These are exciting times we live in. A computer on every desk—the Internet on your cell phone—electronic braille displays reducing the need for paper. Some of these recent innovations have helped blind people immeasurably. In order to recognize this, and encourage future innovations, National Braille Press has launched a $20,000 prize to an individual, or group of individuals, whose innovation has most benefited the field of tactile literacy for blind people.

The Louis Braille Touch of Genius Prize for Innovation will be granted for a new educational method, a new tactile literacy product, or a new technological advance. In any of these areas, the innovation must demonstrate some aspect of tactile literacy—that is, any product, method, or service that has the effect of increasing access to information through the sense of touch. Braille is one example of tactile literacy, but other examples might include tactile graphics, other tactile reading codes, and any other tactile innovation that promotes literacy.

The adjudication committee is replete with bright minds, representing several different fields. Dr. Tom Magnanti is the former dean of the Engineering School at MIT. Michael May is a businessman whose landmark journey from blindness into sight is described in *Crashing Through: A True Story of Risk, Adventure, and the Man Who Dared to See*. Dr. Edward Bell is the Director of Professional Development and Research Institute on Blindness at Louisiana Tech University. Frances Mary D’Andrea is the former director of the American Foundation for the Blind National Literacy Center. And the committee is chaired by National Braille Press trustee Paul Parravano, who has long been involved with the forward-thinking Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Watch our web site at www.nbp.org for an announcement of this year’s winner soon after this newsletter reaches you. The winner will be honored during our *Hands On!* gala on October 26, 2007.

_Angela Kessler_
How the Press Works

How Can I Help You?

Eliza Cooper, on a summer internship through Connecticut College, spent some time manning the phones in our customer service department.

Books about the Google search engine, the environment, and barbecuing were the ones most frequently ordered during my brief time on the phones in early July. The Press’s customers are intellectually curious, and they like to remain abreast of the latest developments in technology—and everything else. Being able to help them do so is rewarding.

Jason Griffiths, who has worked at the Press for over six years, is currently the only full-time customer service representative, which keeps him pretty busy. When he is not answering phones in the office on the second floor, he can often be found in the storage area on the third floor, gathering books to fill specific orders. Or—as was the case when I stepped in—he might be away altogether, representing the Press at a national convention.

As call after call came in, I was suddenly exposed to the variety of customers we serve. Some are sighted, some blind or partially sighted, and some deaf-blind. There were a number of calls from California, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, and Canada. Five calls that week were made using interpreters and relay operators, allowing me to talk to our deaf-blind customers.

One thing I particularly enjoyed was talking to the Harry Potter fans. Orders were pouring in, in anticipation of the mid-July release. It felt great to relay the news to callers that not only would they get the book on the same day as it was released in print, but they would pay the same price—with overnight shipping donated by Quebecor!

Being a braille reader myself, and having ordered from the Press in the past, I could recognize in customers’ voices that tone of appreciation for the reasonable prices we charge. Without your support, braille readers would be paying three or four times as much for books. Your support brings these books within reach.

The customer service department is the part of the Press our customers know best, and, if the calls I took that week are any indication, they are glad the Press is there. For my part, I enjoyed every minute of it.

-Eliza Cooper

Long Live Pottermania!

For many eager readers, the high point of the summer was the July 21 release of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows—the final book in the popular series. National Braille Press readers and employees shared in the excitement as well. Thanks to an agreement with Scholastic Inc., we were able to have braille copies ready for our readers at one minute after midnight, just like other retailers.

A release party at the Press allowed a group of braille-reading youngsters to get their hands on the book at the soonest possible moment. In the wait leading up to midnight, the “young wizards” decorated pointy hats and enjoyed yummy treats such as worms in green slime, and then showed off their knowledge of Harry’s world in a trivia contest. The final countdown was followed by a frantic ripping open of boxes. Several children sat down right on the floor to commence reading, until finally coaxed home by tired parents.

The importance of all the Harry Potter books in reviving literacy for children inspires us to present author J.K. Rowling with our 2007 Hands On! award at our gala on October 26, 2007.

Kristin Turgeon was one of the first braille readers to receive her copy of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows on July 21.
Braille Readers Benefit from Consumer Information in Braille

Paul Parravano has a new-found freedom since he was able to procure his cell phone manual in braille. A 55-year-old blind professional in Cambridge, Massachusetts, he enjoys staying technologically savvy so that he can remain efficient in the workplace.

“Cell phones have so many details and features,” Paul states, “that I need to be able to read the manual carefully on my own. Otherwise I depend on what a sighted person thinks is valuable for me to know.”

But having independent access to cell phone manuals is only a small part of independent living. Paul looks forward to the day when he can “chart my own course with my finances” by getting statements in braille every month as well as having access to talking ATMs. The Press is working to make that a reality for all braille readers. As a result of our recently adopted strategic plan, we are now actively courting more corporate clients who contract with us to produce material for blind consumers.

Our work for these corporate clients helps ensure that our braille presses run at capacity and that contract revenue remains a healthy part of National Braille Press’s operating budget. But most importantly, it helps blind consumers get the information they need in braille. Dave Bovan in Billings, Montana, who recently received his cell phone manual in braille thanks to a contractual partnership between Kyocera and National Braille Press, agrees that being able to refer back to the information “is most invaluable.”

- Tanya Holton

We receive a steady stream of letters and email telling us how our books and services have touched people’s lives. These thanks really belong to you, since it is only with your support that we are able to do this work. Letters may be edited for space considerations.

As far as reading braille is concerned, I love it. My slate and stylus is the equivalent to a pencil and paper. (I’m not good with the braille-writer). Yoh! Like I feel very strongly that braille should never become as they say, a “lost art.” What’s up with that!!

- Lucia, in New York

I saw your piece [about the braille production of Harry Potter] on this evening’s NBC news. I wish I could give more, but as Finance Director of [a food bank], I know that every bit helps. I could only think, as I watched the report, that we feed their stomachs, you feed their minds. Neither can make a whole person but together the possibilities are endless. Keep up the good work.

- Bob, in Ohio

We received our Harry Potter series on Saturday [July 21] —thrilling! ... Hannah’s sighted twin sister received the print book on Saturday and it was just great that they could start it at the same time.

- Carolyn, in Illinois

Thank you so much for sending the [ReadBooks!] braille bags... The family I work with actually has both mom and dad who are blind and their four-year-old daughter who is vision impaired and going blind. When I shared the bag with them they were ecstatic! Not only was the book a big hit, but so was the placemat and the magnetic alphabet. I just wanted to thank you personally for the items. The families we serve are lower income and must really budget what they spend their money on. This will be a good resource for them.

- Theresa, in Nebraska
In a race where sighted and blind compete on “equal footing,” this year’s winner was Gonzalo Moises Berestain Gutierrez, a blind athlete from Mexico. His time for the 5K was 17 minutes and 7 seconds.

There are well over 100 million web sites on the Internet. How can you find the one with the information you need?


The book offers something for everyone, “whether,” as the introduction says, “you’ve never used Google before, you’ve used it a little bit and you want to harness the power that the search engine clearly offers, or you’re a power user looking for that tiny nugget of extra information.” Chapter titles give quick reminders of functions such as “searching for synonyms: the tilde operator (~).”

*Google It!* is designed to be equally useful regardless of what specific access technology is hooked up to the computer—such as screen readers or braille displays. It even proved useful to several staff members who read with their eyes.

Part of the Press’s core mission is “to enable blind people to participate better in their work, family, and civic affairs through information.” Ready access to the wealth of information on the Internet is assumed in so much of our work, family, and civic activities today. *Google It!* shows blind people how to access this information.

*Google It!* is available on our web site (braille.com) for $12 in a variety of formats, including braille, PortaBook, and ASCII text. Its publication was made possible through grant funds from Comcast Foundation.

Seek and You Shall Find

New Book Helps Blind People Harness the Power of the World’s Most Popular Search Engine

Our Vision 5K Run and Walk was a great success. Nearly $300,000 was raised to support the blind and visually impaired community. A big thank-you to all who participated, by running, walking, or fundraising!
Comedian Jay Leno will host our Hands On! Books for Blind Children gala on Friday, October 26, 2007, at the InterContinental Boston. Working hard to make this event a success are our four co-chairs: Tom Sullivan, chairman and founder of Lumber Liquidators, Joe Campanelli, president and CEO of Sovereign Bank, Jim Roosevelt, president and CEO of Tufts Health Care, and Jonathan Kraft, president and COO of The Kraft Group. Help us raise a million laughs for literacy! For more information and to purchase tickets, please log on to our web site at www.braille.com.

With this level of commitment, it is no wonder that Bank of America has supported National Braille Press in so many ways—from premier sponsorship and volunteerism at the Vision 5K Run and Walk to support of our children’s braille literacy program through our Hands On! Books for Blind Children initiative. Bank of America also supports the access program at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, which allows greater accessibility to the arts by channeling funding to accommodate blind and visually impaired visitors to the museum.

Bank of America employee Gerry DeRoche—the latter two also serve as trustees on our Board. These individuals have championed this partnership to make a real difference in the lives of braille readers nationwide.

- Kimberley Ballard
The National Braille Press Board of Trustees is proud to establish the Bill Raeder Strategic Legacy Fund. This Fund will help “put the wind in the Press’s sails,” as Bill phrases it, by building the central infrastructure that is needed to implement bold new programmatic services emerging out of our ongoing strategic planning and central to our mission.

The trustees plan to honor Bill Raeder’s 32 years at the helm by raising funds in Bill’s name to strengthen our capabilities, help implement our strategic vision now and into the future, and jumpstart our overall strategic campaign. To encourage ongoing support, a local foundation will match all multi-year pledges, up to a total of $96,000. And a braille reader has pledged $50,000 to match all new support or increases in regular giving by braille readers.

We will announce the amount raised at Bill’s retirement party in the late fall. If you would like to make a gift to the Bill Raeder Strategic Legacy Fund, call Tanya Holton, vice president for development, at 617-266-6160 ext. 15, visit our web site at www.nbp.org, or simply use the enclosed envelope.

Q: When you walk out the doors for the last time, how will you feel and what will you look back on as your greatest mark?

A: How will I feel? Ask me the next day. What I hope will continue after I leave is the boldness to pursue enterprises that aren’t going to pay for themselves but are important to our mission of furthering literacy and reading for blind people. My hope is that the new leader not necessarily feel compelled to continue any specific activity, but continue this venturesome spirit.

Bill Raeder’s Legacy

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