

This publication was supported in whole or in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act as administered by the State of Tennessee.

Window to the World is published quarterly by the Tennessee Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Department of State. It is available on cassette, in braille, and on the web at www.tennessee.gov/TSLA/lbph. Please call the Library at (800) 342-3308 to request alternate formats.

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Department of State, Authorization No. 305303, 6,500 copies, August 2008. This public document was promulgated at a cost of \$.20 per copy.

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Window to the World

Spring/Summer, 2008 Vol. 12, Nos. 2/3

Ed Byrne, Editor

Newsletter of the Tennessee Library for the Blind & Physically Handicapped

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Gigantic, Combined "Free Offers" Spring & Summer Issue!!!

The headline above suggests that we, your *W2W* editor, have been watching too many infomercials on cable TV. We haven't, but we're obviously desperate for a story lead that will explain our combined Spring/Summer issue.

The truth, of course, is embarrassingly simple. We – and, yes, as editor, we are entitled to the editorial we – got behind, and we don't want to come out with a Spring issue in August. So we decided to divert our faithful readers from the delay by loading you up on information about free services and resources. The first is one that we are really proud of.

But First, a Word from Our Sponsor...

New Reader Advisor Assignments

We are sorry to report that Reader Advisor Sarah Kanervo resigned in June in order to return to graduate school. This fall she'll be studying film editing at the University of Miami by day and probably researching South Florida's vampire scene by night.

Amy Tangerstrom, who is replacing Sarah, has already started work as our first full-

time Reader Advisor for Children and Young Adults. So she will be taking charge of all our pre-school, elementary and high school students, a role in which she previously served as Children's Librarian for the Dickson County Public Library. Amy will also take over all our institutional patrons, including schools, hospitals, and nursing homes.

We'll tell you more about Amy and her plans for our young readers in our next issue. Meanwhile, our other reader advisors will divide up Sarah's eighteen-and-over patrons according to following plan. If you are over 18 and your last name begins with:

A... through **C...** or **U...** through **Z...**, your reader advisor is Ed Byrne (741-3916, Ed.Byrne@state.tn.us)

D... through **J...** or **Sm...** through **T...**, your reader advisor is Francine Sharpe (741-5836; Francine.Sharpe@state.tn.us)

K... through **Sl...**, your reader advisor is Annette Hadley (741-5838; Annette.Hadley@state.tn.us)

Address correction requested

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Free Matter for the Blind
and Handicapped

Free Databases

By Sue Maszaros,
TSLA Special Projects Coordinator

The Tennessee Electronic Library (TEL) offers the equivalent of a major university research library to all Tennessee's residents.

Users can peruse all 29 of TEL's online databases and information services over their home internet connections, or by visiting the nearest branch of their participating public library.

TEL began as an idea conceptualized by Tenn-Share, the library resource sharing consortia, and became a reality through the efforts of Tennessee library organizations as well as the many librarians and library users across the state. In 1999, TEL was officially created and, since that time, has been maintained and administered by the Tennessee State Library and Archives. The Tennessee Electronic Library can tell you more than you ever wanted to know about anything you ever wanted to know about.

TEL provides around-the-clock access to encyclopedias and dictionaries, Spanish-language journals and newspapers, business and financial information, health and wellness resources, and academic research journals on just about any subject.

TEL's "Southern Life" database, for example, offers five million full-text articles on the life, history and culture of the American South. If that's not enough of a choice for you, you can always sift through the ten million articles indexed in the "Military & Intelligence Database."

When you tire of marching through this

material, you can search for consolation among the 250 publications covered in the "Religion & Philosophy" database. In fact, you can sift through these and many other databases simultaneously using Gale's Infotrac Onfile search tool.

If you're uncertain about your next LBPH book request, TEL can help. Just pop into "What Do I Read Next?" This interactive service can suggest choices from a store of 134,000 recommended titles and 75,000 plot summaries. There's even a service, *Kids InfoBits*, designed for children as young as kindergarten age.

Why are we telling you about this service now? Well, we understand that, like a very bright but very young child, TEL is just now learning to talk. Gale, the unit of Cengage Learning which operates many of the services that comprise TEL, has announced plans to provide text-to-speech reading capabilities for its databases. By the time we get our next issue out, you may be able to have TEL read many of these millions of items aloud to you.

How do you get to TEL? You can access TEL databases from any public library branch in Tennessee or by going to your local public library website. If your local library branch isn't readily accessible or doesn't have a website, you can access the entire TEL storehouse through a home internet connection. Go to www.tntel.info for access to the TEL portal. In addition to the Gale databases, you will find EBSCO's Points of View Reference Center, the LearningExpress Library, and NewsBank's Tennessee Newspaper Collection.

You will need a username and password to access TEL from your home. You may call your local library for a password, or

The pilot project worked well, so NLS has opened the digital download project to patrons who purchase their own digital player. No one is required to purchase a digital player. It is an option that is available for people who want to invest in their own digital player to take advantage of downloading books now."

Mail Room News

We occasionally receive calls reporting that a talking book has arrived at a patron's home with defective or missing cassettes. TLBPH does inspect all the books mailed back to us. However, some defective cassettes do slip past us, and you may occasionally receive a damaged or incomplete book. Here are some suggested guidelines for you to follow when you receive a book that has a defective, missing or incorrect tape:

- If you receive a *defective* book, place a rubber band around the damaged cassette. Place it on top of the other cassettes in the mailing container, check the box marked "Defective Book" in the upper left hand corner of the return mailcard, and return the book.
- If you receive an *incomplete* book, place all the tapes and a note reading "Missing Tape(s)" in the mailing container, reverse the mailing label, check the box marked "Defective Book," and return the book.
- Please do **not** put any strings, ribbons or rubber bands on the outside of the mailing containers. This practice, which we once advised, causes problems for postal sorting equipment.
- Finally, whenever you receive any defective or incomplete book, contact your Reader Advisor right away to request a replacement copy.

Volunteers Wanted

The American Foundation for the Blind seeks blind professionals and students in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields to take part in an end user evaluation of best practices for describing STEM images (charts, diagrams, tables, flow charts, etc.) in digital talking books. These standards were developed by WGBH in Boston and its National Center on Accessible Media (NCAM). Participants will be reimbursed for their time. To learn more about the study and to register, visit <http://www.afb.org/Section.asp?DocumentID=3778>.

A Step in the Right Direction

The design for the new 2009 Louis Braille Bicentennial Silver Dollar was unveiled last month at the National Federation of the Blind's annual convention. According to U.S. Mint Director Ed Moy, the new silver dollar is the first coin ever minted in the history of our country to contain readable Braille characters.

The coin will go on sale in the spring of 2009, the bicentennial anniversary of Louis Braille's birth. Surcharges from the sale of the coin will be paid to the National Federation of the Blind to help fund Braille literacy initiatives.

Holiday Closure

- LBPH will be closed on Labor Day, Monday, September 1

document may be anything that can be faxed: a handwritten letter, a utility bill, a food label, or a magazine article. All a patron needs is access to a phone line and a fax machine.

Patrons fax documents to the *ReadThisToMe* toll-free fax number: 1-877-333-8848. (The fax must include a cover page with the patron's first name and a telephone number where you can be reached.) A *ReadThisToMe* volunteer will call back — usually within an hour — and read the document to the patron.

That's all there is to it. The service is available throughout the U.S. and Canada and is absolutely free (though donations are gladly accepted).

ReadThisToMe was created and is maintained by Savetz Publishing. Businesses that wish to help sponsor *ReadThisToMe* and volunteers willing to read documents can contact the organization at info@readthistome.org.

For an audio rendition of this information, call 1-877-333-8847. For more information call this number, or visit www.ReadThisToMe.org.

Free Online Support Groups

We recently learned about two support group sites that might be helpful to our patrons. The first, *MD Support*, bills its online website as "The Eyes of the Macular Degeneration Community." You can visit it at www.mdsupport.org.

In addition to its website, which incorporates more than 850 pages of content and 1600 links to other agencies and resources, MD Support also maintains a global network of local support groups. The website lists one such group in Tennessee, located

in the Hixson area outside Chattanooga. For more information please email Lisa at atlisa0536@comcast.net.

Serving another sector of the community is FamilyConnect, a website for parents of children with visual impairments. This site is a joint venture by the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) and the National Association of Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (NAPVI). One interesting feature of this site is that much of the content is arranged by age-level, so parents may seek information for specific age groups such as infants and toddlers, preschoolers, grade schoolers, or teenagers.

Patrons and family members may visit this site at www.FamilyConnect.org. Visitors also have the option of registering with the site so that they may receive email alerts on upcoming events in their localities, and on new materials in areas of specific interest.

Free Artists with Disabilities Exhibit

The Frist Center for the Visual Arts is hosting "The Artist's Voice: An Exhibition Featuring Tennessee Artists with Disabilities." The Exhibit is located in the Conte Community Arts Gallery at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in Nashville. Admission to this exhibition is free, and the show will continue through September 14, 2008.

The juried exhibition presents more than 50 paintings, prints, sculptures, digital art, and documentary films created by 54 Tennessee artists, each of whom lives with a disability. The artists and their works were selected by a juried panel from more than 400 submissions.

While this show is free, access to other galleries at the Frist will require the standard admission fee of \$8.50 (\$7.50 for seniors).

LBPH Patrons Recommend:

Free "Audible Movie" Downloads

Patron Roberta Cook of Loudon recommends the free audible movie downloads sponsored by Blind Mice Mart, an online distributor of products for the blind and physically handicapped.

This service allows registered Blind Mice Mart members to download and listen to described audio versions of full-length movies. One recent "Saturday Double Feature" allowed listeners to download described audio versions of *Titanic* and Disney's *Lady and the Tramp*.

We haven't actually tried this service ourselves, as the State of Tennessee takes a dim view of employees downloading movie files on the taxpayer's time. But you can check it out at www.blindmicemart.com. You can register as a member online and at no cost through this site.

And Last But Not Least....

Free Money!

Tax Stimulus Payments

Folks at the United Way of Metropolitan Nashville have asked our help in getting the word out. An estimated 123,000 Tennessee residents who are eligible for tax stimulus checks have not done the paperwork necessary to receive them. That is, they haven't filed income tax returns for 2007.

Here's the rub. You may not be required to file a tax return because your taxable income is below the required minimum. *But you must still file a return to receive the tax stimulus payment.*

Although April 15 is long gone, it is not too late to file tax returns for this purpose. The

IRS says it will continue to accept your returns until October 15. Here's the official IRS statement:

"People not otherwise required to file an income tax return should file Form 1040A with basic information to ensure they receive the economic stimulus payment. This information includes name; address; dependents, if any; amount of qualifying income (which must be \$3,000 or more); direct deposit information and signatures. Forms 1040A and instructions are available at www.irs.gov."

Individuals with questions may dial 2-1-1 to find organizations that can help with these returns. Local IRS offices also offer assistance. Call 1-800-829-1040 to get in touch with one.

Tax stimulus payments may be up to \$600 per taxpayer, plus \$300 for each eligible child under 17. So make sure to get a return in before the October 15 deadline.

Assistive Technology Grants

The Assistive Technology Fund (ATF) of the Association of Blind Citizens offers grants to eligible blind citizens to cover half the cost of assistive technology products such as adaptive devices or software.

Products covered by this program must retail from a minimum of \$200 up to a maximum of \$6,000. Persons eligible to apply for assistance must have a family income of less than \$50,000 and cash assets of less than \$20,000.

Applicants must be legally blind and residents of the United States to qualify for this program. Applications must be submitted by June 30th or December 31st for the two annual grant periods. Applicants will be notified if their request for a grant is approved.

We understand that the Association for Blind Citizens considers the Victor Stream digital talking book player, profiled in a recent *W2W* issue, to be an eligible assistive device. To find out more and obtain the online ATF application form, please visit http://www.blindcitizens.org/assistive_tech.htm.

Finally, A Not-Quite-Free-But-Certainly-Inexpensive Screen Reader

Last issue's "Tech-notices" item elicited this response from patron Hugh Spradlin of Jacksboro:

"I would like to inform you, and perhaps, you will inform others, of the reader I have used for over 15 years. This software is called *Speak* by Shadisoft. You may check it out at the following link: www.shadisoft.com/.

"*Speak* is not perfect but its accuracy in pronunciation is in the upper 90th percentile. The current cost of the full-feature version is \$29.95, which is a blessing for potential users. Shadisoft offers a free trial version and it is my hope that others will download it and give it a try. Most people using computers already know how to use the copy and paste features of Microsoft Windows. The user of *Speak* simply copies the item to be read -- such as an article, web content, or email -- and pastes it to the reader."

We thank Mr. Spradlin for alerting us and our patrons to this economical option.

Digital Delays

Colonel Sanders of Kentucky Fried Chicken fame once said: "I only buy the very finest chickens...I steal all the rest." We wanted to write an article explaining the recent schedule delays with our new digital media. But when we saw Margaret Harrison's column in *Louisiana Hotlines*, the newsletter

for the Louisiana LBPH, we decided it would be quicker and easier to steal hers. Here it is.

"We receive most of our library materials, such as the recorded cassettes, and all of the cassette players, from the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS), which is part of the Library of Congress.

"Although NLS is making progress towards the goal of digital books and digital players, advances have been slowed a bit by recent federal budget developments. NLS requested a budget increase of \$19.1 million dollars over four years, but in December 2007 Congress voted to change this to \$12.5 million dollars over the next six years. This may prolong the transition from cassette tapes to digital books.

"During 2008, the network libraries will continue to receive books on tape, and will begin to receive digital books. The digital players will not be ready to lend to our readers until some time in 2009.

"This library is waiting for NLS to release an adjusted timeline for the transition. By law, veterans will receive first preference in receiving digital players. If you are a veteran of the United States armed services, please be sure to tell your reader advisor.

"Recorded cassettes are not going away. They will be an important part of our library collection for a long time. In the future, readers may request a digital player and still keep their cassette player. Some patrons will not be interested in getting the new digital players and books. Most patrons will want to get both kinds of books.

"You may have heard that NLS ran a pilot project to test downloading digital books.

contact Sue Maszaros, Special Projects Coordinator for the Tennessee State Library and Archives, at (615) 532-4627 or sue.maszaros@state.tn.us.

Did we mention that TEL is free? It is, and these days free is hard to beat.

Free Talking Bibles

The first question that many new LBPH patrons ask is, "Can I get the Bible on tape?" Our answer is an unambiguous "Yes and No."

Yes, you can check out copies of both the Old and New Testaments on cassette. We can provide several versions of each, including the *King James Version*, the *New International Version*, *The Living Bible*, the *Jerusalem Bible*, and *My First Bible* for children. But, no, we cannot give you a copy to keep. We can only check our Bibles out for the standard six-week loan period. After six weeks, the patron is obliged to return them.

We do not have enough copies of our Bible tapes to send one out immediately to every patron who requests one. And, not all patrons do return our Bible tapes promptly, which means that other patrons have to wait even longer to get copies.

To be fair, we recognize that it's not easy to read the entire Old Testament in just six weeks. And many patrons want a copy that they can keep and read on a daily basis.

One good strategy for getting around this hurdle is to contact Audio Bibles for the Blind, a division of Florida-based Aurora Ministries. This ministry makes free audio copies of the Bible available to people with print disabilities. It offers English-language recordings of the *King James Version*, the *New King James Version*, and

the *International Children's Bible* on both cassette and CD/MP3 disc (CDs that will play on computers or on MP3-enabled CD/DVD players). Aurora also offers the *King James Version* on cassette in 66 languages besides English.

To receive your copy you must submit an application certifying your disability. You can download this application from the Audio Bibles for the Blind website, www.audiobiblesfortheblind.org. Or, you can ask your LBPH reader adviser to mail you one.

Completed, duly certified applications should be sent directly to Aurora Ministries at P. O. Box 621, Bradenton, Florida 34206. (Not to TLBPH.) If you have questions, you may contact Aurora directly at 941-748-4100, or AudioBibles@auroraminstries.org.

Note that Aurora recordings use standard two-track cassette technology. So they will play on regular commercial cassette players as well as on our C1 Standard players. They won't, however, play on our EZ player. (When you want to listen to these tapes on one of our C1 players, remember to set the Speed switch to "1 7/8" ips and leave the Side selector switch on "1-2.")

But Wait, There's More

Free Document Reading Service

Our thanks to our colleagues at the Texas LBPH for tipping us off to this service. *ReadThisToMe* is a free telephone reading service for blind and low-vision patrons, "powered by volunteers and Internet collaboration."

ReadThisToMe allows blind or visually-impaired patrons to have printed documents read to them over the telephone. The