



## From Instruction to Machine Repair, the Council is Big on Braille

Braille was invented about 200 years ago, and it's impossible to overstate its impact on the lives of millions of people with vision loss over the years. So naturally, braille plays an important role in the Council's day-to-day work, in a couple different ways. We produce braille versions of some of our content and we offer braille instruction to clients.



Rachel Pavone using Duxbury software to create braille instruction materials.

Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist Rachel Pavone knows the value of learning braille.

"I was in elementary school when I started to learn braille," she says. When Rachel joined the Council staff in June of 2022, braille instruction was not among the services offered. Her arrival gave the Council the staff capacity to re-introduce it into the Vision Services mix.

Rachel now works with clients interested in learning braille mainly in the Council's on-site Vision Rehabilitation Classroom. But she is also able to do in-home and online instruction.

Rachel says no two learners are alike. "We fit the instruction to what the client wants to learn and how they plan to use braille," she says. Rachel emphasizes that learning braille can be extremely useful even to people who don't expect to become fluent enough to read an entire book. It can be a great tool for everyday tasks. She gives a few examples: "It's good to learn for reading signs and room numbers in buildings," Rachel says. "People use it to label items in their home, like medication labels or cans of soup. It's a way to identify what's what."

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In addition to teaching braille, the Council also makes a lot of it. We produce a braille version of our flagship Council Courier newsletter. We also provide braille materials for some of our regular events, like Gallery Night and Dining in the Dark. Rachel makes braille worksheets for her braille clients.



**The Council's Greg Schmidt learning to repair Perkins brailers.**

There are a variety of ways to create braille documents. For our newsletter, we use software connected to a large braille embosser that can make multiple copies. An individual may use a slate and a stylus to punch braille manually. Between those two options lies the Perkins brailier, a machine resembling a typewriter that has been around since the 1950s and is the most common type of mechanical brailier. Council staff members who are proficient in braille use Perkins machines regularly, and many individuals who are blind have them at home.

Like old manual typewriters, things can go wrong on a Perkins brailier. Many of the machines currently in use were manufactured in the 1950s and 1960s and therefore need attention from time to time, according to Greg Schmidt, Customer Care Specialist at the Council's Sharper Vision Store. Greg recently completed training as a Perkins brailier repair technician. Greg's foray into brailier repair sprang from conversations with veteran technician Joe Hodgson, who has been fixing the machines for 35 years.

"Every machine has its own story," says Joe, who has serviced countless brailiers for the Council as well as for Milwaukee Public Schools, the State of Wisconsin and many others. Joe repairs the machines at no cost to the owners in keeping with the policies of the organization that got him in the business to begin with, Telephone Pioneers of America.

Using the Perkins manufacturer's manual, "I just learned hands-on," says Joe. Joe's shop includes a "morgue" area where old machines that are beyond repair serve as parts donors for the machines he brings back to life. "When I get a machine, I can usually turn it around in two days," he says.

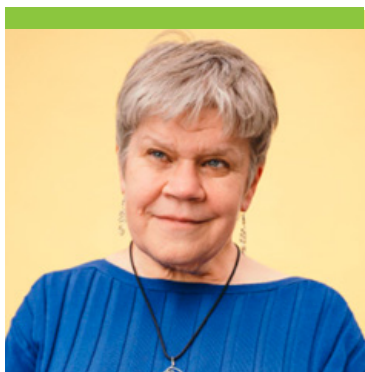
A brailier "looks a lot like a stenography machine," says Greg. However instead of a typewriter that punches the paper from the front, the six keys of a brailier

contact the paper from behind to produce the raised dots. With Greg's new skill set, the Council is better prepared to continue servicing brailers after Joe's eventual retirement.

Folks interested in learning braille or who have a Perkins brailier that needs attention can call the Council at **608-255-1166** or email us at **info@WCBlind.org**. ■

## Letter from Executive Director Denise Jess

### Anniversary Reflections on Trust-Based Relationships



This summer marked my seventh anniversary as Executive Director at the Council. Anniversaries give us a rich opportunity for reflection, and this year I'm reflecting on the value of trust-based relationships. It is both gratifying and exciting to see how the Council has strengthened and expanded our relationships, guided by our core values of inclusivity, integrity and uncompromising respect.

The Council has always been an important voice in the legislative advocacy realm in Wisconsin. In the past several years, we've stretched beyond a primary focus on the legislative environment to foster relationships with state agencies. These agencies are responsible for implementing state law and making policies that impact many aspects of our lives, including transportation, health care, vision rehabilitation services, employment, voting access, pedestrian safety and digital equity. It is critical that the Council be considered a knowledgeable, credible and valuable stakeholder and that we are at the table to influence decisions made by state agencies. If you are a reader of our monthly advocacy e-newsletter articles, you know the numerous ways we are partnering with and influencing state agencies to strive towards equity for those with vision loss.

We've built on our relationships with classic partners like eye care professionals, aging and disability resource networks, senior centers and vision loss support groups, while increasing the diversity of our collaborations across disability groups, community organizations, restaurant owners and academics to elevate our shared interests and educate each other about our unique perspectives.

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We broaden and strengthen our mission when we work in inclusive spaces. On a regular basis, we are contacted by museums, theaters, nature centers, engineers and college educators seeking guidance on how to create inclusive environments for their users. This is the ripple effect of our outreach, helping to build communities where people with vision loss can participate fully and feel welcomed.

As the population of people with vision loss grows and diversifies, it is vital that the Council keep pace and be a leader in service with these changing demographics. A source of pride for me is that the Council welcomes anyone along the spectrum of vision loss. An individual doesn't have to be "blind enough" to seek services. Maybe they have good visual acuity but significant light sensitivity, making outdoor tasks challenging or even limiting certain indoor ones. A consultation in the Sharper Vision Store or with a vision services professional can get them the tools and skills they need to function comfortably in these conditions. This individual deserves our support, just as the person who is experiencing rapid vision loss or who has had vision impairment throughout their life does.

Vision loss touches every racial, economic and social group, and our clients reflect this diversity, ranging from those experiencing homelessness and food insecurity to those who are economically well resourced. We know that eye disease and injury occur across race. We also know that in some cases, people of color are disproportionately impacted by vision loss, and that this is compounded by inequitable access to health care and other resources. It is vital that we continue our outreach efforts and relationship-building into racially diverse communities with integrity and authenticity. I'm regularly touched by people feeling safe to connect with us for valuable vision rehabilitation services.

My reflections regularly turn to the incredible relationships with talented and caring staff, dedicated board members, volunteers and donors who entrust us with their time and treasure so that we can focus our energies on the Council's mission to promote the dignity and empowerment of people living with vision loss in Wisconsin. I look forward to the innovative and thoughtful ways we'll continue together to deepen and broaden our relationships grounded in trust, inclusivity, respect and integrity. ■



# Sensory Gardens Add a Welcoming Touch to the Council Grounds



Master gardeners giving Council staff a tour of the gardens during the early phase of planting.

The original idea for the sensory gardens was hatched as a way to make our building more welcoming from the outside by creating gardens that are visually appealing and to draw visitors to their lovely aromas and textures. They are a tactile sensation. Pinch the leaves of basil and smell the fragrance it leaves on the fingers. Same with the outgrowths of

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*"One touch of nature makes the whole world kin."*  
–William Shakespeare

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Shakespeare could have been writing about the new sensory gardens planted this past Spring at the Council's building in Madison. Thanks to artful planning and planting by members of Rock Prairie Master Gardener Association, the gardens have delighted Council visitors and passersby all summer and early fall with an invitation to slow down, to touch, to smell and to see.



A master gardener taking a soil sample.



sage and columbine. The spicy scented, waxy pink flowers of the Korean Spice Viburnum are also a wonderful sensory experience.

There are shade-tolerant plants along the Livingston Street side of the building and sun-tolerant ones on the Williamson Street side. Tall, bursting planters now reside on either side of the doors at both entrances.



The plot on the Willy Street side of the building off the parking lot.



The narrow plot on the Livingston Street side of the building

The Council is grateful for grant funding from the Marquette Neighborhood Association and the Willy Street Co-op's Community Reinvestment Fund that covered the cost of plants, flowerpots, soil, mulch and signage for the gardens. ■

# 2023 Sharper Vision Store Featured Items

The Council's Sharper Vision Store is a one-stop shop for adaptive products and other useful items to improve your life. From games to personal care items to the latest helpful gadgets, you can find it all here. Try products in person during business hours or view hundreds of items online at **WCBlind.org/Store**. You can also order by phone at **800-783-5213**.

## Magnification

### **3X COIL Auto Touch Magnifier** **\$66.00**

This magnifier provides a larger field of view than most similarly powered products. Hold the blue area on the handle to activate the light and it will turn off once you have released it from your grip. **MLP800**



### **3X Mattingly Slide Magnifier** **\$20.00**

The 3X Mattingly pocket slide magnifier is great for keeping in your pocket or purse. It requires three AAA batteries, which are included. **MPF303**



### **3.5X Eschenbach Magno Magnifier** **\$55.00**

This magnifier is ideal for in-home uses such as looking up phone numbers, setting the thermostat and reading prescription bottles. It is compact in size, so you can take it to the grocery store, restaurants or shopping at the mall. **MLP834**



### **HumanWare Explore 5** **\$675.00**

This handheld video magnifier has a 5-inch screen and adjustable camera. Provides 2X-22X magnification and 18 enhancement modes for customization. **PCCTV11**





**Round Magnifier on a Lanyard. \$16.50**

Perfect for shopping, the black lanyard keeps it handy without the need to dig in a purse or bag. The magnifier has LED lighting and 3X magnification. **MX760**



**Lighting**

**4X Magnifying LED Floor Lamp \$115.00**

This helpful floor lamp offers a 5-inch round glass magnifier with 4X magnification and LED lighting to provide a broad, well-lit reading area. Four LED bulbs around the perimeter of the magnifier provide a 6,500K daylight-bright light source. **LF260**



**5X Magnifying Desk Lamp \$65.00**

This Magnifying Desk Lamp comes with high quality glass lens, color modes, adjustable swing arm, and 10 brightness levels. The sturdy base allows you to move the lamp and lens in nearly every direction. **LT165**



**Syrinx Floor Lamp \$85.00**

This standing lamp features a flexible gooseneck that can be bent into whatever position you need, making the lamp suitable for any room. Some of its features include dimmable lights, adjustable color control, two timer settings and a remote control. **LT175**





**Varilium 30W LED Desk Lamp (Black) \$220.00**

This black Varilium 30W LED Desk Lamp is the highest color rendering index (CRI) of any LED full spectrum lamp at over 90 CRI. The first and only circadian light with intensity controls and full color tunability. Color changing from 3000k to 5500k and all points in between. Use a higher kelvin setting during the day for alertness and adjust to a warm color in the evening. **LT160-B**



**DeepLite LED Desk Lamp with Flexible Gooseneck \$22.00**

This rechargeable lamp has a flexible gooseneck and offers three levels of brightness with the tap of a finger. Its compact portable design is great for almost every setting. **LT135**



**Games**

**Bicycle Large Print Playing Cards – Bridge Size \$7.00**

Big, bold print makes seeing and playing cards easy. Big, bold 1.25" high numbers, letters and suit symbols. Bridge cards (3.5" x 2.25") for easier handling. One standard deck in carry/storage box. Made in the USA. **RL404**



**Dominoes with Raised Dots \$16.50**

These large dominoes have a high-contrast black on white design, and the dots are raised for tactile identification. Each of the 28 dominoes measures 1 x 2 inches. **RT166**



### Low Vision Bingo Card

**\$3.00**

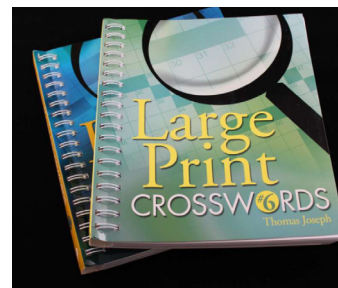
This Bingo card features bold numbers surrounded by thick lines, making them easy to find. **RL326**



### Large Print Crosswords

**\$17.00**

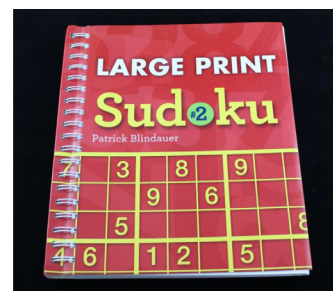
We offer volumes one through eight of this spiral bound puzzle book. This popular item features 125 large print puzzles with generously sized grids. Each puzzle has a high-contrast grid on one page with clues on the facing page. **BL440**



### Large Print Sudoku

**\$17.00**

This spiral-bound book provides 225 high contrast puzzles. Each 8 x 10-inch puzzle gives lots of space for solving. **BL442**



### Kitchen Aids

#### "Ove" Glove

**\$22.00**

The "Ove" Glove has a tough exterior layer that extends the time you can handle a hot object. Non-slip silicone grip. **HK185**



#### Palm Peeler

**\$12.50**

The Palm Peeler features an ergonomic shape that fits comfortably in your hand for more efficient vegetable peeling. Protect your fingers while you effortlessly peel fruits and veggies in seconds with this fun and simple design. **HK650**



### **SafeGrate Finger Guard**

**\$16.50**

This finger guard is great for chopping, grating and zesting and provides a strong hold for both hard and soft foods while protecting your fingers. Simply place your food between either end of the SafeGrate, squeeze to hold in place, then chop/grate/zest away! **HK1020**



### **Measuring Cups (White)**

**\$8.50**

This set of four white measuring cups has high contrast measurement markings for easy identification. Blue markings on the handle and bottom of the cup identify the volume. Standard measuring cups sizes in quarter, third, half and one cup. **HK433**



### **Liquid Level Indicator**

**\$14.00**

A sturdy design that easily determines when a container of liquid is filled to within approximately one inch of the top. Hang this popular unit over the lip of a container. When liquid reaches height, a buzzer will sound and the unit will vibrate. **HK500**





# State Budget Disappointments Do Not Detract from Ongoing Momentum



Governor Tony Evers signing the 2023-25 State Budget into law.

Governor Tony Evers signed the 2023-2025 biennial state budget in early July. This concluded a full year of drafting and legislative action on the massive document, during which the Council and our allies made a lot of calls, paid numerous visits and sent many emails to the policymakers who created the bill. Our efforts were not entirely successful, but there were still many benefits to the year's worth of work we put into our budget advocacy.

"We didn't get the dollar amounts we requested for our population's needs, but we're building momentum on our issues," says Executive Director Denise Jess. The latter point cannot be overemphasized. The Council takes a "long haul" approach to state funding. The momentum Denise mentions is the result of constant engagement and follow-up with state agencies and legislators. The results could be clearly seen in the form of many legislators experiencing "aha moments" in connecting the needs of people with disabilities with the intricacies of state funding and public policy.

This doesn't happen magically or quickly. It takes tireless advocacy work every biennium.

"We meet with state agencies a year in advance of the next state budget," says Denise. "Trying to promote what's important to us, what our populations' needs are." Before the Governor releases his version of the budget in the

December before a budget year, Denise meets with staff in the Governor's Office. "We generally highlight three primary, high-level priorities," she says.

"After the Governor's budget is released, we communicate through our advocacy action alerts and work in tandem with other organizations with similar missions," Denise says. "The focus at that point is the Joint Finance Committee." This part of the process requires engaging legislators on and off the committee. Denise says that these days, she's encountering more and more lawmakers who have a family member with a disability. This makes a difference.

"When we were meeting with several legislators on the Assembly and Senate Transportation Committees, some shared that they have family members who are nondrivers because of either age or disability," Denise says.

"One legislator cried," recalls Denise. "Another talked about her grandma and how small her world has become without a driver's license." Another asked Denise and other advocacy partners to come back to talk about the caregiver crisis because that legislator was coping with a relative in a long-term care facility.

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***These are momentum-building moments. The kind of conversations that are remembered the next budget cycle—or sooner.***

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These are momentum-building moments. The kind of conversations that are remembered the next budget cycle—or sooner, such as when the Council strategically picks an item that did not make it into the final budget and pitches it to lawmakers as a stand-alone bill for the coming legislative session.

An example of this is a proposal the Governor included in his proposed budget that would equalize access to hunting and fishing licenses by allowing a State ID rather than only a driver's license as required identification to register through the Department of Natural Resources' Go Wild system. The proposal was subsequently removed from the budget bill by the Joint Finance Committee.

It's all about educating legislators that these are real issues impacting real people. "It didn't result in as many things that we wanted to pass in the budget," says Denise, "but it's paving the path for gains in the long run." Denise says this attitude is a must-have in the advocacy business. "If you focus on what you don't get instead of on the ongoing process, you might throw up your hands and say 'Why are we doing this?'" Because the Council takes the longer view, we know exactly why. As Denise likes to say, "If you're not at the table, then you're on the menu." ■

# Start Something New This Fall by Giving Monthly



The words Monthly Giving on a background of green plants

Fall is harvest time, but it's also a great time for new beginnings, as schools re-open and activities move indoors.

It's also a great time to consider starting something new with your support for the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired. Monthly giving is a convenient and valuable way to start making gifts that will benefit people in Wisconsin who are living with vision loss.

Julie sent this note along with one of her gifts: "I have RP (retinitis pigmentosa) and would be lost without my white cane. Please use my gift to help someone else!" Many of our donors share the same sentiment. Maybe you do too.

through a bank account or a credit card. A monthly gift of \$25 adds up to \$300 by year's end—a meaningful amount when you know it's going to help support services like:

You can choose the amount of the gift and whether you would like to make it securely

- vision rehabilitation training to keep someone living safely in their own home.
- encouraging government agencies to ensure their materials are accessible.
- a presentation to teach people the importance of using the right type of light and contrasting colors.

A gift of any size is appreciated and will be put to very good use!

To begin making a monthly gift, or to make a one-time donation, please use the enclosed envelope or visit our website at **WCBlind.org**. Contact Lori at **(608)237-8114** or **lwerbeckes@wcblind.org** with any questions. ■



# Denise Receives CSW Civil Rights Defender Award

This fall, Community Shares of Wisconsin (CSW) honored Council Executive Director Denise Jess for her years of work promoting the rights and dignity of people living with vision loss.



At CSW's September 28 Community Change-Maker Awards event, Denise was presented with the Linda Sundberg Civil Rights Defender Award. The Linda Sundberg Award is given each year to an individual whose passion for civil rights has improved the lives of others.

Needless to say, the Council staff and Board of Directors are thrilled to see Denise recognized for her tireless efforts on behalf of Wisconsinites who are blind and visually impaired, and we couldn't agree more with CSW's selection. Congratulations, Denise! ■



## Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired

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The Council publishes weekly e-newsletters that include features, helpful tips, advocacy information, upcoming events and more. You can subscribe at **[WCBlind.org/newsletter-signup](https://www.wcblind.org/newsletter-signup)**.

Did you know that the Council Courier is also available in braille and audio formats? To request an alternative format or update your mailing address, call us at 608-255-1166.

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### Contact Us

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