NCECBVI: Under Construction

NCECBVI is about to undergo major construction all for the betterment of our facilities. Starting in April, the State of Nebraska and the Nebraska Department of Education will be moving forward with addressing the current HVAC and all electrical systems throughout the facility.

“Our boilers and electrical systems are well over 50 years old, and our structure is just not efficient,” Sally Giittinger stated. At this time, a geothermal system is being considered for heating and cooling along with electrical upgrades and the replacement of the food service kitchen hood and exhaust system.

So what does this mean to our staff, students and families? Much planning is currently taking place to continue to address the safety for all involved. “At this time, we plan to close the dormitory section/East wing of the facility during the summer months but will be operational by August. The phasing plan will require construction during next school year with dorm rooms, classrooms and students being moved throughout the building during this time. We are doing all we can not to disrupt learning as much as possible,” Giittinger stated.

Summer camps and family weekend will be held at the Camp Catron Retreat Center in Nebraska City. Other conferences, in-services, and statewide workshops will be provided at alternative locations for the 2015-2016 School year. This project is currently planned for April, 2015 through February, 2016. Updates and information will be provided throughout the upcoming year.

“This will be one of those projects that we will celebrate when it’s complete. Until then, the planning is constant. And we want to thank all those involved for making this happen. We are extremely proud of our facility and look forward to making these improvements,” Giittinger added.
Orientation and Mobility Training is “Traveling” to Nebraska

We are pleased to announce that Salus University (Pennsylvania) will be coming to Nebraska to offer a degree/certification program in the area of orientation and mobility! Salus University has received a federal grant and will be partnering with the Nebraska Department of Education in funding this program. We are so appreciative of Salus University for including Nebraska, where there has been a tremendous shortage in this area for many years!

This program will fund up to eight individuals to complete the O&M degree program. The funding will be provided through Salus’ federal grant and Nebraska Department of Education to cover tuition. Students will be responsible for books, supplies, student fees and the costs associated with the face to face instruction component of the program.

Classes will be mostly online with some face-to-face instruction. Eight to 10 weeks of class will be held on the NCECBVI campus in Nebraska City during the summer of 2016. One week of class will be held on the Salus University campus in Pennsylvania during the Fall of 2016 (students must be able to be released from their full-time employment to complete this).

All graduates of the certificate or master’s program will be eligible to sit for the ACVREP National Certification Exam. Salus University has a 100% pass rate of the national test to become ACVREP certified!

There will be a “payback” contract included with this program. Students must work in the field of orientation/mobility upon completion of this program for two years.

Salus University representatives are tentatively planning to attend the NCECBVI Spring Fling Conference (March 2015) where they will provide more information and conduct interviews. Salus University will also be seeking a small number of Nebraska COMS (must be currently ACVREP certified) to serve as adjunct faculty in this program, particularly during the summer semester.

“This kind of training opportunity has been a goal of mine for a long time. Nebraska students will benefit from increased services from trained individuals which are long overdue. Again, we greatly appreciate this partnership with Salus University, the Nebraska Department of Education, and NCECBVI,” stated Sally Giittinger, NCECBVI Administrator. Eli Shaw is receiving some helpful hints from Mary Farris regarding his cane skills.
**Nifty Networking!**

Let’s face it…there aren’t huge numbers of teachers of the visually impaired (TVIs) in the state, but…the ones we have are awesome! The small numbers of TVIs make it critical to set-aside time and resources to collaborate, cooperate, and learn from each other. That’s why the outreach department at NCECBVI is thrilled to coordinate Regional Conversations!

Regional Conversations are held just twice a year, once each semester, in various areas of the state, typically Omaha, Lincoln, Kearney, Norfolk, and Scottsbluff. Those who attend have the opportunity to network with other TVIs in their area, ask questions of each other and share information, and learn about upcoming activities. Discussions are facilitated by outreach staff from NCECBVI who come prepared with agenda topics for each meeting yet allow plenty of time for TVIs to initiate discussions that are specific to them and/or their area. Common statements heard between TVIs at Regional Conversations include, “Thanks for sharing…I hadn’t heard of that resource before” or “Wow…you are doing some neat things in your schools, do you mind if I tweak that idea and use it myself?”

**Nebraska’s Plan to Transition to Unified English Braille (UEB)**

“On November 2, 2012, the United States members of the Braille Authority of North America (BANA) voted to adopt Unified English Braille (UEB) to replace English Braille American Edition (EBAE) in the U.S. based on extensive dialog and planning that involved more than 30 organizations as well as individual consumers, teachers, and transcribers. BANA established January 4, 2016, as the date by which the United States will implement UEB (www.braileauthority.org).”

In Nebraska, a designated group of educators from NCECBVI, Nebraska Department of Education, and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln have prepared an implementation plan in response to BANA’s official adoption of the UEB code. This is a variable plan which may require changes as more information becomes available.

An information session about the transition to UEB was presented to parents at this year’s Braille Challenge event in February. School district staff and ESU staff are invited to attend a 2-day training session during NCECBVI’s Spring Fling conference to be held March 19-20 in Nebraska City. It is important that TVIs and those who transcribe for students are in attendance. The presenter will be Frances Mary D’Andrea, past-chair of BANA. On Friday afternoon of the conference, Nebraska’s plan for the transition to UEB will be shared with educators. To register for the Spring Fling conference, please visit www.ncecbvi.org, under Professional Development.
“Everything I Learned, I Learned Because My Parents Made Me Do It!” This was the mantra heard throughout the day at this year’s Follow Me & See parent workshop. The workshop, specifically geared towards parents/guardians, explored the true impact of parental expectations on children with visual impairments.

The presenter, Robbin Keating Clark, and ECC Coordinator with the Utah Schools for the Deaf and Blind. She also writes about concepts directly related to the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) for children with visual impairments on her blog, “the independent little bee...”.

Robbin discussed the critical areas of the ECC where parents can lead. The ECC is the body of knowledge and skills that are needed by students with visual impairments due to their unique disability-specific needs. Students with visual impairments need the ECC in addition to the core academic curriculum of general education. Teachers and education team members play important roles in the educational development of children with visual impairments. However, there is much to be said about the irreplaceable role of parents in the learning process. The presentation focused on a “how to” of practical strategies that could be incorporated into everyday life.

Robbin came in with high energy, personal experiences, and lots of strategies that parents could take home with them. Some of my favorite personal quotes from Robbin include:

• “When experience matches language – learning occurs.”
• “Sometimes part of the journey is the part where you get lost and figure it out. Self-determination, pride, and motivation can’t be taught BUT it can be nurtured!”
• “Don’t buy another present; buy an experience.”
• “Let go of the stigma of blindness. If people are going to look, give them something to look at.”

Parents also had a lot of great thoughts and comments after this workshop including:

• “I must teach my child to do more on his own.”
• “I am the one keeping my child from being successful which is the opposite of what I want.”
• “So great to hear from real experiences.”
• “Thank you for coming to Nebraska to share your story, your talent, and your knowledge. It was awesome!”
• Robbin also provided some great resources, check these out!
  http://www.adifferentkindofvision.blogspot.com/
  http://www.familyconnect.org/parentsitehome.aspx
• Pinterest – lots of ideas; type in “visual impairments.”

Parents join Robbin for a photo opportunity while on break from Follow Me and See Parent Training.
Thanks to the Lyle D. Jay Trust that was entrusted to the Nebraska Department of Education, NCECBVI was able to select a family to attend a state, regional or national conference in order for the parents and the student to gain more information on education and/or planning for the student’s future.

Brent McGuire’s family applied to attend a conference at Syracuse University in New York. Brent’s family was selected and travel expenses were covered by these trust funds for them to attend, learn, explore and network. Following is a summary of their experience.

We had the privilege and honor to attend the “Disabled and Proud: Dare to Dream” conference in Syracuse, New York. “Disabled and Proud” is a conference sponsored by Syracuse University School of Education and The Lawrence B. Taishoff Center for Inclusive Higher Education.

The conference provided a wealth of information regarding the plight of disabled students in a high school and university setting and the success stories of these students. As parents, we know what our disabled students are capable of, even if the educators of our disabled students don’t or can’t see their potential. Attending this conference was very inspiring. We met and listened to students who are completely non-verbal and non-sighted who have EARNED advanced degrees in everything from Business Administration, to a Juris Doctorate.

Lydia Brown, sometimes known as Autistic Hoya, is a student at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. Lydia is very active in the rights of disabled students. She is very respected and almost feared because of her intelligence and passion for the rights of disabled students. Lydia opened our eyes to one important fact…not only do we, as parents and disabled students, have to fight for the rights of the disabled student, we also have to fight for the rights of other minority groups, to include but not limited to: LBGT, the rights of ethnic groups typically discriminated against. To put it in simpler terms, if we don’t fight for the rights of all, we can’t expect anyone to fight for the disabled, except the disabled.

As much as our, Brent’s parents, eyes were opened, Brent left bright eyed and full of hopeful optimism. Brent learned that regardless of his physical limitations, he can be successful. Brent really enjoyed hearing Daman Wandke present. Daman is an I.T. accessibility professional. We all realize that technology is everywhere. That being said, technology, and the ability to access that technology is the key to success for many different disabilities. Thanks to Daman, Brent now realizes the importance of self-advocacy…asking and demanding (in the proper way) for the tools needed to succeed.
The 2014-15 School Year has brought many exciting changes to the library. Our goal was to update materials for teachers, students, and all other support staff. So last spring Resource Center Assistants, Kris Chaney and Cindy Kreifels, made a trip to the local Morton James Library to start gathering ideas for the renovation. Afterwards, they met with Sally Giittinger, NCECBVI administrator, to share ideas for the library’s “face-lift”. With the budget figures in place, a trip to Nebraska Furniture Mart was planned and paint colors were chosen. After the minor details were taken care of, the real work began. With the help of office staff, the books were shuffled and the library was ready for a fresh coat of paint applied by the summer maintenance crew.

By the time August rolled around, the facility was beginning to take shape and ready for the next phase of the project to begin which included updating the literature and technology aspects of the library to better meet the needs of our teachers and student population. Tim Lockwood, Teacher of the Visually Impaired, set to work installing a 27” big screen computer that can perform both as an Apple or Windows 8 computer. It contains an Apple Voice Over and Windows JAWS so that the text displayed on the computer can be heard. This system is capable of reading short passages out loud. Next, he installed a Large Screen Video Magnifier in full-color for enlarging books and pictures up to 40 times their normal size. Pretty impressive!

With the library already offering many magazines and books in braille, large and regular print, we knew that new titles were a must, so the teachers met to brainstorm ideas for updating. The students are having a “HOOT” of a good time with over 100 new titles added to our renovation so far.

Louisville, Kentucky – A Trip to Remember

As Ex Officio Trustees for the American Printing House for the Blind, Sally Gittinger and Karen Duffy are asked each year to nominate a teacher of the visually impaired from our state to apply for the honor of APH Scholar. APH Scholars receive an all-expense paid trip to Louisville, Kentucky to attend their annual meeting. This opportunity is full of learning, sharing and networking with experts and leaders from the field. This year, our nominee was not selected due to geographic reasons and Nebraska being “winners” so many times in the past. Due to some grant funding, NCECBVI decided to award this year’s nominee with this experience anyway and pay for the expenses for this teacher to attend with the NCECBVI team. Susan
Distance Learning + Field Trip = Incredible Learning Experience!

by: Mary Farris

The students at NCECBVI had the opportunity to participate in distance learning classes offered through Morrill Hall at the University of Nebraska - Lincoln. These classes were presented through a virtual classroom with an instructor at Morrill Hall who presented us with a unique way to learn information about the exhibits contained at the museum. The students participated in three distance classroom events:

Louisville, Kentucky – A Trip to Remember

Pope, Teacher of the Visually Impaired, from Omaha Public Schools traveled to Louisville and provided the following comments from her experience.

Advanced, Passionate, Humble. The American Printing House for the Blind, Inc. (APH) “is the world’s largest company devoted solely to researching, developing, and manufacturing products for people who are blind or visually impaired”, for good reason. Like pioneers for the blindness field such as Valentin Haüy, Louise Braille, and Helen Keller, employees of APH today, are forging the way, with those in the blindness field collaborating with them, for improving the lives of individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

As I attended the 146th APH Annual Meeting in Louisville, KY, I was in awe of how dedicated, passionate and innovative everyone within the APH family, and those within the field in attendance at the meeting, were to working for the success of those with visual impairment. EVERY individual I encountered spoke with enthusiasm of their latest project, how they saw it improving the quality of life for those with VI, and they wanted everyone they could get to come aboard with them for the journey.

I toured APH, attended learning sessions, exhibitions, showcases, banquets, and went on a steamboat ride. I enjoyed learning about new products being developed, I was asked my opinion, and enjoyed listening to feedback from both individuals with visual impairment and those working within the field. I met leaders and workers in the field, and was greeted with genuine “welcome-to-the-club” hospitality, followed by their asking what I thought and what I was doing that they might share.

But, what I loved the most, was touring the Art Exhibit showcasing work created by students who are blind or visually impaired, and watching with pride as others ogled over their work, spoke of the work, and bid for ownership.

Finally, I met Tuck Tinsley and as I conveyed my awe and inspiration he shared a quote once shared with him about attending the APH Annual Meeting. He said, “...you’ll stumble home refreshed.” Truer words were never spoken. You should attend if you can; you will truly be inspired. P.S. I also got a taste of Louisville and I highly recommend the Derby Pie.
Distance Learning + Field Trip = Incredible Learning Experience!

• **Titanoboa** – At 60 million years old, 48-feet long, and weighing in at 2,500 pounds, this immense serpent gave us lessons in geography, habitats, and climate change. Following the 45 minute virtual fieldtrip, the students participated in hands-on activities that included: using a rope to simulate the length of a Titanoboa; joining hands to form a circle the size of the stomach of a Titanoboa; and students stood in the circle to see how many people would fit inside!

• **Elephants In Your Backyard** – Students were provided a fossil dig kit by Morrill Hall containing a variety of fossils that were placed in layers of sand. The students recorded data and made predictions of the mystery behind each fossil they found.

• **Hall of Nebraska Wildlife** – Lesson gave students the opportunity to discover how animals see the world, how their eyes aid in their survival, and how vision interacts with other senses. The students were provided with a wide variety of tactile items including: skulls, fur, and other animal clues to explore throughout the lesson.

After the three distance learning classes were completed, students went on a field trip to Morrill Hall. They revisited the information presented in all three lessons and gained even more hands-on experiences. Some of the students’ favorite parts of the Morrill Hall learning experience included: exploring dinosaurs, handling fossils, measuring skills with Titanoboa, and learning about how animals use their senses.

Hey Everybody! It’s Music and Movement Time!

This is what you will hear the first Monday of every month in the halls and classrooms of NCECBVI. Over the loud speaker, the Food Service Staff grabs everyone’s attention to stop what they are doing and move. As all staff and students at NCECBVI are concentrating on activity and exercise, this is a quick way to remind all of tips for a healthy lifestyle.

During this time, everyone is asked to get up and move to the groove of Mr. Lockwood’s music and verbal prompts. Physical prompts such as “OK! Now big circles with your arms,” “Everybody march in place,” and “Now stretch,” are examples of the directions given.

Everyone is encouraged to devote ten minutes for the good of our heart and health, continue to move and enjoy the music every chance you get.
The verse T4:12 is the inspiration for the campus ministry group at Lourdes Central Catholic School in Nebraska City. Dana Welch contacted Ms. Whitten, school guidance counselor with the idea for the T4:12 Group to visit her students at the Nebraska Center for Children Who are Blind or Visually Impaired (NCECBVI), where she is the Homelife Supervisor. The T4:12 visits started in the 2014 school year. Once a month, six students from the group visit the center where they play a game with students, work on a craft project together, and end with a snack. During the visit, each T4:12 student is paired with two students from NCECBVI.

The visits have already had an impact on students from both schools. According to Mrs. Welch, one of the male students from NCECBVI made a connection with another male student from Lourdes Central Catholic High School.

Another example of the impact of the T4:12 students are having comes from Audrey Graves, center-based program principal. According to Graves, one of the students, who is autistic, was in a bad mood during the T4:12 visit. He did not want to participate in the activity. A member of T4:12 sat next to the NCECBVI student, talked to him and encouraged him to participate.

After a while, the NCECBVI student joined the activity and left in a better mood.

Graves said her students look forward to the visit from the T4:12 group. “It is such a great partnership for all of the students to get together, learn from each other, and form new friendships. I truly think that all of the students are impacted from these visits.” she said.

Students from NCECBVI are given an opportunity to learn social skills and T4:12 students gain an understanding of students with disabilities and a chance to see them as peers, who have a unique set of challenges. Whitten said she feels that her students have also been positively affected by the visits.

They have been touched by the students that they have met and their strength on overcoming challenges” she said. More visits are planned for the remainder of the school year, giving all 80 students at Lourdes Central High School’s T4:12 the chance to participate in the latest outreach program.
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.

Leadership Team:

Sally Giittinger
Administrator
Audrey Graves
Principal
Tanya Hilligoss
Outreach Director
Karen Duffy
Nebraska Instructional Resource Center Coordinator
Dana Welch
Homelife Supervisor
Karen Kindred
Food Services Coordinator

To be added/removed from the mailing list please call:
402.873.5513
800.826.4355

Newsletter Editor:
Cheryl Wichman
Healthcare Public Relations Consultant
jowichman@msn.com

Graphic Designer:
Stacee Milan
Touch of Pride Graphic Design
tcpride@cox.net

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

visit us at facebook