

REPORT



TEXAS COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND
4800 North Lamar, Austin, Texas 78756 512/459-2500

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TURNER NAMED CHAIRMAN



San Antonio Board member Larry Johnson (l.) and Commission Chairman John Turner during a gathering in San Antonio.

Governor Ann W. Richards has appointed John M. Turner of Dallas as the new chairman of the Texas Commission for the Blind. A long-time member of the Commission, Turner served on the agency's governing board from 1969 to 1987. In 1989 he returned to fill an unexpired term. Governor Richards appointed Turner to a new six-year term in October 1991.

Turner is a graduate of the University of North Texas in Denton and has a B.S. degree in Business Administration. He is employed as an independent life insurance sales representative and is active in numerous civic and professional organizations, including his role as a trustee with The Seeing Eye, Inc., an internationally known dog guide training school based in New Jersey.

"This is a crucial period for health and human services in Texas," says Turner, "and it is equally important for services and programs for Texans who are blind and visually impaired." A former client of the Commission, Turner is determined to see other blind and visually disabled persons "be as productive and independent as possible through rehabilitation services and educational programs."

FREE EYE CARE FOR THE ELDERLY

The National Eye Care Project (NECP) provides medical eye care to senior citizens who normally go without regular eye exams. About 50% of the population that is blind is over age 65. It is estimated that half of all blindness can be prevented. Interested persons can call 1-800-222-EYES from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday. Eligible callers are referred to a statewide network of volunteer ophthalmologists who provide complete eye examinations and necessary treatment free of charge. Since the program began in 1986, it has received more than 10,000 calls.

INSIDE

- 1992 Consumer Forums Slated
- Why Not?
- Search For Gene Narrows
- People In The News
- Country Music Magazine Comes Alive On Tape
- She Chose Not To Quit
- Notes of Appreciation
- In Brief
- People With Disabilities
- Brochure Offers Valuable Tips
- Service Delivery Options

**PEOPLE
IN THE NEWS**

Congratulations go out to **Durward K. McDaniel** on being named a recipient of the prestigious Migel Medal award presented by the American Foundation for the Blind. Along with former AFB President and Executive Director William F. Gallagher, McDaniel was recognized for his efforts on behalf of people who are blind and visually impaired. An Austin attorney, McDaniel is known for his leadership role in governmental relations with the American Council of the Blind and is president of the National League of Disabled Voters.

James Wiley of San Antonio has been appointed to a two-year term on the agency's Consumer Advisory Committee. A free-lance writer, Wiley has had several articles published in such magazines as *The American Home Magazine*, *Holiday Magazine*, and *Continental Airlines Magazine*.

A Word from the Director

A blueprint for the future of services for persons who are blind and visually impaired is on the drawing board. With invaluable recommendations and direction from consumers, staff, and board members, the first step of the Commission's six-year Strategic Plan has been submitted to the office of Governor Ann Richards.

The publication captures the agency's vision, philosophy, and mission. Central to all three is our commitment to recognize and respect the rights of the people we assist. By working in partnership with Texans who are blind and visually impaired, we will continue to develop programs and services which enable these citizens to gain and maintain independence. Also included in this document is an external/internal assessment, an inventory of the agency's organizational structure, fiscal aspects, service population demographics, technological developments, and economic variables.

Already we have turned our attention to the next phase of this monumental project. The second submission will concentrate on objectives and strategies as well as the outcomes and outputs that measure them. As we develop these components of our plan we'll be better able to identify the efforts and activities that will allow us to meet our goals. We will continue to refine and amend our plan as additional issues, concerns, or needs are identified.

Sincerely,



Pat D. Westbrook
Executive Director

REPORT is an official publication of the Texas Commission for the Blind. It is available free of charge to anyone who requests to be on the mailing list. News articles should be sent to the Public Information Office. This newsletter is available on tape upon request. For more information, call 1-800-252-5204.

John M. Turner, Chairman
Pat D. Westbrook,
Executive Director
Rolando Garza, Editor
Jean Wakefield, Editorial Assistant



COUNTRY MUSIC MAGAZINE COMES ALIVE ON TAPE!

Garth Brooks. George Strait. Patty Loveless. These and many more country music stars come to life on America's first monthly audio cassette magazine called American Country Entertainment (ACE). Each edition of the magazine contains interviews with producers, record executives, writers, and the stars themselves. In addition subscribers can hear the joke of the month from top country comedians; find out who's on the road and where; and learn which new acts are on the horizon in the world of country music. For more information, contact ACE, P.O. Box 351, Dallas, Texas 75221.

AFB TO STUDY SERVICE DELIVERY OPTIONS

The American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) has established a task force to develop initiatives which will examine and define the most appropriate service delivery models for persons who are blind and visually impaired. Among other areas, the panel will examine the merits of specialized agencies and schools geared specifically for persons who are blind and visually impaired. "Now when many of our private and state agencies face consolidation or extinction in the wake of budget cuts, it is critical that we take decisive action to address this issue in a proactive manner," says Carl Augusto, AFB President and Executive Director. Concern about the current delivery system of services to persons who are blind and visually impaired has been universally stated as one of the most critical issues now facing service providers, he said.



With the help of Commission services Zita Bernhardt has been able to do her job as executive director of the Olney Board of Industry and Commerce.

SHE CHOSE NOT TO QUIT

"When you quit working, there's something that dies that you never get back," says Zita Bernhardt of Olney, Texas. About one and one-half years ago Bernhardt lost much of her eyesight. The experience was not an easy one for Bernhardt to understand or to accept. "One day I could see. The next day I couldn't," she says as she describes her past.

Initially, Bernhardt refused to accept her failing vision. During initial visits with agency staff she "didn't want to talk about the fact that she couldn't see." "I was almost rude," Bernhardt recounts as she shares her story with *Wichita Falls Times-Record News* reporter Julie Palm. After receiving training through the agency's Technology Training Unit in Austin and being exposed to various devices that allow her to do her job, Bernhardt was determined that she could continue a life of productivity and independence.

"You make a choice of either totally quitting or trying to keep on," she says. As the executive director of the Olney Board of Industry and Commerce she remains busy. Her new "tools" include three gooseneck lamps with magnification capabilities, a closed-circuit television system, a recorder, and a computer system. "I like what I do. I'm good at what I do. This organization (TCB) keeps people like me producing."



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SEARCH FOR GENE NARROWS

A Houston researcher is close to identifying the gene that causes a form of retinitis pigmentosa, a disease that eventually causes blindness. According to a recent newspaper article, Dr. Stephen Daiger, a professor of medical genetics at the University of Texas Medical School at Houston, has identified a piece of chromosome 8 that contains a gene that causes one form of the disease. The work involved analyzing and comparing the DNA of 192 members of a Kentucky family in which retinitis pigmentosa has occurred frequently. According to Dr. Daiger, a person who inherits a single defective gene will have the disease and people who have retinitis pigmentosa have a 50% chance of passing it on to their children.

WHY NOT?

Walter Cronkite. Tom Brokaw. Barbara Walters. Jim Portillo. You've probably heard of the first three journalists. Sometime in the future you may be equally familiar with the fourth. A student at Bowie High School in El Paso, Jim Portillo reads the morning news on the school's daily television broadcasts. In many ways he's like other young, aspiring broadcast journalists. He's got a good voice. He enjoys his work and he's good at it. But there's one minor adjustment: his script is in braille and he reads the news with his fingers.

Portillo has been totally blind since birth. Along with 30 other students he auditioned for the eight slots available. "Most of my friends don't really say anything about my blindness," Portillo says in a recent interview with *El Paso Times* reporter Ramon Renteria. The 15-year-old also plays clarinet in the Bowie band and scored top academic honors in his English class recently.

And what does Portillo think of all the attention he draws as a result of his media experiences? "It's no big deal. People started telling me I had a good voice. So I just said, why not?"



Along with co-anchor Sandra Claderon, left, Jim Portillo brings the news to students at Bowie High School in El Paso.

1992 CONSUMER FORUMS SLATED

The Commission will host a series of public consumer forums across the state beginning in April. The Commission has been hosting these early sessions since 1982 for the purpose of giving clients and other interested persons an opportunity to learn more about the Commission's programs, services, and activities. "This year's forums are particularly important in light of the Americans With Disabilities Act and its impact on people with disabilities," notes Commission Director Pat Westbrook. He adds that "consumer input will continue to play a key role as we go through the process of strategic planning and conducting a thorough evaluation of our service delivery system."

- April 15 -- Corpus Christi
- April 23 -- Tyler
- April 30 -- Fort Worth
- May 5 -- Amarillo
- May 13 -- El Paso
- May 22 -- Bryan
- June 11 -- Austin
- June 18 -- Houston
- June 20 -- San Antonio
- June 23 -- Dallas

For information on time and location of the forum nearest you, please call the local Commission office or call toll-free 1-800-252-5204. Persons unable to attend a forum are invited to send their comments and suggestions to Cecilia Berrios, Coordinator of Consumer Affairs, 4800 North Lamar Blvd., Austin, TX 78756.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES: WHAT DO WE THINK ABOUT THEM?

"The disability community preaches solidarity for disabled people; politically, this may be wise, but advocates should recognize that the public does not think of all people with disabilities as similar," says pollster Louis Harris. Commenting on a recent large-scale national survey of public attitudes toward people with disabilities, Harris noted that the more the public is familiar with persons with disabilities and the more persons with disabilities become visible, the more ready the public will be to accept them as equal participants.

"Clearly, familiarity breeds an empathy, an understanding, a sense of equality. Lack of familiarity breeds concerns, doubts, and even downright hostility," Harris notes. Results of the survey showed that the public is willing to spend money necessary to integrate people with disabilities into the social, economic, and recreational mainstream of society; and an overwhelming majority of those surveyed (98%) believe that everyone, including people with disabilities, should have equal opportunities. The survey showed that there are real and substantial differences in public attitudes toward people with different disabilities.

IN BRIEF

- Former Commission Consumer Advisory Committee member Dorothy Stiefel of Corpus Christi has written a booklet entitled "The Madness of Usher's -- Coping With Vision and Hearing Loss." Stiefel is founder and current executive director of the Texas Association of Retinitis Pigmentosa (TARP). Copies of the booklet are available from \$7.50 plus a \$2.00 handling/postage fee. For more information, write to The Business of Living Publications, P.O. Box 8388, Corpus Christi, TX 78468-0388.
- The Braille Institute is producing five, 25-minute videos on various aspects of blindness and visual impairments, including travel techniques, employment issues, transition topics, and independent living. The Insight Series will be distributed nationally through rent-free sections in major video outlets. For more information, contact the Braille Institute, 741 N. Vermont Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90029-3594.
- The Lighthouse of Houston has established a Technology Training Unit where clients are tested and evaluated on various adaptive aids. The personalized evaluation is performed using any combination of aids including CCTV's, large print computer software, and speech synthesizers. For more information, contact the Lighthouse at 713-284-8461.
- The American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) has published a new book that describes the audiodescription service. "A Picture is Worth A Thousand Words for Blind and Visually Impaired Persons Too!" provides a historical overview of the movement for audiodescription, tells who is providing the service, lists television stations, museums and theaters that make the service available, and suggests ways to advocate for the service. Audiodescription is the verbal description of all the key visual aspects of a production, including sets, scene changes, actions, body

language, and costumes during lapses in regular dialogue to enhance understanding. For more information, contact AFB, 15 W. 16th St., New York, NY 10011.

- Recording for the Blind (RFB) and Computerized Books for the Blind (CBFB) have merged their operations. RFB is the only national, non-profit organization that provides free taped educational books, library services, and other educational resources to persons who cannot read standard print. Audio books on cassette are provided free on loan for up to one year. For more information, contact the RFB at 1-800-221-4792.
- The Alliance of and for Visually Impaired Texans (AVIT) is a new consumer organization. The purpose of the group is to provide representation and advocacy on issues affecting the field of blindness and the lives of persons who are blind and visually impaired. More than 15 organizations were represented at the initial meeting of the Alliance in February.
- The Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind has started two new programs that will help clients seek, compete for, obtain, and keep competitive employment. The Employment Readiness Training (ERT) and Personal/Social Adjustment Training (PSA) programs are designed to help persons who are blind or visually impaired to enhance their independence through competitive employment. For more information, contact Kerry Goodwin at (214) 821-2375.

**TOLL-FREE
TELEPHONE
NUMBER
1-800-252-5204**

NOTES OF APPRECIATION

"I am pleased to know that people who are blind can depend on the Texas Commission for the Blind. Furthermore, I am also thankful for employees such as KEN MICHOLS. I do not ever think that there are words that could describe all the ways in which KEN has helped me. In all the times that I spoke with KEN on the telephone, for example, he has been very patient, very encouraging, and always glad to be of service to me. Because of your aid, I am able today to write this letter showing my appreciation."

Excerpts from a letter to Executive Director PAT WESTBROOK from a client. KEN MICHOLS is a VR counselor in Houston.

"A note of thanks for everything that was done for me while I was at Criss Cole. Your facility is priceless and the staff with all its training and skills can make such a difference in a person's life. Thank you for making the difference in mine."

Comments from a client who received training at the Commission's Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center in Austin.

"I have lost most of my eyesight and was

unable to do anything until the Texas Commission for the Blind started helping me. I live alone. They marked my appliances and telephone, gave me a large print cookbook and telephone index book, needle threaders, a skillet safety holder, a talking calculator, and a closed circuit television. All of this has made life worth living. The Commission for the Blind has been super.

Comments from a client receiving services through the agency's Independent Living Rehabilitation program.

"Thanks to you and the local Texas Commission for the Blind staff. I was so lucky to be placed in my present position at Fort Bliss, Texas, and am enjoying it very much. My self-esteem and self-worth have been boosted considerably and I feel so good about it that I want to wish this same opportunity to all the many handicapped persons like myself. Rest assured that I will do my very best at this job and more to set a good example for others as I continue thanking God, you, and all the Commission staff one more time."

Excerpts from a client's letter to Executive Director PAT WESTBROOK.

BROCHURE OFFERS VALUABLE TIPS

"Tips on How To Assist A Guest Who Is Blind or Visually Impaired," a brochure prepared under the guidance of the Commission's Consumer Advisory Committee, is now being distributed to hotels and motels throughout the state as a part of the Commission's public information and education efforts. The brochure offers answers to commonly asked questions and offers tips that will help hotels and motels to better serve their guests who are visually impaired.

"Access to public accommodations is an extremely timely topic given the passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act," says Pat Westbrook, Commission Executive Director, "and our Consumer Advisory Committee's work on this project will positively impact on this issue."

REPORT



TEXAS COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND
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