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Two

People

# Braillists Serve Blind Community's Reading Needs

By Katherine Perreth

Times-Tribune

MADISON—To loosely paraphrase Margaret Mead, never underestimate the power of a small group of passionate people to change the world for the better. In this case, the dozen or so committed local men and women who transcribe text into braille for blind and visually impaired people. And in so doing, aid sighted people, as well.

The Madison-area non-profit Braille Library & Transcribing Services (BLTS), which began nearly 50 years ago, has transcribed thousands upon thousands of pages of fiction, non-fiction, cooking, craft and children's books, as well as other text, said president, library coordinator, transcriber and transcriber teacher Patricia Herring.

"Instruction manuals, tax forms, restaurant menus, you name it," said Sue Nelson, one of four transcribers from Middleton, also known as "brailists," and the organization's treasurer.

Run by volunteers, with a shoe-string part-time staff of two, the service provides transcribing by request, transcribing training for sighted people and a braille lending library for anyone in North America. Donations and nominal fees, for transcribing text, fund the organization.

The library, utilized by individuals and schools, contains over 2,000 works, from John Grisham's "The Pelican Brief," which comes in four large volumes of embossed braille, to Dr. Seuss's "Green Eggs and Ham," the original book with embossed braille stuck to pages.

The latter allows a sighted grandparent to read to a blind grandchild, or a sighted child to read to a blind adult.

Braille transcribing is a perfect fit for people who love puzzles, challenges, learning new things, helping others and

having fun, the women said.

"It's like learning a new language," Herring said, and is best suited for retirees looking for a way to remain sharp and give back.

It takes about one year to become a Library of Congress Certified Braille Transcriber, which includes learning the braille alphabet and 250 symbols which, for instance, could indicate whether a word is underlined or italicized, or if the print has color. The symbols also serve as "shortcuts," explained Nelson.

"For example, the word 'the' has one symbol; 'party' has two," Nelson said. "So you're not transcribing the whole word, letter by letter."

Indeed, braille involves only six dots. "Anything you want to communicate has to be a combination of those dots," explained Herring—from the "\$" sign, to language markers such as accents. There are many rules to learn since the same dot configuration can be employed in more than one situation, explained Nelson.

Herring noted that blind children now learn the shortcuts, also known as contractions, early, something that pleases the group.

"There was a period when teachers weren't encouraging learning braille in schools," explained Connie Risjord, vice president and transcriber teacher. "In the '80s and '90s, if you had any bit of sight, (the teachers) used magnifiers."

This proved a disservice to those whose sight deteriorated completely, preventing them from reading and writing.

Not all blind people can read and write braille, which is problematic for employment, leisure and simply living in a sighted world, the women said. Braille allows people to label their possessions, such as "blue blouse," "gray slacks," or "tomato soup," explained Risjord.

"Many (blind people) aren't employed," said Herring.

"Those who are, are overwhelmingly braille literate."

Even in a world with audio books and screen readers, braille books broaden life experiences, giving the opportunity to re-read for better understanding, form the voices of characters in one's imagination and simply hold a book, like anyone else, they said.

Braille is named for Louis Braille, a Frenchman who lost his sight in an accident as a preschooler. After a French military officer took the military's written "night code" to a school for the blind, thinking it might be useful there, Braille's "imagination was fired," said Risjord. Braille tweaked the code, which is still used today, as is his code for music.

However, not much happened in the United States with Braille's new code for blind people, even after soldiers from WWI returned home blinded by mustard gas. But after WWII, many more veterans returned without sight and Congress decided to act—it would be a savings to the government if blind vets could read and be productive members of society, explained Risjord.

Washington DC sent representatives around the states to encourage braille training and printing, which would involve a special machine, called an "embosser." Risjord recalled a time in the 1970s when a man from DC came to Madison to launch a group—however, braille transcribing already existed here, she said.

The women commented that even if people think they don't recognize braille, anyone who has noticed the series of dots on an elevator panel has seen it. What appears to be a backward letter "L," they said, is actually the marker indicating the next symbol is a number.

A lot has changed with technology since the 1940s, and now brailists use a regular keyboard and computer at home to transcribe, going top to bottom,



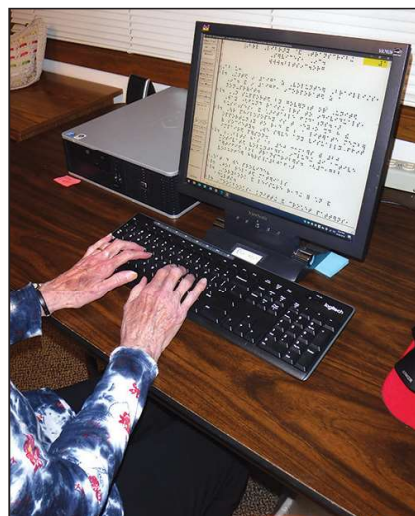
Katherine Perreth—Times Tribune

Above: Standing in front of one row of the 2,000-braille book in the lending library, Patricia Herring holds the first of four braille volumes of John Grisham's "The Pelican Brief," Middleton resident and brailist Sue Nelson, and Connie Risjord, holding the braille version of Dr. Seuss's "Green Eggs and Ham"; Below: A brailist transcribes text at home, using any computer and keyboard. Braille is a code that has only six dots to communicate and requires nearly a year of training to become proficient.

left to right, as with any English book. Then text is sent to certified braille proof readers, and finally, sent through the extremely loud embossing machine in the office, they said, which raises the dots so a blind person can read by using the touch of a finger.

Braille transcription significantly benefits others, they said, directly addressing critical needs in literacy, employment and enjoyment of leisure. Over the years BLTS has trained about 200 sighted people to transcribe print into braille, and last year the lending library sent over 1,300 titles to 180 readers, nearly 500 to children.

The next season of 40 weeks of transcribing training will



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Ann "Girlie" Stein

## LOCAL

## RHTH to Hold First Reunion for Transplant Families

MIDDLETON—Restoring Hope Transplant House (RHTH) is hosting their first Family Reunion on Sept. 8 at Capital Brewery in Middleton from 11 a.m.-3 p.m.

RHTH has served as a home away from home to transplant families in search of a second chance at life through the miracle of transplantation since 2013. Guests from all parts of Wisconsin, 41 different states and

eight countries have called Restoring Hope Transplant House home.

The life-changing relationships built while sharing a supportive home with other families going through very similar journeys is what truly makes Restoring Hope such a special place for so many. These lifelong friendships, unforgettable moments, weekly miracles and memories of dear

people we have lost over the years inspires us to bring this special event together.

There will also be Live music, silent auctions, 50/50 raffle, lunch, group walk to show the faces of transplant, family pictures and more. The event is \$10 per person and includes activities, food and a t-shirt.

## IRONMAN to Pedal Through Cross Plains

MADISON—The annual IRONMAN Wisconsin triathlon is geared up for Sept. 8, beginning in downtown Madison. The race starts at 6:40 a.m. with swimming a 2.4-mile lap at Monona Terrace, then participants will hop on their bikes and ride 112 miles in two-loops

through Dane County, including through the Village of Cross Plains. The race concludes with a 26-mile, two loop run through the streets of Madison.

Athlete events begin on Sept. 5, with check-ins and briefings. Closing ceremonies and award presentations will be held on

Sept. 9. Nearly 2,500 people have signed up for the event which includes categories for men and women age 18-70-plus, including a physically challenged open division. For more information, or to register, visit ironman.com and search Wisconsin.

An IRONKIDS Fun Run will take place on Sept. 7 at 9 a.m. The run takes place around the Capitol Square and is open to all youth ages six months to 13 years. Event participants will race around the Capitol in a single lap, a double lap, a Toddler Trot, and Diaper Dash. Registration is Sept. 5 at the IRONMAN Village at Monona Terrace.

## Walk to End Lupus Planned

MIDDLETON—Hundreds of lupus warriors will converge on Fireman's Park in Middleton for two-mile walk to raise awareness and funds to find a cure for lupus. With tens of thousands of Wisconsinites living with lupus, walk participants realize the urgency to find a cure for this debilitating disease.

The Walk to End Lupus Now-Madison will be held Sept. 14 at 10 a.m.

Pre-registration runs through Sept. 11 at a cost of \$25 per adult and \$15 per child. Fundraising pledge pages can also be set up within the registration process.

After Sept. 11, a day of registration area inside the large red pavilion at Fireman's Park will be available. The cost is \$30 per adult and \$17 per child on event day. All pre-registered participants will receive a Walk to End Lupus Now grey t-shirt. Day of registrants will receive t-shirts while they last.

The walk starts and ends at Fireman's Park and may utilize the Pheasant Branch Conservancy Trail System (depending on flooding repairs) or it may utilize the streets of Middleton which will be determined closer to walk day.

Registration opens at 8 a.m. the day of the walk, with the kickoff ceremony at 9:45 a.m. The 50/50 drawings are planned for 11:30 a.m.

For more information or to register online, visit lupus.org and search Wisconsin.

## Pizza

Continued from page 1

and will continue the same menu at Red's Falbo Bros. He adds that there will also be the same familiar faces from Red's including four people that have worked with him for more than five years.

Speersneider said what makes good pizza more than anything is the freshness and preparation. Two things he takes serious in any place he runs.

The slice business has taken a bit of a hit in the first month but they are going to keep remind-

ing people about it. "We are going to let people know we are still the best place to grab a quick two slices and a soda for \$6," Speersneider reminded.

Speersneider said he most excited to be in a new location that is actually built out as a restaurant. He also likes his new neighbors.

"We're right next to Mid-Town Pub, which is a Middleton staple, and Neil's Liquor so we are happy to be where we are at now," Speersneider concluded.

## Braillists

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begin with an informative meeting on Sept. 17, 10:00 a.m. Although there are only 20 lessons, every other week is dedicated to learning directly from blind people, teachers of blind students and learning tips and tricks.

"People get energized when they see the impact," said Risjord. "They hear first-hand that 'what I'm doing is really helping people.'"

Risjord is somewhat of a braille celebrity, as well. She wrote many training manual

editions to incorporate changes, explained Herrling: "Connie wrote the big bible of teaching literary braille."

For information, call: 608-233-0222; email: office.blts@tds.net; or visit www.bltsinc.org.

## OPINION

## Letters

## JA Benefits Kids, Community

Letter to the Editor:

Our Junior Achievement team values the past support we've received as we served area youth during the past school year.

Thank you students—5,893 of you—for your engagement while you learned to make personal finance, career readiness, and entrepreneurial choices. We're here to help you become tomorrow's leaders.

Thank you teachers—from 308 classrooms in 65 schools—where Junior Achievement lessons were taught. It's a privilege spending time with your students. We're here to help you grow tomorrow's leaders.

Thank you volunteers—239 of you—for delivering 33,201 Instructional Contact Hours to students in Dane, Dodge, Iowa, Jefferson, and Sauk Counties. We're here to help you inspire tomorrow's leaders.

Thank you business leaders—from 102 companies—who made donations and encouraged your employees to volunteer. We're here to help you develop tomorrow's leaders.

Our goal for the upcoming 2019-20 school year is to reach 6,100 students. We'll accomplish that goal with your continued support. If you'd like to volunteer or donate, click "Get Involved" at Wisconsinja.org.

Randy Danielson, Betty Bergquist, Troy Mitchell, and Bret Wagner, on behalf of Junior Achievement Dane Area Board of Directors

## Carbon Goals Not Met with Expansion

Dear Editor,

The City of Middleton is currently undergoing a master planning process to create a blueprint for future development at the airport. One of the things the city would like to do is expand its primary runway from 4000 to 5000 feet (a 25 percent increase). This would allow bigger private jets to take off and land at the airport. Yet, recently, the City of Middleton pledged to reduce its carbon footprint, and even approved the installation of a solar array at the airport which is a step in the right direction.

Given all of this, one would think the city would be doing everything in its power to reduce—not increase—private plane usage at its municipal airport. After all, private planes are considerably less

efficient than commercial planes, and the personal carbon footprint of passengers who travel this way is much higher. Some estimates say private jets produce 10 times the amount of carbon per passenger, although calculations clearly vary depending on the make and model of aircraft being compared, the length of journey and the number of passengers per flight.

For this reason and many others, area residents (including me) are opposed to any expansion of the primary runway. It would have been nice if the city surveyed the people most affected by airport operations at the same time it surveyed those who use (or may potentially use the airport). The city has done the latter, but does not intend to do the former until AFTER the master planning process is completed. That is a shame.

Leona Sparky, Town of Springfield

## Create Airport Citizen Committee Now

Letter to the Editor:

The City of Middleton should create a Federal Aviation Administration ("FAA") recommended Citizen Advisory Committee right now, particularly for city owned Middleton Municipal Airport/Morey Field where there is widespread citizen interest in whether or not the city proceeds with significant airport expansion plans. All further expansion-related activity should halt unless and until the city creates an Airport Citizen Advisory Committee to provide meaningful citizen input from those affected in residential neighborhoods in the City of Middleton, Town of Middleton, and Town of Springfield.

The City of Middleton Common Council appears to be so eager to push this aggressive Morey Airport expansion plan through to completion that it intentionally skipped this critical Citizen's Committee first-step specifically recommended by the FAA. In-

stead, the Common Council started with the assumption that they already have the votes needed to approve an aggressive expansion of Middleton Municipal Airport and moved to the FAA's recommended second-step, the 2019 Technical Airport Advisory Committee (a/k/a City of Middleton "Airport Master Plan Advisory Committee" or "AMPAC").

The AMPAC has only been allowed to consider agenda items that deal with technical airport expansion-related details. Such discussions are led by the city's high-priced engineering consultant, Mead & Hunt, and are not primarily intended for complete public understanding or comprehension of such technical details. It may be appropriate for a technical detail committee to include members with a conflict-of-interest as they may be more knowledgeable than many others with respect to such matters. However, a committee on technical details prior to a Citizen's Committee on whether there should be any airport expansion at all is a classic cart before the horse scenario. This is an extremely flawed approach and is not open, honest, and transparent governance.

A proposed expansion of Middleton Municipal Airport raises many serious questions of land use incompatibility, and before any technical aspects are considered, there must be a Citizen's Committee of members without financial conflicts-of-interest created to consider all of these issues.

Cynthia Richson, Middleton



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