



**March, 2010**

**President's Message**

**Kathy Davis**

Spring is in the air (hopefully)....It's been snowy around Raleigh since last I wrote to you. On the subject of snow, as you have seen on the chapter website, we have had to change the dates of the conference to accommodate the snow make up days needed by the GMS program. Nonetheless, your chapter continues to work on finalizing the details of the program. Please remember to check out the event at [www.ncaer.net](http://www.ncaer.net) or contact either William Tubilleja ([William.tubilleja@dhhs.nc.gov](mailto:William.tubilleja@dhhs.nc.gov)) or myself ([mary.k.davis@dhhs.nc.gov](mailto:mary.k.davis@dhhs.nc.gov)) for details and information. The 2010 conference theme is assistive technology across the life span, or "Assistive Technology: It's Where It's AT." We welcome you to the campus of the Governor Morehead School for the Blind in Raleigh on March 26 and 27, 2010. Also remember that at our conference we hold our annual NCAER meeting, open to you all to attend, so please make sure you come, provide your input, and support NCAER. At that meeting you can also welcome your new president, William Tubilleja, and I know that you will provide him with support and assistance that is necessary to make YOUR professional organization grow and prosper, even in these rough economic times.

And speaking of the economy: I know that we are all mindful of diminishing resources, that while financial times in education have never been particularly "cushy", we presently experience greater and greater budget cuts to our programs. That means that we must continue to do more with less: fewer people, fewer financial resources, fewer staff development opportunities. We need to become masterful at thinking outside of the box—think of ways to share information and resources with others in nontraditional formats. Can you email? Can you videoconference? Can you teleconference? Can you call the GMS OutReach program for resources? Remember that you don't ALWAYS HAVE to order a piece of equipment, or a book, or a lamp, or a device.

Check and see if the OutReach program has the particular item and request that from their lending library. Remember, too, to utilize the NCVI listserv to see if others have equipment and material they would share.

The sad reality is that economics don't appear likely to improve in the near future....which is a double-edged sword. While things *are* tight, teachers have always been experts at doing more with less. And facing tough times forces us to be creative and think about delivering instruction and services in ways we never imagined ! If you remember *why* you entered this field in the first place, and keep your focus on your students, you *will* always succeed—and so will they.

**Change at GMS (Gary Ray)**

Budget cuts at GMS: By now you have probably been impacted by budget cuts in your agencies or in other ways. The Governor Morehead School for the Blind, Eastern NC School for the Deaf, and NC School for the Deaf have suffered as well. Two recent changes of note: decrease in the number of working hours of the residential life staff from 40 hours per week to 35, with a trickle down to impact student instructional schedules. The second impact of the reduction in hours means that students now arrive on Monday morning (instead of Sunday night) and leave on Friday afternoon. For day students, their day begins at 7:30; however, for residential students who travel the long distances across the state, they are now getting up on Monday morning at very early hours, riding for several hours, arriving at GMS, and beginning their instructional day at 11:30. The severity of these changes on students and their families has prompted me to draft the following position statement. I and the AER Board concur that the new operational schedule for the school puts an extraordinary burden on students and their families.

*Position Statement*

*The NC Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (NC AER) is the professional organization for persons working in the field of visual impairment and blindness in North Carolina. NC AER members are committed to ensuring the best*

*possible outcomes for those we serve by offering and supporting high quality services.*

*NC AER opposes the recent instructional day schedule changes at the schools for the blind and for the deaf in North Carolina. We do not believe these changes ensure the best outcomes for the students taught at the schools. We are concerned that these changes will lessen the ability of the students to learn effectively and at the highest level. We understand the need for cost reductions at the schools but believe that those reductions could best be borne through means which do not impact instructional time and service delivery, e.g., physical plant cost reductions, transportation cost reductions. We express our concern that having students begin a Monday bus ride at 6 a.m. AND arrive at school at 11 a.m. to begin their instructional day flies in the face of scheduling conducive to a productive learning environment. We also have concerns for students with multiple impairments who may find the travel time particularly onerous as they must have medication considerations taken into account in this travel and be ready to learn once they arrive at school. The schedule change occurs in February, several weeks into the second semester. Such a change would have been (potentially) less disruptive at a natural school break, e.g., between first and second semesters. Lastly, we express concern for the stress placed on families by this schedule change. Parents must adjust transportation and child care arrangements which places them and our students under undue stress. In times of budget limitations, we recognize that cuts are inevitable. We believe strongly that those closest to the schools' instructional daily operations be allowed to determine where cuts be made. Bureaucratically mandated cuts are not likely to have the interest of the students and their families considered.*

***Where in the Uwharries ?? (Rod Poole)***

That was the question that four high school students had to answer on a wilderness trail hike they recently enjoyed. On February 25, two Governor Morehead School Orientation and Mobility staff took four short term students to the Birkhead Mountains Wilderness area, part of the Uwharrie Mountain range southwest of Asheboro for a long day trip. Using compasses, trail maps, monocular scopes, and walking staffs, these four teens had to negotiate

Hannah's Creek Trail and part of Birkhead Mountain Trail, and then reverse their route.

Since the day was cold with a brisk wind, we were thankful for our warm winter clothing and had quite a discussion about survival skills for outdoor adventures. Orientation involves figuring out where you are, where you want to go, and how to get there, so it was important for our students to use their equipment to figure out the direction they needed to choose at two different trail junctions. Bright sunshine also helped orient them as they journeyed.

Problem solving in a wilderness experience affords folks an opportunity to utilize all of the Orientation and Mobility skills in a challenging setting where decisions carry real life consequences. Having O/M Specialists who are very experienced hikers to assist, if needed, adds a level of safety to help folks relax. This type of experiential learning opportunity is incredibly valuable for anyone, sighted or not, and we are ALWAYS seeking avenues to make learning come alive in vital, exciting ways that help students achieve a higher level of independence. If you want more information on this or other cool O/M experiences, you are invited to contact Rod Poole or Claire Hakin at the Governor Morehead School. Rod is at [rod.poole@dhhs.nc.gov](mailto:rod.poole@dhhs.nc.gov) and Claire is at [claire.hakin@dhhs.nc.gov](mailto:claire.hakin@dhhs.nc.gov).

**REMEMBER: NCCVIB,  
March 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010,  
The Governor Morehead School for the Blind,  
Raleigh, NC  
[www.ncaer.net](http://www.ncaer.net) for more information**

***2010 NC ABS Student Seminar (Gary Ray)***

The NC Association of Blind Students, a division of the NFB of NC, will host its 2010 Student Seminar on Saturday, March 20. The seminar will be held on the campus of the Governor Morehead School in Raleigh. The target audience is high school students who are contemplating college and college students already involved in post secondary education. For details, a detailed schedule, and online registration, go to [www.ncabs.org](http://www.ncabs.org)

### ***NFB National Scholarships (Gary Ray)***

It is getting harder and harder to afford post secondary education these days. The National Federation of the Blind awards 30 educational scholarships each year. Urge students who need financial assistance with school to visit [www.nfb.org](http://www.nfb.org) Students can apply online. The deadline for these 30 scholarships is the end of March. The scholarships are awarded at the NFB Convention which will be held over the 4<sup>th</sup> of July in Dallas.

### ***More Scholarship Resources for NC Students (Gary Ray)***

The National Federation of the Blind of NC awards two \$1500 scholarships each year to honor Robert and Hazel Staley. The deadline for applications is the end of June. The application form can be downloaded from [www.nfbofnc.org](http://www.nfbofnc.org). It must be submitted in print form this year. The scholarships will be awarded at the NFB of NC State Convention in Burlington the weekend of September 10 – 12, 2010.

### ***NC-APVI (Dana Fox)***

NC Community Resource Panel, Saturday, March 20 from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. at the Governor Morehead Preschool. Ever wonder about extra curricular opportunities for your child? Curious about educational supports and services across the age span? This resource panel is for you ! Panel presenters include GMS OutReach, Family Support Network, Miracle League of the Triangle, Abilitations Indoor Soccer, Yogabilities, NC Association of Blind Students, Parks & Recreation, and more. Childcare is provided but you must RSVP to reserve your spot(s) by March 18. Volunteer teachers come from out of town for childcare so please confirm your need ASAP. Drop off begins at 9:30 a.m. Students attending the NC Association of Blind Students conference will be available during childcare as a resource and mentor for your child.

Please RSVP to Jennifer Strickland, NC-APVI President at [JCar382600@aol.com](mailto:JCar382600@aol.com) or 919-266-6119. [www.nc-apvi.org](http://www.nc-apvi.org)

### ***Greetings from the NC Department of Public Instruction (Julie Kagy)***

I look forward to seeing many of you at the upcoming NCCVIB. There is a great line-up of

sessions this year. Your only problem will be deciding between them !

There are two other professional development opportunities coming for VI professional coming up in 2010. At the NCDPI Summer Institute at UNC-Greensboro, we will be hosting a 2-day workshop on administering the Braille Adaptation of the Woodcock Johnson III for TVIs and School Psychologists. It will be held July 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>. Registration for this free workshop should be online in April at <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ec>. I will send a notice on the NCVI Listserve when registration opens. There will be limited admission.

Thinking even further ahead, the Exceptional Children Conference will be held this year on November 1 and 2. It was questionable whether we would be able to have the conference this year due to the budget, but it is going on ! At the end of the conference, on November 2 and 3, we will have a Vision Institute. This will be 1 ½ days of instruction on using the APH Functional Vision Learning Media Assessment Protocol (FVLMA). Again, I will send out more information about registering for the Institute on the NCVI Listserv as it becomes available.

If you are not on the NCVI listserv, you are missing a great deal of information about what is happening in our state in our profession. If you have not joined and would like to, send an email to me at [jkagy@dpi.state.nc.us](mailto:jkagy@dpi.state.nc.us) and I will enroll you.

### ***THE BRAILLE CHALLENGE: It's About More Than The Dots! (Debbie Jackson)***

If you read the "official" literature about the Braille Challenge you will learn that it provides students who are Braille readers in grades 1-12 the opportunity to compete in areas that include spelling, proofreading, reading comprehension, reading charts and graphs, and speed and accuracy in writing Braille. But if you *attend* a Braille Challenge you will find out that much more goes on than reading and writing Braille!

One elementary school student from a rural county learned how much noise several canes make as students tapped their way down the hall. Before the Challenge that student had heard only one cane—the one she was using.

Another elementary school student had a chance to talk to his new "idol"—a college

student who competed in the National Braille Challenge a few years ago.

Students and their parents who have had limited or no contact with blind adults had the opportunity to meet blind volunteers working along with sighted volunteers to run all aspects of the event.

Being part of the event clearly took some kids out of their comfort zone. But by the end of the day the shy and sometimes frightened younger kids were opening up and interacting with people they had never met.

Those are just a few of my observations based on volunteering with the Raleigh-based Braille Challenge this year, but I doubt my experience is unique. My guess is that these stories and many more could be told about every event held.

This year North Carolina hosted two competitions--one in Catawba County and one in Raleigh--with a total of 29 students participating. In addition to some students from the Governor Morehead School the two Challenges combined had students from ten counties participating. These two regional competitions are part of a network of competitions across the nation with students who score highest in their grade groupings having the opportunity to be selected to participate in the National Braille Challenge in Los Angeles in June. This is the tenth anniversary of the Braille Challenge which is organized and supported by the Braille Institute with sponsors such as the National Braille Press and Seedlings Braille Books for Children.

In North Carolina the efforts of many volunteers, agencies, and organizations are needed to make a Braille Challenge possible. The Raleigh locations had about twenty volunteers from the community, public schools from which students were participants, and The Governor Morehead School K-12 and Outreach Programs, funding provided by the Braille Institute, the Friends of the NC Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, the NC Braille Literacy Council, and the Department of Public Instruction, and space on the campus of The Governor Morehead School.

The high scorer in each grade grouping in the Raleigh competition will receive one of the Louis Braille coins specially designed and minted in honor of the anniversary of Louis Braille's 200<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2009. Funds raised through sale of

these coins are used to promote Braille awareness and literacy.

Yes, there were lots of Braille writers clanging as students worked their way through the contests and lots of Braille documents being read as the day progressed. But there was so much more learning going on in this wonderful event brought together through the partnership of so many enthusiastic people who are dedicated to an excellent education for our students who are blind. To learn more about the National Braille Challenge go to [www.brailleinstitute.org/braille\\_challenge](http://www.brailleinstitute.org/braille_challenge) and you will soon see information as plans begin for the 2011 Braille Challenge!

\* \* \* \* \*

#### ***Upcoming Events (Webinars by AFB)***

- April 7: A Paradigm for Diagnosing AT Implementation
- April 12: 101 Assistive Technology Solutions that You Can Make with PVC Pipe, Flag Pole Holders, and Swiffer Mops
- April 16: Accept Yourself: Sometimes You Just Don't Feel Like you Fit In....Learning to Problem Solve
- April 21: Assistive Technology for Students Who Are Blind and Visually Impaired: A Guide to Assessment
- May 5: Creating Assistive Technology Solutions in Minutes: Methods, Materials, and Resources
- May 7: Empower Yourself: What Is It and Why Is It Important?
- June 6: Empowerment: Speaking Up for Yourself

#### ***Workshops***

- April 14: Low Vision Technology Workshop, Boston MA
- April 21: CEC Annual Convention and Expo, Nashville TN
- July 21: AER International Conference , Little Rock AK