Bright Future

A publication of the Oklahoma Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired division, Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services

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Bright Future is also available in braille, on Oklahoma Telephone Reader, on Oklahoma Recorded Magazines, and on our website.

**Main entrance accessibility, safety upgrade complete**

 When guests are allowed to visit the OLBPH building again, they will come in through an improved main entrance. The upgrade was completed in December.

The project included lowering the front desk, installing doors on both ends of the front desk, and a desk-to-ceiling enclosure with a sliding glass window. The new, lower front desk meets Americans with Disabilities Act standards by accommodating wheelchair users. The added doors and enclosure give OLBPH staff more safety and control over visitors’ access to the rest of the building.

The building is still closed to the public as part of the State’s COVID-19 restrictions. Only staff members, select volunteers, and DRS clients who have made appointments are allowed in until further notice.

**Director’s column**

Nearly every workday, some of our staff members receive emails from the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS) that update us on various things happening in the organization. Several days ago, NLS sent out its annual call for Library of the Year nominations. Each year, the request is accompanied by the winning entries from the previous year. As most of you know, the latest winner of Regional Library of the Year was your very own Oklahoma Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.

Revisiting those documents filled me with pride in multiple ways. First, it is very flattering to know that hopeful NLS regional libraries in other states are learning about our many accomplishments in Oklahoma and following our entry as an example – “The Oklahoma Standard” of success. Second, it reminded me how fortunate we are to have a library that is doing things right and serving our patrons well. Of course, that wouldn’t be possible without our terrific, talented, dedicated staff who should never be taken for granted.

We learned about our 2019 honor in April 2020 and could make the news public in August. National recognition via the NLS virtual biennial conference came in December 2020. What an honor it was for me to follow the Librarian of Congress, Carla Hayden, and officially accept the award on behalf of Team Library.

There have been some really long months since April of last year. The pandemic has disrupted our lives in ways we didn’t expect a year ago and tragically ended way too many lives too soon. My heart goes out to all of you who have battled the disease and lost loved ones to it.

With the optimism of spring right around the corner, I hope you have a happier and healthier year in 2021. And good luck to the next NLS Regional Library of the Year. I hope its leaders are as proud of their library as I am of ours.

--Kevin Treese, Library Director

**OTR gets volunteer boost**

One silver lining of the awful pandemic is that more people with a volunteer spirit are finding Oklahoma Telephone Reader (OTR) as a safe way to help others. The service has seen an increase in volunteer participation in recent months. For example, OTR gained five new volunteer readers in December.

OTR is a free, on-demand, dial-up information service available to OLBPH patrons. It features local articles of interest, sales ads, and obituaries from *The Oklahoman*, *Tulsa World* and newspapers from other cities in Oklahoma. Most volunteers do their reading from the comfort and safety of their homes.

“We’ve lost some of our in-person volunteers because of COVID, so it’s great that we’ve gained some at-home readers for this program,” OTR and Studio Director Jill Streck said.

If you are interested in becoming an OTR volunteer, email olbph@okdrs.gov or call (405) 521-3514.

--Brian King, Editor

**Oklahoma Reads**

Showcasing fiction and nonfiction books in our collection that are about Oklahoma, its history and its people.

*Oklahoma Today* has been the state’s official magazine since 1956 and is published six times each year. Its mission is to showcase the state, from travel destinations and food to culture, history, and interesting Oklahomans. It is recorded at the Library for the Blind’s own studio, so you, too, can enjoy it! Let’s look at two separate issues from the past year.

The Jan/Feb 2020 issue of *Oklahoma Today* contains a special section highlighting the 25th Anniversary of the Oklahoma City Bombing. Five articles confront varying aspects of the terrorist attack: how Oklahoma City continues to come to grips with the bombing as a community, how survivors and witnesses have struggled and persevered with their experiences over the years, the bombing site itself as a hallowed ground, and the archival artifacts of that day.

The May/June 2020 issue of *Oklahoma Today* explores a 99-year-old chapter in Tulsa history: the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. On May 30, 1921, a white elevator operator and an African-American shoe shiner had some sort of encounter in downtown Tulsa. The police determined it was less than assault and the white elevator operator had no interest in pressing charges. Nonetheless, the next two days saw a white mob attack black residents and businesses in the Greenwood district of Tulsa. The massacre killed up to 300 people and destroyed 35 square blocks of Tulsa. Over 10,000 black Tulsans were left homeless.

The May/June 2020 issue contains articles that cover this grisly crime. One delves into the history of Tulsa’s Greenwood neighborhood, known as Black Wall Street. Others explore how black Oklahoma artists and poets reflect upon the massacre, as well as Greenwood’s 21st century re-emergence.

If you are interested in hearing *Oklahoma Today*, please contact us and ask for a librarian!

--Andrew Shockley, Librarian

**DB 52166 – *American Terrorist: Timothy McVeigh and the Oklahoma City Bombing* by Lou Michel and Dan Herbeck**

Two reporters tackle the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City by Timothy McVeigh on April 19, 1995. Through more than 300 prison interviews with McVeigh, the authors document his childhood, military career, and drifter lifestyle in this compelling, terrifying true story in order to understand his motives and personality.

**DB 78729 – *Now You See Me: How I Forgave the Unforgivable* by Kathy Sanders**

A grandmother reflects on her emotional struggle after her two grandsons were killed in the 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City. Sanders recounts the comfort she eventually found through faith, forgiveness, and an unlikely friendship with one of the bombers.

--Sammie Willis, Librarian

**AIM Center adapts to help students, teachers in pandemic**

Living with COVID has been a challenge for all walks of life. Never has that challenge been as great as in the halls of our schools across Oklahoma. Imagine the added trials if you are a blind or visually impaired student.

Here in the AIM Center we have had a school year like no other. Meeting the needs of our Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs) and blind/visually impaired students has been a test in perseverance. The need for technology has changed drastically from last year. Most school districts use Chromebooks in the classroom. **Chromebooks** are laptops/tablets and two-in-ones running on Google's Chrome operating system. For a blind or visually impaired student, the regular-sized screens are too small to read or completely inaccessible.

The AIM Center has used state and federal funds to purchase large-screen Chromebooks and JAWS or ZoomText to support other students. The challenge has been to keep up with the demand for these products as any purchase over $5,000 has to go out for bidding per state guidelines. Fortunately, we have Elaine Woodward in the Executive Division and Tommy Hay in Contracts and Purchasing who go to great lengths to assist us in this process.

In spite of the hurdles we have faced in the AIM Center, they are nothing compared to the daily, sometimes hourly, trials our TVIs and students encounter. We asked our TVIs and students about their experiences in the past year during a global pandemic:

“My Student is a 3rd grader in a rural school and I have struggled with him being ‘virtual’ and VI (visually impaired) as well. We have adapted with the parent doing many things as instructed. While it is far from ideal, I feel that he has made gains with an open line of communication between student, parent and myself. When the rest of our school was doing Remote Learning for 2 weeks, he was able to attend and we addressed some issues at a greater level.”

*Teacher, Bridge Creek*

“Thankfully, we have remained in school in Walters and my student has not been quarantined. I do know from the end of ‘19/20 school year that working with my 4th grader, who is learning braille, was a huge struggle, and it was difficult to get anything accomplished. Her father struggled with how to help, and they had no access to the internet. My 4th grade student said the following, ‘I am glad we are in school. My dad can't help me with braille. I don't like learning at home.’”

*Teacher, Walters*

“A definite POSITIVE for me during this interesting season: I love the parent involvement during virtual lessons with my students! They are engaged in learning braille as well as cane travel. We are raising the bar on our independent living skills at home, too!”

*Teacher, Jenks*

“As a TVI, trying to upgrade devices to larger screens and add a ZoomText download has been a trial! It has been a challenge to try and meet the technology needs of students when they are required to use small Chromebooks for all their assignments. I feel like some students have lost independence relying on paraprofessionals for help inputting answers because they cannot see the screens.”

*Teacher, Moore*

“I like the idea of using more technology, but it has slowed me down and caused more eye fatigue.”

*4th grader, Moore (Large print reader)*

“It's been more challenging and complicated using Chromebooks. It has caused me to have a lot more headaches looking at screens for so long.”

*8th grader, Moore (Large print reader)*

“I am trying to learn braille virtually, and it’s very frustrating that my teacher can’t be beside me to help me. My parents don’t know braille, but my mom is learning when she is not working.”

*3rd grader, Burns Flat*

“During COVID there has been an increase in need for large screen Chromebooks for Virtual and Distance Learning... and the AIM Center has stepped up to the plate to meet this need! This allows material/assignments from their 'regular' education instructors to be accessible and ease concerns of parents!”

*TVI, Western Oklahoma*

 “At first I had a regular Chromebook and had to put my forehead on the screen to see the words. My teacher got me a larger Chromebook from AIM, and now I can look at it like a normal kid. Plus my eyes don’t get tired as fast.”

*6th grader, Lone Grove*

“It was way more difficult at first. Trying to get all the teachers to understand I may need something presented in a different format so that I can access it. Now that we’ve gone this long we might as well finish the year out. I’ve already got my routines down.”

*7th Grader, Tulsa*

“I’ve missed seeing my TVI teacher and friends. I like that I got to spend more time with my Daddy, though. Learning braille at home with Zoom gave my parents a chance to learn with me.”

*2nd Grader, Tulsa*

“It’s been difficult knowing if any students have had any changes to their vision when I don’t get to be with them physically. I have to rely on the parents, and so far some have been diligent about letting me know of any changes. The other issue is dealing with the Chromebooks checked out by the district. They are NOT visually impaired friendly. There are a lot of features but not easy to use.”

*TVI, Tulsa*

\* \* \*

As we work to finish this school year we can only hope that the start to the ‘21/22 school year will look different and our students and teachers will only face the “normal” obstacles of public education. As for this year, we will carry on and recognize the extraordinary efforts of all of Oklahoma’s educators, but our Teachers of the Visually Impaired in particular! We appreciate you!

--Pepper Watson, AIM Center Director

**Volunteer Spotlight**

 How much are strawberries this week? And what kinds of soup are on sale? Patrons who use OLBPH’s Oklahoma Telephone Reader (OTR) service get answers to those questions and many more – as well as some inspiring self-help advice – from Debra Mendez, one of our cherished volunteers. Debra has been contributing her talents to OTR for five years. She currently reads the Buy for Less grocery ad and “Tips for Daily Living” each week.

 Debra is also a colleague; she works for our parent agency, the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) as a Rehabilitation of the Blind Specialist, based in the Weatherford office. “I provide assessment, training, and adaptive aids to people who have vocational cases in SBVI (Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired) as well as to individuals in the Older Blind program,” she explained.

 Debra’s undergraduate degree is in Business from Oklahoma Christian University. She started with DRS as a Rehabilitation Technician. “I took a tour of the Library and was so impressed by DRS and the Library that I decided to go back to school to become a Vision Rehabilitation Therapist.” Her graduate degree is from the University of Massachusetts Boston.

Debra lives in a rural area west of Clinton with her husband, Alex, as well as a parakeet, one dog, three barn cats, and a porcupine that lives in their field. They have a blended family of six children and 12 grandchildren. She has an interesting variety of hobbies, including playing viola in a string duet for 17 years and growing carnivorous plants, specifically Sarracenia and Nepenthes.

Debra is thankful that the way OTR is designed makes it mostly immune to the ongoing pandemic. “Fortunately, COVID has not affected my ability to record OTR articles because I can do them from home or the office any time of the day or night,” she said.

“My husband is a Respiratory Care Practitioner and has been working long hours due to COVID-19,” Debra explained. “His job has become extremely busy and very stressful. COVID has also affected how much time we can spend with our family and friends. It makes me realize how important OTR is to people who are having to spend more time at home and having less contact with their families and in public.”

When asked what she enjoys most about volunteering for OLBPH, Debra said, “I love thinking about the people who may be listening to OTR recordings… people like my clients or friends who are able to access information in an easy, convenient manner.”

We at OLBPH sincerely appreciate Debra and all the OTR volunteers for being so generous with their time while informing, entertaining, and inspiring our patrons. They inspire us, too!

--Brian King, Editor

**Book Corner**

**DB 81117 – *Buried in Bog; Scandal in Skibbereen; An Early Wake* by Sheila Connolly**

These three mysteries feature transplanted Bostonian Maura Donovan, who now lives in a small Irish village in County Cork where her grandmother was born. Her work in Sullivan's Pub is regularly interrupted by murders that need investigating.

**DB 95214 – *One Warm Winter* by Jamie Pope**

Wynter Bates was adopted as a child by a tech billionaire, but a scandal throws her parentage into question. To avoid the media, her bodyguard Cullen whisks her away to a secluded island, where they must pose as a couple.

**DB 95276 – *Colt Family, Books 1-4* by Don Bendell**

This cartridge contains the first four books in the Western series about Chief of Scouts Chris Colt and his family’s ranch. In *Coyote Run*, a mining company will do anything to take over the Colt’s ranch. Also includes *Warrior*, *Justis Colt*, and *Eagle*.

**DB 89746 – *From Here to Eternity: Traveling the World to Find the Good Death* by Caitlin Doughty**

Fascinated by our fear of death and dead bodies, mortician Caitlin Doughty embarks on a global expedition to discover how other cultures care for the dead. From Zoroastrian sky burials to wish-granting Bolivian skulls, she investigates the world’s funerary customs and expands our sense of what it means to treat the dead with dignity.

**DB 96754 – *The Long Call* by Ann Cleeves**

In this mystery, Detective Matthew Venn stands outside the North Devon church as his estranged father's funeral takes place. On the day Matthew left the strict evangelical community he grew up in, he lost his family too. But before he leaves again, he learns that a body has been found on the nearby beach.

**DB 95827 – *Somewhere in France* by Jennifer Robson**

It is 1914 and war is in the air, but so is romance. Lady Elizabeth Neville-Ashford wants a career, but her domineering mother forbids it. When war breaks out, Lilly defies her parents, eventually becoming an ambulance driver in France. There she reunites with her brother's best friend, surgeon Robert Fraser.

**DB 67337 – *Promises to Keep* by Joe Biden**

The 46th President of the United States recalls his Irish Catholic upbringing in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and Wilmington, Delaware and the tragic deaths of his first wife and daughter. Written while he was a U.S. Senator from Delaware, he highlights social and political issues that arose during his time in that office.

**DB 92608 – *Whiskey When We’re Dry* by John Larison**

1885. Orphaned seventeen-year-old Jessilyn Harney disguises herself as a boy and sets out to track down her outlaw brother and bring him home. Along the way, Jess finds herself employed by the very man seeking to hunt down her brother - dead or alive.

--Andrew Shockley, Librarian

**Blind pianist to give free virtual concert March 3**

The National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS), Library of Congress, will kick off its 90th anniversary celebration with a free virtual concert by jazz pianist Matthew Whitaker on Wednesday, March 3, at 7:00 p.m. (CST) — and you’re invited! Whitaker, who has been blind since birth, is an NLS patron who has garnered accolades across the jazz world. He won ASCAP Foundation Herb Alpert Young Jazz Composer Awards for 2019 and 2020 and has been featured on stages around the world and on TV shows including *Ellen* and NBC’s *Today*. In a story on the CBS newsmagazine *60 Minutes*, neuroscientists discussed how Whitaker’s brain is stimulated by music—so much so that his visual cortex lights up when he plays.

Like previous NLS concerts that featured José André in 2019 and Justin Kauflin in 2014, this event showcases the NLS Music Section’s work in providing patrons with direct access to the world’s largest collection of braille, audio, and large print music materials.

Whitaker’s concert will be broadcast on the Library of Congress YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/libraryofcongress). An interview with Whitaker will be posted there at 7:00 a.m. (CST) on March 3.

**The Back 40**

 The name of this column evokes visions of farm life, or at least that’s the intent. Both of my parents were born and raised on farms in Oklahoma. Both of their families were tenant farmers, not owning their own land. My Mom and Dad met at a “hog killing.” Those were community events, making more efficient use of the fire and kettle used in the process, the grouped manpower, and implements and tools necessary to the operation.

 My parents, members of the “Greatest Generation,” learned a lot in their growing up years on their respective farms. They learned a strong work ethic, enduring hardship, appreciation of what they had even if it wasn’t much, an understanding of life cycles, and of nature. They worked hard all their lives and did their best to pass those values along to us, my two sisters and me.

 Being a lower-middle-class family, our vacations were mostly trips to visit family members: cousins, aunts and uncles, etc. My Uncle Claude and Aunt Josephine were childless after their two children died very young. They loved children and we loved them and visited their farm a couple of times a year. Walking through the fields, driving the tractor with our uncle, helping milk the cows (I thought I was helping when, in fact, Uncle Claude was humoring me by letting me “help”), fishing in the ponds, playing in the granary, shooting Uncle Claude’s .22 rifle, and generally roaming their quarter-section being careful of rattlesnakes that lived there… all of that was heaven to a city boy and his sisters.

 So I told you all of that just to explain why I chose a farm term to name this column. That, and my former work space being in the back corner of the OLBPH. Farm and OLBPH both dearly loved.

--Jim Kettler, Contract Monitor

**Do you know someone who could use OLBPH?**

Think for a moment about the people you know – relatives, friends, neighbors, people in church and civic groups, and so on. There’s a good chance one or more of them needs a different way to enjoy books, magazines, and newspapers. They may have worsening low vision, eye diseases, or could be dealing with conditions that make holding traditional books difficult or even impossible.

Tens of thousands of Oklahomans are eligible for OLBPH’s free statewide audio books service, but they don’t know about us. That’s where you can help. Even with all our outreach efforts, a word-of-mouth referral from a satisfied patron or supporter is still one of the most powerful ways of raising awareness. Please encourage the person you thought of to contact OLBPH so he or she can enjoy reading again.

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