

Report

State Commission For The Blind



Planning Group Examines the Needs of Older Blind Texans

Following through on its commitment to work toward enhancing the service delivery system in Texas for the older blind population, the State Commission for the Blind hosted a conference of state leaders in Wichita Falls in September. Conference participants included administrative staff of the Commission, heads and rehabilitation staff of Lighthouses for the Blind across the state, Chris Kyker, director of the Texas Department on Aging, Judy Scott, regional consultant with the American Foundation for the Blind, and representatives from the Texas Department of Human Resources, and the Texas Lions Camp in Kerrville.

The meeting was led by John C. Wilson. Stating that the meeting was simply a beginning, Wilson pledged that the Commission would do everything in its power to continue the enthusiasm that was so obvious during the conference. "All elderly Texans should be entitled to live with dignity, as free from dependence as they desire. We all need to share in bringing together the network of resources, training, and expertise that will assist our older citizens who are dropping out of social and productive lifestyles because of being blind or visually disabled," Wilson said.

Statistics show that there are more than 21,000 older blind individuals in Texas today with legal

blindness, and the number continues to grow with the increasing population of the state. The group began outlining the current resources and services on a demographic basis and will study the service gaps. The Commission will complete the study in time to present a program to the Texas Legislature in the next session that will benefit this target population.

Chris Kyker, speaking to the group about the services of the Texas Department on Aging and the Area Agencies on Aging, promised cooperation in the identification of needs and expressed the availability of her agency to assist in encouraging a system that will assure the full participation of blind elderly people in the activities around the state. Various Lighthouse leaders also expressed their willingness to study the expansion of activities within their centers for the specific needs of older citizens with visual disabilities.

Expressing his appreciation to the group at the close of the conference, Wilson stated that he was optimistic that this cooperative effort between state agencies and cooperating nonprofit organizations will result in positive steps toward keeping the elderly blind population in the mainstream of life and bringing back some of those who need assistance in dealing with their visual loss. Tentative

plans for the formation of a planning committee to further explore the ideas discussed during the conference and develop a specific proposal toward the accomplishment of a truly comprehensive service network for older blind Texans were discussed at the conclusion of the conference.

Board Meets

The State Commission for the Blind's board met in Austin on July 12, 1983 to act on routine matters. The board heard the quarterly report of executive director John C. Wilson and acted on routine matters such as approval of capital purchases. Wilson was appointed as the board's designee to the Disabilities Advisory Council of the Texas Health and Human Services Coordinating Council created by S.B. 711 during the past legislative session. The next board meeting will be held in October in Abilene at which time the Commission will present the annual "Employer of the Year" awards to employers who have offered exemplary opportunities to blind and visually disabled Texans.

Members of the Commission include William C. Conner, chairman, Fort Worth; Mrs. John L. (Susan) Fischer, Jr., Dallas; John W. Longley, Stamford; Mrs. Thomas W. (Ann) Masterson, Houston; Walter Musler, San Antonio; Mrs. John (Paula) Schuhmacher, Houston; Don L. Steelman, Marshall; and John M. Turner, Dallas.

Welcome to the first edition of *Report*. We have developed this newsletter to keep you informed on the activities of the State Commission for the Blind, as well as many events affecting the general field of blindness and visual disability.

For those of you who are reading about us for the first time, the State Commission for the Blind is the state agency in Texas with the primary responsibility for providing services to visually disabled persons except welfare services and services for children already provided by regularly established educational agencies and state authorities. The rehabilitation programs of the agency fall basically into three categories: vocational rehabilitation, nonvocational rehabilitation, and services to children.

What do these terms mean? Vocational rehabilitation services are those that benefit adult blind persons in terms of employability, and are funded by state and federal appropriations. Nonvocational rehabilitation services are those provided to blind or visually disabled persons who are not entering the job market and which benefit them in terms of living independently within their communities. Services to children include prevention of blindness, coordination services, and family counseling on blindness. Nonvocational services and services to children are funded solely by state appropriations.

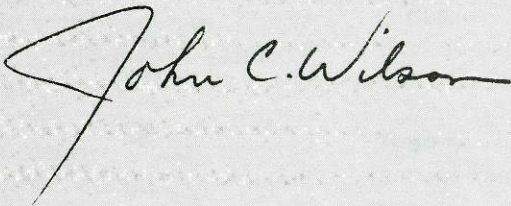
Since becoming executive director in December, my visits across the state have confirmed to me that the accomplishments of the Commission are directly related to the superb efforts of each staff member and their commitment to the mandates of the Legislature and the policies established by the agency's governing board, and although our Texas Commission has had one of the best records in the nation for decades, we are still working hard to improve our services. Initiatives taken during the last biennium in our administrative and service delivery systems gained state and national recognition for their effectiveness and practicality.

We also look forward to the future. With the increased diversity of the job market for blind and visually disabled Texans and new advancements in rehabilitation engineering, have come new challenges for the Commission and its vocational rehabilitation programs. We are entering what may become the most exciting decade of the century in terms of employment opportunities. Revolutionary advances in the medical field give added promise to new and more successful treatments for progressive eye disorders, and the increased support by the Texas Legislature for the Commission's Visually Handicapped Children's Program has meant that more children can receive intervention services in an attempt to prevent blindness and conserve eyesight. We have also taken a renewed position on increasing services to older blind members of our state, and we are meeting with blind individuals and consumer organizations throughout the state to receive, evaluate, and act upon their concerns.

This is an exciting time in the Commission's 52-year history. It is also an appropriate time for this publication. I would like to invite you to share this newsletter with friends and associates. Write us; share with our Public Information Office your thoughts and articles; join with us in reaching out to other interested readers. . . .

We look forward to your comments.

John C. Wilson
Executive Director



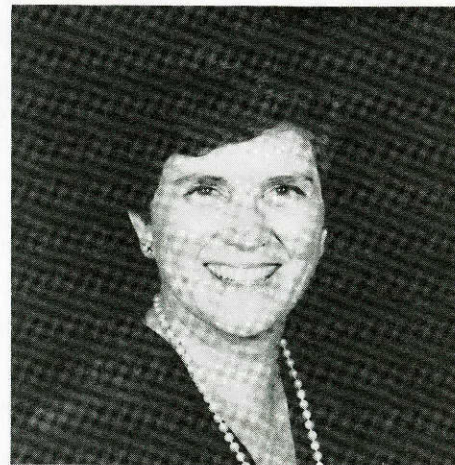
Masterson Appointed

Governor Mark White has appointed two persons to the State Commission for the Blind. In early July, Governor White appointed Mrs. Thomas W. (Ann) Masterson of Houston to a six-year term on the nine-member Commission. The selection of Don L. Steelman of Marshall was announced in August.

Masterson replaces Frank Bogus of Harlingen whose term expired. She attended her first board meeting July 12 in Austin. She has been involved in volunteerism for more than 25 years with the Houston Lighthouse for the Blind, and she also serves as a volunteer driver for elderly blind Houstonians through the Garden Club for the Blind.

An active member with the Delta Gamma Sorority, Masterson maintains a busy schedule centered around projects involving blind Houstonians. Asked for her reactions on being appointed to the Commission, she responded: "I am interested in the needs of individuals and what can be done to help them. I am deeply interested in services to blind children and elderly persons and I look forward to serving on the Commission and learning more about its work."

Editor's Note: A biographical sketch and accompanying photograph on Commission member Steelman were not available at press time. Both will appear in the next issue of this newsletter.



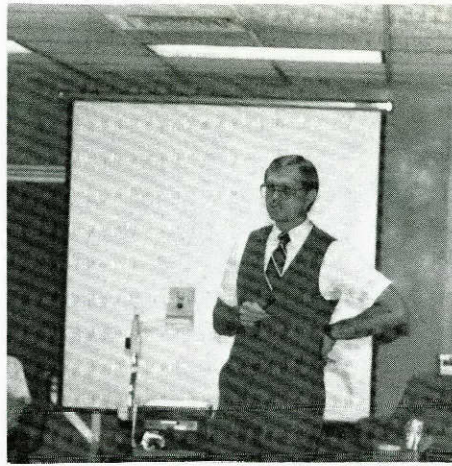
New Commission member Mrs. Thomas W. (Ann) Masterson of Houston.

Marketing Managers

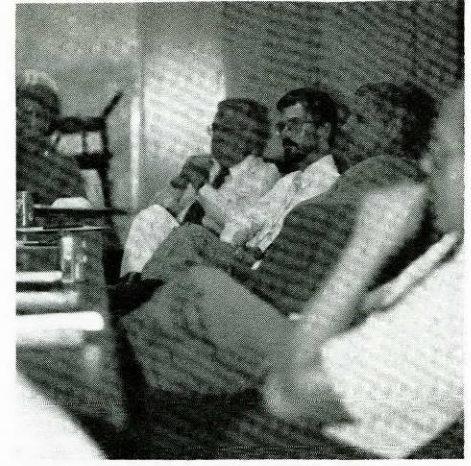
At their last meeting in July, the Commission's ten regional supervisors reviewed an '82-'83 performance report compiled by the agency's Audit/Evaluation Unit and discussed the Management-By-Objectives system. For many, the meeting featured a discussion of a rather challenging concept: the role of the regional supervisor as a "marketing manager." Terry Murphy, director of the Commission's Field Services Division, explains that while most of the regional supervisors are familiar with the basic functions of marketing (including advertising, public relations, market analysis, and packaging) this is a relatively new approach for them in their roles.

During a discussion of a marketing approach to employment assistance efforts with blind clients, Murphy noted that "with a carefully and thoroughly developed marketing strategy, a region of the Commission's operations should experience more blind people being more appropriately trained for the available employment opportunities in the area." "By having more skills," Murphy notes, "clients will be going to work at jobs that pay substantially more than our overall current efforts have achieved." During the meeting supervisors had an opportunity to examine some of the strategies available to them as marketing managers, including job fairs, employer seminars, assigned accounts with certain companies or employers, account building, employer advisory councils, use of the media for public information purposes, and "team" marketing meetings.

To a field such as vocational rehabilitation that has in the past relied on predominantly social service tenets, the use of business tools such as those offered through an aggressive marketing approach will be more effective. "Many of our supervisors are already doing many of the things prescribed through a marketing approach."



Terry Murphy, director of Vocational Rehabilitation Field Services, leads a discussion on marketing approaches to the Commission's employment assistance efforts as one of the participants at the meeting, Glenn Hall, regional supervisor in Houston, listens to the presentation.



Regional supervisors Ann Barron, Dan Daughtry, Charles Sherman, and Arnoldo Vera (left to right) were some of the participants at the July meeting in Austin.

Weldon Named to Committee

Kathy Weldon, rehabilitation teacher at the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center in Austin, has been appointed to the Governor's Committee for Disabled Persons. The Committee, previously known as the Governor's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, was created via an executive order signed by Governor Mark White on July 8, 1983. The new chairman is Bobby Simpson. The 16-member body includes at least eight disabled members and was created to increase public awareness of the abilities and special needs of disabled Texans. Along with the Com-

missioner of the Texas Rehabilitation Commission and the chairman of the Texas Employment Commission, John C. Wilson, executive director of the State Commission for the Blind, serves as an ex officio member of the Committee. One of the functions of the group will be the continued coordination between local, state, and federal agencies and emphasis on encouraging employer acceptance and job placement for disabled citizens. The Committee will also advise the Governor's office regularly on issues involving disabled persons.

Toll-Free Number Changed

Due to an incorrect telephone listing, the State Commission for the Blind has changed its toll-free WATS line number. Effective September 27, 1983, the new number is **1-800-252-5204**. "We anticipate some minor inconveniences as a result of this change," notes executive director John C. Wilson, "but we expect that the service will continue to be used extensively by citizens of our state."

The State Commission for the Blind offers a toll-free WATS line

to give blind, visually disabled, and interested persons an additional opportunity to access the Commission and its services. The line is operational Monday-Friday, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. It is staffed by a Commission employee who is responsible for relaying requests or concerns from callers to appropriate agency personnel for necessary action. In addition, this staff member files a monthly report, outlining each call received during the previous month, with Wilson.

Federal Funding

H.R. 3520, the House Rehabilitation Extension Bill that would extend the Rehabilitation Act through 1988, authorizes an increase in the basic state grant entitlement program for the next five years at a rate sufficient to restore the FY 1979 purchasing power of the program by 1987. These monies would be authorized for Section 110 Basic Vocational Rehabilitation Grants to the States. As of late September, the status of Congressional action on this matter was unpredictable.

On September 21, 1983, the full House Appropriations Committee "marked up" its version of a continuing appropriations resolution for those departments within the federal government which do not yet have appropriations acts for fiscal year 1984. Included in these departments is the Department of Education. According to executive director John C. Wilson, who participated in the markup proceedings earlier this year, the Section 110 monies are allocated to the states through the Rehabilitation Services Administration office of the Department of Education. "The State Commission for the Blind receives its federal monies based on a formula that incorporates demographic data such as population of the state and the average income of its residents. Currently, the Commission receives 20% of the federal allocation to Texas and the Texas Rehabilitation Commission receives 80%."

Under the House Appropriations Committee's continuing resolution measure, Wilson notes, state grants would be funded at the \$943.9 million level. The proposed resolution would expire on November 15, 1983, some 45 days into the new fiscal year. "The Commission continues to monitor the funding picture in Washington closely," says Wilson, adding that there has been "no opposition to the extension of the Rehabilitation Act in Congress and for the meantime, the best we can do is follow the proceedings throughout their development."

A Look at Sunset

sun set /,set/n 1.: the apparent descent of the sun below the horizon; also : the accompanying atmospheric effects 2. the time when the upper limb of the sun disappears below the sensible horizon as a result of the diurnal rotation of the earth 3. a period of decline; esp : old age

For many employees of the State Commission for the Blind the word "sunset" has come to mean much more than the "apparent descent of the sun below the horizon. When discussed in the context of the Sunset Commission the term refers to the lifespan of an organization or a state agency such as the Commission for the Blind.

The Sunset Commission was established by statute in 1977 to evaluate the need for state agencies. Every state agency is given a lifespan prior to the time in which it is to be reviewed by the Sunset Commission. Unless recreated by the Texas Legislature, the agency under review is "sunsetting" out of existence. The primary responsibilities of the Commission are to review scheduled agencies; recommend to the Legislature the abolition, continuation, consolidation, or reorganization of the agencies, as well as appropriation levels; develop draft legislation necessary to carry out its recommendations; and review the implementation of Commission recommendations made to the Legislature in the previous legislative session.

The State Commission for the Blind is one of the 30 agencies being evaluated by the Sunset Commission at this time. The initial report submitted to the Commission by Executive Director John C. Wilson, entitled the "Administrator's General Statement," contained a brief outline of the agency's history, operations, and key issues. The second phase of the Self-Evaluation Report centered on information addressing the specific sunset evaluation criteria which relate to the agency as a whole and to each substantive program area.

"The complete Sunset process is exhaustive and will involve numerous members of the agency's staff," points out Wilson. He adds that the study provides a good opportunity for the Commission to examine its operations thoroughly and thus be in a better position to make needed changes or modifications in its operations.

Human Rights Commission

After September 1, 1983, it will be against state law for an employer, an employment agency, or a union to discriminate in employment or membership because of race, color, handicap, religion, sex, national origin, or age. House Bill 14, creating a Human Rights Commission, was signed into law by Governor Mark White in July. The six-member commission will take over from the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission the investigation of complaints of bias in hiring and promotion, including state and local government employees. Texas joins 34 other states with similar laws giving the state responsibility for policing job discrimination.

REPORT is an official quarterly publication of the State Commission for the Blind. It is available free of charge to any individual requesting to be placed on the mailing list. News articles should be forwarded to the Public Information Office, P.O. Box 12866, Austin, Tx. 78711 or call 512/475-3245.

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Employer Seminar Held in El Paso

Representatives from the El Paso Electric Company, the El Paso Natural Gas Company, Levi Strauss, Rockwell International, Tony Lama Boots, the Texas Department of Human Resources, Fort Bliss Civilian Personnel Office, Mountain Pass Canning, Farmer's Dairies, and several other companies attended an employer seminar recently held in El Paso by the Commission. El Paso Regional Supervisor Franklin Johnson joined Career Development Unit members Ron Mansolo and Mike Nolan in addressing the employment assistance efforts of the Commission and discussing some of the technological aids and appliances currently available for blind and visually disabled persons. Participants had the opportunity to examine a diverse display of equipment and meet with El Paso District Office VR counselors Demetrio Vasquez, Alejandro Salazar, Gus Georges and Odessa VR counselor Miguel Balisnomo for the purpose of discussing employment opportunities with their companies. Reporters from television stations KTSM and KDBC attended the gathering and filed reports that featured interviews with Johnson and Mansolo.

"Employer seminars of this type have proven very successful in

identifying interested employers," says Mansolo. He adds that oftentimes employers are skeptical about what types of jobs blind people can perform but after hearing and learning more about the assistive aids and appliances that are available they are more receptive to the idea. Following the seminar Mansolo, Nolan, Johnson and the counselors met to discuss some of the comments made by participants and lay out plans for the next phase which involves a visit by a counselor to each of the organizations represented at the seminar. "Whether it be through commercially available aids, custom-designed technology, or modified standard systems, more and more diversity in job opportunities for blind people can be seen today," Mansolo says. As employers become more aware of the abilities of blind and visually disabled persons, the attitudinal barriers that often meant the difference between hiring or not hiring a blind person are being eliminated.

"Employer seminars, such as that held in El Paso, are learning experiences because you never know what inquiries you will get from employers who have never had the opportunity to see a blind person at work," Mansolo says.

Commission Active in NCSAB

State Commission for the Blind Executive Director John C. Wilson, secretary for the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind, (NCSAB) reports that the Commission has become increasingly involved in the national picture of services for blind and visually disabled persons. As an officer for NCSAB, Wilson works closely with other national leaders in developing and coordinating activities for the national organization.

NCSAB is a group of chief administrators of specialized public rehabilitation agencies for blind and visually disabled persons in the U.S. and Territories. In a formal position paper adopted by NCSAB at its April 1983 meeting, the group

took the position that "the most effective and comprehensive services available to blind individuals are those delivered by separate service agencies for the blind." One of the primary purposes of NCSAB is to offer a specialized forum for administrators of member agencies to study, deliberate, and act upon matters affecting rehabilitation agencies.

"For years the Commission has been recognized as a leader in the delivery of rehabilitation services and through our involvement in NCSAB we will insure that the highest standards service delivery will be maintained and expanded," Wilson says.

Legislative Report

According to Wilson, the Commission fared well in the 68th Legislative session, reporting that support for the Commission is evident by the 24% increase the agency will receive each year of the coming biennium. "As the Commission's representative on the Disabilities Advisory Council created by Senate Bill 711," he said, "I will be most concerned with the coordination of services by various agencies such as the Commission and will work to insure that services to blind and visually disabled Texans are continually represented and improved."

Of the 3,889 bills considered by the Legislature during its regular session, about 20% of the 1,128 which passed dealt with health and human services. Some of the measures followed closely by the Commission passed. Of particular interest to the Commission were the following measures:

S.B. 123 by Leedom, allowing an exemption from sales and use taxes for certain equipment used by visually disabled persons.

S.B. 329 by Edwards, authorizing the continuation of the Texas Committee on Purchases of Products and Services of Blind and Severely Disabled Persons.

S.B. 705 by Brooks, establishing a program to screen and treat certain young persons for special senses and communication disorders.

S.B. 711 by Brooks, establishing the Texas Health and Human Services Coordinating Council.

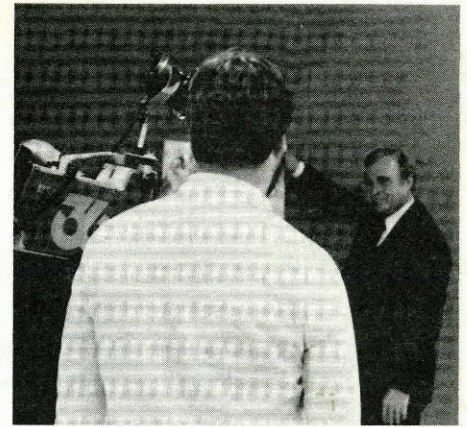
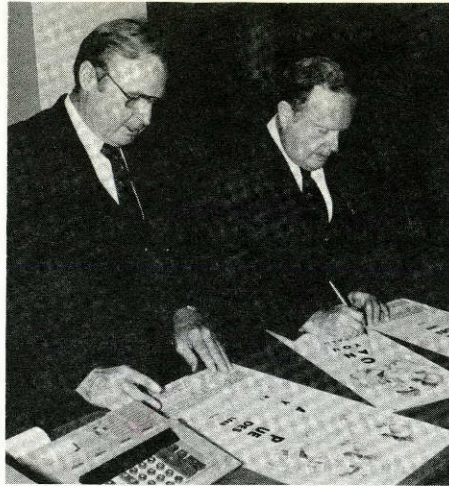
S.B. 816 by Brooks, relating to the disposition of interest earned on certain funds deposited in the treasury by the State Commission for the Blind.

S.B. 215 by Parker, creating the Texas Diabetes Council and calling for pilot programs to serve diabetics.

Commission Joins DPS in Public Service Effort

In cooperation with the Texas Department of Public Safety, the State Commission for the Blind has developed a set of posters reminding people of the importance of their vision and the need for regular eye examinations. The posters, prepared in English and Spanish, have been placed in every DPS drivers license office across the state.

Col. James B. Adams, director of the DPS, and John C. Wilson, executive director of the Commission, placed the first posters at the DPS North Austin Drivers License Office earlier this year and had the opportunity to explain the project to members of the media who were invited for the ceremonial event. "The purpose of this venture is to bring attention to the vital importance of regular eye examinations to a lifetime of good eyesight. The Commission is glad that the Department of Public Safety has joined us in this project and we look forward to successful results from our efforts," says Wilson. In addition to the posters placed at each location, the Commission makes available handouts listing some of the more common symptoms of loss of vision or eventual blindness.



Executive Director John C. Wilson (left) and Col. Jim Adams, director of the Texas Department of Public Safety, were on hand to place the first posters at the North Austin Drivers License Office. Pictured at right is Wilson as he places the first poster on the wall while reporters with a local television station film the proceedings for a news report.

NOTICE

Anyone wishing to receive future issues of the *Report* must so indicate in writing. This is one of the provisions contained in S.B. 179 of the 68th Legislature (Article V, Section 62 (c)). Specifically, the bill states that: "All units of state government . . . which expend appropriated State funds to publish periodicals . . . at no charge, shall insert annually in such periodicals a notice, in three consecutive issues, indicating that anyone desiring to continue to receive the publication must so indicate in writing. The agency shall furnish publications

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This article shall constitute the first of three consecutive notices as required by law. Once you comply with the request, please disregard future notices. This newsletter is available on tape upon request.

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