**THE BRAILLE SPECTATOR**

**FALL 2016**

*A semi-annual publication of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland.*

**Judy Rasmussen, editor**

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**Sharon Maneki, President**

**Comments and questions should be sent to** **nfbmd@earthlink.net**

In this issue:

The Top 10 Reasons Why You Should Attend the NFBMD State Convention

A Victory for Voters in Maryland and Perhaps Beyond

The Annapolis Roundup: Protecting the Rights of Disabled Parents

The Maryland ABLE Act

A View of the National Convention from a National Scholarship winner

BELL Academy 2016

Maryland Student Wins Braille Competition

Al Saile, Determined Leader and Economist

Tom Ley Testifies Before the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) about Accessibility

Spectator Specs

**The Top 10 Reasons Why You Should Attend the NFBMD State Convention
October 28-30**

10. We have not held a convention in Baltimore City in decades!

9. The Baltimore Marriott Inner Harbor at Camden Yards Hotel is spacious and has lots of amenities such as a beer and wine wall!

8. The hotel is in a great, convenient location. 110 South Eutaw Street, Baltimore, MD.

7. We will offer 2 great tours, a behind the scenes look at the home of the Orioles- Camden Yards Stadium AND a look back in time at The Westminster Burying Grounds and Catacombs – the final resting place of Edgar Allan Poe and other notables. Be watching the website [www.nfbmd](http://www.nfbmd).org for tour registration information.

6. October 28 is the right day for “Sorry, Wrong Number,” the premiere performance by the Braille Is Beautiful Players. Join us at 6pm for pizza and a play!

5. Dance with the stars. NFB leaders such as President Riccobono, Melissa Riccobono, Marc Maurer and Patricia Maurer, and Maryland leaders are ready to dance with you. Music will be provided by the John Starr Jazz Quartet. If you need a brush up on how to dance, attend our Wallflower Destruction Workshop on Friday afternoon! If dancing is not your thing, listen to good music, bring your own card games, and mix and mingle with your federation family.

4. Great exhibits and great workshops. Check out the new Braille Note Touch. Examine the Orbit Reader, a braille display that costs less than $500!

3. Meet and greet a great national representative, Gary Wunder, the editor of the *Braille Monitor*.

2. Great Door Prizes! There will be 2 special door prizes reserved only for people who purchased a sleeping room at the hotel. One prize will be a free, scrumptious breakfast with Gary Wunder at the Yard Restaurant. The other prize is a weekend getaway in Baltimore to include: Complimentary overnight stay & breakfast for two at The Royal Sonesta Harbor Court Baltimore, two (2) VIP passes to Baltimore’s best-loved attractions, museums, sites, and tours, and (1) $50 restaurant certificate to The Food Market on the Avenue in Hampden.

1. The chance to celebrate the Golden Anniversary of the NFBMD with fellow Federationists and the opportunity to make new friends and to rekindle or gain the federation spirit!

**A Victory for Voters in Maryland and Perhaps Beyond**

By Mark Riccobono

Taken from the Thursday, September 15, 2016 Blog Post

EDITOR’S NOTE: “As spectator readers know we have been battling with Maryland election officials for many years. While we will still have the segregated ballot problem in the November 8 election, as President Riccobono explains the November 8 election blind voters should have a better experience in November than we did during the primary election. “

Last week the Maryland Board of Elections took a new and important step in ensuring that all blind Maryland voters can exercise our right to cast our ballots privately and independently. The board agreed, after forceful persuasion by the National Federation of the Blind and other advocates, that poll workers must inform all Maryland voters of the availability of an accessible method for reading and marking their ballots.

Maryland is one of several states that require a voter-verifiable paper trail when voters cast their ballots, instead of ballots being cast and recorded entirely by electronic means. Like some other states with similar laws, Maryland uses optically scanned paper ballots, which can be marked either by machine or by hand. Maryland has leased electronic ballot-marking devices (BMD's) with audio output and other accessibility features, and until last spring there was a system in place to ensure that a significant number of state voters, with and without disabilities, would use these machines. However, problems with the machines, unrelated to their accessibility, caused the board to decide that their use should be limited primarily to voters with disabilities, and that the option to use them should generally not be offered unless a poll worker decided that a voter had a qualifying disability. The National Federation of the Blind and our allies objected to this plan, both because it was unlikely that election workers could correctly identify all voters who could benefit from using the BMD's, and because the result would be a segregated, identifiable pool of ballots consisting of those cast by voters with disabilities. Despite these concerns, the board did not require that poll workers tell all voters that an accessible voting option was available when Maryland's primary elections were conducted this past spring. The only requirement was that at least two voters without disabilities be requested to use the BMD's, to slightly mitigate the segregation issue. The effect of this policy was that, unless a voter happened to know about the accessible ballot-marking devices and asked to use one, voters with disabilities were kept from using the machines in many instances. Voters were not informed about the machines and, in some instances, the machines were not even set up or turned on. In addition, some voters were interrogated by poll workers about why they wanted to use the machines.

Armed with survey data about these fiascoes that we collected, I pointed out in a letter, and in testimony before a special Board of Elections meeting on September 8, that the Americans with Disabilities Act and its implementing regulations require actual notice of accessible services for people with disabilities. After nearly two hours of testimony and debate, the NFB and our partners persuaded the board that every voter should be told about the BMD's. Starting in November's general election, poll workers in Maryland will be required to read aloud a statement telling each voter that, if needed, there is an accessible alternative for those who have difficulty reading or marking a paper ballot. The board even went a step further, requiring that this statement be printed and taped to the check-in table at the polling place, so that poll workers theoretically won't forget to make the announcement to each voter.

Whenever a separate method or device is designated for the blind and other voters with disabilities to use in casting our ballots, problems typically arise. All too many blind voters throughout the country have arrived at their polling places to learn that the "special" machine for us isn't working or hasn't been set up, or that poll workers don't know how to operate the device or its accessibility features. The only real solution is for all voters to use the same equipment, with appropriate accessibility features for those who need or wish to use them. Barring that, election authorities must ensure that poll workers understand the importance of accessible voting equipment being available and operational for all voters who need or can benefit from it. All involved must be clear on one point: It is the right of blind voters, just as it is of all other voters, to vote privately and independently.

Maryland's Board of Elections, to its credit, realized that the decision of how to cast one's ballot must be firmly in the hands of the voter. The board's decision sends two important signals in Maryland, and hopefully beyond. First, the board recognized that election officials have the ultimate responsibility to ensure that all voters can exercise this cherished right. It is all too often the expectation that advocacy organizations like the National Federation of the Blind should take primary responsibility for providing information to voters with disabilities, and initially there was some sympathy for this position among Maryland Board of Elections members. But while the National Federation of the Blind and others can and should remain engaged in informing voters with disabilities of our rights and how to exercise them, election officials cannot and must not abdicate their responsibility to make sure that all voters can vote privately and independently. Second, informing all voters of the availability of accessible voting methods raises expectations among these voters and the public, by making it clear that the blind and other voters with disabilities can, do, and should participate fully and equally in the democratic process and, by extension, in American society. The Maryland Board of Elections' new policy will inform many voters who can benefit from the ballot-marking device of its availability, including voters who don't have obvious disabilities. Just as importantly, if not more, it will inform the public that Maryland is rightly committed to the full and equal participation of all voters, regardless of disability. Each voter gets a secret vote, with no exceptions, and each vote is of equal importance.

It took vigilant and vigorous advocacy by the National Federation of the Blind and our partners, but the Maryland Board of Elections is to be commended for implementing an affirmative, and hopefully effective, method of ensuring that all Maryland voters can exercise an equal right to vote. Perhaps a similar solution will benefit voters in other jurisdictions throughout the nation.

**The Annapolis Roundup: Protecting the Rights of Disabled Parents**

By: Sharon Maneki

In the spring issue of the Braille Spectator, we thoroughly discussed our successful efforts to pass the Maryland Equal Employment Act that will eliminate the practice of paying disabled workers less than the minimum wage by 2020. In this article, we will describe our efforts to strengthen the rights of disabled parents and other bills of interest to Federationists.

As we know too well, due to stereotypes and misconceptions held by society, many people, including judges, social workers and other court officials, believe that disabled parents are not capable of caring for children. The NFBMD began the process of strengthening the rights of disabled parents in 2008. We successfully enacted 2 laws in 2008 and 2009 that were a step in the right direction. As time progressed, we realized that we needed to do more work to strengthen the rights of disabled parents who found themselves involved in custody disputes, guardianship cases, or adoptions.

Under the leadership of Senator Jamie Raskin and Delegate Sandy Rosenburg, SB765 and HB976 were introduced and discussed by the General Assembly. The main provisions of these bills are that the burden of proof is placed on the person who makes the allegation about the parent’s lack of capabilities. Second, the judge in these cases must write his findings and describe the evidence he used to make his decision. Third, if a judge plans to make a change in the child’s living arrangement, he must provide the disabled parent with the reasonable accommodation of supportive parenting services first. Supportive parenting services will give the disabled parent the opportunity for training or networking with other parents to improve his or her abilities to care for a child. The following testimony by Mike Bullis and Patricia Broda demonstrate why these bills were necessary. They testified before the House Judiciary Committee on March 1, 2016.

**Mike Bullis**:

“In 2006, I found myself in a messy divorce. One of the key concerns became whether I, as a blind person, could care for my four year old daughter, even though I had been doing it since her birth. After a ten day trial that took two years, Judge Robert Dugan in September of 2008, finally said that I was a "mature and responsible adult" and that there was "nothing" to the concerns about my blindness. In 2014, I finished paying off the $60,000 I spent to defend my rights to parent.

No person should have to defend against phantoms: “What if she gets away from him?” “What if she hurts herself?” On and on it went. What this bill and its amendments say is that the burden of proof should and would lie with the accusing party rather than leaving me to prove my capabilities. It also clarifies that they have to provide evidence, not simply fears and speculation.

The bill also clarifies outdated disability language and provides for supportive parenting services in cases in which parents may need specific independent living skills training to manage their child, such as those we provide at our Center in Towson.

The bill simply puts people with disabilities on the same footing as those without disabilities when it comes to CINA, adoption, parenting and custody.

I urge your support of HB 976.”

**Patricia Broda**:

“My name is Patricia Broda and I am here to ask you to support HB 976. What is happening to me is unfair and discriminatory. My story shows why this bill is desperately needed. My son is involved in an ugly divorce. He and his former wife are fighting about what shared custody of their son, my grandson, will mean. My son lives with me so my 8 year old grandson will be staying in my home and I will be assisting with his care.

On October 28, 2015, a home study and parent child observation was completed at my home with Jeffery Hill, my son, by a LCSW social worker from the Family Services Division of the Department of Social Services of Baltimore County. This investigator had been informed by the mother’s attorney that I was legally blind.

During the home visit, the investigator talked only to my son. She did not tell us why she was there; she did not address me in any way except to say goodbye. I was shocked when I saw her report. It reads, “Mr. Hill’s parents are not appropriate child care providers given their medical conditions, specifically auditory and visual impairment.”

I live in constant fear of future biased reports from social service agencies. I never know when an investigator may appear to evaluate me. I have been successfully caring for children since I was a teenager. My capabilities have never been questioned before. The next hearing in my son’s case is March 12, 2016. I hope that the judge will disregard the social worker’s report. She made assumptions and did not get any information from me. My family should not have to suffer because of this improper evaluation.

HB 976 will help me and other caregivers because it will force reports to be based on facts, findings, and actual evidence.

Please vote yes for HB 976 so that I may continue to be involved in my grandson’s life.”

Here is one example of the many letters written in support of this legislation.

“Senator Jamie Raskin

Dear Senator Raskin,

I am a blind man and a member of the National Federation of the Blind.

 I write to thank you for introducing SB765, the Blind Parent's Custody Bill.

 I am a parent of two daughters. Blindness is no barrier for a blind

person in raising children. I started at the beginning with changing

diapers, washing clothes and children, walking them to child care and school. Sometimes I did the cooking of meals when my wife had other activities. Later, the tasks included arithmetic drills with flash cards and explaining adding fractions. I went to dance recitals and soccer games. I participated in PTSA meetings and school musicals. I stayed home from work because the girls had measles. Now it is ‘grandparent's duty’.

I have friends where both parents are blind, others where the mother is blind and the father sighted. We find ways to get the jobs done. It only takes determination, ingenuity and lots of love.

We need S.B.765 because not enough social workers and judges believe that blind people can do all the things I listed above. Thank you again for

 introducing the Blind Parent's Custody Bill.

 Yours truly,

 Tom Bickford

After much letter writing and visiting by advocates, SB765 was enacted into law on the last day of the General Assembly session. I am pleased to report that Governor Hogan signed this bill into law on May 10, 2016. Our work to protect the rights of disabled parents is not complete. The section of the bill concerning Children in Need of Assistance cases was removed because of opposition from the Maryland Department of Human Resources. We are working with the department and hope that legislation in a future session of the Maryland General Assembly will correct this problem. Although SB 765 is not a perfect bill, it goes a long way in strengthening the rights of parents with disabilities.

**Other Bills of Interest**

**Education**HB709/SB422 will benefit the Maryland School for the Blind because it instructs the Governor to appropriate one million dollars for residential services. The legislation also changes the funding formula so that the school can receive some state funding for its outreach services. The Maryland School for the Blind will have a better opportunity to recruit teachers and other professional personnel,, because this law stipulates that they be paid an annual salary at least equal to the salary received by public school teachers and professional personnel of similar training and experience in Baltimore County.

Parental rights for students with disabilities were strengthened by the enactment of two new laws. Because of the enactment of HB551 parents must be told about mediation. The law reads “If, during an individualized education program team meeting, a parent disagrees with the child’s individualized education program or the special education services provided to the child, the individualized education program team shall provide the parent with, in plain language:

 1. an oral and a written explanation of the parent’s right to request

 2. contact information, including a telephone number that a parent may use to receive more information about the mediation process; and

 3. information regarding pro bono representation and other free or low–cost legal and related services available in the area.”

The second law is SB421. Under this law local school districts must “translate a completed individualized education program or a completed individualized family service plan into the parents' native language if that language is spoken by more than 1 percent of the student population in the local school system.”

**Employment**

Employment remains one of the greatest challenges faced by blind persons. Persons with disabilities will have a better chance to be hired by state government because of the enactment of SB818/ HB928. For positions that require a test, 5 points will be added to the score of a person with a disability.

A second law that will help with employment, especially for persons with disabilities who own their own business, is HB1537. This law encourages state government to purchase supplies and services from persons with disabilities who own their own business. State agencies are supposed to buy first from the prisons, next from Blind Industries and Services of Maryland, and third from Maryland Works which is the sheltered workshop program or from a business owned by an individual with a disability.

Many thanks to everyone who made the 2016 session of the Maryland General Assembly such a productive one for persons with disabilities, especially those who are blind. We look forward to another productive session in 2017.

**The Maryland ABLE Act**

By: Sharon Maneki

The Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act became a federal law in 2014. This law allows persons with disabilities to save money in a special account for later use, provided that the individual became disabled prior to the age of 26. States were required to set-up their own procedures to implement this law.

In 2016, the Maryland ABLE Act, HB 431/SB 355, was enacted into law.

The Maryland ABLE Act will permit persons with disabilities or their parent or guardian to establish a special savings account with the Maryland 529 Board. Persons with disabilities cannot be penalized by federal programs such as SSI for having money in this special savings account. State programs that have means tests, such as those run by the Division of Rehabilitation Services or the Developmental Disabilities Administration, also may not penalize persons with disabilities because they have these special accounts. Money from these accounts may be used to purchase needed technology or other items to help the individual with a disability achieve greater independence and a better life experience.

The implementing regulations will be ready by October 2017. We will provide a link to the rules and regulations on [www.nfbmd.org](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cadmin%5CAppData%5CLocal%5CMicrosoft%5CWindows%5CINetCache%5CContent.Outlook%5C6LUV0S0Q%5Cwww.nfbmd.org) when they are issued.

**A View of the National Convention from a National Scholarship winner**

(Editor’s Note: The following article came from the blog of the National Association of Blind Students. Congratulations, Nathan!)

Here is how Kathryn Webster, president of the National Association of Blind Students, introduced Nathan’s segment at the national convention.

Nathan Clark is a proud resident in the state of Maryland. He attends Towson University and is a proud graduate of the Louisiana Center for the Blind. He serves as the Vice President of the Maryland Student Division; and has high hopes of pursuing a profession as a probation officer. Nate is a seasoned Federationist, yet a first time finalist. We are very proud of his great work within our movement.

Here is Nathan’s post.

“As a national scholarship winner this year, it was an amazing and educational experience for me. Although this was my eleventh NFB National Convention, which made me one of the most veteran students in the scholarship class, I learned a lot about both our mentors and the Federation in general. Having a mentor every day allowed me to interact and communicate with great leaders within the organization from across the country that I would not have probably had the chance to encounter, unless I was a scholarship winner. I learned about how many of our leaders found the Federation and what role they play in the organization. It was a humbling experience walking around with my mentors and meeting new people from different states, especially during the general sessions. For example, when I was with Ron Brown of Indiana, I had many of the Indiana state leaders and friends come up to me during the general session and I got to talk to them about my experiences in college and what I want to do professionally. I enjoyed talking to my mentors and observing their excitement and enthusiasm that they had regarding the Federation and the convention as a whole.

On Sunday, when I had Ron Brown, he was screaming, cheering and clapping the entire time during the opening ceremony of the General Session and during the veterans’ ceremony. Finally, when I had Gary Wunder on Tuesday, when the resolutions were being discussed, I got the chance to talk about my philosophy and beliefs with Gary and how they compared to his opinions and attitudes on policy issues for the organization. I want to thank the NFB as a whole and the scholarship committee for giving me this wonderful and fortunate experience this past week at the NFB National Convention in ORLANDO, Florida. I am proud to be a member of the greatest blindness organization in the world because I know that we, in the NFB, are changing the public's perception of the blind so that all blind people can live the lives we want. I will always consider myself a Federationist, and I have, and will continue to consider the NFB part of my family. Let's go build the Federation!”

**BELL Academy 2016**

By: Judy Rasmussen

For the past eight years, the bells have been ringing for blind students in Maryland. As some of you may know, BELL stands for Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning. We are proud that the program started in Maryland, and has now spread to 34 states. One parent's idea has led to life-changing experiences for nearly 300 blind and visually impaired students across the country.

From July 18 to August 5, 23 students (seven for the first time) participated in well-organized educational programs in Salisbury, Glenn Dale, and Baltimore. Students ranged in age from 4 to 10. Each program is different, depending on the program's location, and the students' needs. Several students in all three programs were younger, and therefore just beginning to learn braille. Observing blind adults reading braille at a normal pace motivates beginners to continue practicing to increase their speed, and to learn all of the contractions necessary to read and write efficiently.

Drawing pictures, playing braille games, reading poems, and learning to spell new words are only a few of the many innovative things BELL students did to increase their knowledge of braille. Every day, students wrote highlights of the day's activities in a journal. All students shared a "bell ringer" (something they were proud of" each day." Examples of bell ringers were: "I learned the ch sign," "I learned to write the contractions for the words before and after," "I kept my learning shades on during the travel activity," I blew up a balloon for the first time," I liked playing beach ball braille, "and I liked making candy necklaces."

Some programs had specific themes. Of course, all programs' themes were to expose students to many fun braille-related, non-visual and travel activities using the white cane. Farming was Salisbury's theme. Students went to a farmer's market, planted plants, shucked corn, had a visit from goats and sheep, and participated in other farm-related activities. Shooting water at each other with squirt guns was a highlight of play time.

Students in the Baltimore program visited the Jewish Museum of Maryland, where they made pretend doctor kits, and were able to listen to their hearts. They got to open up small drawers where they learned to identify some medicines by their smell. At the Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, students made mazes. Everyone had lots of fun at a swimming pool. Some students enthusiastically did cannon balls, while others had fun splashing each other.

Since blind and visually impaired students do not often have a chance to work in the kitchen, cooking using non-visual techniques is an essential part of the BELL program. Learning to measure and mix accurately with cups and spoons labeled in braille allows everyone to work independently. Some students really enjoy getting their hands all messy, except when it comes to reading a braille recipe to follow directions.

 Making nachos, s'mores, and caramel sticky buns in the microwave were all enjoyed by BELL participants. Eating the homemade ice cream in a bag was a real hit on a hot day.

Participants in the Glenn Dale program visited the College Park Aviation Museum. Dressing up like Wilbur and Katherine Wright, an air mail pilot, helicopter pilot, a modern woman pilot and a rescue pilot was a big deal. Students participated in a scavenger hunt, where they had to locate eight items, including bells, plastic ducks, scented soap, and Brailled cards. Seeing the progress some students had made in their reading and writing was a joy for the volunteers.

Two students in Baltimore participated in the BELL Ex program. This is a program for older students who have learned enough braille to branch out and try other things such as learning more about assistive technology. This year's theme was to create a newspaper called "The Blind Bell." Participants interviewed instructors and students as well as the president of the National Federation of the Blind, Mark Riccobono. Their job was to write articles about each part of the program, and put it all together, including formatting and embossing it.

The last day of the program is always a highlight. Parents' seminars were held in Baltimore and Salisbury. The theme for the last day activities for the Baltimore and Glenn Dale programs was the Braille Olympics. BELL Academy students made crafts, participated in relays, and many braille activities.

A song learned by all BELL Academy students was "Braille Is Beautiful", composed by Federationists to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the National Federation of the Blind.

This song, as well as other songs and skits by each program, were performed for the parents.

Last but not least, each student was given a back pack with school supplies donated by the National Harbor Chapter, as well as a goody bag containing a braille book, playing cards, and a bell. Hearing all of the students ring their bells was a fitting climax to the 2016 BELL Academy program.

The BELL Academy would not have been possible without the dedication of our many volunteers, committed teachers, parents, and our most excellent participants. We wish to gratefully acknowledge grants from the Friends of the Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Dollar General, Eastern Shore Charities, The Greater Baltimore, Central Maryland, TLC, National Harbor and Sligo Creek Chapters. We are all looking forward to the 2017 BELL Academy program.

**Maryland Student Wins Braille Competition**

 EDITOR'S NOTE: “Meredith Day, who is eight and is a third grader at Mechanicsville Elementary School in Sykesville, Maryland, has attended our BELL Academy program since the age of three. She was one of our BELL Ex students this summer.”

Meredith won the Regional Braille Challenge competition in the apprentice category (first and second graders) held at the Maryland School for the Blind on January 30, 2016. She was invited to attend a nationwide competition held every year at the Braille Institute in Los Angeles. It is an honour to be invited to this event. The competition consists of students from ten US regions and three Canadian provinces. Not only did Meredith win our regional competition, she placed first in the apprentice category in the national competition.

The competition consists of four categories: speed and accuracy, vocabulary, grammar and punctuation, and comprehension. Meredith is very happy about winning the national competition. Just as important, she made many friends from across the country. Her mother, Chris, says now she and her new friends enjoy conversing with each other on FaceTime, reading paragraphs from books on their braille note takers.

Meredith's older brother, Derrick, who is also blind, attended the festivities. Chris reports that seeing Meredith win the competition has motivated him to read more braille, and who knows, maybe win the competition in his age group next year? Meredith is definitely living the life she wants. The below article will give you a little more insight as to the excitement Meredith felt before going to this competition.

FInksburg student Competes in National Braille Challenge

June 30, 2016 | carrollcountytimes.com | By Heather Mongilio

A second-grader from Finksburg traveled across the country to participate in the National Braille Challenge on Sunday.

Meredith Day, 8, a blind student, won the Maryland Regional Braille Challenge, advancing her to the national competition in California. She competed in the apprentice level against other first- and second-grade students from around the United States.
The Carroll County Times caught up with Meredith before she left for the competition to ask her about competing.
Q: Can you tell me a little about what you had to do for the Braille Challenge?
A: We had to read, we had to spell words, we had to write words in Braille and spell them correctly, and we had to read and detect errors and read things and do comprehensive questions.
Q: Did you practice for this? How did you train?
A: I use Braille every day so that's how I practice.
Q: For people who don't know what Braille is or how you read in Braille, how do you read in Braille?
A: It's a six-dot code. It's dots that make up different letters and things. So like six dots on a dice.
Q: Is it easy or hard?
A: Easy. We're all Braille readers [at the Maryland School for the Blind]. Not for the sighted people who are trying to learn it because then they have to learn both ways. So there are people in school that read with their eyes and teach.
Q: Do you have a favorite book you like to read?
A: I like to read this book called, "Socks." It's about a kitty cat by Beverly Cleary.
Q: So going on to the national level of the Braille competition, what are you excited for the most?
A: Well I'm excited about the reading part because I love to read.
Q: What's your favorite part about reading?
A: All the great stories.
Q: Is there anything that you think will be the hardest?
A: Maybe finding errors because sometimes you can't always find them because you might not know how to spell a word.
Q: When you are competing with other people, are you all in one room or are you doing it separately?
A: It's divided into different grade levels. I'm in the second grade level, which I think is apprentice because I'm in second grade.
Q: Were you in a room full of people when you were doing all the reading?
A: Well, only the other people who were competing and the instructor for that activity.
Q: Do you have a certain amount of time you have to do each activity in?
A: Yes, they are timed. Yes.
Q: What's your favorite part about competing?
A: I like to do lots of different things. And sometimes if you finish before time is up, up you get to do different things like play Braille games and stuff.
Q: What types of Braille games do you play?
A: Sometimes we play Uno and sometimes we'll read Braille cards. Lots of things. And sometimes I play Monopoly.
Q: What made you decide to do the Braille Challenge?
A: Because I like to read and most of it is about reading. When I grow up I would like to be a librarian.
Q: Do you get to read a lot at school?
A: If you finish your work early you get to read, yes. But there's also a time when teachers tell you that you should be reading, that you can read. And in the mornings after you've done everything you have to do in the morning, you can read.
Q: Do you have a favorite subject at school?
A: I like media, and I also like math. And I'm really good at math, too.
Q: What was it like to get past the regional Braille Challenge and find out you won?
A: I was pretty excited.
Q: I know you get to travel but anything else that you are looking forward to when you are going to the National Braille Challenge?
A: We're going to Disneyland before we go to the Braille Challenge. And I was excited when I found out.
Q: And what's a fun fact about you?
A: I like pink. And I like cake and puppies. And bunnies.

**Al Saile, Determined Leader and Economist**

Editor's Note: “Al Saile was a long-time member of the National Federation of the Blind. He was active in both the Sligo Creek and Central Maryland chapters of the NFBMD, and was the president of the Sligo Creek Chapter for at least a year. He had a delightful sense of humor, and was an excellent fund raiser. After his recent death, we reflected on the struggles he endured on his job. Al's struggles happened in the late 1970s. Discrimination existed then as it does today. Knowing that he was qualified to perform the duties of an economist, yet was always passed over for promotions and not given meaningful work to do, he persisted and won his grievance with the Department of Labor. We are reprinting an article from the January, 1981 *Braille Monitor*, which describes Al's determination to fight discrimination. His persistence led to his being awarded the promotion he should have received years earlier. As Federationists, we know that if we want to continue living the lives we want, we must be vigilant in pursuing what is right. When one person wins a victory, we all win! The Al Saile case set a precedent which has helped many federal employees ever since.”

Braille Monitor, January 1981

ANOTHER VICTORY AGAINST DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT:
THE AL SAILE CASE

By JAMES GASHEL

“Unlike discrimination based on race, sex, national origin, or religion, which usually takes the form of some open and outright prejudicial action, discrimination against the blind in employment is often more subtle and covert. The discrimination practiced against Al Saile (who is a long-time Federationist and who has been employed for many years) is a case in point, illustrating our long and painful struggle to achieve first-class citizenship.

Al Saile is a well trained and highly qualified labor economist, currently assigned to the Labor Department's Employment and Training Administration. He has worked in various capacities at the Department of Labor for nearly 15 years. During this time it would be hard to isolate any single or especially significant incident which, in and of itself, would give rise to a claim of discrimination, but despite this Al Saile has been victimized by one of the most cruel, yet indirect, forms of prejudicial treatment. The type of discrimination practiced against Al Saile is one of the more typical forms of mistreatment of qualified blind employees wherein denial of opportunity is a gradual process which can only be perceived upon viewing a series of incidents over an extended period of time.

The discriminatory treatment in this case was a pattern of behavior adopted by supervisors which prevented Al Saile from demonstrating his professional skills, thereby placing him at a serious disadvantage in competition with others for promotions. The result was that, while sighted employees were given the assignments and tasks necessary to prove themselves and to build a record of competent performance, Al Saile was systematically denied these opportunities, falling victim to his employer's presumption that "he would not be able to do the work anyway."

This is the age-old situation in which a blind person is protected by someone else (in this case supervisors on the job) from what is thought to be inevitable failure, should the opportunity be extended. The problem with this quite familiar and typical practice of protecting the blind is, of course, that while extending the almost maternal hand of custodial care for the welfare and safety of the blind person, the self-appointed protector is also foreclosing any possibility of success. Making the situation even worse, this custodial treatment is usually extended with the best of intentions and the desire to prevent the blind person from suffering the pain of failure.

This is exactly the problem which Al Saile lived with for the majority of his 14 years of employment at the Department of Labor. It wasn't that people didn't like him or that they would leave the room and make rude remarks whenever he came around — quite the opposite. Almost everybody was, for the most part, congenial and good tempered. But the problem was really much more basic and subtle; behind the facade of kindness and goodwill toward Mr. Saile, there was the deep-seated feeling that a blind person (any blind person) was simply not cut out to be a labor economist. So year after year Al Saile suffered this undeserved sentence of inevitable doom. Sometimes he was given assignments which were well beneath his capacity, but more often he was passed over even for the most simple and menial jobs, being left to sit idle as though the government could well afford to hire a token blind person, thereby being proud that it was meeting its obligation to employ the handicapped.

There are undoubtedly hundreds, perhaps thousands, of blind persons who are trapped by their employers in exactly the same situation, but the success of Al Saile's long struggle to break loose from the bonds of deeply rooted prejudice should give hope and encouragement that the traditional barriers of discrimination have at last begun to crumble. Reprinted below is an article from the July 28, 1980, issue of Federal Times, a newspaper printed for federal employees. In the section entitled "Forum," Al Saile describes in his own words his situation. On September 11, 1980, Mr. Robert L. Davis, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration and Management at the Department of Labor, announced the Department's proposed disposition of Al Saile's grievance. The decision represents a victory for Al Saile and for all of us; it came in the form of a letter which we are including in this article because of its significance. Victories such as this are made of hard work, tenacious determination, and the realization that we can best achieve our common objectives by organizing with one another. Al Saile exhibits each of these characteristics, and because of this the decision in his case will go down as a ringing declaration of equal rights and another victory for the National Federation of the Blind.

FORUM

Affirmative Action Doesn't Exist for the Blind

by ALVIN SAILE

(From the *Federal Times*, July 28, 1980)

For the past 14 years, I have been employed as a labor economist or in other related jobs in the Employment and Training Administration of the Department of Labor at the same grade.

Legally blind until late 1971, and totally blind since, I have encountered continuous discrimination by office chiefs and top management in the recognition of my abilities to perform all the tasks specified in my position descriptions.

Many remarks reflect the prevailing attitude that no blind person can perform complex duties involved in research assignments of the office in which I have been employed. Nor was any effort made to reassign me to what management thought could be more suitable work. The little work I did do was generally considered of good quality, but never had any practical purpose.

Unhappy with my situation, and unable to gain union support, I directed my efforts to seek competitive jobs as they were posted. For the first few years, because both my resume and my performance evaluation included remarks about my blindness, I never made the highly qualified rating from panels. By removing these references to blindness, I was able to seek, over the past five years, nearly 80 interviews for which I had been found highly qualified.

The negative attitude about blindness surfaced in these interviews with such comments as: "How do you function? How did you find this room? It's so marvelous what blind people can do."

I was in competition for jobs in which minorities and females were granted preferential selection by my agency and I have heard the remark, "I can promote your guide dog because she is black and female, but management knows nothing about affirmative action for the handicapped because there are so few employed and top management gets no pressure to recognize advancement rights for the handicapped as is applied for minorities and females."

In late 1978, I went for an interview with a person who knew my work previously done in the research specialty that he directs, and who thus accepted my capabilities. However, he warned he might not have hiring authority, since the overall office director had some concerns over the position. It was well-known the office director in the past had a say on who was selected and he was one of the persons who believed that due to lack of sight, my work was not competitive.

Upon being turned down for this position, I filed an equal employment opportunity complaint. Before this action, I had brought my situation to the attention of the American Civil Liberties Union, with the support of the National Federation of the Blind, to seek possible court remedy. The complaint was based on advancement denials and the inadequacies of my work assignments due to my blindness.

In May 1980, one year after this case had been initiated (my report had been lost twice) a meeting was held with the equal employment opportunity officer of Labor's Employment and Training Administration for resolution. Present were Marc Maurer, representing the National Federation of the Blind, Patrick Norton, representing ACLU from the law firm of Covington and Burling, and myself. Selecting officials, we were informed, had the right to choose from among the applicants interviewed.

There was no answer from the EEO official when asked how over the past decade minorities and females settled claims of discrimination when they were not chosen, yet it is well-known that within ETA such persons must be given preferential selection and if not chosen, the selecting official must document the reasons why to top management. As expected, management continues to ignore the Vocational Rehabilitation amendments of 1973 which in intent, provide for the handicapped the same consideration for preferential selection.

Management conceded that I had, indeed, not been given enough work since my total blindness and the reason was based upon the belief that I could not perform the duties of my grade because of lack of sight. Yet, management did not have to atone for this prolonged mistaken view. The case was resolved this way: I have to prove that I can do all the tasks while management sets about to prove that I will fail. And this is not to be done in my present job. A new job will be created, setting me aside from my work background, and I will be placed under an unidentified supervisor.

The carrot is that if I survive and meet up to the full expectations of all the tasks required at my present grade level, I then can be promoted without competition.

As far as I am concerned, this face-saving management offer is too little, too late. Worse, it fails to address the entire problem of enforcing the law which specified the advancement of handicapped. I do not have to prove my qualifications. I know I can do the full extent of the next higher grade in my job series or related series and the only reason I have not advanced according to my skills is solely due to management concern over my lack of sight.

Fourteen years is more than enough evidence of that. I totally reject management's argument that others have also gone such long periods without promotion since there are a number of persons, a few of whom I know personally, who do not want advancement and do not actively seek to compete for higher paying jobs of more advanced skill.

If management now wants to test out my capabilities, let them do so at the higher grade I have so long sought. It is only at the higher grade I will willingly undertake the test, for I know I will not fail and both the government and myself become winners. Otherwise, let's take the risk, the long siege of battle in court and prove there is or there is not a provision in law that is meaningful.

I intend to continue the fight until the battle is won no matter how scarred I become for there is no end to manning the barricade on this issue until handicapped persons receive equal treatment in matters involving their qualifications for advancement as do others protected under civil rights laws. Members of the National Federation of the Blind will stand shoulder to shoulder with me, and we will win.

U.S. Department of Labor

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration and Management

Washington, D.C.

September 11, 1980

Certified Letter-Return Receipt Requested

Dear Mr. Saile:

As the Department official designated by the Secretary of Labor to make agency decisions in cases alleging discrimination under the Equal Employment Opportunity Program, I hereby submit my proposed decision on your complaint.

You allege that because of your handicap (loss of sight) you were not selected for a position of Manpower Analyst, GS- 140-1 3, under announcement ETA 78-244, in the Office of Policy, Evaluation and Research (OPER) and that the underlying reason for your non-selection was because you were given too few, and too insubstantial work assignments since becoming totally blind in 1971.

The evidence gathered during the investigation reveals that the merit staffing of the position in question appears to have been executed properly. However, the events leading up to the actual selection indicate that you may have faced some unnecessary barriers to employment. There is more than a casual connection between your being underutilized, periods of inadequate accommodation, and your non-selection for the position of Manpower Analyst, GS- 140-13.

In past years, employment discrimination tended to be viewed as a series of isolated and distinguishable events, for the most part due to ill-will on the part of some identifiable individual or organization. Employment discrimination, as viewed today, is a far more complex phenomenon and is generally described in terms of 'systems' and 'effects'. The investigative file reveals that you were ranked as the second choice for the GS-13 Manpower Analyst position. The question is, with adequate accommodation and proper utilization, would you have been selected for the position?

I have concluded that you are a capable employee, who because of periods of inadequate accommodation and underutilization, could not perform adequately. Therefore, there is reasonable cause to believe that inadequate accommodation and underutilization were factors in your not being selected for the position in question.

Based on the evidence in the file and my conclusion, I am disposed to find that you should be retroactively promoted to the position of Manpower Analyst, GS-140-13 and awarded back pay to the date you would have been promoted had you been selected for the position in question.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Davis

Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration and Management”

**Tom Ley Testifies Before the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) about Accessibility**

Editor’s Note: “For many years, Tom Ley has been a leader in the diabetes action network, a proud division of the National Federation of the Blind. He also facilitates the Maryland Diabetes Action Network Committee calls on the first Thursday of each month at 7pm. If you wish to receive information and support on managing diabetes, call 641-715-3272. The access code is 720125.

We are reprinting Tom’s testimony before the Food and Drug administration to demonstrate our commitment to accessible equipment for people who have diabetes and blindness or low vision. If you would like to read the Technology Bill of Rights that Tom refers to, go to <https://nfb.org/2016-resolutions>, Resolution 2016-16. Tom was able to make the case for accessibility not only to the FDA, but also to the many equipment manufactures and other leaders in diabetes who attended this session.

This FDA hearing took place on July 21, 2016. The purpose of the hearing was to determine if people with diabetes should be able to use continuous glucose monitoring (CGM) systems to make insulin dosing decisions. Prior to this hearing FDA was recommending that these systems be used for monitoring only, so additional blood testing was still required. The FDA decided that people with diabetes can make insulin dosing decisions based on the data from their CGMs. This decision will be very beneficial to people with diabetes who also have low vision or blindness because they will no longer have to get blood on the test strip.”

Time: 1:00 PM

“Hello, my name is Tom Ley, and I am here representing the National Federation of the Blind, and in particular, our National Task Force on addressing the inaccessibility of diabetes technologies for people who are blind or have low vision.

The National Federation of the Blind did pay for my Uber car down from Baltimore today, but that’s it. (audience chuckles).

In the National Federation of the Blind (the NFB) we have much experience with diabetes because so many of our members have diabetes. Some, like me, grew up with diabetes and have gone blind. Many more today, though, are those who lived their whole life as blind people and have now suffered from the epidemic that’s spreading across the world today of Type 2 diabetes, and many are using insulin. Then we have another group coming into play, those who are living longer and encountering age-related eye disease, and then are diagnosed with diabetes after losing vision in their senior years.

So our ranks are swelling, not that that’s what we’re looking for, but the issue we have is, what’s been addressed by others, is the great burden of doing finger sticks when you are blind and can’t see well enough to find the drop of blood.

The advent of the CGM(Continuous Glucose Monitor) has been extraordinary in my life personally. Even before I could use a CGM accessibly, I’ll get to that in a moment, I had a CGM. Even though I couldn’t read the screen, I used one just so I would know what was happening when it would alarm when I was going too high or too low. So the technology is terrific.

But for those of us who have to work hard, sometimes testing five or six times to make sure we are getting an accurate blood sugar reading, and for those of us who have issues with sensitivity in our fingers, to get the strip to where the blood is, this is a huge burden lifted from us to only have to test twice a day to calibrate.

Second point quickly, we want to commend Dexcom. We’ve put out a Technology Bill of Rights for People who are blind and have diabetes stating that all people who are blind or have low vision have a right to technologies that can be used by people who are blind or have low vision, and Dexcom has done that.

Their G5 Mobile system is wonderful, and it’s been designed in a way so that I, using my iPhone with its built-in accessibility, I today can know what my blood sugar is (I was 129 going steady before I came up here). (audience chuckles)

And my Type 1 son, when he was up at camp in Connecticut, I was using the Dexcom Share feature and knew what his CGM reading was too.

So, I really want to encourage the FDA to take this into consideration as you make your recommendations this afternoon. People with diabetes - we are all for using CGM for treatment decisions. We do it today. We know what works and doesn’t work as people with diabetes. And this works. Thank you. “

**Spectator Specs**

Weddings:

* On June 11, Danielle Shives, an active member of the At-Large Chapter, married Jonah Manke.
* On July 8, Nicole Fincham, an active member of the TLC Chapter, married James Shehan.
* On August 5, Anthony Evans and Kim Mohnke were married. Both are long time Federationists. Currently, Anthony is a member of the At-Large Chapter and Kim has been an active member in the NFB of Michigan. We welcome Kim to the Maryland affiliate.
* On August 13, Faith Geipe and David Waybright, long time active members of the Greater Baltimore Chapter, were married.

Congratulations to all the newlyweds!

New Babies:

* Longtime Federation leaders Mary Jo and Jesse Hartle recently welcomed a new member to their family. Braden Alexander was born on August 9. Jesse is
Second Vice President of the NFBMD, and Mary Jo is the immediate past President of the TLC Chapter.
* On August 11, Melissa Sheeder and Aaron Carpenter became the proud parents of Ren Elizabeth Carpenter. Melissa has been an active Federationist for many years and in true Federation fashion, she has involved Aaron and big brother Luke Carpenter.
* Nicole Fincham-Shehan and James Shehan became the proud parents of Christian Nicholas on August 20, 2016. Nicole and her daughter Arielle have been active participants in the Federation for years. Nicole is the newly-elected Vice President of the TLC Chapter. Christian Nicholas Shehan is fortunate to have two big sisters and a big brother, Arielle, Inanda and Ikheem.

Congratulations to all the parents on their new arrivals!

Graduations:

* Christopher Nusbaum, President of the Maryland Association of Blind Students, graduated from Francis Scott Key High School in Westminster, MD. Christopher is attending the adjustment to blindness program at the Louisiana Center. After completing this program, Christopher will continue his studies in college.
* Brandon Pickrel graduated from Northern Middle School. He will be attending Northern High School in Accident, MD.
* James Zimmer graduated from Wicomico Middle School. He will be attending Parkside High School, in Salisbury, MD.

Best wishes for much success to all the graduates.

Deaths:

* Al Saile, a longtime leader and member of the Sligo Creek Chapter, died on May 22, 2016. In his later years, Al moved to Columbia and continued his NFB activities by joining the Central Maryland Chapter. During his working career, Al was an avid fundraiser for the Sligo Creek chapter. He also fought against discrimination. Read “ANOTHER VICTORY AGAINST DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT: THE AL SAILE CASE” elsewhere in this issue.
* On July 13, Harold Hayes, a charter member of the National Harbor Chapter, died after a long illness. We will miss Harold’s kindness and his willingness to help anyone in need. He was always a willing volunteer alongside his longtime companion, Ava Ferebee.
* Lavonnya Gardner, a member of the Greater Baltimore Chapter, died suddenly on August 26. She was a strong advocate for people with autism and blindness and always tried to educate the public. Lavonnya and her daughter Brianna were always at chapter meetings, conventions, and federation events together. We will miss Lavonnya’s enthusiasm and spirit.

Achievements:

* Congratulations to Geoffrey Rono who became a U.S. Citizen on August 12. Geoffrey, born in Kenya, is a member of the Sligo Creek Chapter.
* Congratulations to Orlo and Mary Nichols who celebrated their 49th wedding anniversary on September 16. May they have many more years of happiness together.