

In Touch with Nebraska



Fall Issue 2011

"Not just a living, but a life..."

samuel bacon

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A publication developed by the
Nebraska Center for the Education
of Children who are Blind or
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Administrator's Alley...A Chat With Sally:

"Nebraska Loves Our Public Schools"
Features NCECBVI



Sally Gittinger

"We want everyone to know about the good work taking place throughout Nebraska in our schools," says

Susan Nellson Baird on behalf of the Sherwood Foundation. Susie Buffett and her foundation tell the stories of how Nebraska's schools are using innovative programs and practices to effect change. And we are proud to say that NCECBVI was selected as one of these innovative programs.

This organization filmed and photographed the activities on April 28th that surrounded the annual prom.

These activities included arriving at the school, settling into dorm rooms, a social skills workshop, a formal dinner,



Colby Wetsch, Sheldon Bright, Aleah Beranek & Greg Rider pose by the limousine at Prom.



Student, Jakob Solheim, works with the film crew.

limo rides, and of course the dance including the crowning of a king and queen. NCECBVI hosts this event each spring and invites students from the area ESU 4 special education programs.

"The prom and social skills workshop such as this have been a dream come true for me that started in my early days as a transition coordinator. Parents often told me that their child with special needs is typically not invited to many social activities and the parents' biggest fears were related to social skills and making friends," said Sally Gittinger. That was the start of the social workshops in the early 1990s which eventually led to the prom and overnight event that it is today.

All of the teachers and staff involved in this event do a remarkable job in

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“Nebraska Loves Public Schools” (continued)

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preparing their students with all of the lessons involved in social etiquette, how to dress, hygiene/grooming, dinner manners, dating etiquette, dance lessons, etc. The “teachable moments” are endless. The NElovesPS project coordinators asked many questions related to how do you teach these concepts to students who are blind. The NCECBVI staff



Mrs. Schomerus’ daughter, Jessica, and Jon Sailors.



King Wayne Pumel, ESU 4 Life Skills Program & Queen Aleah Beranek, NCECBVI student.

quickly demonstrated how much is verbalized, explained, touched and described when teaching.

The result of this endeavor is a touching video that shows the magic of prom, the instruction of students with special needs, and the impressions of many who contribute to the success of our students. Take a moment now to watch this video! It can be found at

www.nelovesps.org and is the home page feature on the new NCECBVI website. Sally Giittinger shared, “We want to thank the Sherwood Foundation for selecting NCECBVI to be recognized. It was an honor to work with the Foundation representatives on such an awesome effort. Many of us learned just as much about video production as they learned about the education of students with disabilities. It was a partnership that formed friendships. The camera crew even danced the night away with the students!”

∞
 Thank you to the many NCECBVI and area staff members, teachers, parents, and volunteers who assisted with the “Evening with the Stars” prom.
 Johnson Brock Public Schools
 staff and students – decorations and much more
 Area high school students and Delta Gamma Sorority for assisting with hair, make-up and serving as peer models
 Luxury Limousine for complimentary limo rides
 Ottemann Photography for taking pictures
 Valentino’s for always being a great partner and serving the kids’ favorite meal
 And a special thanks to
 “Nebraska Loves Our Public Schools”
 ∞

SAVE THE DATE

SPRING FLING!

Our spring conference will be held

March 22-23, 2012.

Look for information to be posted on the NCECBVI website soon, under Professional Development.

SAVE THE DATE

KAREN MARKUSSEN SCHOLARSHIP

Mrs. Markussen served as a teacher of the visually impaired in central Nebraska for many years. She passed away on July 16, 2006. It was her wish to assist teachers who are pursuing their degree to teach children with visual impairments in Nebraska. NCECBVI and NDE will be awarding a \$500 scholarship to a teacher who is currently enrolled in the senior year of their vision endorsement program or orientation and mobility training program. The application can be found on the NCECBVI website. The deadline for submission is February 20, 2012.

Nebraska Braille Challenge Sends Two to Nationals

Becoming a "regular" at the national competition of the Braille Challenge is coming true for two Nebraska students. Chase Crispin (Blair, NE) and Maura Loberg (Wayne, NE) have had the chance to return to sunny California to take part in the national competition more than once.

By participating in Nebraska's regional competition, each student's scores are submitted to the Braille Institute to compare nationally. Each year, the students who receive the top 60 scores in the U.S. are invited to participate in the national competition held in Los Angeles in June. The goal is set for the students to strive to do their best and hopefully earn a trip west.

Each year the number of participants has greatly increased in the Nebraska regional contest. There were 10 participants from Nebraska the first year (2007) compared to 36 students from four states in last year's event (2010). The next Braille Challenge will be held at NCECBVI (Nebraska City, NE) on February 29, 2012. "We are pleased to see the dedication to Braille of so many students," said Sally Giittinger, NCECBVI Administrator. "And we are proud to sponsor these students to this national event, along with their families, to represent our state and our public schools. Congratulations to Chase and Maura!"



honor for me to go to L.A for the Braille Challenge. Although I did not place in the finals, I felt like a winner just to be able to go, to compete, to meet others like me, and to experience such a neat event. The Braille Challenge is something I look forward to every year, and I look forward to participating in the regional and hopefully nationals again in the future!" (written by Chase Crispin)

"Going to the National Braille Challenge in L.A was a very rewarding experience for me. Instead of focusing on the contest part of the event, the staff (at the Braille Institute) go out of their way to make us all feel welcome, at home, and most of all, like winners. It is a great

"The National Braille Challenge is a competition where you compete against 11 other people from around the US, testing your skills in spelling, proofreading, reading comprehension. Sometimes, the tests can make me really nervous, especially when you're up against people with different levels of skills. It also means lots of practice, or else you won't do very well. It was Saturday, June 26th 2011 we rode on the shuttle to the Braille Institute in LA. They lined the contestants up into age groups, I was both excited and nervous at the same time. There was a live band playing as we walked in to the auditorium. We were placed on a riser, in front of a large audience. After long hard hours of testing, we were finally done. Even though I didn't win, it was still really cool participating in the National Braille Challenge." (written by Maura Loberg)



Ian's Art

Ian Webster's artwork "Night Sky" has been chosen to be exhibited in APH InSights Art 2011, the twentieth annual juried art competition held by the American Printing House for the Blind. The competition attracted 396 entries this year.

Eighty-one pieces were selected for the exhibition.

Preschool through high school work was judged according to grade placement of the artist. The jurors judged all entries within each category on the basis of originality of concept, expressive use of medium, and artistic excellence.

From these "show



Ian Webster's artwork

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Fall Foliage

Join us for our fall conference on **October 27-28, 2011**. We are excited to announce this year's conference topic: "Success with Braille and Print: Ensuring Positive Outcomes for Dual Media Readers." The TVI (Teacher of the Visually Impaired) plays a critical role in teaching and monitoring the literacy instruction of students who are blind or visually impaired, whether they read Braille or print—or both. How do we define "success" for our students who are using both Braille and print? What are some considerations to keep in mind? In this workshop, the importance of reading assessment for students who are visually impaired and the role of the TVI will be discussed, and various instructional strategies will be described. The presenter will be Dr. Frances Mary D'Andrea, an instructor at the University of Pittsburgh and other universities, a reading specialist, and an educational consultant specializing in literacy issues related to students with visual impairments. Dr. D'Andrea began as a TVI in 1982. From 1995-2005, she worked at the

American Foundation for the Blind (AFB), and helped establish their National Literacy Center. Dr. D'Andrea also co-authored *Assistive Technology for Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired: A Guide to Assessment; Instructional Strategies for Braille Literacy; Looking to Learn: Promoting Literacy for Students with Low Vision*; and *The Braille Trail* books. She continues to serve as AFB's representative to the Braille Authority of North America. For information about conference registration, please visit the NCECBVI website, under Professional Development.



Dr. Frances Mary D'Andrea

NCECBVI Welcomes New Staff to the Team!



Pictured left to right are: Dianne Bossung (houseparent), Kate Zost (VI teacher) and Tanya Hilligoss (Outreach Director).

Dianne Bossung is a new houseparent in the boy's dormitory at NCECBVI. She has worked at NCECBVI previously as an overnight houseparent

on the girl's side. Dianne also works part-time at Region V Developmental Services. She totally enjoys her work, and the staff and students are glad to have her back on the team. Dianne's other interests include camping and spending time with her grandkids.

Kate Zost graduated in 2008 from Peru State College with a bachelor's degree in elementary and early

childhood education. Prior to teaching at NCECBVI, she taught kindergarten for two years at Elgin Public Schools. She is currently teaching practical skills and enjoying getting to know her students as well as other students and staff at the school. Kate is enrolled at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in the vision endorsement program.

Tanya Hilligoss has joined the NCECBVI team as the new Outreach Director. For the last six years, she worked for Lincoln Public Schools as a supervisor in the special education department coordinating programs for students who are visually impaired and hearing impaired, as well as transition and summer school programs. Tanya previously served as a program specialist for the Southeast Nebraska Regional Program for Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, a deaf educator for Lincoln Public Schools, and a special education teacher for School District #45-Waverly.

Campers' Got Talent!



Makenna Lee decorating her stepping stone

"Campers' Got Talent!" was the theme for the Sizzlin' Summer Camp ...and did we have talent! Students from all over Nebraska came together for a week of

fun in the sun, swimming, arts and crafts, music and a variety of activities (and we did manage to sneak in plenty of instruction).

Each year, NCECBVI hosts a summer camp for students with visual impairments. The NCECBVI teachers and staff, along with the assistance of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Vision Endorsement student teachers and some high school peer volunteers, develop lessons and activities which include the core and expanded core curriculum.

Camp days are filled with academics and plenty of fun is infused into the lessons. The campers are gathered in small groups and paired with a teacher, staff and volunteers to participate in camp activities. This year, the week ended with a talent show like no other. The talent show included singing, dancing, playing instruments and a magic act.

Camp provided the opportunity for 13 students to apply many skills taught all year, and, according to the kids the best part is making new friends. Many campers already wanted to know next year's camp dates so they can plan their return.



Eric Ludwig practices his keyboard talent for the big show

Parents Discover Keys to Success



Minute to Win It...great smile, Joshua Wichman

Games, gathering, laughing, and learning were all a part of this action-packed weekend designed for the entire family. Seven families from Nebraska participated in The Keys to Success Family Weekend held at NCECBVI in June.

The weekend kicked off with the chance to show off the family's competitive traits. The families participated in a variety of "Minute it to Win it" challenges and the competition was fierce. Parents, students with visual impairments and their siblings were also challenged to a bowl-off. However, the trick to bowling was everyone was blindfolded! This was a fun-filled

evening with everyone being a winner at the end of the night.

The rest of the family weekend offered the opportunity for parents to attend informational training sessions while the students were entertained, instructed and supervised by NCECBVI teachers of the visually impaired and staff members. Kevin O'Connor was this year's speaker. Mr. O'Connor returned to Nebraska by popular demand. He helped parents focus on relationship and team building, not only within their families but also with educational team members who serve their child.



Oscar & Sofia Becerra family bowling

The annual family

APH Scholars Share Their Perspective and Encourage Others to Apply

Once a year, an exciting opportunity is presented to teachers of the visually impaired throughout the United States...a chance to visit the American Printing House for the Blind in Louisville, KY during its Annual Meeting. How is this possible? Just ask Mary Farris, long-time teacher at NCECBVI. "After spending two decades working in the field of vision and using APH products, I started to wonder about where they came from, who developed them, how they were made and tested – I just never thought I would get to make the trip to APH until a co-worker suggested I should apply to be an APH Scholar. I never thought I was worthy nor had the time. I thought wrong."

Both Mary and veteran teacher, LeAnna MacDonald, from Westside Community Schools in Omaha had their dreams come true in October, 2010. The previous April, each had accepted APH's invitation to apply for one of their five all-expense paid Scholar awards given out annually. Sally Giittinger, NCECBVI administrator and Karen Duffy, NIRC Coordinator completed letters of nomination for these two worthy candidates.

Reflecting on being chosen as an award recipient, Mary noted, "I am not sure I understood the full scope of the adventure I was about to go on." She explained, "I had imagined that APH items were produced in a large sterile factory. I was overwhelmed by the amount of thought, planning, testing, and personal craftsmanship that went into each individual project. This, paired with the historical aspect of the facility, helped me gain much more respect for APH and what they accomplish each year."

"I was so honored to be a part of that select group," expressed LeAnna. "The opportunity to tour the Printing House and to see the many processes that they use to make the materials we all know and love was delightful. Walking through the different areas of the production floor and seeing the bins with items that go in the many kits was just fascinating."

But a visit to the production facility is only one aspect of the APH Scholars' experience. Sitting in the large Annual Meeting sessions and hearing about the

entire scope of services and materials that they provide was a highlight for LeAnna. "We all see just a small 'piece' of the puzzle, but there is so much more than just the APH catalog!"

When attending the New Products Development Input Sessions, both Mary & LeAnna were pleased to find that their counsel was sought after. LeAnna, with her expertise in technology, stated, "I was able to sit in on several sessions when the technology staff was talking about future items and what we wanted to see in them. Many participants in the audience were from Schools for the Blind or were adult consumers. So, it was helpful for them to hear the public school requirements for equipment use and the scenarios for using them in class."

To discover that APH considered her opinion important was an eye-opener for Mary. "With the amazing people I was having contact with, who could possibly care what I think? Now, I know better," she related. "I realized that APH really does want input from those of us in the field. So this past summer I volunteered to test and report on the new 'Game of Squares' by using it with students and making suggestions on how this product could be changed to best meet students' needs. It was fun and exciting to think I could be a part of something APH does."



In the photo: Sally Giittinger, Mary Farris, LeAnna MacDonald, Karen Duffy

Nebraska Has a National Winner!

Principals of Schools for the Blind (POSB) Recognize Meagan Gerdes



Meagan Gerdes (2011 Outstanding Teacher of Students who are Blind/Multiply Impaired) with Kasen, NCECBVI student.

NCECBVI is proud to announce that we have a national winner in our midst! Meagan Gerdes was selected as the 2011 Outstanding Teacher of Students who are Blind/Multiply Impaired. Meagan has served as the lead teacher in NCECBVI's Basic Steps Program for eight years.

To best describe the efforts of Meagan Gerdes, here are some quotes from nomination letters for this award: "Educating students with visual impairments – especially those with severe and profound disabilities – can be like a large puzzle. The student is the focal point of the puzzle, and each team member is a piece of the puzzle who

come together to offer this great thing we call education. There is no doubt that Meagan Gerdes is one of the 'corner pieces' of the puzzle at our school for the blind. She is the anchor and the link that strengthens each child's program and her effective instruction causes each of our students to shine." (Sally Giittinger, NCECBVI Administrator)

"The greatest distinction between Meagan and other teachers is her communication with the families of the children she teaches. For example, we are given a detailed explanation of the events of Kasen's day in a journal every day. She offers us advice when we need it most, but also consults us every time she is trying something new at school. Meagan understands that we, as Kasen's parents, are the people who know him the best and she respects that enough to seek our advice when she needs it. That is not something that can be easily found in a teacher. She gives us the sense of security and trust we needed in order to send Kasen to school 50 miles away from our home."

(Robbie and Amanda Sipple, parents)

Ian's Art (continued)

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pieces" of art, awards were selected in each of nine categories.

Ian Webster is a sophomore attending NCECBVI. His home school district is Ralston Public Schools.

Ian created his artwork out of wood, paint, glue, and glitter. The wood blocks were placed randomly and glued together. Ian painted his project different colors, and based on the color arrangement, decided to name his artwork "Night Sky." When asked how he came up with this name Ian stated, "The colors reminded me of a night sky." Ian stated that he was very glad that his artwork was chosen to be in the exhibit because his art has never been chosen in the past. The artists whose work is chosen to be displayed in the exhibit also have the opportunity to sell their artwork. Ian said excitedly, "I hope it sells to the highest bidder!"

Parents Discover Keys to Success (continued)

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weekend also serves as a gathering place for the Nebraska Chapter of the National Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (NAPVI) to meet and plan upcoming social events for families in Nebraska.

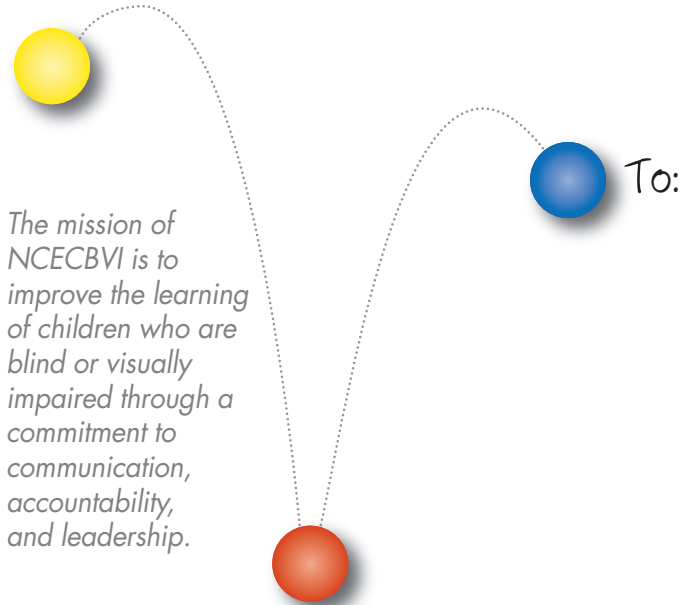
While the students are in the safe care of the staff on Saturday night, the parents participate in a night out on the town. "Each year, the parents report that they truly appreciate the opportunity to dine out, go to a movie or an area activity, socialize and swap stories with the other parents," Sally Giittinger said.



Good friends, Gabe Elting & Nathan Wichman, have a few things in common. They both attended family weekend this past summer, both are twins, and both of their twin siblings are blind and attend NCECBVI.

Nebraska Center for the Education of Children
who are **Blind or Visually Impaired**

824 10th Avenue, P.O. Box 129
Nebraska City, Nebraska 68410
www.ncecbvi.org



The mission of NCECBVI is to improve the learning of children who are blind or visually impaired through a commitment to communication, accountability, and leadership.

To:

Calendar of Upcoming Events:

October 27-28, 2011 Fall Foliage Statewide Conference	January 20, 2012 NCECBVI In-Service Day – No Class for Students
October 31, 2011 NCECBVI Closed for Fall Break	February 29, 2012 Braille Challenge
November 8, 2011 NCECBVI Vision Stakeholder Team Meeting	March 9, 2012 End of Third Quarter
November 9-10, 2011 Nebraska Children's Low Vision Clinic	March 16, 2012 Parent/Teacher Conferences
November 23, 2011 NCECBVI Closes at 12:30 for Thanksgiving Holiday	March 22-23, 2012 Spring Fling Statewide Conference
December 21, 2011 End of Second Quarter; Holiday Music Program	March 26, 2012 NCECBVI Closed for Spring Break
Dec. 22, 2011 – Jan. 3, 2012 NCECBVI Closed for Holiday Break	April 6-9, 2012 NCECBVI Closed for Easter Break
January 4, 2012 Classes Resume	May 22, 2012 End of 4th Quarter; Last Staff and Student Day
January 17, 2012 NCECBVI Closed for Winter Break	

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NE Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired (NCECBVI)

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Administrator

Audrey Graves
Principal

Tanya Hilligoss
Outreach Director

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