

NE/AER NEWSLETTER

Northeast Chapter

Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired

Volume 07.1

January, 2007

*The Northeast Chapter Newsletter is published 3 times a year by NE/AER:
Nancy Milczanowski, Editor; Marybeth Dean, Printing and Tape Recording;
Cindy Reed-Brown, Mailing Print Copies, Brian Charlson, Tape Duplication and Mailing.*

2006 CONFERENCE ISSUE

President's Message

What a time we had in Montreal!!! Whenever the opportunity to consider the many faces in attendance presented itself, the faces of those unable to attend also popped into my mind. We missed all of you and certainly hope to catch you in Massachusetts in 2007.

The diligent efforts of the Host and Program committees were evident throughout the conference. Every event of this magnitude presents its own challenging situations and opportunities to learn. Who would have predicted a heat wave in Canada in November? (Ok, maybe Al Gore) Since it is illegal to turn AC on in Canada after October 15th some rooms were undoubtedly a bit warm but we were able to make the best of it. Thank goodness the layered look never seems to go out of style.

On behalf of those of us needing to cross the border I offer sincere thanks to the kind host committee lady who gave prior notice to the authorities and thus made the crossing easier. In addition, when crime unfortunately struck one of our own at a restaurant near our beautiful hotel the host committee was quick to offer assistance and a huggable stuffed ALL Canadian beaver to ease the victim's pain.

The Awards Banquet was an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of respected colleagues. No matter how late the event may run it is always a pleasure to enjoy the nomination speeches as well as to experience the quivering of each recipient.

Now that our time in Montreal has passed and those of us lucky enough to partake have once again "staggered home refreshed" we turn our attention to holiday time with family and friends. However, before that happens I would like to once more extend a HUGE thanks to **Paulette Arsenault, Mike Adams** and their support teams for a VERY successful conference.

Stay safe and warm, have a super New Year, see you in 2007.

Gail A. Johnson

Northeast Chapter/AER 2006

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Newsletter: Nancy Milczanowski
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Nancy Moskowicz
2007 Conference: Betsy Bixler, Darick Wright

Division Chairs:

Multiple Disabilities/Deaf Blind/Infant/Preschool
Karen Olson, Peg Palmer, Tom Miller
Psychosocial Services: Nancy Druke
Low Vision: Gail Johnson, Mimi Flanary
Orientation & Mobility: Meg Robertson
Education Curriculum/Itinerant Personnel:
Jill Baker, Jeanette Haines
VRT/Aging: Montress Kenniston
Personnel Prep: Bob McCulley

Report from the Membership Committee

NE/AER is the largest chapter with its 392 current members at the end of October. At the conference non-members were encouraged to join to try to make a total of 400 members. However, in order to maintain 400 members all members need to keep their membership current. So renew today if your membership has lapsed!

Additional incentives for professionals to join the organization are currently being explored. Please contact me if you have any thoughts for increasing the membership. The membership committee has been busy this fall with a record number of grant applicants to attend the NE/AER annual conference in Montreal, Canada. The committee received 10 applications for grant money with grant recipients from CT, MA, ME, NH, and RI. In addition, NE/AER provided a grant to Meg Robertson to attend the International Conference in Utah.

Stay tuned for additional information regarding the grant application. In the future, the deadline for grant applications will be sooner in order to let recipients know the amount of money they are offered prior to registration deadlines.

At the Montreal conference new members and members for 20+ years were recognized at the awards banquet.

Lori Cornelius

Membership Committee Chair
(e-mail mail to: Lcvision@aol.com)

2007 CONFERENCE PLANS

Massachusetts, Here We Come!

The 2007 Host committee chairs, Betsy Bixler & Darick Wright (MA), and Program Committee chairs, Suzanne Cappiello & John Reilly (CT), met at the Board of Education and Services for the Blind in CT on December 12th to continue making plans for the November 2007 conference.

Beyond food and facilities, the decisions to be made for such an event would be overwhelming if it were not for the teamwork of the committees. Many wonderful ideas were exchanged with hopes that this too will be a gathering for the record books. Please think positive thoughts for these hard working individuals who give so much of their time for the benefit of all, as well as how you might be able to contribute to the success of the next Conference.

Here is the expanded Conference Rotation Schedule.

Save for future reference.

Approved by the Board of Directors, May 1997
(originally listed 1997-2003)

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Host</u> | <u>Assist (Program)</u> |
|-------------|-------------|-------------------------|
| 2003 | ME | NH |
| 2004 | RI | ME |
| 2005 | NH | VT |
| 2006 | CA | VT |
| 2007 | MA | CT |
| 2008 | VT | CA |
| 2009 | CT | RI |
| 2010 | ME | NH |
| 2011 | RI | MA |
| etc. | | |

News from the Carroll Center

Upcoming seminars for professionals.

Each workshop is \$80. Please visit www.carroll.org for more info.

Kurzweil Training -- Jan. 5, 10 to 3

Duxbury -- February 2, 10 to 3

JAWS Intermediate -- March 2, 10 to 3

Bookport -- May 2, 10 to 3

A Free Hands-on Intro to the Pacmate by
Freedom Scientific -- January 12, 2007, 1 to 4.

Annual Braille Literacy Celebration -- March 3,
10 am to 3 pm

Summer Youth Program Orientation -- Feb. 21,
10 am to 2 pm

Summer Program Dates

CARROLL KIDS/CARROLL TEENS --
July 9 to 20, or July 23 to August 10

Youth in Transition -- July 23 to August 23

Real World Work Experience --
July 9 to Aug. 3, or July 16 to Aug. 17

Computing For College -- June 11 to 22
(current college students or recent
high school grads only)
July 9 to 20 or August 13 to 24
(high school Juniors/Seniors)

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News from the Divisions:

Low Vision Division

SAVE THE DATE OF APRIL 27, 2007!!

Thanks to all who have offered to help keep our division running forward. Although Mimi Flanary and I may be co-chairs by name, it will be through a group effort that our goal of a successful spring workshop will be accomplished.

The date is set for Friday, April 27th in the Boston area.

Please feel free to contact me at besbgailj@charter.net for more info after the New Year when our plans for stimulating topics and special speakers should be in place.

Gail A. Johnson
Co-Chair

Psychosocial Division

The Psychosocial Division held a workshop at the NE/AER conference in November in Montreal. While a number of topics were explored, a general theme emerged regarding how social workers and others in the counseling profession fit into the field of vision loss, how we might elicit more social workers and others in the counseling profession who currently work in the field to become members of AER, and what kinds of needs do these professionals have as they work in more than one field.

We came up with no magic answers to these questions. We will continue to look into these issues as we continue to meet and work together.

We did, however, decide to hold a Psychosocial Division Workshop in the spring. We are working on the topic and the date so be sure to look for an announcement. This will be an opportunity to not only earn CEU's but to learn skills that will enhance your area of work as well and, of course, a great opportunity to get together with friends and colleagues!

Nancy Druke, LICSW
Chair, Psychosocial Division
ndruke@sightcenter.com

More News From the Divisions

VRT/Aging

Fifteen people attended the NE/AER VRT/ Aging Division meeting in Montreal on November 16, 2006.

There was continuing discussion about the shortage of VRTs and the need for a VRT training program in the Northeast. Some division members gave feedback from their respective states about the possibility of support from State agencies and non-profits in their areas for a regional VRT program at UMass-Boston. It seems likely that Laura Bozeman, the new administrator of the existing vision programs at UMass-Boston will be pursuing federal funding to reestablish this program (stay tuned!).

Karen McKenna, CVRT(c), CLVT, a longtime VRT division member, received the Excellence in Rehabilitation to Adults who are Blind and Visually Impaired Award in Montreal. Karen works for the Iris Network in Maine. Congratulations to Karen on a well-deserved award!

Several of us had the pleasure of hearing Julie-Anne Couturier discuss the new VRT University Personnel Training Program which is now operational in Montreal. This program leads to either a Diploma in Specialized Graduate Studies or a Master's Degree.

The attendees at the Division meeting expressed interest in having a Pre-Conference before the 2007 NE/AER conference.

Margaret Cleary, from the Carroll Center suggested a joint VRT/Diabetes Educator's workshop modeled after one she recently organized for the AER National conference. There was unanimous support for this idea and Margaret will pursue outside funding. If anyone has ideas for presentations or presenters please contact Margaret at mecleary@aol.com.

Montress Kenniston, MEd, CVRT(c), LSW
Chair

Orientation and Mobility

Congrats to **Peter Waterfield** who has been an O&Mer for 40 Years as an O&M specialist at the Carroll Center for the Blind!

Congrats to the Mass. Commission for the Blind State Agency which celebrated its 100th birthday this past July. Helen Keller was one of the 5 Commissioners of the agency when it was first formed!

Baby Congrats to: NE/AER O&M members: **Chris & Kelli Jarosz** whose new son, Camden, arrived this fall.

And to COMS **Christy Vercauteren**, and her husband Geoff who welcomed their son, Carter, who arrived via Korea also this fall.

Save the Date:

"Focus On Vision Impairment & Blindness Conference:

Meeting the Needs of Individuals with Cognitive Disability & Vision Loss:

Wed. March 14, 2007 Taunton MA.

Registration due 2/28/07.

For more information call Ann Flynn at 781-279-3141 or email her at AEFLYNN@aol.com

There are many products to make winter easier and safer, including cleats for boots or shoes, spikes for canes, mittens and gloves for cane users, reflective clothing for people and dogs, protective items for dog paws, and lists of things to have in your car in winter. For more information, please contact:

Meg Robertson COMS, Mass. Commission for the Blind, O&M Department,
48 Boylston St., Boston MA 02116-4718
617-626-7581; Meg.Robertson@state.ma.us

Meg Robertson, COMS
Chair

Education Curriculum/Itinerant Personnel

At our Division meeting we discussed the issues that most impact the TVIs in each state and province. It appeared that having enough TVIs is a concern shared by the majority of our Division. Several states are expecting a decrease in personnel due to a lack of replacement TVIs as the aging professionals retire. Many TVIs either contract independently or work for private agencies, and salaries are not competitive with their public school counterparts. This information was shared with the rest of the NE/AER Divisions at the Town Meeting.

We are in the process of planning a one day workshop in June, 2007 on teaching braille in an inclusive model. The speaker will be Louise Nelson, an Education Consultant at BESB in CT. More information will be forthcoming on the NE/AER website.

Jill Baker and Jeanette Haines
Co-Chairs

Board Interactions
or
What happens at those meetings anyway?

November 2006 meeting of the NE/AER Board of Directors

- * Conference report from **Paulette Arsenault**. Expected attendance is 179, with a high percentage of presenters from Canada. Website well-received. NE/AER will expect to supplement conference income to balance conference budget.
- * Treasurer and financial committee will continue to look into bonding for a treasurer of a non-profit organization.
- * 2007 Conference Host State is Massachusetts, with **Darick Wright** and **Betsy Bixler** co-chairing the Conference Committee. The 2007 Program Committee (CT) will be co-chaired by **John Reilly** and **Suzanne Capiello**.
- * **Paul Doyle** has resigned as a Board Member at Large. As stated in the bylaws, the President will appoint a member to serve out the rest of the term.
- * ACVREP is in the process of determining a way for those who are renewing the certificates to be able to use all their continuing education points; currently there is a period of time between submitting for recertification and getting approval during which earned continuing ed points are not usable.
- * New flyer from NE/AER ad hoc committee: Benefits of Membership in NE/AER (see copy in the newsletter; available in electronic format from Cynthia.Reed-Brown@po.state.ct.us)
- * Ad hoc financial committee will be discussing guidelines for how NE/AER money should be used. We currently have resources that aren't available to most chapters and need to develop guidelines to help insure their best use as well as explore potential investing to provide for the future of our chapter. Ideas and input can be sent to **Cindy Reed-Brown**, **Meg Robertson**, **Cammy Moraros**, or **Claudia Pattison**.
- * The Personnel Preparation division and an ad hoc committee will be exploring ways to more actively involve University students in NE/AER. Input and ideas to **Laura Bozeman**, **Marybeth Dean**, **Sue Bergeron**, **Lori Cornelius**, or **Julie Anne Couturier**.
- * Ad hoc committee will be looking at updating and expanding the NE/AER website (www.neaer.umb.edu); ideas to **Meg Robertson** or **Nancy Druke**.
- * 5 awards to be given at the Banquet
- * International bylaws were updated summer of 2006 at the International Conference (in Utah) and will be on the AERBVI website soon.
- * Membership is currently 392, with several new student members. Eight grants were awarded for Montreal, and one for Utah over the summer.
- * Newsletter is now posted on the website and recorded versions are now on CD rather than cassette.
- * Election results: Pres-elect **Nancy Druke**, Treasurer **Linda Skibski**, Secretary **Kelli Jarosz**, Board Members at Large **Sue Bergeron**, **Stephanie Bissonette**, **Wendy Lundstrom**, **Lisa Mowerson**, and **Claudia Pattison**.
- * Upcoming Division events
 - Psychosocial division workshop potentially in the spring
 - O&M division spring conference
 - Education and Itinerant Personnel divisions will hold one-day workshop in June

Notes by
Cindy Reed-Brown

Benefits of Membership in AERBVI - Northeast Chapter

The Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AERBVI) is the professional organization of the blindness field. The Northeast Chapter includes the states of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island and the Canadian Provinces of New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Quebec.

Below are some of the benefits of membership:

- * Continuing Education opportunities: Professional Conferences, custom-designed Division Workshops, Lighthouse courses, etc. help members meet various certification requirements.
- * Awards - Peer recognition of outstanding contributions to the vision field.
- * Discounted certification fees through ACVREP
- * International and state-to-state connections and perspectives
- * Leadership opportunities at many levels
- * Legislative support (lobbying) - AER is our voice in Washington
- * Life-long contacts with other AER members:
 - Opportunities to network with a diversity of professionals in the blindness field
 - Ongoing exchange of ideas and knowledge
 - You're not alone; you're part of the bigger picture of the vision field
- * "Listserves" help keep members informed and in contact with other professionals
- * Member discounts on publications through AER - books, textbooks, study guides, computer tutorials
- * NE/AER Newsletter keeps members informed of chapter activities and news
- * Partnerships with other blindness organizations allow for more effective advocacy
- * Professional Liability Insurance is available to members
- * Publications included in membership:
 - Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness
 - Re:View
 - AER Report
- * Reasonable Membership Fees:
 - One Year Regular Professional membership:
 - AERBVI: \$130 US, plus optional division fees (\$0-15)
 - American Physical Therapy Association: \$265, plus required state fee (\$45-\$245)
 - American Occupational Therapy Association: \$225
 - American Speech-Language-Hearing Association: \$200
- * Reduced registration rates for NE/AER conferences and workshops
- * Scholarships and Stipends
- * Supporting AER adds to our feeling that we are investing in our goals for the future of the vision field.
- * And finally, being an AER member looks good on your resume!!

For more information about AERBVI International, check out the website at www.aerbvi.org
The Northeast Chapter website can be found at www.neaer.umb.edu.

Cindy Reed-Brown

2006 FALL CONFERENCE

Award Winners Honored at Fall Conference

At our Awards Banquet this November, NE/AER honored four individuals and one team for their outstanding contributions to the education and rehabilitation of persons with visual impairment.

Excellence in Direct Service to Adults with Visual Impairment Award

Karen McKenna

Karen McKenna is a Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist (CVRT) and Certified Low Vision Therapist (CLVT) who has worked at the Iris Network in Portland, Maine, for 22 dedicated years. Karen is passionate about providing her clients with the best professional services. She pinpoints those skills that each client needs and teaches practical and creative solutions. She is an amazing problem solver and guides clients through their training with a relaxed and fluid approach. Her clients and co-workers continually remark on her patience, optimism, in-depth knowledge, support and determination. Karen is a talented and dedicated service provider, an invaluable asset to the profession and very deserving of this prestigious award.

Excellence in Direct Service to Children with Visual Impairment Award

Jennifer C. Shields

Jennifer has worked in the field of visual impairment for twenty-five years. During this time she first served as an itinerant teacher in Prince Edward Island for four years, and then as Provincial Supervisor overseeing all programs provided to children who are blind or visually impaired from birth through the end of high school. She works constantly to stay abreast of the ongoing changes in our field, is an active member of AER, and has held various positions on the NE/AER Board. She has eagerly taken leadership roles in conference planning, student team meetings and other professional activities. Jennifer is dedicated to the children and families with whom she works, and is committed to being a supportive member of the school programming teams. She always strives to provide the most appropriate and highest quality program to students with visual impairments.

Distinguished Service Award

Irene Lambert

Ms. Irene Lambert is a long-time member of Montreal Association for the Blind (MAB) Board of Directors, as well as the President of MAB's Users Committee. She has been a member of the Board's Strategic Planning Committee and various internal MAB committees and projects. She served as President of the Low Vision Self Help Association, an important Montreal consumer group. Colleagues who know her best describe her as a natural leader and a tremendous inspiration not only to themselves, but to so many others throughout the years. They wanted her to have the recognition she so greatly deserves for making a mark in the world of all visually impaired and blind persons.

NE/AER Team Award

Intensive Residential Life Experiences Team

Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (VABVI)

Vermont Division of the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI)

TVI's from the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired and staff from the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired have for the last three years joined forces to provide a weeklong Intensive Residential Life Experience (IRLE) for high school students. In previous years the IRLE focus was on transportation, job shadowing and computer technology. This year's theme emphasized daily living skills. Students did their own shopping, cooking and cleaning. The TVIs provided the expertise and teaching strategies for independent living, and the State Voc. Rehab. Counselors facilitated career exploration activities using the REAL Game Curriculum. This combination of expertise, combined with recreational activities throughout the week fostered a great learning environment. According to Stephanie Bissonette, who nominated this team, "It is highly unusual to have TVIs, O&M Specialists, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and Rehabilitation Associates working so closely together for the betterment of students with visual impairments on a continuing basis." NE/AER is happy to recognize this collaborative effort.

Kerry Clifford and Rob Schicker, TVIs from VABVI accepted the award on behalf of the team.

Father Thomas Carroll Award

Gisèle Hall

The Father Carroll Award recognizes the "exemplary performance of an outstanding individual whose efforts have had a significant and positive impact on the lives of people with visual impairments". It is named for the founder of the Carroll Center for the Blind.

Gisèle Hall has been a member of the Northeast Chapter, AERBVI, since 1974 and a member of Division 9, Orientation and Mobility. She has been extremely active in NE/AER, providing leadership in a variety of roles at the chapter and international levels, including NE/AER Secretary, Chair of Conference Program Committee twice, member of the AER International Conference host committee, and AER O&M Certification Committee.

According to her nominator, Paul Gareau, "Ms. Hall has over 30 years of service in our field. She has been involved with the creation of innovative service models and the development of new programs throughout her career. She is, however, much more than the sum of her many accomplishments. In the field of blindness and visual impairment, which is full of many dedicated and capable people, Ms. Hall stands out. Anyone who has had the pleasure of working with her will say that she brings something special, besides her wealth of knowledge and experience, to her dealings with people: a sense of respect, dedication, and most of all, caring. We are better people for knowing Gisèle Hall."

Ms. Hall is the Director of Professional Services for the Montreal Association for the Blind and the Mackay Rehabilitation Centre. She began her career at the Carroll Center during her Orientation and Mobility internship before moving to Montreal.

Town Meeting a Big Success at Conference

Marybeth Dean, Moderator

Almost 100 NE/AER members attended the Town Meeting general session at the NE/AER Conference in Montreal. The Meeting was held to give our membership a chance to "talk about the hot topics affecting AER, to ask questions or state a point of view on professional issues that affect us all."

Kim Stumpf led off with an informative summary of the Medicare Demonstration Low Vision Project as it is being implemented in New Hampshire, one of the six demonstration sites in the US.

The chair of each division gave a brief report on the most important issue currently facing the division. Two Canadian members -- one education and one rehabilitation -- reported on issues from the Canadian perspective.

Several themes emerged from the Town Meeting, including recruitment, funding for personnel prep, and updating our own professional skills.

Recruiting the next generation

Clearly the number one issue across all divisions and both countries is the fact that professionals in our field are aging and soon a large number of us will retire. Who will replace us? Are there enough personnel prep programs? How will we recruit new professionals?

Every group reported on the need to step up recruitment of people into the vision field. Some of the ideas that emerged from the Town Meeting included targeting high school students and special ed classes in undergrad programs; participating in career fairs; and recruiting "second career individuals" who bring highly developed skills to their jobs.

Funding training programs

At the Town Meeting many people urged AER to advocate for training funding and an increase in the number of university programs. Montress Kenniston pointed out that the situation is most critical for CVRT where there are only 5 universities left in the US that offer RT programs. Canada reports the same situation. The VRT program at Mohawk College is unable to recruit enough candidates to fill all available slots.

Keeping pace with changes in our client population

Another theme that emerged from this meeting is the need for us as professionals to retool to meet needs of the changing populations we serve. At all age levels there is an increase in the number of individuals with complex multiple impairments. For example, among children in developed nations, the single greatest cause of blindness and visual impairment is Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI). And we are serving more visually impaired adults with cognitive disabilities.

Participants called for further study into the needs of these groups and a willingness for our members to advocate on their behalf. Participants also pointed out that as our client population changes it will be incumbent upon university programs to adjust their curricula accordingly and for AER to provide appropriate continuing education.

While there were other discussion topics as well, the three cited above were overarching.

I would like to thank all who made presentations, asked questions and provided input. In addition to lively discussion, participants also provided extensive written feedback to the questions that were posed. Look for a summary of the written responses in the next issue of this newsletter.

Marybeth Dean

Reports from Grant Recipients

Attending the Montreal NE AER Conference was indeed a "Passport to Learning". All of the sessions were fabulous!!! Because of my interest in serving adults with cognitive disability and vision loss, I thought I'd highlight the Pre-Conference for Divisions 3 & 8 entitled "Observing, Assessing & Planning for the Child with Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI)", as many of the adults I work with, although not formally diagnosed, do present with many of the same characteristics in terms of their functional vision as those which describes CVI.

Kathy Morgan and Karen Olsen, from the CT Board of Education & Services for the Blind, presented a wonderful and thought provoking session based on the work of Christine Roman, Ph.D and others who have dedicated themselves to helping individuals who have CVI.

So much more information was given than space allows here - but here are three highlights taken from Kathy and Karen's presentation and handouts in regards to defining and diagnosing CVI:

- * Working Definition: CVI refers to visual impairment due to damage to the visual cortex, the posterior visual pathways, or both (Groeneweld). As a result of this damage to the neurological system, the individual can have difficulty in processing and/or understanding visual information.
- * General Characteristics: Although a person's eyes may appear "normal" and eye exam may state "normal", CVI can be diagnosed by MRI type tests and by the presence of characteristic visual behaviors that are found in people with CVI. Individual may have other ocular impairments and often has accompanying disabilities.
- * Roman's 10 Characteristics that can impact vision in people who have CVI: Color; Movement; Latency; Visual Fields; Complexity; Visual Motor; Light Gazing/Non Purposeful Gaze; Distance Viewing; Visual Reflexive Responses; Visual Novelty. Also - it is important to keep in mind that CVI is never static and is always changing. Fluctuating vision may be more dependent on how consistent we are in presenting visual information (Roman 10/04). Vision can also be influenced by health, medication, alertness, emotion, stress, fatigue, situational demands, etc.

Thank you to Kathy & Karen for a great presentation!

Lisa DiBonaventura

The Eyes Have It

After 17 years as an RT, I finally got to hold an eye in my hand and dissect it. It was amazing! Some people were hesitant about touching the cow eye at first, others just jumped into it. Faith Horter shared her "Exploring the Eye" presentation as though we were a class of elementary school kids (about 5th grade.) We started with questions and answers from the FDA regarding Mad Cow Disease. Then Faith explained the parts of the eye with power point, diagrams and outlines to use when we are called on to speak in schools. We were paired up with a tray for contrast, latex gloves, a scalpel and a cow eye. Each of us actually had our own eye. Holding an eye in our gloved hand (some went ungloved, Gail J.) we first pulled the fat away from the front of the eye to identify the cornea and sclera. With scalpel in hand we next sliced through the sclera half way between the front and back of the eye which by the way is tough. As we sliced a fluid-like substance flowed out. Imagine how happily grossed out some kids would be! Looking at the front section of the eye, we examined the iris, pupil, and fluids which lead to inverting that front part and popping out the lens. We found that it bounced.

On to the back section of the eye, we were asked to note the color of the inner layer. Then with the tip of the scalpel pull the retina away noting how thin it was. The retina easily pulled away and could be held in the palm of our hand looking like an iridescent rose petal. We noted the optic nerve and tactually could feel the indentation of the fovea. Faith's handouts included: objectives, material lists and procedures. She provided a list of places to get eyes and equipment. You can contact Faith Horter, BESB, 184 Windsor Ave. Windsor CT. 06095 for more information.

Faith's presentation was very organized with essential resources that will in turn be a fun to teach. In summary this was a great workshop for all us kids!

Linda Hunt

Evaluation of the Satisfaction and Use of the Trekker

Of the many excellent presentations at the Montreal conference, I would like to summarize the talk of Carole Zabihaylo, Coms, M.Sc. on a pilot study on the Trekker, an orientation aid that uses the Global Positioning System. I cannot thank NEAER enough for giving me a grant to this fantastic conference.

Characteristics of the 12 participants (men and women): 1. Ages 16-60, 2. White cane travelers who had received OM training and were traveling safely, independently and with ease. 3. Good hearing, 4. Good computer users, 5. Highly motivated and committed from beginning to end. 6. VA; $\leq 6/150$ and 7. VF; 5 degrees or less.

Participants assessment of the advantages of the Trekker: 1. Complementary tool (orientation aid), 2. Informational tool (identifies streets/points of interest), 3. Safety tool (indicates position), 4. A Universal tool that can be used on foot, in a car to give directions to drivers in cars, taxis or buses 5. Snow travel, 6. Learning names and points of interest in a familiar neighborhood. 7. For some it was helpful in unfamiliar neighborhoods, but some needed to be familiarized first, and 8. Self-esteem tool (independence, confidence, assurance, ease).

Participants assessment of problems with the Trekker: 1. Adverse conditions: in storms and solar storms in September, the connection can be lost. 2. In wind, the volume must be at maximum and 3. Intense noises make it hard to hear information.

Preliminary results after 1 year of use:

- 4 people were no longer in a position to participate
- 1 person uses it sporadically (bus, unfamiliar environments, and winter)
- 1 person uses it in unfamiliar areas and at home to familiarize to new areas
- 1 person used it all the time (bus, unfamiliar travel, and the car)
- 2 people used it in the winter
- 1 person used it in unfamiliar environments
- 1 person used it 90% of the time for new routes and environments

The newest Trekker is a Bluetooth GPS. In the future, Trekker will attempt to see if it can make a device into a bracelet with 4 buttons so it will be easier to handle.

Claudia Pattison

With the help of the Membership Committee's generous grant, I was able to attend the Annual NE/AER Conference in Montreal. What a great time to reconnect with colleagues, share ideas, and dust off some French vocabulary! There were so many advantages to attending—everything from the small LED "Turtle" light which can attach to canes, to the results of studies by Dr. Lofti Merabet confirming the involvement of the visual cortex with braille readers.

When I think of the Conference as a whole, the words, "Past, present, and future," come to mind. Dr. Olga Overbury's Keynote provided an excellent reminder of our past history; the sessions I attended such as those on cell phone use by visually impaired travellers and assessment of the GPS Trekker system provided useful information for present services; and the Town Meeting discussion gave us a glimpse at the issues affecting the future. I especially liked the Town Meeting where we could all connect and present new ideas for encouraging student involvement and recruitment, learn about the pros and cons of the Medicare Demonstration Project in NH, and discuss ways of including paraprofessionals, perhaps with a new Division. We had so many talented, thoughtful and compassionate NE/AER members in one room!

One last thought is about the interesting O&M Pre-conference. I never expected to learn how to read a traffic engineer's diagram of a traffic-light intersection! It was fascinating! Thanks Claudia and Meg!

To NE/AER, thank you so much for the grant. It was appreciated more than you know!"

Linda Skibski

I attended the NEAER Conference in Montreal this November. I am grateful for NEAER and the award of a grant to assist with the cost of registration for the event. It was a wonderful conference!! I left the event feeling a revived sense of joy and enthusiasm for our field and its future serving people with vision loss. I was most impressed and inspired by the presentations of the key note speakers - Dr Olga Overbury, Associate Professor of Optometry, University of Montreal and Dr. Lotfi Merabet, Assistant Professor of Neurology, Harvard Medical School.

Dr. Overbury spoke of the history of the vision rehabilitation field, and the challenges it will face in the future. Challenges such as the increasing medical, physical, and cognitive needs of the individuals we serve in the community, and how services and our current strategies will need to evolve to accommodate these complex needs.

Dr. Merabet spoke about research regarding neuro plasticity and the incredible ability of the brain to adapt. He shared recent research regarding individuals who are blind and use of the visual cortex. The research demonstrates that the visual cortex remains active and is rewired to assist with tactual and auditory tasks. The evidence opens up interesting discussions, possibilities and implications regarding restoration of sight, visual prosthesis, and sensory substitution devices.

Montreal did an outstanding job planning and executing the conference. I look forward to the next one in my own neighborhood, Boston. Thanks again for the assistance.

Michele Reed

The guest speaker for the General Session on Wednesday morning was Dr. Lotfi Merabet, who is an Assistant Professor of Neurology at the Harvard Medical School, a staff optometrist at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and a clinical Research Scientist at the Boston Retinal Implant Project at Bostons' VA Medical Center. Dr. Merabet addressed the subject "What Do Blind People See?" from a new perspective - delivering an inspiring talk that synthesized information from many different facets of his professional field.

In his talk, Dr. Merabet reported that there are 150 million blind people in the world; 38 million have no light perception. Magnetic Resonance Imaging reveals that activity present in the visual cortex of the brain, is also present in other sensory systems (auditory, tactile). Restoring functional vision through the science of neuroplasticity has been an ongoing challenge in the neuroscience field, as the "plasticity" of the brain undergoes extreme changes in the visual cortex when visual stimulus is lost. What is proposed is a substitution device that is placed on the retina and effects a process referred to as crossmodal sensory integration. The device, proposedly, will be able to teach the visual cortex to 'read' and interpret visual information in the same area of the brain, but which is stored through other sensory modalities. This process will allow the blind to devices (e.g., noninvasive visual input transformed to their intact senses. With sensory substitution stimulation or into sound. It is like a sensory channel (i.e. auditory) that is decoded into visual data. Different languages represent similar information. Different sensory channels encode information that can be decoded into visual input.

The implications of this field are huge. So are the questions. When to consider implanting such devices is still not a known science, as the natural process of perception follows its own timetable and pathway: when to intercept in that process is still an unknown.

Dr. Merabet provided fascinating audio-video illustrations and resources that provided insight, inspiration and support to this field of study. Information about his work and references to websites for the general audience could probably be found by contacting Dr. Lotfi Merabet: Center for Noninvasive Brain Stimulation DIMC, Dept. of Neurology, 330 Brookline Avenue KS-430, Boston, MA 02215. (e-mail: lmerabet@bidmc.harvard.edu)

I wish to acknowledge my appreciation to the AER Membership Committee and Grant Awards Committee for the opportunity to participate in the recent NEAER Conference in Montreal.

Kusala Tibbetts

Signature of Applicant

Signature of Employer

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(E-mail: Lcvision@aol.com) Fax: 860-602-4030

AT LEAST ONE MONTH prior to the event.

Date received: (for office use) _____