

# MWMM

LARGE PRINT EDITION



WINTER 2012

*NEWS FOR THE VISUALLY-IMPAIRED*



overhaul of city codes

police cost him

Merrick Washington Magazine for the Blind

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Hello MWM Readers!

This year marks an exciting milestone—the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Merrick Washington Magazine for the Blind.

When founders Lyda Moore Merrick and John Washington launched the publication in 1952, their goal was to educate and instill pride in a segment of the African American population that had limited access to news about achievements of Blacks in the arts, sciences, and sports.

Today, our mission is the same. MWM remains a free resource for sight-challenged readers interested in pivotal and positive information about people, discoveries, and happenings that are of particular interest to the Black community.

To that end, the articles featured in this issue chronicle some of the most exciting recent news stories we've read. The technology industry has introduced better tools for the visually-impaired, and businesses are touting the benefits of hiring blind employees. New artists, designers, and chefs are confirming that creative power transcends one's ability to see. Plus, a school in Massachusetts has adapted tennis for the blind.

As the 2012 Presidential election nears, we encourage you to stay informed and exercise your right to vote. We have provided some interesting articles about people and issues that have helped shape our current political landscape.

We hope you enjoy the issue and are thankful for your interest in MWM. Here's to another 50 years!

- Brandi Stewart, Editor

# **GENERAL NEWS**

*The Advocate*, August 8, 2012

## **Teen transcribes menus into Braille**

By Cheramie Sonnier

Imagine not being able to do something as simple as read a restaurant's menu. Fifteen-year-old blind student Sophie Trist said that's a hurdle she faces time and again.

"Most restaurants do not have Braille menus. This can be a major problem for visually impaired individuals," the Mandeville High School rising sophomore said. "If a sighted person does not accompany us, the simple task of ordering off of a menu becomes a challenge."

Because she believes "blind people should have the same access to written materials, such as menus, as sighted people do," she decided to start a summer business providing restaurants in the Mandeville, New Orleans and Baton Rouge areas with Braille menus. Braille is a system of printing and writing for the blind that uses raised dots to form characters felt with the fingers.

"I've been having the idea for a while," Trist said.

With the help of her father, Will Trist, she sent out letters to about two dozen restaurants soliciting their business. In the letter, she said that for a fee of \$30, she will transcribe a restaurant's menu and provide the restaurant with a Braille copy. Trist can be contacted via email at

sweetpeareader@gmail.com. She asks customers to include the name of the restaurant, contact information and any other specifics of the order.

Like most teenagers today, Trist has a smartphone — hers is set up to speak to her. She reads her emails on a Braille-Note Apex, which is a laptop computer without a screen. During the school year, the honor student takes notes and tests on her laptop.

Accompanied by her grandmother, Corinne Cook, Trist recently met with Ruffino's Restaurant owner Ruffin Rodrigue to demonstrate how she transcribes a menu into Braille. She explained she requests her customer copy the menu and paste it into an email. She told Rodrigue she reads her emails on her laptop and then uses a Perkins Brailier, which looks similar to a heavy manual typewriter, to make the Braille menus.

“Don't do this when you're hungry,” she said as her fingers flew over the keyboard, which has only six keys that make all the combinations for letters, numbers and symbols.

It's tiring to type for long periods of time, Trist said, because Braille requires the use of a heavy card stock to emboss the characters and it takes more pages to write the same amount of information on a printed page.

“I correct mistakes with a stylus. You just smooth it out. My mom (Allison Trist) then binds the pages for me and puts the restaurant's logo on it,” she said.

One of the benefits of transcribing menus is finding out

about the number of selections, she said.

When they eat out, her mother usually reads only the menu items she thinks her daughter will like. Trist favors Italian, Mexican, Lebanese and Greek foods.

Rodrigue ordered copies of each for his restaurant's five menus: regular dinner, limited, Friday lunch, Sunday brunch and the wine list.

"My dad will like that," Trist told Rodrigue when he added the wine list to his order. She thought it was a good idea to have the wine list in Braille. "There might be some blind wine connoisseur" come in to the restaurant.

Her other customers include Galatoire's, Commander's Palace, Palace Cafe, Dickie Brennan's Steak House, Bourbon House and New Orleans Hamburger and Seafood Co., which has nine locations in Metairie, Mandeville and New Orleans.

When it was suggested she not limit herself to local restaurants but also contact chain restaurants, she nixed the idea. "I'm not opening that can of worms. Remember, this is a one-woman business. My fingers can't handle worldwide work."

The American with Disabilities Act doesn't require restaurants to offer blind patrons a Braille menu if a staff member or server is available to read it to them, according to the Louisiana Restaurant Association. But, association Chairman Dickie Brennan, a cousin of Will Trist, said in a news release



that “having a Braille menu on hand provides restaurants with an efficient way to serve the visually impaired diner.”

*Business Wire*, May 7, 2012

### **National Federation of the Blind Applauds New Jersey Ruling on Braille Instruction for Blind Child**

OCEANPORT, N.J. -- After a three-year administrative and legal battle against their local school board, the Oceanport Board of Education, Jeffrey and Holly Miller obtained a ruling (docket number:2011 17218) from an administrative law judge that their eleven-year-old son Henry "Hank" Miller was improperly denied instruction in Braille, the reading and writing code for the blind. The legal victory, obtained with the assistance of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), comes on the heels of a letter from 26 U.S. Senators urging the Department of Education to take steps to ensure that blind children who need Braille instruction receive it.

Holly and Jeffrey Miller brought the legal case on behalf of their son, Hank, whom they adopted from China and who is blind due to albinism and nystagmus. Hank has limited vision that allows him to read enlarged print for short periods of time, but he is unable to read for sustained periods of time. Although Hank's parents continued to tell school officials that their son was experiencing visual fatigue and was having difficulty reading, the school board and its consultant, the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI), insisted that Hank was a proficient print reader, notwithstanding his

continued placement in a special resource room for language arts. In a nearly ten-day hearing, held under the due process provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, Mrs. Miller testified that she watched Hank routinely struggle with his homework, suffering from eye strain and fatigue, but was unable to convince school officials or the CBVI that Hank needed Braille instruction. She also testified that Hank's schoolwork was not of the same quantity and quality as that of his classmates. Although experts from the school and the commission claimed that Hank was a "visual learner" and should participate in the "sighted world," experts hired by the Millers and the NFB concluded after thorough assessment that Hank could not read print for extended periods of time without eye strain, neck and back pain, fatigue, and loss of reading speed and comprehension.

In her order, Administrative Law Judge Lisa James-Beavers found that the school board and the commission displayed a clear "bias against Braille." She found that the school board and the commission had failed to assess Hank's "sustained reading ability" with print, relying instead on reading assessments involving only brief passages, and citing Hank's alleged failure to complain about struggling to read print. The judge was unconvinced by the board and CBVI's contention that Hank could rely on audio technology as reading demands increased through his school years, noting that "as pointed out by all of petitioners' well-qualified experts, listening does not equate to reading. One does not enhance the active skill of comprehending text by passively listening, even if one is

following along with the reading." The order noted that "the CBVI failed to do what Oceanport relied on them to do, which is to help construct a program that would give H.M. meaningful educational benefit considering H.M.'s future needs." Judge James-Beavers ordered that Hank Miller be provided with Braille instruction for forty-five minutes, five days a week, and that the school board provide compensatory instruction because of the three years that Hank was not provided with Braille instruction, in the form of intensive Braille summer programs or tutoring.

Dr. Marc Maurer, President of the National Federation of the Blind, said: "Based on the experience of countless parents of blind children and blind adults who had never learned Braille and have contacted us over the years, the National Federation of the Blind has consistently argued that blind children are being improperly assessed and denied Braille instruction when it is clearly appropriate. Now after a thorough and comprehensive examination of the evidence in Hank Miller's case, an independent judge has confirmed what we always knew. We hope that school and agency officials across the nation take note of this landmark ruling and commit to giving blind children access to Braille, the true key to literacy for the vast majority of children who are blind or losing vision. The National Federation of the Blind will continue to stand with families like the Millers who find themselves pitted against the educational establishment in obtaining the equal education to which their children are entitled and which they deserve."

Holly Miller, Hank's mother, said: "I am obviously thrilled with this ruling, although I am still saddened that it took such a prolonged battle to achieve it. I am stepping forward to tell Hank's story in hopes that other parents of blind children will not have to struggle as we did. I thank the National Federation of the Blind and all of the individuals and experts who came forward to assist in this case. I plan to strongly and publicly advocate with the National Federation of the Blind for Braille instruction for blind children."

The plaintiffs are represented in this matter by Sharon Krevor-Weisbaum of the Baltimore firm Brown, Goldstein, and Levy, and Jayne M. Wesler of the Cranbury firm Sussan and Greenwald.

For more information about the National Federation of the Blind, please visit [www.nfb.org](http://www.nfb.org) . For more information about Braille, the reading and writing code for the blind, please visit [www.braille.org](http://www.braille.org) .

#### About the National Federation of the Blind

With more than 50,000 members, the National Federation of the Blind is the largest and most influential membership organization of blind people in the United States. The NFB improves blind people's lives through advocacy, education, research, technology, and programs encouraging independence and self-confidence. It is the leading force in the blindness field today and the voice of the nation's blind. In January 2004 the NFB opened the National Federation of the Blind Jernigan

Institute, the first research and training center in the United States for the blind led by the blind.

*CBS News*, August 17, 2012

**Doctor uses salons to encourage healthy living in the African-American community**

By Michelle Castillo

(CBS News) It took years before Dr. Reed Tuckson worked up enough courage to cross the imaginary boundary that separated the men and women at his community's beauty shop. But, in his desire to find out how to help African American women live fitter and healthier lives, he knew taking these steps was necessary.

"All these women would come in, would get these elaborate things done," Tuckson, a former Washington, D.C. Public Health Commissioner and executive vice president and chief of medical affairs at UnitedHealth Group, told HealthPop. "I walked across the magical divide and asked a woman, 'Are you exercising?' (She) said, 'Do you know how much money I spend on my hair?'"

Tuckson has made it his personal mission to enact changes towards healthier living in the African-American community, and he believes the place to start is the beauty shop. Using a variety of tools - including a "Hair Fitness" competition which showcases exercise-friendly hairstyles and classes that teach hairstylists how to create exercise-friendly hair, along with

teaching tips to share with their clients about nutrition and fitness - Tuckson hopes that he can change the mindset of millions of women.

While obesity is a problem that is affecting the entire United States, no group is affected more than African Americans. According to the 2011 edition of America's Health Rankings, more than 30 percent of African Americans in 36 states and Washington D.C. are obese.

Non-Hispanic blacks have the highest age-adjusted rates of obesity at 49.5 percent, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, compared to Hispanics (39 percent) and non-Hispanic whites (34.3 percent). The Office of Minority Health, with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, found that between 2007 and 2010, about 70 percent of non-Hispanic black men and 80 percent of non-Hispanic black women aged 20 and older were overweight or obese. And, when it came to children between the ages of 2 to 19, an overwhelming 49.6 percent of non-Hispanic black children had been told by a doctor that they were overweight.

The Office of Minority Health reported that while 57.8 percent of obese white Americans over 18 are given advice from their doctors about exercise, only 54.7 percent of obese black Americans get counseling. The results mirrored a study in Obesity showed that African Americans get less advice on weight reduction and exercise than white people.

"Previous studies have shown disparities in the proportion of black obese adults informed by physicians that they were

overweight compared to white obese adults," study author Dr. Lisa Cooper, professor of epidemiology at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, said in a written statement. "We now also see that black patients are receiving different medical counseling as well."

In earlier statements, U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Regina M. Benjamin said part of the reason why African American women don't exercise is over fears that perspiration will ruin their hairstyle.

"Oftentimes you get women saying, 'I can't exercise today because I don't want to sweat my hair back or get my hair wet,'" she said. "When you're starting to exercise, you look for reasons not to, and sometimes the hair is one of those reasons."

She's not alone in her beliefs. Dr. Toni Yancey, professor of health services at UCLA School of Public Health and the author of "Instant Recess: Building a Fit Nation 10 Minutes at a Time," previously told CBS News that it's true hair issues block a lot of African American women from exercising.

"A white woman can shower and shampoo and blow dry her hair and get it back into style. It's not that easy for African-American women who may have spent \$100 or \$150 on a hairstyle," Yancey explained.

That's exactly why Tuckson is starting his campaign for better health with hairstylists. Because the salon is such an integral part of the African American neighborhood and a place where women frequently socialize, he believes that if he can

teach the hairstylists about healthy living they can pass the message on.

"A big part of (the obesity epidemic) is that African American women are not exercising nearly enough," Dr. Reed Tuckson, UnitedHealth Group's Chief Medical Officer, told HealthPop. "We found out for a significant number of people, the amount of money spent on their hairstyle and the amount of money that they spent on upkeep, it is [inconvenient] to them (to ruin it with) exercise."

Tuckson and Benjamin were both on-hand to emcee the "Hair Fitness" competition at the Bronner Bros. International Hair Show, sponsored by UnitedHealthcare, on Aug. 5, 2012 in Atlanta, Ga. Over 50 stylists competed to create the best fitness-friendly hairstyle and were judged based on technical execution of the hairstyle, originality, new ideas, and suitability and head contour. Styles had to adhere to the following categories: hair that would fit a low-impact workout, which involves little to no sweat and requires only one shampoo/condition per week; one that would fit a moderate-impact workout, which involves modest sweat and requires one to two shampoos/conditions per week; and one that works with a high-impact, which involves profuse sweating and requires two to three shampoos/conditions per week. First place stylists earned \$5,000 and a trophy for outstanding design and execution, second place got \$2,000, and a \$500 award was given to third place participants. Linette Battle of Palm Beach, Fla., won first place.



While the competition was fun for the hairstylists, Tuckson said the main point was to highlight the fact that hair doesn't have to hinder someone from exercise. Tuckson - who exercises every day even when he's traveling - said that while he understands that many women in the demographic have socioeconomic and income challenges, there's always time to walk around the block or move the coffee table and do some stretching.

But, first people have to be alerted to how they can make these changes in their lives. In addition to the hairstyling contest, UnitedHealthcare offered a free class called "Stylin' Healthier Futures." The class is part of an initiative that started in Wisconsin where UnitedHealthcare worked with local hairstylists to teach them how to create their own exercise-friendly hairstyles as well as diet and exercise tips to help them be "positive influences."

"What's been really fun about it is that prominent hairstylists are starting to recognize now that what we are doing by emphasizing the hairstylist's role is much more profound, that doing hair can play into overall healthiness and wellness for their customers," Tuckson explained. "So many of them are starting view their role as more important."

Three hundred people have participated in the pilot program in Wisconsin, and UnitedHealthcare is in negotiations to spread the classes to other states.

Pointing out that there's no question that the fight against obesity centers around "too much food going in and too much

bad food going on and the need to exercise more," he believes the more attention they can bring to the issue the better.

Not only does Tuckson hope that his efforts inspire women to recognize that putting health high on their list of priorities is an important thing, he wants them to stand up and be good role models for their children. Showcasing a healthy attitude to young children can show that working hard can help you achieve good things, and that diet and exercise are an important part of life.

"It's an army of positive reinforcement. It's not actually just about the hair styles but an overall lifestyle," Tuckson said.

## **Arts & Entertainment**

*New Jersey On-Line*, January 11, 2012

### **Jersey City artist teaches blind students after losing her vision opened her eyes**

By Summer Dawn Hortillosa

When Jersey City artist Bojana Coklyat lost her sight four years ago, she thought she would never paint again.

"I couldn't paint the way I had before," said the School of the Art Institute of Chicago graduate. "I wasn't able to get the detail I wanted and I was just so disappointed in what I had been creating."

Coklyat became legally blind when Type 1 diabetes caused blood vessels in her eyes to burst. Coklyat, who was diagnosed at 10, said having to undergo dialysis and take insulin because of her disease was nothing compared to possibly losing her ability to do what she loves most.

"I was always drawing - even drawing on the walls when I was little," said Coklyat, who participated in several arts programs, including the Visual and Performing Arts Program at NJCU while she studied at McNair Academic High School.

"In my senior year in the program, I really started to love painting and to see this as something I could do as career, do for rest of my life," she said. "But when I slowly started to lose my vision, I sort of just gave up on painting."

That all changed when Coklyat took the New Jersey Foundation for the Blind's art class with art therapist Joseph Doric.

"He was so amazing. He really gently guided me back to a creative place and gave me faith to paint," she said. "I saw that I just need to paint differently now and find a way that works for me."

Coklyat said she has developed a "raw, emotional style" that makes her work more personal.

"I'm less focused on what I'm seeing and more focused on what I'm feeling. Before, I was always working so hard to get the right nose, right eyes, right bone structure. Now, I can't really do that.

"But I have found a way to convey so much more feeling and emotion in one stroke, a couple of strokes in a space. At first it looks very simple, almost child-like - but if you look at it more closely, you see how much is actually behind it. It's actually very thought-out," she said.

"I use more contrast and thick black lines to guide where I'm going. The colors I use are very vibrant," she said. "A lot of my paintings are just a visual diary. Since losing my vision, it's become much more personal, more meaningful."

In November, Coklyat received kidney and pancreas transplants that has freed her from dialysis and insulin injections - and might even at some point in the future allow her sight to improve. Whether or not she regains her vision, Coklyat said her experiences have opened her eyes and allowed her to touch others with her work.

"It's amazing to me when people find connections in my art work they might not have found in any other parts of their lives," said the artist, who said her work covers diverse topics from undergoing surgery to messy breakups.

Today, Coklyat inspires other visually-impaired people at the St. Joseph's School for the Blind in Jersey City where she teaches an art class to students ages 3 to 21.

"They amaze me every day with their enthusiasm and willingness to try something new," said Coklyat, who said the students often work with clay, paint, finger paint and other tactile materials.

She said one of her students, Omar Tziz, particularly inspired her. The then 12-year-old said art was a "feeling language," a definition which resonated with the painter.

"With sculpture or painting, you can kind of feel what's going on. It means something to you and your memory, it makes you feel happy or sad. It's a way of communicating without having to talk, even for those who are visually impaired or blind.

"I'm not saying it to be cheesy, it's actually true," said Coklyat. "You really can do anything you want. Sometimes you just have to adjust and tweak it, but you can do it."

*ABC News, September 11, 2012*

**Blind Chef Christine Ha Crowned 'MasterChef' in Finale**

By Ryan Owens and Meredith Frost

From the moment she took those first tentative steps onto

the national stage, chef Christine Ha captured America's heart.

During Monday night's season 3 "MasterChef" finale, Ha won the title, \$250,000 grand prize and a cookbook deal, beating out Josh Marks and about 100 other chefs . But that's not what makes her so inspiring. Ha is blind -- the first blind contestant on the show.

Sticking with what she knows best, Vietnamese comfort food, Ha's three-course finale dish included crab vegetable salad for appetizer, a braised pork belly entree, and a coconut lime sorbet dessert. Marks made a lobster grits appetizer, a lamb rack entree, and a bacon pecan pie dessert.

"I think there are a lot of people who completely discounted me," Ha told "Nightline." "They think I'm there as a TV gimmick for ratings. People will say, 'what is she doing? Is she going to cut her finger off?' But I cook at home for years without vision, so if I can do it at home I don't see why I can't prove to everyone else I can do it on national TV."

Week after week, the 33-year-old Houston native, who is working on her graduate degree in creative writing, managed to whip up culinary masterpieces with only her sense of taste, smell and touch to guide her. The judges did allow her to use her aide, Cindy, but she did not cut or taste Ha's food.

"She's basically my eyes," Ha said.

Aside from that, Ha faced the same time constraints, the same stress and the same withering criticism from the other judges, including notoriously tough chef Gordon Ramsey of "Hell's Kitchen" fame. She

"I couldn't see what anyone else was doing, I was solely focused on myself, and I think that helped me. It gave me an advantage," she said. "When I came out of it, it was most stressful intense experience of her life, it was amazing."

Ha said she is able to compete mainly because she was not born blind. She nearly lost all of her eyesight about five years ago after being diagnosed with an auto-immune disease that attacks the optic nerves.

"I see shadows," Ha said. "I think the best way for me to describe it is, if you were to come out of a really hot shower and looked into a really steamy mirror, that fogginess is what I see."

But Ha, who has no professional culinary training, said she was determined not to let blindness force her to give it up.

"When I lost my vision, there was one time, I tried to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich," she said. "I recall getting it all over the counter. I just started crying and was wondering if I would ever cook again."

But she did more than pick herself up off the counter. She

started her own blog, theblindcook.com, which is how the producers of "MasterChef" discovered her.

Ha's kitchen is decked out with a few special tools to help her along: a talking thermometer, homemade Braille bumps on the stove, and oven mitts so large they look like they belong to an astronaut, but they keep her from getting burned.

But her favorite part of cooking is plating, the presentation of food, which Ha does from memory.

"I do remember colors and I can visualize things," she said. "I know I like to plate everything on white. The color pops out, looks better."

"I picture the colors of food – this needs some green, this needs some red," she continued. "That's how I think about garnish. I just feel my way through that plate and that's how I present."

Now an official "MasterChef," Ha said her next dream is to open her own ice cream store and a pub.

"I just want people to realize that they have it in themselves if they really want to," she said. "If they have that passion, that fire, that drive, that desire... you can overcome any obstacle and any challenges to really achieve what you want and prove yourself to the world. Everyone is very capable. Much more capable than they think they are."



*Los Angeles Times*, April 22, 2012

## **Blind fashion designer aims to make TV shows**

By Bob Pool

He's been blind since age 15. But nobody can say that Mason Ewing lacks vision.

Overcoming a nightmarish childhood, Ewing, 30, has been a successful fashion designer in Paris.

For the last six months, however, his mind has been set on Hollywood, where he hopes to create a teen comedy and a dramatic series for television.

Born in Cameroon to an American father and a Cameroonian mother and raised in France, his own life has been filled with drama.

His mother, a seamstress and dressmaker, was murdered when Ewing was 4, he said. As an older child, Ewing remembers watching fashion shows and seeing glamorous top models like Naomi Campbell on the catwalk.

"I decided to work in fashion and follow in my mother's footsteps," he recalls.

Separated from his father, he lived for a time with a great-grandmother in Cameroon. But, Ewing said, his life took a dark turn at age 6 when he was sent to stay with relatives near Paris.

He remembers being routinely beaten and abused for seven years. He was whipped with belts, his arms were burned by candles, and he was forced to stand with his arms extended as he held heavy books in his hands, he says.

"I lived with my uncle and aunt and they began to fight me. They would awaken me at 4 in the morning to clean the house and wash dishes. When I wet the bed in fear, they took my head and bashed it on the bathtub," he recalled. "They poked my eyes and put pigment in them."

Ewing was bashed and kicked in the head so often that he suffered a seizure that landed him in the hospital, where, he said, he was in a coma for three weeks. When he awoke, he was blind.

The "pigment" Ewing mentioned is actually a peppery African hot sauce, according to a friend and associate, Raffael Becker, who translates for him. He said Ewing is convinced that the spicy hot sauce is to blame "for burning his optic nerves and killing the cells of his eyes."

"I don't know why they did this to me," Ewing said. "It was just wickedness."

French authorities eventually intervened and placed young Ewing in a series of foster homes. He studied physical therapy

in college before deciding in 2001 to pursue his childhood dream of fashion design.

His Parisian fashion styling work ranged from evening gowns to Braille-lettered T- shirts.

Translating what Ewing could see only in his mind's eye was a challenge. He was able to recruit artists willing to sketch the designs he described, including an elaborate "Marie Antoinette" gown — a flowing, billowing dress accented with swoops of golden-brocaded fabric.

Able to see only vague combinations of light and shadow, Ewing discovered his blindness had enhanced his ability to distinguish the textures of silks, lace, linen and cotton twill. That feel for material also came into play when doll-size miniatures of his creations were sewn together and he was able to "see" his designs by touch.

Although other fledgling young designers of haute couture voiced skepticism of Ewing's chances of succeeding in the design world, a French organization for the handicapped, Agefiph, decided to finance his first fashion show in 2006, according to print and television reports.

Since then, Ewing has produced a collection of T-shirts that feature Baby Madison, a multi-ethnic cartoon figure, in different settings. The infant has dark skin, blue eyes and a tuft of blond hair that "represents tolerance and love for everyone,"

he said. The shirts' raised Braille lettering tells him the garment's color and what Madison image is printed on it.

Ewing used the cartoon character to branch out into video animation with "The Adventures of Madison." He hopes to parlay that into two TV series that feature live actors.

Test scenes for the teen drama "Eryna Bella" have been shot in South Los Angeles' Vermont Square neighborhood, where Ewing rents a small house. "It's about high school beauty queens competing for the attention of the campus alpha male," he said.

His proposed teen comedy series is called "Mickey Boom."

Mary E. Fry, a producer and casting director for independent films who is assisting Ewing and his young actors, said what he is planning is doable.

"I grew up in an era of Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder and I know what they've accomplished," Fry said. "He'll have people at his side that are his eyes and ears. His biggest challenge is getting investors in line."

Ewing is confident he can triumph in another visual arts field.

"There are a lot of people who are handicapped and they're able to do a lot of things that people don't necessarily think they can do," he said.

## **Business**

*The Root*, February 16, 2012

### **Barack Obama, America's CEO**

By Steven Gray

On the morning of Nov. 5, 2008, the day after Barack Obama's election, I sat in the office of my Chicago apartment, filled, like most Americans, with a peculiar sense of hope. It seemed that in electing the country's first black chief executive, we'd finally taken a huge step toward becoming a true meritocracy. My friends -- an educated, well-traveled, multiethnic bunch, very much a reflection of Obama's world -- were convinced that the moment signaled the country's new understanding of the tricky road talented African Americans climbed toward professional success -- the "double consciousness" that W.E.B. Du Bois described.

Post-civil rights era blacks who'd invested years overachieving at the best schools and cultivating key relationships at top firms now had more reason to believe that we'd have a credible shot at making partner. Or becoming

senior managers at new-media outlets that had apparently broken from the old guard.

Of all the narratives crafted about Barack Obama's presidency so far, few have seriously explored a richly distinctive vein: What is Obama's tenure teaching America about how black executives -- particularly men -- lead? And what role will race play in his assessment this November?

These are hardly trivial questions. Nearly a half-century after the civil rights movement's peak, senior black executives remain a relatively rare phenomenon. The pot of Fortune 500 CEOs who are black is so small, they can be counted on one hand: notably Ursula Burns, of Xerox; Kenneth Chenault, of American Express; and Clarence Otis Jr., of Darden Restaurants, the \$7.5 billion purveyor of Olive Garden and Red Lobster.

In many ways, Obama is like any other senior black executive at a blue-chip firm -- except, of course, his case is extraordinarily magnified. It takes a certain mix of restraint and audacity to believe that one can climb from organizing residents on Chicago's South Side to the corner suite -- or the White House -- and still keep a sense of blackness, however that's defined, intact.

By nearly any measure, Obama fits the American presidential ideal: well-educated, highly analytical, empathetic, with a global view. He identifies with nearly everyone, yet

remains enigmatic to much of the broad coalition that elected him.

This November, Obama will be assessed -- fundamentally, and rightly -- by the same tangible metrics used to judge his predecessors: the country's economic health, his policies on the environment and education, the closing of the Iraq War and his handling of the Afghan conflict. Our judgments will be influenced by who we are -- and the factors that shape our worldview, including race.

To flesh out this theme, earlier this week I called Ashleigh Shelby Rosette, a brilliant professor at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business, whose research centers on black executives. The first observation, confirmed by data, is this: In the U.S., the ideal leader is white. In this 2008 paper, "The White Standard: Racial Bias in Leader Categorization," from the Journal of Applied Psychology, Rosette's team concluded that white leaders were evaluated most favorably because their race was more easily matched with success, but not necessarily because of stereotypes about blacks.

"Any black trailblazer frequently has to ask the question," Rosette says, "Is the critique based on merit, or because of race?"

Indeed, the Tea Party movement can arguably be viewed as a racialized reaction to Obama's presidency. So can Rep. Joe Wilson, the South Carolina Republican, shouting, "You lie!"

during one of the president's speeches before Congress. How else to interpret Newt Gingrich's description of Obama as "the best food stamp president in American history"?

The subtle and blatant indignities that Obama faces reflect the challenges many black professionals encounter daily -- on a far grander scale. The president handles it in much the way we do: Simply walk out of meetings rather than confront obvious ignorance, just as Obama walked away after Gov. Jan Brewer waved her finger in his face on an Arizona airport's tarmac.

Surely, Obama -- as someone who was elected with coalitions that spanned race and class -- is keenly aware of this tricky balance. The slightest inflection of his voice, the raise of an eyebrow, is carefully parsed. Show too much confidence and you risk being branded as arrogant. Show too little and you risk being dismissed as "effete," as some columnists have dubbed him. Curiously, at various points during last summer's debt debate and the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil-spill crisis, Obama was asked, "Why don't you show more anger?" Showing public anger simply isn't Obama's professorial style.

This, again, is where Rosette's research is insightful: Black men who display "warmth" and "communality" are evaluated more positively than those who show decisiveness and aggression -- the very attributes we associate with prototypical executive leadership. White men, in contrast, are evaluated favorably, regardless of how these behaviors are displayed. "That explicitly tells us that black men are burdened with



having to manage this perception of anger that white men don't have to worry about," she says.

There's little substantive work -- in academia or monochromatic quarters of elite media that set much of the country's agenda -- examining Obama as a black executive. I've witnessed it firsthand, having been told by a White House correspondent: "Obama -- he just married into the black thing." Which basically meant: No need to cast him in black terms. One editor bluntly told me this about race: "It's an old story."

Obama should be examined as a president. To some degree, the willingness to view Obama through a de-racialized lens is a sign of progress. But that view is naive because it ignores one of the most distinctive aspects of Obama's presidency and how his worldview shapes his policies. It's tricky, projecting our hang-ups -- about race, class -- onto any figure. The full truth of Obama's experience will never surface until his presidential memoir is published.

Part of the Obama mystique -- and gift -- is that he constantly offers a baffling cocktail of lessons. He is slowly changing perceptions about black men, and black leadership, although there's clearly much work to do: In 2010 the unemployment rate among blacks with advanced degrees (pdf) was nearly twice the rate among whites. So understandably, much of the optimism we felt nearly four years ago is gone.

In just a few months, Obama will face his grand evaluation, hinged on a key question: Can he maintain the broad coalition of voters -- especially educated, politically independent suburban whites? But really, the question will be whether America is ready to examine one key lesson Obama has presented us: the meaning of black executive leadership.

*The New York Times*, February 4, 2012

### **A Chance to See Disabilities as Assets**

By Peggy Klaus

Many people know of Berkeley, Calif., as the birthplace, in the 1960's, of the Free Speech Movement. Fewer people know that Berkeley also played a major role in the disability rights movement. It was here, also in the '60s, that Ed Roberts — a student with quadriplegia — became an outspoken advocate of the cause.

I became aware of this after being invited to give a lecture for the Disabled Students' Program at the University of California. I was delighted and, of course, flattered, but I was also nervous.

Sure, I'd given workshops and lectures hundreds of times, but this would be my first time speaking to an audience made up entirely of people with disabilities. To be perfectly honest, I'd always felt uncomfortable around disabled people. Suppose I said the wrong thing? Came off as insensitive?

I needed guidance, so I turned to Paul Hippolitus, the director of the program. Reluctantly, I acknowledged my discomfort. Paul had spent 30 years at the Office of Disability Employment Policy of the federal Labor Department before coming to the university, and he had heard it all before.

“Perfectly normal,” he told me. “In this culture, nearly everyone is uncomfortable with disability.”

Apparently that goes for those with disabilities, too. Enduring the stares and the obvious uneasiness of others, people with disabilities often feel painfully self-conscious. Not surprisingly, they can lack self-confidence.

His students are not exempt. It’s the reason, he says, that many opt to go on to graduate school, thereby delaying the task of entering the work force. Besides the distinct disincentive to work because of a possible loss of federal disability benefits, the students are not nurtured, and are often discouraged, when it comes to career goals.

Today, more than 20 years after the Americans With Disabilities Act became law, the percentage of the disabled population that is employed is only 17.9 percent. That compares with 63.7 percent for people without a disability.

Why the lack of progress? Perhaps some employers fear that “reasonable accommodation” of the disabled, as the law

terms it, will require extra time, resources and money. That fear, according to the federal Job Accommodation Network, is unfounded; many accommodations cost nothing or run into the hundreds of dollars at most.

But Mr. Hippolitus is not waiting for employers. He refuses to watch these talented students give up on careers. He is betting that with the proper tools, they can bring about the change themselves. He has just started teaching a course, called Professional Development and Disability, that focuses not only on the principles and practices of disability employment but also on strategies for navigating the world of work.

Clearly, and especially in this economy, there's a challenge ahead for these students. For them, as with everyone else, nailing the interview is often crucial to getting the job.

Employers are prohibited by law from asking about an applicant's disability. But if the disability is visible, that won't stop them from having concerns. The applicants themselves are under no such restriction, and may find it best to address employers' potential reservations head-on — a topic that is addressed in the course. This not only serves to pop that awkward thought balloon, but it also opens an opportunity to talk about the skills required to manage a disability, like strategic planning and time management.

To start with a line like, “You may be wondering how I could manage to travel as part of the job,” means that job applicants can elaborate on how they manage the rigors of travel, given their limitations. In addition to talking about their work and academic experience, they can offer up “brag nuggets” and stories — talking about the preparations they needed for a trip to Europe, for example, or to make an 8 a.m. class.

As for my lecture, I needn’t have worried. The students put me at ease immediately with their warmth and hunger to learn. The subject matter made them feel part of the mainstream of the employment culture, and they saw how their disability could be presented as a real asset in the workplace, in terms of their ability to cope and be full-time adapters.

If more of us can see disability as both a challenge and an asset, the nation will be well on the way to fully using the job skills of all of its citizens.

*The New York Times*, March 24, 2012

### **Hiring the Blind, While Making a Green Statement**

By Nicole Laporte

When Chris Yura, chief executive of the apparel company SustainU, was looking for a factory to produce 24,000 T-shirts, it was important that it be within 200 miles of where the fabric was made.

SustainU, based in Morgantown, W.Va., uses all-recycled materials to make clothing for colleges and universities. As its name indicates, it is committed to “social, economic and environmental sustainability,” Mr. Yura says. Lighter transportation demands would mean more environmental benefits and a faster turnaround time, not to mention reduced shipping costs.

The company found a factory in Winston-Salem, N.C., that seemed a logical choice. But it was no ordinary factory. Owned and operated by Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind, the factory has a work force that is blind or otherwise visually impaired.

To many, this may have been a deterrent, or at least raised doubts. “Even though you have the Americans With Disabilities Act, it’s still a challenge because people who are not familiar with the blind have misperceptions about what they can or can’t do, and it affects their decision to give people a chance,” said Kevin A. Lynch, chief executive of the nonprofit National Industries for the Blind.

The unemployment rate for blind adults of working age is nearly 70 percent — a number that has been stagnant for 30 years, Mr. Lynch said.

There may be a notion that hiring blind workers — or any disabled worker, for that matter — means spending more time,

money and resources on training and equipment. But Mr. Yura said he found that there ultimately was no difference in either cost or quality between working with the Winston-Salem agency, an affiliate of the national group, and any other domestic manufacturer.

When blind people contact the agency, they often have very little work experience. They are trained to complete specific tasks and are set up with adaptive equipment to help them do their jobs. If they are making eyeglass lenses, for example, audio alerts let them know when the lenses have spent enough time in a fining, or polishing, machine. Or if they are assembling parachutes, tactile measurement guides, in the form of long wooden rails, help make sure that the lengths of ropes are all equal.

The training offers practical skills and an opportunity for upward mobility through certification classes. Workers with no experience receive minimum wage, while those with some experience are paid in line with workers doing similar jobs at other area factories, said Jeanne Wilkinson, vice president for business strategies at the Winston-Salem agency.

Anastasia Powell, a mother of three daughters who has been with the agency seven years, works in the factory's T-shirt unit. Her job is to sew together shoulder seams. She received four months of training, and her sewing machine is specifically designed for her. A four- to six-inch metal strip is attached to

the machine's foot — where the needle contacts the fabric — to help line up the material.

“I gather my material at the corner, under my foot— the foot secures the material — and line up the guide,” Ms. Powell said. “The guide helps me make sure the seam is straight, and helps me cut off an accurate amount of material. After that, I complete the process on the second side of the shirt and send it over to the next operation.”

Ms. Powell, who has been completely blind since the age of 21, called the alteration to her machine “very minor.”

“The only difference between me and a sighted person is just that four- to six-inch strip of metal,” she said. “Nothing else had to be added.”

THE federal government has long known about the effectiveness of a blind work force. The National Industries for the Blind was established in 1938 as a result of a law signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt that required federal agencies to buy supplies made by blind workers.

Ever since, the group and its agencies have been making products as varied as brooms and mattresses for the government and military. (In addition to clothing, the Winston-Salem agency produces eyeglasses for veterans and parachutes for soldiers in Afghanistan.)



But with the gradual withdrawal of American forces from war zones and the overall downsizing of the military, the national group hoped to do more business with private-sector companies in the future, Mr. Lynch said.

“I think there’s a growing interest out there in the general public for social responsibility, and I think that’s translating over to corporate responsibility,” he said. “There is also a real interest for things made in America.”

Showing that high-quality products can be made in America by people who are blind is a major selling point, he said.

Mr. Yura, who is already lining up another job with the Winston-Salem agency, is happy to endorse this message. And Gary Stein as for how those 24,000 T-shirts turned out? “You would never know whether the person who made the garment had full vision capability or not. It all looks the same. It’s the same product at the end of the day.”

*Huffington Post*, August 30, 2012

### **Utilizing the Blind -- A Vast Untapped Resource**

By Gary Stein

Over the last few years, we have seen the highest levels of unemployment since the great depression. However, the numbers that are reported only tell one part of the story. The

media often reports that the unemployment figures do not include those who have given up looking for work, and yet that information still misses a story of an even greater need.

The National Federation of the Blind determined that the unemployment rate of the Blind and Visually Impaired was 62.3 percent, meaning only 37.7 percent were employed. Add to that number the impact of the economic downturn since that data was published, and the number of returning veterans with new blindness and visual impairment, and that can be far higher.

There seems to be a reluctance on the part of employers to hire this population, and those that do have greatly underestimated the knowledge, skills and abilities of the blind. Many governmental and non-profit vocational rehabilitation agencies still offer visually impaired or blind individuals piece-meal jobs, such as assembling braille key-chains, necklaces and charm bracelets or binding braille books, for far less than minimum wage. One gentleman that I encountered had recently been a vice president at a New York bank before he lost his eyesight and his job, only to be offered a position selling braille greeting cards at a kiosk. My dear wife, who lost her eyesight only a few years ago after working as a teacher, a writer and journalist, was offered a jewelry-making job that would earn \$3,000 per year, or was told to take a similar job where an agency would pitch in \$5,000 if the employer would pay the other \$5,000. However she would lose her Social Security, which was \$8,500 per year, giving her a net increase of \$1,500 per year, doing a job that was more depressing than

uplifting.

There are several problems that need to be overcome, along with the mindset that I mentioned above. Adaptive technology has, in the recent past, been slow to develop and unaffordable for this often unemployed population, but that has been changing, in part due to technology developed, not for the blind, but for the facility of the general population craving for new voice-activated applications. The other problem is a major one for the blind -- transportation. Even the physically disabled have far more opportunities to be able to drive a car than the blind.

My organization, Health Equity Connections, has developed a telecommuter model to employ this group, utilizing laptops in the employee's home with bio-metric scanners for secure log in that evaluate the blood vessels in the thumb that give rise to the fingerprint. This offers a level of security necessary when the employee uses sensitive data, such as HIPAA information. Webcams at the top of the laptop allow employers to ensure accountability. Apple programs, such as voice-over allow audible verification of keystrokes and screen-reading, and Windows computers can use programs such as JAWS (Job Applications with Speech) which uses key-strokes for all functions, eliminating the need for mouse or touch-screen. Group meetings can be handled by webinar, eliminating the cost and logistics for daily or weekly face-to-face meetings.

This group of individuals, along with other physically disabled job-seekers, are highly motivated, and highly capable

of professional work that can pay a good living wage, and so many deserve the type of income that they were earning before losing their eyesight. The possibilities are endless, including customer services, sales, data-entry professional writing and editing, contract management and a host of other positions. They should not be ignored, underestimated or set aside.

## **SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY**

*Physorg.com*, February 13, 2012

### **Building a 'blind-friendly' Internet**

By Kathy Quirk

Rakesh Babu demonstrates how a blind person uses the Internet.

He runs his mouse across the pad, and a screen reader rapidly speaks everything that appears on his computer screen – plus graphic tags and other background coding. The computerized voice runs through the information at a speed that's barely comprehensible to the untrained ear. Experienced screen-reader users, says Babu, an assistant professor in UWM's School of Information Studies (SOIS), usually run the sound faster.

Screen readers are vital tools in helping those who are visually impaired use computers and the Internet, but improvements are needed to make online information easier to access, he says.

“The motivation for my research is to see that the Internet, which is so critical in today’s society for education and social interaction, is accessible to blind people,” says Babu, who joined the SOIS faculty in fall 2011. He adds that improvements in accessibility and usability may benefit not just the blind but also others, like older people, whose vision isn’t as acute as it once was. And, he adds, making a site more user-friendly for the blind benefits everyone.

#### An interest born of experience

Babu’s interest in this area grew out of personal experience. He was born with perfect vision, but began losing his sight around fourth grade because of a degenerative eye disease. He earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees in chemistry in his native India, but also battled depression as his vision finally faded away and his career prospects dimmed.

It was his mother, Madhuri, who encouraged him to study computers. At first he wasn’t convinced the technology would benefit him, but he found that with adaptations like the screen readers a whole new world was opening. He went on to earn his doctorate at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

His dissertation outlined a new way to accurately understand accessibility and usability problems blind users face in interacting with the Web.

Designing a blind-friendly Internet environment

“For the first time, we have the opportunity to integrate blind people in the information society through equal access to information and communications technology. We just need a little bit of understanding in designing a blind-friendly environment.

“Computers and websites,” Babu continues, “are designed for sighted users. Emphasis is primarily on visual modes of communication, with icons, colors, layout, buttons...everything is very visual.” They don’t support the nonvisual interaction techniques that people who are blind or visually impaired rely on, he says. Screen readers can help, he adds, but have their limitations because they provide a more linear experience rather than an interactive one.

For example, the “tags,” or written descriptions that designers put on graphics, may not be very informative when read aloud. The tag may say “snow,” but the blind person doesn’t know whether the graphic is of a snowstorm, an individual snowflake or gently falling snow.

Likewise, the screen reader may pick up some of the coding on the page, which can be confusing. Babu demonstrates with his university email account. The screen

reader says the word “attach” in the coding before it actually gets to the “attach” button that he needs to use. “I know the system, but a blind user could get off track, clicking the first time he hears the word.”

Babu’s research focuses on how blind users conceptualize online tasks, trying to get inside their minds to understand how they think as they organize their knowledge about objects, events and activities. It’s an area where very little research has been done, especially from the point of view of the blind user.

Equal opportunity = web accessibility

He is working with an inter-university research team and national organizations serving the blind to set up the TREVIS Research Center to maximize blind people’s education outcomes, independent living and career prospects. The work is externally funded by a planning grant. Once established, this center will be the only one of its kind in the world, he says. (TREVIS stands for Triad Research Initiative to Empower the Visually Impaired for Information Systems Competitiveness.)

“Designers assume blind people are like sighted people except they can’t see,” Babu says. “But, because sighted people rely on their vision to construct models in their minds, blind people often think about computer tasks differently. Understanding these different ways of thinking is critical to designing blind-friendly systems and environments.”

While there are all sorts of guidelines for designing accessible websites, assisting the end user in completing Web-based tasks is as important as complying with technical standards and laws, says Babu. “Web accessibility is not a legal issue; it’s an equal opportunity issue.”

“When you sit down to design a website, you have to think, how would a screen reader read my website? You need to be user-centered from the beginning.”

He sees his role as an intermediary in this process. “I am the neutral observer trying to bring the user and the designer closer together.”

Babu says his career goal is to empower the blind in the information society, enhancing their ability to get an education, develop careers and live independently. “For the first time, we have the opportunity to create equal access if we can understand the environment and design for it. This is something I’ve always wanted to do. I really love my research.”

*Chicago Sun-Times*, August 31, 2012

### **Seeing Braille into 21st century**

By Sandra Guy

A Lake Zurich company has played a key role in redesigning a 1950s-era Braille writer into a ‘talking’ LCD-screen device intended to make it easier for people to learn Braille.



The new Perkins Smart Braille, with a “brain” developed by Product Development Technologies, addresses a controversy arising in the blind and visually impaired community: Will the blind and visually impaired become illiterate if they depend on technology such as the Apple iPad to do daily tasks, skipping the often-tedious task of learning Braille?

It’s a growing concern as Baby Boomers confront vision loss in middle age, and as a new generation relies increasingly on smartphone and tablet technology — much like students failing to learn to spell or write in cursive letters because they ‘text’ to communicate. The issue has economic repercussions, too: While seven of every 10 blind people are unemployed nationwide, only two of every 10 who know Braille are out of work, studies show.

Chicago-area experts say people need to be able to write to be literate, and the Smart Braille could give them extra incentive to learn Braille because it operates much like today’s tablets, though it weighs in at 8.6 pounds and costs \$1,995.

The new Braille will be given for free to about 60,000 blind schoolchildren nationwide through a federal program that funds the purchases.

Its new smartphone-like screen displays letters alongside their “dot” patterns, allows lesson downloads, ‘speaks’ back audibly and immediately to tell the learner whether he spelled a word correctly, and prints out the student’s writing with embossed dots so he can read it.

Even better is the motivation a student receives when the machine “claps” at the end of a full sentence done correctly, said Mary McCarthy, a 38-year veteran Braille reading teacher at Perkins School for the Blind, the Watertown, Mass., school where Helen(CQ) Keller learned Braille.

“It helps the students to keep practicing, and they need the repetition to get the dot letters and dot names right and to learn to finger the correct keys,” McCarthy said.

The machine’s six keys have electronic sensors that instantly interpret a key stroke as a Braille symbol.

“Braille is an unknown to sighted people — no one knows about it and it’s scary at first,” said John Freese, program manager at Product Development Technologies, a 17-year-old company started by former Motorola and Zenith technology experts. “It’s a real challenge for parents with blind children or for older people losing their sight. If that’s you, you likely haven’t learned a new language in 50 years.”

As the Perkins school product division aims to get the word out about the Smart Brailer, other Chicago and federal efforts are underway to train people with vision problems about the vast and vastly less expensive ways they can use technology.

The Chicago Lighthouse for the Blind offers free demonstrations and fee-based training for individuals and groups on iPad and iPhone apps and other equipment that make daily living easier, ranging from a \$1.99 downloadable

“money reader” that identifies cash denominations to a \$29 EyeSight app that uses an iPhone camera to blow up print size.

The training costs \$40 an hour for individuals and \$25 for groups at the Lighthouse’s locations at 1850 W. Roosevelt Road and at the Vision Rehabilitation Center at 222 Waukegan Road in suburban Glenview.

Tom Perski, senior vice president of rehabilitation services for the Chicago Lighthouse, said the iPad’s compatibility with refreshable Braille displays gives people the kind of access to online tools that frees them up like never before.

“One of our interns who is blind uses a free app to audibly identify any item of food in the kitchen,” Perski said. The intern takes a photo on his iPhone of a cereal box or a bottle of iced tea, for example, and when he scans the item, the phone will say ‘honey-crusted shredded wheat’ or ‘bottle of Diet Lipton iced tea.’

People may also download books on an iPad and read them in Braille because the dots pop up on the display screen so the reader can feel the Braille symbols. They may download magnifying readers, cash and color identifiers, GPS locators and other things they carry around inside the single device. Before the iPhone and iPad, they’d have to buy individual devices for hundreds of dollars apiece and figure out which ones they could carry at a time.

The Lighthouse also works with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to set up personalized iPads for veterans. The

veterans specify their preferences for pre-loaded software, apps and features.

The federal government just launched its own campaign at ICanConnect.org and at fcc.gov/NDBEDP to let low-income people with hearing and vision loss know about free technology and training programs.

Said Perkins President Steven Rothstein, “With the right technology, people with disabilities can link to information and ideas, be productive and move ahead.”

*Businessweek*, August 30, 2012

### **Flashes of Light Seen by Blind Woman Spur Bionic Eye Hope**

By Jason Gale

An Australian woman blinded by an inherited retina-damaging disease experienced some vision after doctors in Melbourne implanted an electronic device they say may lead to a bionic eye by 2014.

Dianne Ashworth, who has profound vision loss due to retinitis pigmentosa, received the world’s first implantation of an early prototype bionic eye, Bionic Vision Australia, the group undertaking the research, said in a statement today. The implant, attached to the back of Ashworth’s eye, was stimulated to produce images using a computer, the researchers said.

“I didn’t know what to expect,” Ashworth said in the statement. “All of a sudden, I could see a little flash. It was amazing. Every time there was stimulation, there was a different shape that appeared in front of my eye.”

Understanding of the electrical stimulus required to produce images with the implant will enable researchers to develop a vision processor that creates images using flashes of light. The team is developing two prototypes within the next 12 to 18 months that will bring some vision to patients with retinitis pigmentosa initially, and then to sufferers of age-related macular degeneration.

About 1 in 3,000 babies born in Australia have retinitis pigmentosa, caused by an errant protein supplied to the retina that causes photoreceptor cells to die and a progressive loss of vision, according to Retina Australia.

## Two Groups

Researchers are working with Ashworth to determine exactly what she sees each time the retina is stimulated. The team is looking for consistency of shapes, brightness, size and location of flashes to determine how the brain interprets the information, said Rob Shepherd, director of the Bionics Institute, which designed, built and tested the early prototype.

Bionic Vision Australia includes researchers from the Bionics Institute, Centre for Eye Research Australia, the University of Melbourne and the University of New South

Wales,

The group is one of two that are developing bionic vision devices in Melbourne, where the cochlear ear implant was developed by Graeme Clark more than 30 years ago.

A team at Monash University in Melbourne aims to test a prototype in people within 18 months with a device that stimulates the brain directly to produce vision.

## **SPORTS**

*The New York Times*, June 4, 2012

### **Hitting the Court, With an Ear on the Ball**

By Thomas Lin

WATERTOWN, Mass. — Dan Guilbeault was 3 when doctors discovered a tumor called an optic glioma pressed against his optic nerves. He continued to play the sports he loved — basketball, baseball and football — until he lost most of his sight at 11.

Now he is 19 and almost completely blind, and his favorite sport is tennis.

When he first heard about tennis for the visually impaired, his reaction was “No way!” he said. “I was skeptical.”

So were faculty members at the Perkins School for the Blind here, when a sighted student from nearby Newton proposed it nearly two years ago. But Perkins, known for athletic innovations like adapted fencing, decided to offer what are believed to be the first blind tennis classes in the country.

Like tennis for sighted people, the game requires speedy court coverage and precise shot-making. Blind players rely on their ears to follow a foam ball filled with ball bearings that rattles when it bounces or is struck.

“Your ears have become your eyes,” said Dr. Robert Gotlin, director of orthopedic and sports rehabilitation at Beth Israel Medical Center in New York City.

Sejal Vallabh, a 17-year-old high school junior in Newton, encountered the sport during a summer internship in Tokyo and then proposed the program at Perkins. She set up a volunteer organization, Tennis Serves, which introduced the sport last year at Lighthouse International in New York and the California School for the Blind in Fremont.

As blind tennis grows in the United States, where the Census Bureau estimates that 1.8 million people over 15 have “severe difficulty seeing,” it is testing popular notions of the limitations of blindness.

“I want to show that it is possible for blind athletes to play tennis,” Ms. Vallabh said. No one believes it, she said, “until they see it for themselves.”

The most important adaptation is the ball, which is larger and made of foam, wrapped around a plastic shell that holds the ball bearings.

“It sounds like bells ringing,” said Emmanuel Ford, 10, who has cerebral palsy and is learning to hit tennis balls at Lighthouse.

Other adaptations include a smaller court with a badminton net lowered to the ground, string taped along the lines and junior rackets with oversize heads. Players with some sight get two bounces, the completely blind three. Only one set is played, and an umpire calls the lines.

The first sound-adapted tennis ball was designed in 1984 by Miyoshi Takei, a blind high school student in Japan. Now, about 300 players compete in tournaments there; blind tennis is also played in China, South Korea, Taiwan, Britain and Russia.

During matches, Mr. Takei, a 16-time national champion who worked as a massage therapist for older people, mostly hit flat, aggressive strokes, but lobbed the ball on defense to regain court position. Sometimes he lunged or dived for shots. (He died last year, at 42, after falling in front of a train.)



His widow, Etsuko, who is also blind, said he saw the “court in his mind and he knew where he was standing, where the ball was flying and bouncing.” By listening, she said, “he could control the ball very well.”

An expert on orientation and mobility for the blind, William R. Wiener, dean of graduate studies at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, said that sound localization “is so important when blind people navigate the world,” and added, “Listening to the ball, locating where it is and swinging at it probably helps you with the sport and also with your mobility.”

Blind tennis is made possible, scientists say, by the adaptability of the human brain — which appears to repurpose its visual area, the occipital cortex, to process sound and touch in response to blindness.

A series of studies discovered activity in the visual cortex when blind test subjects read Braille, and found that a blind woman could no longer make sense of the raised dots after suffering an occipital stroke. Another study, of sighted subjects who were blindfolded, showed that the occipital cortex began processing tactile and auditory information within five days.

“How it works is not a mystery,” said Melvyn A. Goodale, director of the Brain and Mind Institute at the University of Western Ontario. “We know that it is possible to localize sounds, and it is likely that the blind get better at this than sighted people.”

Dr. Goodale and his colleagues are studying how echo processing works in the occipital cortex of blind echolocation experts like Daniel Kish, who as a baby lost his sight to retinoblastoma. Human echolocators use palatal clicks or hand claps to “see” objects around them, like sonar in bats, only bats use ultrasonic frequencies that can resolve flying insects. This skill allows Mr. Kish to hike along cliff edges and ride a mountain bike.

While humans don’t have the auditory resolution to echolocate a moving tennis ball, blind tennis “promotes freedom of movement,” said Mr. Kish, president of World Access for the Blind, a nonprofit group that has taught echolocation and other mobility skills to hundreds around the world. “Most blind kids just don’t get early experience interacting with flying projectiles.”

Kiran Prasad, 20, a Columbia University junior and Tennis Serves coordinator at Lighthouse, said: “They’re living in a world that’s built for sighted people. I can only hope that tennis is giving them that confidence to feel like you can do anything.”

Ms. Vallabh, the young founder of Tennis Serves, hopes to someday host a national tournament and to have blind tennis recognized as an official sport at the Paralympics.

But first the sport has to catch on, and it takes a few years for totally blind players to become proficient enough to play a

match, said Ayako Matsui, former secretary general of the Japan Blind Tennis Federation. And it is still met with skepticism. The Washington State School for the Blind rejected Ms. Vallabh's pitch, said Jennifer Butcher, a fitness instructor there. "But if a student expresses interest in learning tennis, we could try it down the road," she said.

Meanwhile, Ms. Vallabh is working to improve the sport, partnering with an engineering class at Harvey Mudd College to design a ball that emits a continuous sound, so players can hear its trajectory before it bounces.

At Perkins, a sound-adapted tennis ball sits on the desk of the school president, Steven M. Rothstein, symbolizing possibility.

"Sometimes you don't know until you try it," said Matt LaCortiglia, the adapted physical education coordinator at Perkins. "Now we're doing a lot more tennis."

*Essence Magazine*, August 14, 2012

### **Olympics 2012: Gold, Silver and Bronze Are the New Black**

By Yolanda Sangweni

The 2012 Summer Olympic Games are officially over, but we still have much to celebrate. This year in London, we saw African-American athletes not only shatter records, but also make Olympic history in sports that we've rarely been visible in.

Take boxer Claressa Shields, who made history by becoming the first American and the first woman to ever win a gold in the ring. Or Gabby Douglas, who became the first African-American gymnast to win gold in the women's all-around final competition. From Serena and Venus Williams' total dominance on the court to the adrenaline-inducing sprints of Sanya Richards-Ross, Allyson Felix and Carmelita Jeter, it was triumph all around for Team USA!

ESSENCE takes a moment to salute the African-American athletes who participated in the London Games and showed us that gold, silver and bronze are the new Black.

For the first time in 16 years, the U.S. women's 4×100 relay team walked away with a gold medal. Sprinters Carmelita Jeter, Bianca Knight, Allyson Felix and Tianna Madison also set a new world record, completing the race in just 40.82 seconds.

Gabby Douglas made history by becoming the first African-American woman to win the gold medal in the Artistic Gymnastics Women's Individual All-Around final. She also took home gold in the Artistic Gymnastics Women's Team final.

This tennis duo prove two forces are better than one. The Williams sisters reclaimed their title from the 2008 Beijing Olympics with another gold medal in the women's doubles this year. Just a day earlier, Serena grabbed the gold in women's singles, beating Russia's Maria Sharapova 6-0, 6-1.

Boxer Claressa Shields, 17, made history by becoming the first American woman to ever win a middleweight title. Hailing from Flint, Michigan, Shields' story is inspiring in and out of the boxing ring.

The U.S. Women's basketball team — which includes Candace Parker, Tamika Catchings and Maya Moore — took home three consecutive gold medals.

Track and field golden girl Allyson Felix won three gold medals, making her the first U.S. woman to do so since Florence Griffith-Joyner in 1988.

Besides her team wins, track and field star Sanya Richards-Ross won the gold medal in the Women's 400m final.

Mississippi native Britney Reese won a gold medal Women's Long Jump Final.

The U.S. men's basketball team — which includes Kobe Bryant, LeBron James, Chris Paul, Jevin Durant, Carmelo Anthony, James Harden, and more — took home gold.

Swimmer Lia Neal, 17, won a bronze medal in the women's swimming 4×100 meter freestyle relay.

Lashinda Dermus is all smiles after winning the silver medal in the Women's 400m Hurdles.

Kellie Wells won the bronze medal in the Women's 100m Hurdles Final.

Jason Richardson celebrates after winning silver in the Men's 110m Hurdles Final.

Besides her team wins, track and field star Carmelita Jeter won the silver in the Women's 100m Final.

Destinee Hooker and Foluke Akinradewo pose with teammates Logan Tom and Courtney Thompson after winning silver in the Women's Volleyball gold medal match.

The U.S. women's 4×400m relay team, Sanya Richards-Ross, Francena McCorory, Allyson Felix and DeDe Trotter brought home two gold medals.

Wrestler and certified eye candy (you'll have to excuse us) Jordan Burroughs celebrates winning gold in the Men's Freestyle 74 kg Wrestling Final.

Besides team wins, track and field athlete Justin Gatlin won the bronze medal in the men's 100 meter final.

Michael Tinsley kisses the silver medal he won in the Men's 400 meter hurdles.

Aries Merritt won a gold medal in the Men's 110m Hurdles Final.

Erik Kynard celebrates after winning the Silver medal in the Men's High Jump Final.

Reese Hoffa took home a Bronze medal in Shot-Put.

Christian Taylor took home gold in the Olympic Triple Jump.

Track and field star Janay Deloach kisses the bronze medal she won in the Women's Long Jump Final.

Swimmer Cullen Jones has earned three medals at the London Games: Gold in the men's swimming 4×100 meter medley relay, Silver in the men's swimming 50 meter freestyle, and Silver in the men's swimming 4×100 meter freestyle relay.

Track and field stars Bryshon Nellum, Joshua Mance, Tony McQuay, Angelo Taylor pose with the Silver medals they won in the men's 4×400-meter relay.

Terrence Jennings took home a Bronze medal in Olympic Taekwondo.

Ashton Eaton took home Gold in the Men's Decathlon.

Trell Kimmons, Justin Gatlin, Tyson Gay and Ryan Bailey won silver in the Men's 4 × 100m Relay Final.

Will Claye won Bronze in the Men's Long Jump Final.

Like her teammate Lauryn Williams, Jeneba Tarmoh did not run in the 4×100m race, but she did win Gold.

She may not have raced in the women's 4×100m race, but Lauryn Williams won a Gold medal. It's complicated.

Dawn Harper won Silver in the Women's 100m Hurdles Final.

Fencer Maya Lawrence celebrated winning a Bronze medal for Women's Epee Team Fencing Finals.

As part of the U.S. women's national soccer team, Sydney Leroux took home three Gold medals.

*CBS News, September 7, 2012*

### **Blind U.S. Navy vet takes gold at Paralympics**

After just one year of training, Bradley Snyder can now call himself a Paralympic swimming champion. But perhaps more impressive than his compressed training period is the fact that just one year ago to the day, Snyder was on the ground in Afghanistan as part of the U.S. military effort in the country.



A 28-year-old Navy Lieutenant, Snyder clearly remembers the blast that robbed him of his vision.

"I remember the actual blast itself, I remember waking up on the ground," he told CBS News correspondent Mark Phillips.

When he came to, he had some vision in his left eye, but said "shortly thereafter, it went away."

"[I'm] still looking for it," he joked in a report that aired Friday on "CBS This Morning."

Within five weeks of the explosion, Snyder -- who was on the Naval Academy swim team at Annapolis -- was back in the pool. And despite his quick ascent to the the top of the sport, Snyder said he got back in the pool simply to prove his well-being to his loved ones and prove his own worth to himself.

"It started as just a friendly, 'Oh, let's show my family and friends that I'm okay,' show everyone that I can go and still do the things I used to enjoy ... So, hopping in the pool felt very organic, very natural, saying 'Hey, you're actually still good at something', you know, and that was an amazing experience," Snyder explained.

Soon, he found that training and competing in the pool allowed him to tap into new stores of confidence and self-esteem.

"To be able to hop into the pool and experience success on

the level that I've experience here at the Paralympics just gives me an immense amount of confidence moving forward into life."

Friday, a year after losing his sight in the blast, Snyder competed in his favorite event, the 400-meter freestyle. And, unsurprisingly, he finished a full 30 seconds before all of his competitors.

## **POLITICS**

*Forbes Magazine*, July 18, 2012

### **The Affordable Care Act And People With Disabilities**

*By Judy Owen*

I have been following the Affordable Care Act, as have so many others. People with disabilities have unique problems when it comes to health care. In Florida, if you are receiving Social Security Income (SSI) you qualify for Medicaid. So, people with disabilities have great incentives to maintain their SSI because they can't risk being without medical coverage. The result, many people with disabilities will only work part-time, at most. They are self-limiting their income in order to continue to receive Medicaid. Is this milking the system? I don't think so. I think an unintended consequence of this system is work disincentives. This was a consideration when Jim and I formed Opportunity Works.

How will the Affordable Care Act affect this issue? Today, if my son has more than \$2,000 in assets, he would not be able to qualify for Social Security Income. The way families deal with this is through Special Needs Trusts, which can have unlimited assets, but there are restrictions on how the money can be spent. And, the State can put liens on the trust, so that when my son passes away, the State can collect the assets to recoup their costs of providing the benefit. This is an issue that is complex and without proper guidance can leave families in quite a bind.

For this reason, I have asked one of the nation's foremost legal experts in this matter, David Lillesand, of Lillesand and Wolasky, P.L. to contribute this week to my blog. Here is some of what David had to contribute on this topic:

“ACA changes the world for persons with disabilities and funds who will now have a choice between public or private health insurance. For significant financial as well as health reasons, we believe that private health insurance, not Medicaid, will be soup d’jour for the vast majority of (Special Needs Trusts) SNT clients. We cannot know for certain, but I would not be surprised to see persons with disabilities leaving public health insurance (Medicaid) for the private market in January, 2012.

The most obvious and most significant health industry reform important to our SNT clients is the elimination of pre-existing conditions as a bar to purchasing private health insurance. However, ACA also eliminates annual or lifetime

caps, rescission of insurance policies, non-renewability, and higher premium costs for persons with pre-existing conditions. For individuals with significant medical problems, elimination of cost-containment ceilings is just as important as access to the door of private medical care. It is not unusual to see clients who have maxed out their lifetime cap and are now seeking public health insurance.

Why would clients opt to pay for private health insurance rather than “free” Medicaid? The two major reasons are first, securing health insurance without a payback on death and second, access to significantly better medical care...

Change makes most of us uncomfortable, but change is a constant in our lives. This is one time when special needs attorneys can both lament the negative impact of national legislation on our personal financial well-being, but rejoice in the concomitant good fortune of our clients with disabilities who can now join the private health insurance market with the rest of us as equal citizens with their dignity intact.”

Looking at employment opportunities, I think the ACA will open the door to many more people to confidently join the workforce, knowing they will not do so at the cost of having medical needs met. This will improve the recruiting possibilities for Opportunity Works and other organizations seeking to ensure people with disabilities are included in the workforce. Three years ago, it seemed like the system we had in place to help people with disabilities achieve competitive employment was broken beyond repair. Now we have the ACA, there is a

proposed federal rule for federal contractors to have a quota for employing people with disabilities and we have an educational system, much more focused on preparing ALL students for college or career. Times are changing.

A special thanks to David Lillesand for his contribution this week. Your knowledge is a gift to me, that I am happy to be able to share with my readers. If you want an in depth look at this topic you can see the full document written by David on Scribd, Deciphering the Impact of the Affordable Care Act.

*Voice of America, June 22, 2012*

### **Promoting Disability Rights Internationally**

“Persons with disabilities have a right to full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, and ... respect for their inherent dignity.”

One billion people, or fifteen percent of the global population have disabilities, according to World Health Organization and World Bank statistics. That is one reason President Barack Obama has highlighted disability rights as an important component of his domestic and international human rights policies, said Special Assistant to President Obama Samantha Power:

“Persons with disabilities have a right to full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, and ... respect for their inherent dignity.”

Ms. Power, who is Senior Director for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights at the National Security Council, outlined four planks of President Obama’s strategy to promote and protect disability rights internationally.

“Our most effective tool for human rights promotion is our example,” said Ms. Powers. She noted that, through the American’s With Disabilities Act, the U.S. was the first country in the world to declare that citizens with disabilities should comprehensively be treated on an equal basis with others. “This administration has sought to build upon the historic, bipartisan record,” she said.

Second, the Obama administration has sought to institutionalize support for disability rights through appointments of disability advisors in many major U.S. government agencies, including USAID and the State Department and through ordering reports on employment statistics for disabled persons.

Third, U.S. leadership on disability rights will be extended and amplified through internationalization and multi-lateralization of disability protections and promotions. For example, the Obama administration has added a representative of disabled people's organizations to its delegation to the

Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council and supported disability rights resolutions there and in the UN General Assembly.

Also, in 2009 the U.S. signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which President Obama transmitted to the Senate on May 17, 2012 for its advice and consent to ratification.

Finally, said Ms. Power, mainstreaming the conversation on disability rights is of significant importance. This means, ultimately, that persons with disabilities should have a voice in key international initiatives including the promotion of women's human rights, the fight against human trafficking, development, and conflict resolution:

“They are one group that any and every other group, gender, racial, ethnic, you name it, overlap with and yet they are often left out of discussions of and responses to human rights concerns.”

“We cannot and should not say,” said Ms. Power, “That we are actually promoting human rights or resolving human rights abuses if there are groups out there who are not part of the solution.”

*The Wall Street Journal*, July 25, 2012

## **Obama Plans Program to Help African-American Students**

By Laura Meckler

NEW ORLEANS—President **Barack Obama** was set to announce an executive order aimed at improving the performance of African-American students as he addresses the Urban League Wednesday night.

The speech to the civil rights group is an opportunity for the president to reach out to some of his most loyal supporters, African-Americans, who as a group have struggled more than most Americans in the tough economy.

The executive order establishes an interagency initiative aimed at identifying promising programs to improve African-American students' performance and developing a national network of people and groups to share these ideas and put them into practice. The program, to be housed in the Education Department, is dubbed the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans.

The order also sets up a commission to advise the initiative and a federal interagency working group to coordinate federal efforts from early childhood education through college and adult schooling.



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