Touch of Genius Prize for Innovation
2009 Prize Awarded to an Exciting Educational Method

Through support from the Gibney Family Foundation, the $20,000 Touch of Genius Prize for Innovation was developed in 2007 to inspire an innovator to continue the promotion of braille literacy for blind people worldwide. The 2009 application process continued to build on the success of previous years, with a strong showing from international applicants.

The recipient of the 2009 Touch of Genius Prize for Innovation is Jeffrey Killebrew for the System for Conceptualizing Spatial Concepts (SC)². This innovation is an exciting new teaching method for blind and visually impaired students to introduce spatial concepts such as linear math problems and measurement. The adjudication committee loved “the simple yet elegant nature of the design” and “the flexibility it has for teaching a variety of concepts” beyond math and science.

Killebrew developed (SC)² for his chemistry class at the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NMSBVI). It is comprised of a system of beveled and magnetized wooden blocks used in conjunction with a magnetic white board and 3x5 index cards which his students braille using a slate and stylus. Killebrew said, “I am looking forward to exploring ways to help mass produce (SC)², so that we can get this tool to as many blind students as possible.” The impact this system has had on his students’ ability to learn is already apparent; the day after he mailed the prototype with his application, the students asked, “How are we supposed to learn without it?”

NMSBVI student using (SC)² to arrange and calculate dimensional analysis equation
National Braille Press has a Big Night and Big Laughs at Hands On! gala

Thanks to all those that supported and attended, Hands On! raised nearly $550,000 to put more braille books and materials into the hands of blind children.

National Braille Press hosted the 5th annual Hands On! Books for Blind Children gala on Friday, October 16, at the Renaissance Boston Waterfront hotel. Co-Chairs Tom Sullivan of Lumber Liquidators, Richard Walsh of Walsh Brothers Inc, Peter Smyth of Greater Media Inc. and Peter Palandjian of Intercontinental Real Estate enjoyed the festivities hosted by special guest Howie Mandel. NBP was honored to give the Hands On! award to Rocco Fiorentino for his outstanding work advocating for braille education. Check out Rocco’s story at, musicbyrocco.com.

1. Board Chair, Paul Parravano, and President of NBP, Brian MacDonald, chat with Avana and Precious
2. Paul Parravano gives Hands On! award to Rocco Fiorentino
3. Howie Mandel entertains the crowd
4. Leslie Nordin speaks at gala

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Historic First Step Will Lead to Affordable Braille Displays

In a historic signing ceremony Saturday, November 7, 2009, National Braille Press (NBP) and China Braille Press (CBP) agreed to combine their expertise and resources to reverse the decline of braille literacy worldwide.

Through the implementation of cutting edge engineering and technology, NBP and CBP are committed to combining a team of researchers to accomplish three goals including the design, development and production of low cost braille displays. These devices allow blind people to take notes and download and manage data similar to a PDA, however the average cost for this product is around $6,000, making it unaffordable for most people.

Brian MacDonald, President of National Braille Press said, “This is a historic opportunity that both of our organizations have agreed to leverage our resources and technology to make the lowest cost refreshable braille display for world wide distribution.” In the United States, National Braille Press has partnered with the National Federation of the Blind and the American Printing House for the Blind to share funding, research and distribution of this product, to reach as many consumers as possible.

New Logo Brand and Website

In an effort to reflect the innovation and technology-based focus of National Braille Press, we have embarked on a major re-branding of our logo and website. A collaborative team took an in-depth look at NBP’s mission, constituents, history, and strategy for growth. “This process guided us to create a brand which reflects the traditional values of NBP while embracing technology for the future,” said President, Brian MacDonald. The logo was unveiled at our Hands On! Books for Blind Children Gala on October 16, and the website facelift will be launched in March 2010.

Reach into the Future to Help NBP

National Braille Press recently formed the Braille for Life Alliance, an honorary society to recognize individuals who have included National Braille Press in their estate plans. For more information, contact Jennifer Stewart, jstewart@nbp.org, or at (617)266-6160 x436, by April 30, 2010 to become a founding member.

Farewell to Tanya Holton

After nearly a decade as NBP’s remarkable Vice President of Development, Tanya Holton left the Press to continue doing good work at The Kenneth B. Schwartz Center, an affiliation of Massachusetts General Hospital. After Tanya’s mother passed away from breast cancer this past summer, Tanya, who had witnessed her struggles with the healthcare system, wanted to make a difference for other patients. “Though I’ll dearly miss my friends and colleagues at National Braille Press, I am excited about the professional opportunity, and inspired by the mission” she said of the Schwartz Center, which trains doctors and healthcare practitioners on how to care for cancer patients with compassion and dignity.

Thank you, Tanya, for all you did to further literacy for blind children and adults. You will truly be missed.
Adobe Systems, Incorporated

Known worldwide for their familiar software applications, Adobe is known much more personally to National Braille Press for its employees who volunteer and fundraise for us, and the Action Grants that have helped us to publish braille software manuals.

Adobe’s community involvement stems from core values that the company has embraced since it was founded in 1982; they are dedicated to helping make communities better and stronger.

National Braille Press discovered the generosity of Adobe’s employees through Nicole Vale, License Compliance Manager, when she ran the Vision 5K road race - a unique run and walk for blind and sighted participants. Nicole stepped up her commitment this year when she ran the race blindfolded for the first time, joining 50 other runners who ran with blindfolds to show that being blind doesn’t have to hold you back.

Adobe extended its support in 2008 by inviting National Braille Press to apply for an Action Grant to improve access to electronic information for people with disabilities. Adobe has since awarded two grants to support the production of our braille technology publications. Written by a blind author, these braille manuals provide blind users with a unique guide to common software programs.

Most recently, a team of Adobe employees came to NBP in October and put together a wealth of materials for our annual Hands On! gala, which saved our staff hours of work. Adobe’s involvement at National Braille Press enriches all our efforts to provide braille resources for blind children and adults.

National Braille Press is pleased to announce a new tactile set: Noah’s Ark.
NBP brings the story, the man, and his menagerie of animals to life in three ways: a print/braille book by five-time Caldecott Award-winner Jerry Pinkney that tells the story of Noah; twelve delightful tactiles by tactile artist Ann Cunningham; as well as a booklet called “Fun Facts About Noah’s Ark” that tells you things about turtles, penguins, giraffes, elephants, and dragonflies you never knew!

Want to view more new releases from National Braille Press? Visit us on the web at www.nbp.org