book broadcasters in the Twin Cities wouldn’t look for this quality. They would have other needs,” she said.

The Lions Club has provided funding for new equipment and postage so that reading coordinator Lynn Brand can mail out the volunteer schedule. Volunteers have set nights for reading, and now there are two-person reading teams, which makes coordination easier.

Working with the Lions is a fun, fulfilling pastime for Paulson. “And from what I have heard, Minnesota is at the forefront of radio reading services.” ■

Lions Club Reading Program

Listeners of the Lions Club Reading Program, broadcasting from Fergus Falls, get news of interest to their 45-mile radius broadcasting area—not just news exclusive to the Fergus Falls Daily Journal. Each broadcast includes 40 to 45 minutes from the Daily Journal and 15 to 20 minutes devoted to another paper, including:

Ashby-Dalton Post
Battle Lake Review
Henning Citizen’s Advocate
Parkers Prairie Independent

Grant City Herald
Pelican Rapids Press
Frazee Forum
Perham Enterprise Bulletin

Helen Lifson

St. Louis Park – 91-year-old Helen Lifson figures she has recorded more than 500 books over 50 years of volunteering for State Services for the Blind.

In the early years, she tested, trained and monitored hopeful volunteers working out of a carrel at the Minneapolis Public Library.

She has helped the Communication Center organize thousands of tapes in preparation for moves from locations at 555 Wabasha and 1745 University to the present-day 2200 University Avenue in Saint Paul's Midway. ("That place is like a palace," she said.)

And when she felt her voice wasn't as strong as it needed to be, she worked in the Communication Center print library, maintaining and weeding the collection for the benefit of SSB staff and volunteer patrons.

"I love every person who works there. It is such a special place. When I would come in to the office, I would hear 'Helen's here, so it must be Thursday,' " she recalled.

Lifson was introduced to State Services for the Blind by a friend, who was also a volunteer. "She was going on a trip and asked me to take her place. I picked up a Henry James novel and read and read and read and didn't stop."

On business trips with her husband, a professor in the physiology department at the University of Minnesota Medical School, Helen carried a Wollensak reel-to-reel so she could keep recording two books at a time. One year she received a Wollensak for her birthday, and went on to record English, history, and sociology textbooks and poetry at home for 15 years.

In 1989 after her husband passed away and with an empty nest, Helen called Ellie Sevdy, Audio Services Supervisor. "Ellie," I said, "I've given to State Service for the Blind for so many years, I need you to give back to me. I need to do something."

"Helen was willing to do anything that needed to be done," said Sevdy.



So she and Ellie set about organizing and weeding the tape library's 35,000 reels, reel by reel, 5-6,000 books in the dirty, old basement of the 1745 University Avenue building.

"We worked on that project for a whole summer. The first time we came across a book to be erased that I had recorded, I said, 'Ellie, I thought that recording would be around forever.' And she said, 'But Helen, no one has borrowed that book in years.'"

Helen now lives in an assisted-living center in St. Louis Park, where she promotes SSB services to residents. Although her health prevents her from working at the Communication Center, she regularly keeps in touch with staff.

"For me, volunteering was a way of life. I miss going there." ■

Volunteer Emeritus Program

Helen retired in the last year and joined the Communication Center's Volunteer Emeritus program, a program that began only a couple of years ago. To be a member, Communication Center volunteers must be retired from their volunteer corps and have a minimum of 15 years of service, said Ellie Sevdy, Audio Services Supervisor. Volunteers have been recognized at a tea at the Governor's mansion and at the James J. Hill House.

The Communication Center always seeks new volunteers. Currently most in demand are technical people with the skills and knowledge to record technical books for students and professionals.

FFY 2005 Placements by Occupation

Check Cashier	Administrative Assistant	Clergy Member
Computer Systems Hardware Analyst	Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor	Addresser
Receptionist	Check Cashier	Machinist
Administrative Assistant	Receptionist	Baker Helper
Writer, Prose, Fiction & NonFiction	Homemaker	Merchant Patroller
Telephone Answering Service Operat.	Teacher, Preschool	Assembler, Production
Transcribing-Machine Operator	Training Representative	Food Service Assembler, Kitchen
Transcribing-Machine Operator	Homemaker	BEP Operator
Band-Saw Operator	Welding- Machine Tender	Cleaner, Industrial
General Practitioner	Electrician Apprentice	Systems Analyst
Bagger	Shipping and Receiving Clerk	Historian
Janitor	Lobbyist	Musician, Instrumental
Homemaker	Social Worker, School	Operations Officer
Vending-Machine Attendant	Clinical Psychologist	Packager, Hand
Nurse Assistant	Manager, Property	Teacher, Music
Kitchen Helper	Laundry Worker II	Doorkeeper
Civil Engineer	Clerk, General	Janitor
Embroidery-Machine Operator	Administrative Clerk	Ticket Taker
Computer Programmer	Nurse, Consultant	Stock Clerk
BEP Operator	Industrial-Truck Operator	Home Attendant
Data Entry Clerk	Masseur/Masseuse	Graphic Designer
Paralegal	Nurse, General Duty	Network Control Operator
Sales Rep, Audiovisual Program	Customer Service Representative	Writer, Prose, Fiction and Nonfiction
Budget Officer	Manager, Food Service	Graphic Designer
Groundskeeper-Industrial-Commercial	Homemaker	Sales Agent, Business Services
Administrative Assistant	Estimator	Sales Rep, Data Processing Services
Personal Attendant	Carpenter	Social Group Worker
Contractor	Process Checker	Maintenance Supervisor
Good-Service Supervisor	Cook, Short Order I	Nurse, Staff, Occupational Health
Tax Preparer	Policyholder-Information Clerk	Lifeguard
Masseur/Masseuse	Customer Service-Helper-Any Industry	File Clerk II
Teacher, Adult Education	Laundry Worker II	Bagger
BEP Operator	Microcomputer Support Specialist	Teacher, Preschool
Assembler, Production	Customer Service Representative	Attendant, Children's Institution
Teacher, Elementary School	Supervisor, Parking Lot	Software Engineer
Manager, Apartment House	Graphic Designer	Receptionist
Computer Programmer	Cntr, Attn dt, Lunchroom or Coffee	Hospital-Admitting Clerk
BEP Operator	Social Worker, Medical	Masseur/Masseuse
Clerk, General	Woodworking-Shop Hand	Clerk, General
Automobile-Body Repairer	Manager, Food Service	Stock Clerk
Cook	Clergy Member	Farmer, General
Casework Supervisor	Cook	Mechanical-Maintenance Supervisor
Benefits Clerk II		Cook



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TTY	952-346-4043	 	
 		WOODBURY	651-275-8672
		TTY	651-275-8653





State Services for the Blind is a program of the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development.

2200 University Ave.
St. Paul, MN 55114
651-642-0500



www.mnssb.org

This information is available in alternative formats such as braille, large print, audio tape and computer disk by calling 651-642-0729 or TTY 1-651-642-0506 Toll Free: 800-652-9000 Toll Free TTY: 888-665-3276

