TALKING TIMES GOES DIGITAL

Starting with this issue, members who previously received the Talking Times newsletter in cassette form will now receive it as a digital cartridge. Unlike the old cassette newsletter, the new digital cartridge newsletter must be returned in its mailing container. Remember to reverse the mailing card and send it back to us as soon as possible. The digital cartridge is valuable; returning the cartridge in the mailing container will help us save funds and resources. Thank you for your cooperation! (If you would like to receive the newsletter in a different format, please call Talking Books Plus (TBP) at 401-574-9310 or email us at tbplus@olis.ri.gov.)

2011 ANNUAL REPORT
by Andrew Egan, RI Regional Librarian

As I review the past fiscal year (October 2010 – September 2011), many activities have been accomplished. Two issues of the "Talking Times" newsletter were mailed to more than 1,800 members via print, audio, and electronic media. In the Winter 2011 issue, a member survey was included. The results and analysis of members' responses are on the TBP website.

The Reading Across Rhode Island 2011 program was announced on our blog and related books were identified in the TBP collection. Both the adult book,

The Unforgiving Minute by Craig Mullaney and the children's book, *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* by Grace Lin were promoted.

TBP staff attended and promoted our services at the 2011 ATAP Assistive Technology Conference. Our services were also promoted at the Providence Veterans Administration Center, the National Federation of the Blind of Rhode Island annual meeting, and to staff at the George Hail Library and the Tiverton Public Library.

A local mailing campaign was developed to introduce inactive members to the new digital players and cartridges. A National Library Services (NLS) mailing solicited new institutional members. TBP also worked with NLS consultants to plan the 2012 National Conference of Librarians Serving Blind and Physically Handicapped Individuals in Newport, RI.

Besides these activities, TBP circulated 30,163 audiocassette books and 16,312 digital books. Total circulation of all materials was 56,927. We responded to a total of 4,000 telephone calls, emails, and letters. Nearly 20,000 people visited our website and another 4,000 visited the blog. In the coming years, we will continue to improve digital access for our membership.

2012 SUMMER READING PROGRAMS

This summer get involved with the summer reading programs at your local public library! The 2012 program themes are Dream Big Read! (children), Own the Night (teens), and Between the Covers (adults). Kick off for the Kid's Summer Reading Program is Saturday, June 16 from 1-4 at the State House. Gale Carson Levine, author of *Dave at Night* which is the featured book for Kids Reading Across RI, is the special guest. The Pre-school

through Grade 3 summer reading kick off is at the Providence Children's Museum on Friday, June 1 from 5:30 to 7:30 pm. Nine authors and illustrators will be reading their books at this event. Admission is free for both events. The Summer Reading Programs run from June 16 to August 20. More information is available at your local public library or on the Office of Library and Information Services website (www.olis.ri.gov/services/srp/).

TRAVELING THE DOWNLOAD ROAD

When you order a book from the TBP library collection, the packaged audio book travels from the library to the post office to the member's mailing address. For those living in apartment complexes or residential centers, the delivered book might travel additional steps before it arrives in your hands. Of course, the TBP members all the while wait with bated breath for the books they requested. Some United States Postal Service (USPS) workers have selflessly exceeded the bounds of their duty, picking up returns from members' homes. Postal employees aren't required to do this.

The USPS has provided great free service for our members and been an equally great delivery partner with the TBP library for years. Each year Congress appropriates funds to the USPS to cover the mailing cost of "Free Matter for the Blind and Other Physically Handicapped Persons."

Each TBP digital book downloaded from a computer to a cartridge replaces the need to depend on the USPS for delivery of TBP books. For those who can download, this delivery method is the fastest way to get books.

Although learning to download may be challenging the first time, once learned and used regularly, the steps to download become routine. The blank cartridge that is provided at no cost by TBP to new BARD members is

reusable and will hold as many as 17 titles at one time. Insight, a nonprofit organization in Warwick that assists the blind and visually impaired, provides classes for TBP members and their helpers on how to download. Call Rick Andrade at Insight about their digital downloading classes (401-941-3322).

In most cases, those who are sufficiently computer literate only need the download instructions that are posted on the TBP website. Downloading instructions can be found by following the link for BARD.

TBP staff are better able to assist BARD members and their personal helpers in downloading if they are already able to navigate the web and know how to connect the cable to a computer port and the digital player. TBP staff can be most helpful to a member who has already tried to follow the instructions found on the TBP website. When calling or emailing, members are encouraged to be specific about where in the downloading steps they are stuck.

After the first successful download, downloading is much easier. Eligible TBP members who haven't applied for BARD can find instructions and the application on the BARD webpage. The simple application must be submitted electronically. All communication regarding approval, password and technical support from the BARD Support group is provided online.

Individuals who have no personal computer or computer skills can take steps to learn to use a computer. With time, patience and access to the computer of a family member, friend or public library, members can acquire the knowledge to download a book. Insight has classes that introduce students to computer concepts and operation. Your local public library may also have computer classes or be able to assist with downloading.

TBP members who have BARD accounts may sign up for the BARD Technical Support listserv. NLS provides this service as a one-way, announcements-only list. The ongoing series of tips for using BARD are available in an archive for list members; postings include Updating BARD Account Settings (with a specific set of tools), Books going on BARD when ready, and Browsing BARD for Magazines. BARD members can subscribe to this mailing list by sending a message to NLSDownload@loc.gov. Include an e-mail address and the BARD member's first and last name. BARD members can learn more about the mailing list and BARD service by visiting the BARD page on the TBP website.

TURNING THE VIRTUAL PAGE

At a national talking books readers' advisors online session, Brian Charlson, Director of Computer Training Services at the Carroll Center for the Blind, presented a program entitled Turning the Virtual Page. In this article, devices that help users access print materials, such as screen readers, screen magnifiers, Braille displays, OCR scanners, smart phones, and ebooks that Brian has tested and used are summarized. Brian readily admits to not knowing everything about assistive technology although he surely knows a great deal.

Several book reading devices are available from commercial vendors. The most popular device besides the NLS digital talking book machine is the Victor Reader Stream Daisy MP3 player. Thirty thousand units have been sold. Brian says that this is a significant number of machines in relation to the size of the blind and visually impaired community. The company Humanware (www.humanware.com) produces this small portable device (4.6 x 2.6 x 0.9 inches) that weighs only 6 ounces. This device, with a key

available from Humanware, can play books downloaded from BARD. An adapter is also available that allows users to play TBP digital cartridges. Another reading device is the Book Port Plus which is available free of charge to qualified K-12 students under the Federal Quota Program (www.aph.org/fedquotpgm/quickfed.htm). This device, produced by the American Printing House for the Blind, is designed for classrooms. The Plextalk Pocket (www.plextalk.com) and Book Sense (www.hims-inc.com/products/booksense) are other portable, lightweight devices.

Accessibility software for computers includes speech, magnification, or Braille tools. Screen readers are the popular devices for making computers accessible to the blind. A well known reader is JAWS, made by Freedom Scientific. Insight has classes on how to use JAWS. GW Micro Window-Eyes (www.gwmicro.com) is another screen reader comparably priced. Open Source's NVDA (www.nvda-project.org) and Voice Over for Mac (www.apple.com/accessibility/voiceover/) are two other screen readers.

A screen magnifier is one of the cheapest devices to purchase. Freedom Scientific MAGic (www.freedomscientific.com) is listed at less than $300. AiSquared Zoom Text (www.aisquared.com) is another magnifier. Adding a read aloud function to a screen magnifier costs extra.

The most expensive way to access print is by Braille display. Freedom Scientific Focus Blue and Humanware Brailliant BI both cost approximately $3,000. There is an additional cost to attach the Braille display to the computer.

Brian also discussed OCR (optical character recognition) scanners. OCR scanners convert images of handwritten, typewritten or printed text into text that is read out loud by the device. Three OCR scanners are the

Kurzweil 1000, Freedom Scientific PEARL with Open Book, and Eye Pal. The Kurzweil 1000 (www.kurzweiledu.com) was developed specifically for blind people. Freedom Scientific PEARL provides lightning fast OCR. In combination with Open Book software, the PEARL can quickly snap a picture of reading material for instant reading. Pearl and Eye Pal (www.abisee.com) are portable devices. Eye Pal folds up and can scan a page a minute.

Brian's number one choice for a smart phone for people with visual disabilities is the iPhone. The iPhone has a number of accessibility features built in. Users can keep data costs down by using less bandwidth. There are many "apps" (applications) for the iPhone that are available through Apple's App Store; all apps are vetted by Apple. According to Brian, Android phones are a lot more challenging to use and have fewer accessibility features. These phones use an open source operating system. With open source, there are many versions of the system and, as a result, more problems with the apps for these phones. Android phones do have a talk back screen reader available at no extra cost.

Smart phones can be used as book reading devices with applications such as iBooks from Apple and applications from Audible.com and Bookshare. NLS is actively engaged in efforts to provide TBP members an application that will allow them to play NLS audiobooks on mobile platforms. As progress is made, updated information will be made available from TBP.

Want to learn more about assistive technology or get information about the products mentioned in this article? Visit the Perkins School for the Blind Perkins Products website at http://bit.ly/perkins-products. You can also learn more about assistive technology online through social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, podcasts, and Internet radio. YouTube is a great source for instructional videos.

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