



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

National Library Service
for the Blind and
Physically Handicapped

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Photos on Page 1 and 2 by Amanda Reynolds.

New Hampshire regional librarian Marilyn Stevenson accepts the Network Library of the Year award from NLS director Karen Keninger.

New Hampshire and Palm Beach County libraries win Network Library of the Year honors

The atmosphere of the Network Library of the Year Award luncheon was congenial and expectant as representatives of the honorees, the committees that selected them, and NLS gathered for the annual recognition on June 5, 2014, in the Library of Congress Whittall Pavilion, Jefferson Building.

This year, the New Hampshire State Library Talking Book Services (TBS) of Concord received the Network Library of the Year Award, and the Palm Beach County Talking Books Library (PBCTBL) of Florida received the Subregional Library of the Year Award. Both awards include framed certificates

for the libraries and their parent agencies, a \$1,000 prize, and the right to hold the perennial plaques listing all past award winners for a year.

Marilyn Stevenson, TBS regional librarian, said “Our goal is to help our patrons increase their independence by providing them with reading materials they want and need, as well as the technology necessary to use those materials.” She noted, “My staff is a big part of this. They provide the service day in and day out through sleet and snow. We reach one person at a time.”

TBS meets and exceeds the 2011 American Library Association

The Program

The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Library of Congress, publishes books and magazines in braille and in recorded form for readers who cannot hold, handle, or see well enough to read conventional print because of a temporary or permanent visual or physical disability.

Through a national network of state and local libraries, the materials are loaned free to eligible readers in the United States and to U.S. citizens living abroad. Materials are sent to readers and returned by postage-free mail. Most books are also available for download on the NLS Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD) website, <https://nlsbard.loc.gov>.

Books and Magazines

Readers may borrow all types of popular-interest books including bestsellers, classics, mysteries, westerns, poetry, history, biographies, religious literature, children’s books, and foreign-language materials. Readers may also subscribe to more than seventy popular magazines in braille and recorded formats.

Special Equipment

Special equipment needed to play the audiobooks is loaned indefinitely to readers. Amplifiers with headphones are available for eligible readers who are also certified as hearing impaired. Other devices are provided to aid readers with mobility impairments in using playback machines.

Eligibility

You are eligible for the Library of Congress program if

- You are legally blind—your vision in the better eye is 20/200 or less with correcting glasses, or your widest diameter of visual field is no greater than 20 degrees;
- You cannot see well enough or focus long enough to read standard print, although you wear glasses to correct your vision;
- You are unable to handle print books or turn pages because of a physical handicap; or
- You are certified by a medical doctor as having a reading disability, due to an organic dysfunction, which is of sufficient severity to prevent reading in a normal manner.

How to Apply

You may request an application by calling toll-free 1-888-NLS-READ or download one from the NLS website at www.loc.gov/nls.

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standards for library service. In 2013 the library, which has a full-time staff of four, served 2,802 individuals and 206 institutions and organizations, and circulated 71,320 audiobooks and other materials. As a result of its service and outreach, digital book and magazine circulation in New Hampshire increased 90 percent through patron use of BARD—the NLS Braille and Audio Reading Download service—and the BARD Mobile app. Stevenson trained many of the public librarians in the state’s 232 libraries to use BARD, enabling them to assist their eligible patrons.

The regional library also supplies a collection of more than 5,000 items to the state library’s Family Resource Connection, which serves families with children who have special needs. TBS cooperates with local and public library book clubs and reading programs and participates in programs in which an entire community reads one book.

In addition to the more than 54,000 audiobooks available through NLS, TBS patrons have access to 7,200 audio titles from the Overdrive New Hampshire Downloadable Books Consortium, a collection of commercial audiobooks available to member libraries.

TBS established strategic partnerships with 27 organizations that have common constituencies and teamed up with four other New Hampshire agencies to create a traveling exhibit that circulates throughout the state to educate politicians, professionals, and citizens about the full range of services available to readers with visual and physical disabilities.

During the luncheon, New Hampshire state librarian Michael York commended Stevenson: “We’ve had talking-books service for 40 years. Ms. Stevenson has taken an outstanding service and turned it into a spectacular service. It is always gratifying to get recognition from your colleagues and



Palm Beach County’s Sarah Smedley accepts the Subregional Library of the Year Award.

your peers. We are pleased and we thank NLS for this wonderful honor.”

Sarah Smedley represented the PBCTBL, which celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2013. Located in the Palm Beach County Public Library Annex in Lake Worth, Florida, it has a full-time staff of four. The subregional offers events and services that engage its readers and create a sense of community. In 2013 it served 2,400 patrons with a collection of 61,000 items.

“My staff and I are very, very excited for this award because what we are



NLS braille specialist Tamara Rorie (left) and consumer relations officer Judith Dixon (right) talk with Illinois State Library Talking Book and Braille Service director Sharon Ruda.

doing is now nationally recognized,” Smedley said. “Staff members have been extremely instrumental in coming up with ideas.” PBCTBL hosts regular screenings of descriptive movies, teleconference book discussions for

patrons who are mobility disabled, an adult summer-reading program, and workshops on using BARD.

The library procured a state-of-the-art audiobook cartridge-duplicating machine to better serve its readers. The machine enables staff to assemble popular anthologies such as the *Twilight* and *Harry Potter* series on one cartridge—a novel practice for the library. Smedley has also taken a leadership role in promoting locally produced materials.

“This award would not be possible without the enthusiasm of Sarah, who started out as a part-time employee 25 years ago. She has developed

high-quality programs that are absolutely outstanding,” said Wendy Rosenfeld, director of the Palm Beach County Public Library Outreach Services, and Smedley’s supervisor.

Library of Congress associate librarian for Library Services Roberta Shaffer commended NLS and its network of cooperating libraries. “I came back from vacation early so that I could be a part of this program,” she said. “The service you provide is truly special.”

“The service you provide is truly special.”

—**Roberta Shaffer, associate librarian for Library Services, Library of Congress**

NLS created the Network Library Awards to recognize outstanding accomplishments of libraries serving people across the United States and its territories who cannot see regular print or hold or turn the pages of a book. A committee of librarians and consumer organization representatives chooses finalists from among nominated libraries based on mission support (defined by the American Library Association Revised Standards and Guidelines for Service), creativity and innovation in providing service, and record of reader satisfaction. Chairpersons of the four NLS network library regional conferences recommend the finalists to the NLS director.

Correction

The story on the national conference in the April–June issue of *News* had two errors. Teresa Faust was Vermont’s regional librarian. And Unified English Braille will be implemented in the United States January 4, 2016.

New Network Division chief looks to the future

Richard J. Smith, a 20-year veteran of the NLS network, became chief of the Network Division in June. Before coming to Washington, D.C., Smith was director of Special Services at the Louisiana State Library from 1982 to 1988 and director of the Wolfner Talking Book and Braille Library in Missouri from 2000 until this year.

An early adopter of Internet technologies, Smith was one of the first people to teach courses on web browsing and e-mail. His book *Navigating the Internet*, published in 1993, was an international bestseller.

At Wolfner, Smith participated in the prelaunch of the NLS digital transition, providing Victor Reader Streams to patrons and encouraging participation in the NLS Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD) site through the Wolfner Library Show-Me Downloads program. (Missouri is known as “the show-me state.”) In addition, he created a statewide online public-access catalog-training program for patrons; replaced an obsolete automation system with the Keystone Library Automation System (KLAS); oversaw construction of a state-of-the-art recording booth; and implemented a duplication-on-demand program.

Smith said he is inspired by the effects of sharing best practices with fellow network libraries: “It was extremely gratifying when a program or procedure that provided user satisfaction in a library I was directing was adopted by another network library for its users.”

As division chief, he seeks to contribute on a greater level to the service of the network. “I hope to bring a positive, upbeat, and innovative attitude to the future of library service for those unable to read printed materials,” he said. “The future will bring changes to the delivery of service to our readers

through duplication on demand and direct delivery via the Internet, and perhaps players with direct Internet access, portable players, and affordable refreshable braille devices. Expanding outreach through collaboration with partners, other libraries, and institutions is also on the horizon.”

NLS director Karen Keninger said, “Richard is known for his innovative spirit and his enthusiasm in serving our patrons. His experience will contribute substantially to his new leadership role in the network of cooperating libraries.”

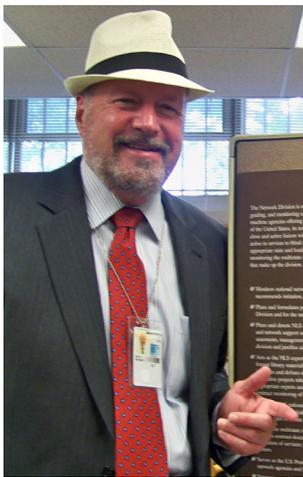
“I hope to bring a positive, upbeat, and innovative attitude to the future of library service for those unable to read printed materials.”

—Network Division chief Richard Smith

In the short term, Smith is familiarizing himself with Library of Congress policies and operations and the national program to ensure that the Network Division functions as a team with the rest of NLS divisions to meet the network’s goals and the needs of users. In the long term, he hopes to smoothly integrate information resources so that patrons have full access to the NLS collection.

“I think the network has a bright future,” Smith said. “Technology can and will improve both access and delivery of materials to our readers. This will, in turn, allow network librarians and staff to provide direct personal service to readers and fully promote reading and literacy.”

“The hard-working staffs of the cooperating libraries are the lifeline of the NLS network, the most effective way of connecting users to the NLS collection.”



Richard Smith comes to Washington after a long career in the NLS network.

NLS releases report on the future of braille

Deputy Librarian of Congress Robert Dizard Jr. took the podium at the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) annual conference in Orlando, Florida, on July 4, 2014, to announce the release of *The Future of Braille*, an NLS report that provides a blueprint for expanding and improving braille literacy and accessibility.

“We recognize braille as the fundamental medium of literacy for blind people,” Dizard said. “We want to identify how the Library of Congress can take a leading role in advancing opportunities for braille literacy.”

To meet that goal, in June 2013 NLS assembled more than 100 librarians, instructors, producers, users, and other experts in the field of braille at a Braille Summit cohosted by the Perkins School for the Blind. “That was the first gathering of its type since the early 20th century,” NLS director Karen Keninger said. “People were eager to contribute ideas and help shape the course of this important literacy tool.”

The report released at the NFB conference, available at www.loc.gov/nls/other/futureofbraille.html, represents three days of brainstorming and discussion. Panelists at the summit shared their own experiences as braille readers, discussed the criteria by which libraries and other institutions select materials for transcription, examined the production process, assessed current and future technology used to produce and access braille, and described efforts to promote braille literacy. Attendees then had the opportunity to gather in small groups and turn their thoughts into recommendations for future NLS actions. Participants recommended that NLS:

- Provide refreshable-braille displays at no cost to patrons or help make them more easily affordable, as e-braille increasingly becomes the method of choice for braille readers accessing long-form texts.
- Vary the quality and/or publication medium of its books, depending on their use and expected shelf life, rather than requiring that all books be produced in hard-copy.
- Work with publishers to acquire source texts to reduce the time lag between print and special-format releases.
- Expand the use of tactile graphics in its books, potentially using 3D printing and other new technologies to reduce the cost.
- Support efforts to update braille technology, specifications, and methods for selection, production, and distribution—including production on demand—in hopes of making a wider range of material available for a lower cost.

In a press release, Keninger highlighted the importance of the first recommendation but noted that while “an e-reader would make braille readily accessible and convenient for all blind Americans . . . the technology is currently too expensive.” The Library of Congress continues to explore the issue; in the future, NLS may host a technology challenge to develop a refreshable braille e-reader, Dizard said.

Other recommendations from *The Future of Braille* provide equally valuable guidance for NLS as it continues to expand its braille service. “The next step,” Keninger said, “is to produce a strategic plan to bring the NLS braille program into the 21st century.”

International Briefs

England

Country music star Dolly Parton took time out of her United Kingdom tour this past June to present a braille book—*The Tale of Peter Rabbit*—to five-year-old Dylan Manifold from Liverpool. Dylan, who was born with septo optic dysplasia, has no sight except for slight light perception. The event celebrated the one-millionth book delivered through the UK Imagination Library program since its launch in 2007 and the beginning of the program’s partnership with the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB).

Working with UK Imagination Library, RNIB will deliver six free braille or audiobooks each year to blind and partially sighted children. “It is great to be here in the United Kingdom to make this very special delivery to Dylan and his parents,” Parton said. “I’m so excited that the 28,000 children who receive a book each month from the UK Imagination Library can now be joined by blind and partially sighted children, thanks to

Photo courtesy of RNIB.



Country music star Dolly Parton with five-year-old reader Dylan Manifold.

our new partnership with RNIB. Now even more kids have the opportunity to develop a love of books from the earliest possible age.”

Parton launched the Imagination Library in 1996 in Tennessee to foster a love of reading among preschool children. In 2000 she expanded the program across the United States and in Canada and the United Kingdom.

Canada

A new cooking show makes it easier for visually impaired viewers to follow along. NLS patron Christine Ha (*News*, July–September 2012), Fox TV’s *MasterChef* 2012



Christine Ha

season winner, teamed up with *Top Chef Canada* 2012 winner Carl Heinrich to host *Four Senses*, a television program that features descriptive narrative.

Shot in Toronto, Canada, the series, which debuted in January, features cooking segments with celebrity chefs, discussions related to eye disease, and accessibility tips and tools for independence in the kitchen. Each 30-minute show has a different theme—aroma, texture, and romance, to name a few—which is highlighted by recipes and cooking techniques.

“It is great to be part of a show that is so mindful of those with vision loss,” said Ha, who was diagnosed in 2003 with neuromyelitis optica, an autoimmune disorder that affects the optic nerves. “I ‘watch’ TV all the time, but I’m always asking others what’s going on. With *Four Senses* everything is described, making it easier than ever to share in our television culture.”

International Briefs

Four Senses uses embedded description, which eliminates the need for an additional narration track to be added in post-production.

“I was so impressed with Christine and her ability to cook, taste, season, and teach—all without the use of sight,” said cohost Heinrich. “I hope we can inspire people of all abilities to experiment and have fun in the kitchen.”

Four Senses returns for a second season on Canada’s AMI (Accessible Media, Inc.) cable network in January 2015. A behind-the-scenes audio report on the show is available on www.ami.ca (search for “Mosaic City *Four Senses*”).

Scotland

Allan Russell, a producer and presenter for RNIB’s Insight Radio, had the honor of carrying the Queen’s Baton on July 20, 2014, in the run-up to the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. The 42-year-old from Glasgow Harbour shared the honor with his guide dog Troy.

“Troy will be retiring soon and I am over the moon that he got to accompany me on this fantastic event,” said Russell, who lost his sight 14 years



Allan Russell and Troy

ago to Leaber’s congenital amarois, a retinal degenerative disease. “I was nominated [to carry the baton] because of my work at Insight Radio, breaking down barriers for blind and partially sighted people through our broadcasts and letting everyone know that visual impairment isn’t as devastating as people may think it is.

“I haven’t been a big runner in the past, but I do keep fit with martial arts and tandem cycling,” he added.

The Queen’s Baton relay was the curtain-raiser to the 20th Commonwealth Games. The baton traveled through 70 nations and territories before it was delivered back to Queen Elizabeth at the opening ceremony on July 23.



Justin Kauflin

From the NLS Music Section blog

Musician Happy Traum was recently inducted into the New York Blues Hall of Fame. Folks at NLS are quite familiar with Happy because of his work in establishing the audio music company Homespun Tapes—which offers many audio music lessons that are included in the NLS collection. . . .

NLS has acquired a braille transcription of Benjamin Britten’s *Friday Afternoons*. . . . NLS music patron Justin Kauflin got a shout-out in *Billboard* for his work with Quincy Jones. . . . Read these posts and more on the Music Section blog: <http://blogs.loc.gov/nls-music-notes>.

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Kentucky Talking Book Library gets some celebrity help



Madeline Abramson, wife of Kentucky’s lieutenant governor, records the children’s classic *A Pocketful of Cricket* for the Kentucky Talking Book Library.

Madeline Abramson, wife of Kentucky lieutenant governor Jerry Abramson, recently volunteered her time and voice to record a children’s book for the Kentucky Talking Book Library (KTBL). Abramson recorded *A Pocketful of Cricket* by Kentucky author Rebecca Caudill, a Caldecott Honor Book from 1964.

“Reading is one of life’s most treasured and simplest pleasures,” Abramson said. “That’s why I’m so happy to support the Talking Book Library and open the world of books to people who might not otherwise have a chance to experience these stories.”

KTBL branch manager Barbara Penegor praised Abramson’s contribution: “We really appreciate her taking the time to help us provide a classic book that otherwise would not be accessible to our readers. She has been active in the arts, education, and children’s issues, and we felt she would enjoy this experience in addition to helping a good cause.”