

**From The Dallas Lighthouse News Desk**

**by Dallas Light House for the Blind**

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**Dallas Lighthouse**  
for the Blind  
focus on opportunity



**Employment Services**  
Offers a variety of high-quality employment services to the business community. We train and place highly-qualified, pre-screened employees for Customer Service, Telemarketing and other Call Center positions. The Dallas Lighthouse provides direct hire, contract placement and temporary placement personnel to meet a variety of needs. Training is also provided for employers on a number of topics, including Job Accommodations and Tax Incentives.



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## **Welcome to Our February Edition of Good News You Can Use from the Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind**

I'm Blake Lindsay, Manager of Communications. As a longtime presenter with total blindness since infancy, it is my passion to deliver monthly motivation, education, and entertainment dedicated to inspiring and supporting people with any level of visual impairment. For nearly two years, we have updated you on development of life improving assistive technology.

A portion of DLB's excellent educational tactic is to advance your proficiency with access to useful tools. The Dallas Lighthouse team believes that informing the public on current accomplishments from those with visual impairment is equally valuable.

DLB's unique newsletter will continue to share your success stories to help initiate additional employment and educational opportunities. Many of our readers have confirmed that these professional development stories frequently move them to achieve even more. Now that's what I call "good news."

We'll keep you up to date on Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind's expansions, and special activities to encourage your involvement, along with employment opportunities, and services for people with visual impairment within our enormous 11-county, 7,600 square mile North Texas territory.

Thank you for subscribing to Good News You Can Use. Please share this worthwhile information with your family and friends everywhere!

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**(Click on the links below in the table of contents, or use your screen reader commands to guide you to specific sections in this Newsletter.)**

**If you are having trouble navigating the links, please let me know and I will send you the word file as an attachment in an email.**

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## **Inspirational Story**

### **The Call Center: A Proven Business Model for the Blind and Visually Impaired**

by Blake Lindsay

As a person totally blind since infancy I was drawn to radio. During my teen years I commenced a radio career that spanned over two decades. However I quickly learned that the radio industry is notorious for its frequent change of personalities. I desired greater stability with full time employment in a career in

which I could make as much of a contribution as employees with sight.

Bank of America's call center was the first occupational opportunity outside of radio. It was an opportunity to prove that I could make a difference in the world of work. I had the unique opportunity to interview with their recruiters who attended a local job-finding convention. I took advantage of the moment and expressed my desire to work in Customer Service. I learned that no other people who were blind were employed in their call center. Fortunately they had an open mind and I convinced them to offer a job opportunity for me. A couple of weeks later, my day went from good to great when I received their confirmation call announcing my new employment. My tenure with the Customer Service profession transformed me into an improved communicator with the ability to be sensitive and responsive to the needs of our customers.

My employers also assisted me by providing all of the necessary assistive technology needed for the job. The talented trainers were patient which inspired me to give them 100% of my attention and devotion. This occupation continued for more than seven years. I felt very fulfilled with this work.

Now you can imagine how delighted I was when my current long-time employer, The Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind (DLB), acquired an established call center and marketing company in North Dallas called Bold Sales Solutions. This acquisition took place in March, 2017. It was intended to increase employment opportunities, with stability for people with visual

impairment. The DLB is naturally providing the necessary assistive technology needed in making the call center job feasible for people who are legally or totally blind.

Throughout the past 4 years, Brent Rotunno has been Associate Vice-President of Training and Development with Bold Sales Solutions. Brent shared, "I didn't quite know what to expect from people with visual impairment, but the experience blew my mind. I'm happy and proud with all that we have been able to accomplish. The opening class went only two days longer than usual. I took notes on what we agreed worked well or didn't work. With the help of the first class, we've been able to incorporate new techniques. Our team has been very successful, and constantly positive about things. They really make my day!" Brent Rotunno is delighted how supportive the simple solutions were, in this important project. He declared, "I quickly realized that merely recording our script in audio, and translating printed text into Braille, worked well. I'm looking forward to building upon this, and making this the best organization possible, helping everybody succeed and be a part of it."

Several top performance awards presented during the Bold Sales Solutions holiday party, were earned by people with visual impairment. The recipient for Best Attendance award, was Gale Levitan. She is legally blind. Gale said, "The team here at Bold has made my job interesting and I am learning new avenues within the inside sales world! They have always provided the necessary equipment/training needed in order to make my job more challenging. Every day is a new experience. We are one large family who cares about each other, and they are very

opened to hiring blind and visually impaired individuals, and treat them like they should be treated, despite their disabilities.”

Over the next two years, the Bold Sales Solutions team wants to add 60 people who are proficient with the necessary computer and verbal skills who are either legally or totally blind. This is a magnificent opportunity for people to earn decent wages, but even more important, to find fulfillment.

In the spirit of expansion, Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind purchased a new building in Richardson that has been perfect for housing the Call Center and will eventually include DLB’s administrative offices. The new facility is conveniently accessible for people blind or sighted by being on the DART bus and light rail line. “All of us have proven to the Bold Sales Solutions team, that just because we do not see well, we all have that drive to succeed within the workplace,” Gale stated.

If you have had call center experience, or know anyone else who is blind or visually impaired seeking similar duties, I encourage you to email a résumé to [HR@DallasLighthouse.org](mailto:HR@DallasLighthouse.org)

It’s essential that all applicants are competent computer users. The Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind team desires your success and fulfillment.

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**Microsoft's Seeing AI app for the blind now reads handwriting**

The updated iOS app is available in 35 countries.

Artificial intelligence took center stage at Microsoft's AI Summit in San Francisco. Aside from announcing AI smarts for a range of software from Bing to Office 365 the tech titan is also ramping up its Seeing AI app for iOS, which uses computer vision to audibly help people who are blind and visually impaired to see the world around them. According to Microsoft, it's nabbed 100,000 downloads since its launch in the US earlier this year, which convinced the tech titan to bring it to 35 countries in total, including the EU.

It's also getting a bunch of new features. The app now boasts more currency recognition, adding British pounds, US dollars, Canadian dollars, and Euros to its tally. Going beyond the color in a scene, it can also spot the color of specific objects, like clothes. Plus, it's no longer restricted to just short printed text, with handwriting recognition now part of its skill set. You can also customize the voice that it uses to speak its observations out loud, and set how fast it talks.

Finally, a musical light detector alerts you to the light in an environment with an audible tone -- Microsoft claims the tool will save users from having to touch a hot bulb or LED battery to check if it's on. Despite the big update, there's still no word on an Android launch.

Article Link:

<https://www.engadget.com/2017/12/14/microsoft-seeing-ai-app-update/>

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## **Survey to Support Mobility Needs of Individuals that are Blind or Visually Impaired**

Presented by Texas A&M Transportation Institute

If you would like to participate, the direct link is

[https://tti.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_9SjCLD24ESyin1H&Q\\_JFE=0](https://tti.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_9SjCLD24ESyin1H&Q_JFE=0)

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### **The Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind Helping to Keep Local Sidewalks Safer On FOX-4 News**

Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind applauds the bicycle rental company called Mobike. Recently, the DLB took advantage of a wonderful opportunity to openly support their proactive signage.

These signs will increase the public's awareness on avoiding potential danger to the blind community. This concern quickly became problematic in the Dallas area. According to Mobike, fears from people with visual impairment, brought this unintended obstacle to their attention, and they have taken action.

The link to the FOX-4 TV coverage.

[www.fox4news.com/.../dallas-bike-share-company-will-pick-up-knocked-over-bikes](http://www.fox4news.com/.../dallas-bike-share-company-will-pick-up-knocked-over-bikes)

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## **Google launches a disability support team**

Google recently announced the public launch of a disability customer support team. The support team is available to answer questions about using assistive technology with Google products and accessibility features and functionalities within Google products.

The support team can be reached Monday through Friday, 8am-5pm PST through email and only in English language.

Contact the team at

[disability-support-external@google.com](mailto:disability-support-external@google.com)

and you will receive an answer by a support representative within 72 hours.

The support team is exploring adding additional languages and support channels in the future. [Read the full announcement](#) posted on [Google's accessibility blog](#) where you can also check for news and updates from Google.

Explore Google's accessibility products and features on

[google.com/accessibility](https://google.com/accessibility).

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## **Healthy Tips for Living: Winter Weather Fitness**

by Dr. Jamie N. Lindsay, D.O.

Although you may know that you need to include exercise in your routine, barriers to exercise can often deter you. Problems, circumstances, and excuses are barriers that can get in the way of your exercise goals. And the winter months can add yet another barrier.

Some barriers are:

- It's too cold outside.
- It's dark in the morning which makes it more difficult to get up earlier and exercise.
- By the time I leave work, it's dark and I'm tired.
- There are too many people in the gym.
- I don't have equipment at home.
- I don't have a good place to exercise.
- My neighborhood isn't safe.

What's important to remember is that these are barriers, not concrete barricades! The saying, "If there's a will, there's a way" rings true here. When you're serious about creating or maintaining an active routine, you will work to identify solutions and opportunities to push past barriers to exercise. Doing so is a step in the right direction to developing exercise habits for life.

## Solutions to Push Past the Winter Barriers

- Walk at the mall
- Workout videos
- Go dancing or take a dance class
- Bowling
- Make the most of watching TV – use the minutes during commercials to do crunches, push ups, or work up a sweat on a stepper.
- Ice skating
- Workout at home – you don't need fancy equipment to get in a good workout at home. A chair, a couple dumbbells, and a resistance band are good foundation pieces but you don't even have to have those. There are countless exercises that utilize only your body weight.
- Clean – use the winter to do lots of extra cleaning since cleaning keeps you moving.
- Shovel snow (consult your physician first if you have a history of heart problems)
- When the weather cooperates, take advantage of it and exercise outside

## The Bottom Line

It's possible to develop or sustain an active lifestyle no matter the season or climate.

When you have the will, you can make the way to be active during the winter months.

Dr. Jamie N. Lindsay, D.O.

NuStartHealth.com

Email Dr. Lindsay at

[info@NuStartHealth.com](mailto:info@NuStartHealth.com)

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## **Useful Tools in the DLB Store, Make Great Gifts for Anyone**

Our store staff regularly adds beneficial items for people who are legally or totally blind for purchase. A few examples are a hand-held CCTV video magnifier, ladies and gentlemen's talking watches, unisex braille watches, talking clocks, signature guides, large print paper, large button phones, and TV remotes.

We also have oven mitts, 20/20 pens, and big sticky text dots to help you mark your appliances for convenience and accuracy.

There are Uno playing cards, Dominoes, fit-over anti-glare shades (available in amber, gray, and yellow), and magnifiers with powers of 3, 3.5, and 4.

We're always adding more, so come visit Melva at the DLB store located at:

4306 Capitol Avenue

Dallas, TX 75204

If you have questions, call

(214) 420-6585

Or email,

[store@dallaslighthouse.org](mailto:store@dallaslighthouse.org)

Find DLB's store video including audio, at

<https://tinyurl.com/y7rb8js3>

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### **A Fresh Useful Resource**



*Insightful Publications logo with a picture of a person reading Braille on the left, the words Insightful Publications written in blue text in the middle, and a picture of a book on the right.*

My name is Christine Chaikin and I am the founder of Insightful Publications. It is a sole proprietorship setting out to compile a consolidated list of useful information specifically geared toward the blind and visually impaired user.

This includes information about employment, one of the main issues facing the blind and visually impaired communities. The unemployment rate among this group is in the 70th percentile! This figure combined with my own struggles trying to find work due to transportation issues and hesitant employers necessitates the requirement for help in this area.

I do not receive any monetary considerations from any of the companies, organizations or individuals listed in these handbooks.

These screen reader-friendly resource handbooks cover anything from employment, to housing, and transportation organizations.

The contact information includes the local, regional, and national levels. There are a total of 33 states completed. The resource handbooks include Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Maine, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Massachusetts,

North Carolina, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oregon,  
Pennsylvania, Nevada, South Dakota, Texas, and Utah.

For more information on pricing and formats please contact  
Insightful Publications by email at [insightfulpub@gmail.com](mailto:insightfulpub@gmail.com) or by  
phone at (808) 747-1006. Visit their website at

[in-sightful.com/orderpage.html](http://in-sightful.com/orderpage.html)

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### **New JAWS® - ZoomText® - MAGic® Suite Available for Students and Adults!**

You well know that often students don't have access to the same  
accessibility software at school and at home, which can be  
frustrating and waste time better spent on school assignments.  
This is why in 2016 APH partnered with VFO® to bring to make  
JAWS® and MAGic® available with Quota funds (and non-Quota  
funds as well).

Now this software deal has gotten even better! APH and VFO  
have extended our partnership to offer an expanded bundle called  
**"JAWS® - ZoomText® - MAGic® Suite."** For the same \$300  
price as the previous "JAWS and MAGic Student Edition," students  
can now have access to **any combination of THREE programs  
for use at school** and at home! Students can download the  
software on multiple computers, plus they can keep the software  
after a four-year subscription commitment, so the software goes  
with them to college, home, or work. And employers  
overwhelmingly use JAWS, so having consistent access to this



software gives students a competitive edge as they enter the workforce.

**Schools and Rehabilitation Agencies:** The JAWS® - ZoomText® - MAGic® Suite software bundle is available exclusively from APH, at a significant savings compared to buying JAWS alone.

Subscriptions can be purchased by schools using Federal Quota funds and schools can buy multiple licenses at once, but they can hold these licenses and activate them as needed. Quota Funds:

For more information on purchasing with Quota funds, visit

<http://www.aph.org/products/jaws-zoomtext-magic-suite-quota/>

**Individuals:** The software bundle is also available for individual purchase using non-Quota funds, so ANYONE can buy this set of essential accessibility tools. We want as many students and adults as possible to have access to this software bundle! Non-

Quota Funds: **To learn how to purchase the software bundle**

**directly with regular** funds (such as a credit card), visit

<http://www.aph.org/products/jaws-zoomtext-magic-suite/>

or call (1800) 223-1839.

We're excited about this expanded offering, because we know this will make it easier for students who are blind or visually impaired to live up to their full potential in the classroom!

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## **Toronto astrophysicist offers a musical guide through the universe and Shares it with Those Who Are Blind**

Toronto — A Canadian astrophysicist who used the orbital patterns of seven newly discovered planets to create music will be bringing his work to the public in a Toronto show that will also allow those with visual impairments to experience the wonders of the universe.

Matt Russo, a planetarium operator at Toronto's Dunlap Institute for Astronomy and Astrophysics, said his work takes the rhythm of planets orbiting and combines them with other notes to create music based on cosmic activity.

Russo's work combining astronomy and music began in earnest last year, after scientists discovered seven Earth-sized planets orbiting a dwarf star called Trappist-1. The system, about 40 light years away, is believed to be in the right zone to harbour liquid water to sustain life. Russo was one of the researchers who created a musical simulation of the system's orbital dynamics.

"What people noticed was that there were these special patterns in (the planets') orbits, so their orbits were simple multiples of each other, for instance," Russo said.

"Since I was a musician and an astrophysicist, I realized that those simple patterns were the basis of musical rhythm and musical harmony. So, it was fairly straight forward to put it

through a numerical simulation, kind of turn the crank and hear the music this planetary system was creating."

Russo's work with Dan Tamayo, a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Toronto's Centre for Planetary Sciences, showed that the same properties that makes Trappist-1 musical are what keeps its planets' synchronized and, thus, their orbits stable.

Russo created a video that uses musical notes to illustrate the orbits of the planets and also adds drum beats to mark when the planets pass each other.

"Almost as soon as I released my first musical version of Trappist-1, I started hearing from people who were blind or visually impaired, just kind of thanking me for giving them a way to experience astronomy in a new way," Russo said. "So I realized the potential for converting things in space into music and sound for reaching out to blind and visually impaired communities."

Russo's new show, *Our Musical Universe*, debuts Friday at the University of Toronto Planetarium and showcases that work and other sounds for twinkling stars and Jupiter's orbiting moons.

Robyn Rennie, an Orillia artist who became partially blind 13 years ago, got a sneak peek of the show last month shortly after her daughter called the planetarium to ask about its programming for people with low vision.

"We used to live in the country where there were no lights at all ... so the night sky was a huge part of my life," Rennie said. "I used to be able to look through the window when I was in bed and see Orion."

She said her and her family were "buzzing" after the show.

"Matt really wants to reach people who otherwise wouldn't be able experience the universe like everybody else," Rennie said.

Russo said the idea of pulling music out of astronomy is nothing new — it goes back more than 2,000 years ago with the ancient Greek thinker Pythagoras. But the musician and astrophysicist said his involvement in both fields remained separate until the Trappist-1 discovery.

"I did the physics during the day and the music at night, and they never really crossed paths," he said "I knew there was some connection, it was kind of obvious, but I never explored it. Since I did, it's opened all kinds of doors for me and hopefully other people to share in astronomy."

**Article Link: <https://www.thespec.com/news-story/8094538-toronto-astrophysicist-offers-a-musical-guide-through-the-universe/>**

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## **Valuable Free Offers**

Bring your friends and meet new ones as you join our host Al Rodriguez for Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind's Bingo Night. Our get together is on the third Friday evening of each month, and this month, it's Friday, February 16<sup>th</sup> from 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM. You can count on free prizes, free food, and the best part, friendly fellowship.

We look forward to hearing and seeing you in the DLB Auditorium at 4306 Capitol Avenue!

Our weekly yoga get-together takes place Fridays from 1:15 to 2:15 PM. Please join our thoughtful volunteer Bruce Boyd and others in the auditorium for some exercise and camaraderie. He has participated in Blindfold Yoga, increasing his knowledge of coaching people with visual impairment. Bruce wants for us to be in good health and good shape.

Please RSVP with Blake if you are interested in joining us.

Call (214) 420-9411

Or email him at

[blake.lindsay@dallaslighthouse.org](mailto:blake.lindsay@dallaslighthouse.org)

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## **Come Hear the Olympics with us!**

Just Dial the Toll Free Number to Listen. Aira provided audio description of the recent Superbowl. Here's their invitation.

We had so much fun with our Aira Super Bowl Experience, didn't you?

For those of you who missed it, and for those of you who are Olympics fans...

We are providing a free conference call to hear Aira Agent Ashley describe the Opening Ceremony!

Winter Olympics - February 9-25, 2018 South Korea

We will be catching the replay at 8pm EST / 5pm PST on [NBC](#) and cheer Team USA on to victory!

We are keeping it simple- just one phone number to dial:

(877) 568-4108

Enter Meeting ID: 536-565-714

The public broadcast is scheduled from 8 pm to 11 pm EST. All people in need of audio description are welcome to dial in.

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## **How Soundscapes and Vibrations are Helping People Who are Blind**

WorldGlasses that translate images of physical objects into soundscapes and a belt that turns images into vibrations are helping people who are blind to build up a real-time 3-D picture of the world around them, and the technology could hit the market as soon as this year.

According to the World Health Organization, there are about 285 million visually impaired people around the world, of whom 39 million are blind. Advances in technology and medical science may never restore perfect sight to the millions with very poor vision or unable to see at all.

But a wearable gadget resembling glasses uses cameras and a compact processing unit to create 3-D images on the fly and feeds the information back to the wearer as intuitive soundscapes.

'The cameras produce a three-dimensional picture of the surroundings in real time and the system translates this into sound, something like the sound of the sea, which the user learns to interpret to navigate their environment,' said Antonio Quesada, chief executive of Eyesynth, based in Castellon, Spain.

The specially developed headset, developed with the support of EU funding, constructs 'audio pictures' of the wearer's surroundings with the aim of improving everyday interactions and increasing the independence of blind people and those with very poor vision.

Crucially, it was designed with style in mind. Using carefully designed eyewear, discreet cameras, and a processor about the size of a mobile phone, Eyesynth aims to overcome users' resistance to ungainly or unattractive medical equipment.

'We aimed to make the system as beautiful as possible, so it can be stylish, and more than just a gadget,' Quesada said.

### Neural scanning

Neural scanning shows that even when only abstract sounds are used, the brain engages the visual cortex to build up an audio image.

By learning the audio language, users can make their way around obstacles or identify and grasp nearby items, such as a water bottle on a restaurant table. 'By learning to understand the subtle variations in the sounds, the user can identify straight lines, or rounder shapes,' Quesada said.

One of the special features of Eyesynth is that the audio signals are not transmitted through the outer ear, but conducted through bones on the side of the head allowing the user to hear what is going on around them. This method also provides benefits for people with poor hearing.

Users learn Eyesynth's audio language in a familiar environment, so they rapidly get used to understanding the sounds associated with known shapes and positions. And after a week of training, blind testers are able to distinguish small objects on a table.

'Since the use of the white cane and guide dog, there hasn't been a technological mobility solution for the blind and visually impaired,' Quesada said.



Eyesynth has already been patented in Spain and Quesada expects the product to be on the market next year, with the team in the process of closing distribution agreements with two leading eyewear chains in Spain.

The system is also being further developed to recognise faces, read text and identify colours.

### Vibrating belt

In Iceland, researchers are also using 3-D-camera systems to create a picture for blind people but they're complementing it with a vibrating belt that uses the sense of touch, also known as haptics, to produce a novel form of visualisation.

The latest prototype belt in the EU-funded Sound of Vision project fits around the user's mid-section and uses a matrix of motors that vibrate gently against the stomach. This provides an alternative, tactile way to represent the scene picked up by headset cameras.

Project coordinator Runar Unnthorsson, professor of industrial engineering at the University of Iceland, said the belt could make a simple shadow-like representation of the object being viewed.

'If there is a lamppost in front of you, for example, as you rotate, you would feel the centre column moving along the belt,' Prof. Unnthorsson said. 'In a way you could think of it as a low-resolution vibrating image.'

The belt offers wide scope for conveying information and images to the user. It could even produce animations by switching neighbouring motors on and off in sequence to create a sensation of movement.

'In this way, we can make the user feel like someone is drawing on their stomach,' Prof. Unnthorsson said.

The Sound of Vision system is able to scan and read text, helping people to read signs in challenging situations such as airports, and can identify the best path through a series of indoor or outdoor obstacles.

Danger mode

Unnthorsson said they tested several ways of converting visual information into useful audio via the 3-D cameras.

The latest prototype uses sounds simulating a stream of bubbles in water. A large object, for example, is represented by more bubbles, and a high object by lighter bubbles.

The system also has a danger mode to warn people if there are hazards such as stairs going down or a missing utility cover on the pavement in front of them.

'The system is highly customisable, so users can switch between different audio modes, or tactile modes and even change parameters, such as the number of objects represented,' Prof. Unnthorsson said.

While the prototype currently uses a laptop in a backpack for image processing, the ambition is to bring a smaller system to go onto the market next year.

Article Link:

<https://phys.org/news/2017-12-soundscapes-vibrations-people-world.html>

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## **Follow Dallas Lighthouse on Social Media**

*Discover what's happening at the DLB through our [YouTube channel](#). We are adding interesting interviews and much more.*

*If you have not yet liked our [Facebook](#) page, we would appreciate you doing so. We are also on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).*

*Follow DLB and share!*

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## **Navigating Through Darkness**

*by Blake Lindsay*

*People often ask me which of my four senses is the most valuable. With no reservation, I always reply my hearing because of my superior sense of echo, which helps me avoid running into people or things. I use the echoes to guide me in walking around a person or an object in my direct path and perceive when to accurately make a turn as if I could see. Only two limitations come to mind: One is that I cannot hear when there is a flight of stairs going down; however, I can usually feel a draft. The other is that an object has to be at least waist-high before I pick up an echo. At times this has caused me pain—literally. Take, for*

*example, a dog's favorite thing to mark his spot on...yes, a fire hydrant. Fire hydrants hurt. I can't for the life of me figure out why dogs like them so much. I don't particularly care for their height or lack thereof. Fortunately though, if I am properly using my cane, I no longer deal with this dilemma.*

*Another frequent enquiry from the public is regarding how I am able to navigate unfamiliar areas. The journey of navigating started with my mobility instructor, Pat Soja. He taught me the importance of focusing on my hearing to assist in my independence. Part of the training I received involved complete concentration on my keenly sharpened sense of hearing in order to line up with traffic and confidently cross busy intersections with stoplights.*

*After my freshman year in high school, something very exciting and life-changing happened. I experienced self-navigation in my home town. My family lived in the small suburb, just north of Indianapolis. Mr. Soja patiently and effectively educated me with walking all over town. He first taught me how to get to my favorite hot spots, otherwise known as places to eat. First was the bakery. A pleasant woman who worked there was very enthusiastic when I mastered the trip unattended, and she quickly became an encouraging friend.*

*Mr. Soja and I also strolled to the post office and other helpful places. There were occasional mishaps, forgetting where to make a turn or going too far or not far enough. Once I had down the ability to walk about freely, I had a great sense of independence. Through people's friendly communication, I sensed they were*

*impressed and inspired watching me without a guide. Prior to learning self-navigation, I would often find myself with nothing to do and was restless. Suddenly, everything had changed for the better.*

*The following Christmas break, I decided to take a walk. The only difference this time was the eight inches of snow on the ground. Snow is a bit of a hindrance for blind people because we rely primarily on sound to help us navigate. It resembles carpet, muting sound waves and surroundings to be silenced. An inch of snow mutes sound, so you can imagine what big snowdrifts do. They create significant barriers, and believe me when I tell you; they achieve this distraction in more ways than one.*

*I found out the hard way on that cold winter day as I was returning home from a solo walk. I became disoriented and missed my turn. Fortunately my mother knew my expected arrival time and when I didn't make it home, she went out to search for her aggressively independent son. She found me, took me home and thawed me out! I learned a great lesson about navigating after a snowstorm.*

*Today, I do not have to worry too much about traveling in the snow. Dallas, Texas, does not get wintry weather like Indiana. While snow has its amusing moments, I am grateful for southern weather patterns, for mobility's sake.*

*Occasionally, I get disoriented, when learning new territory, but if I learn the route I am taking with the assistance of a good*

*traveler, I am able to memorize poles, shrubs and other markings that I can feel or hear, which help me stay on track.*

*When it comes to traveling, a number of my friends who are blind choose to use dog guides. These well-trained dogs can be a great guiding companion and a fun friend. These amazing animals expand people's newfound freedom to the maximum. It is enjoyable to observe the increased confidence demonstrated by people with sight impairment, especially those who desired additional assurance. For me, using a cane works well. I like to teasingly say I have a stick dog named Bruiser requiring no food, water, potty breaks, or trips to the veterinarian.*

*I was introduced to my stick dog (walking cane) at age eleven, when I took a mini-mobility course at the Indiana School for the Blind. On and off, I enjoyed additional training, and by age 15, I completely understood the importance of using the cane for my independence and began to train quite intensely on mobility movements.*

*One of the most phenomenal things I have learned about all people is our God given ability to develop and sharpen our senses rather quickly. I have witnessed firsthand this rapid development of hearing through working with sighted mobility instructors.*

*Each person undergoing mobility school is required to perform several times while blindfolded before they can earn their license to teach orientation mobility. In only a few days, without taking a break from wearing the blindfold, these people, as well as those*

*who recently lose their eyesight, develop out of necessity, the same expanded echo perception that I benefit from. The improvement of this "radar hearing" happens in only a few days. We would all be pleasantly surprised with the senses we can uncover and take advantage of when survival is our main concern. Our god sure made us all special in one way or another.*

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**Do you have an upcoming event you want our readers to know about?**

Email or call me with the details so we can support your good news. Would you like to share your personal story? Please email or call me to coordinate a 15-minute interview.

Feel free to contribute a significant article about access technology or inspiring news and stories related to the blind community.

Send us your comments, suggestions, and ideas by emailing:

[blake.lindsay@dallaslighthouse.org](mailto:blake.lindsay@dallaslighthouse.org)

Or by calling:

(214) 420-9411.

Thank you for considering the Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind for your financial donations. Your generosity will help us continue to improve our services in the 11 counties we support through

access technology training and much more. Also, please let us know if there's anyone you know with visual impairment who is wanting assistance.

As always, Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind encourages you to live your lives to the fullest. Stay tuned for more Good News You Can Use, serving people who are blind, visually impaired, and beyond.

Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind

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