

# InFocus

## Summer/Fall 2016 Edition

### New Mexico School for the Blind & Visually Impaired

#### **Our Delicious Holiday Sampler!**

***by Datha Peters, Life Skills Instructor***

The Holiday Sampler is a tasty event that NMSBVI Alamogordo students and staff look forward to each year. In October, students in the Life Skills classroom begin planning December's Holiday Sampler event. First, students are assigned a particular type of dish (this past year: desserts & appetizers), and then they have the opportunity to research recipes which they can prepare independently. (Students are excited to discover all of the different recipes that are available!) Next, they have to decide how much to make in order to serve the entire campus; and then come up with a shopping list and make an assisted trip to the store to purchase the ingredients. Students prepare their recipes, arrange the items on serving trays, help set up the event in the school's Dining Hall, and then welcome those who come to enjoy the goodies. The months-long process lets students learn a lot about how to plan, prepare, and host a party for a large group of people; while staff look forward to sampling the delicious selections, and they enjoy visiting with the students about the culinary creations showcased at the event.

*Shown above, several students proudly present their dishes as school staff & other friends line up to fill their plates with goodies. Student Zachary Jones chats with Maintenance Specialists Bill Shields & Brad Butterfield, surrounded by jovial guests.*

#### **Access to Learning Low Vision Clinic**

***by Marjorie Rhodes, TVI, Low Vision Clinic Consultant***

A significant number of students throughout New Mexico are diagnosed with a visual impairment that interferes with their educational and daily activities. However, these students often have some degree of functionally useful vision. NMSBVI Access to Learning Low Vision Clinic provides a special exam to determine a student's level of visual functioning and to identify optical and non-optical tools for use in an educational setting. An assistive technology consultation is also available at the clinic. To be eligible to attend a clinic a student must qualify for services as

a student with a visual impairment. A teacher of students with visual impairments (TSVI), an orientation and mobility specialist (O&M), or another member of the educational team makes the referral for a student to be seen at the clinic. The NMSBVI Access to Learning Low Vision Clinic is offered as a service with no cost to parents or school districts in New Mexico.

The Low Vision Clinic is held up to six times per school year in Albuquerque as well as other locations around the state. This year, in addition to Albuquerque, the clinic traveled to Gallup, Roswell, Rio Rancho, and Las Cruces. During the 2015-16 school year, 88 students age 2-18 were seen; these students represented 17 school districts as well as NMSBVI.

Currently, Dr. Tiffany Martinez, OD is the primary low vision eye care provider with Dr. Kendra Powell, OD joining the clinic when it travels to Las Cruces. Over the years, they have developed a wonderful working relationship with teachers, students and families who attend the clinic and return again for follow-up evaluations. For more information please contact Marjorie Rhodes, NMSBVI Low Vision Clinic Consultant.

*Shown here, Dr. Kendra Powell, OD, examines Deanna Casarez to help determine her visual functioning.*

### **Construction Continues at the Alamogordo Campus by Margie Macias, Dir. of Institutional Support Services**

As promised, construction continues at the Alamogordo Campus and will do so for quite some time. NMSBVI is very excited to have HB Construction of Albuquerque on site. Renovations to the former education building, the Ditzler Auditorium and Recreation Center and the Central Receiving Building are ongoing. The Ditzler Auditorium and the Central Receiving Building are both on the State and National Historic Registers.

Since the construction of the new Watkins Education Center, the old education building is being repurposed as the school's administration building. The building will house the Superintendent's office, conference rooms, Business/Finance offices, Human Resources, Capital Projects, Information Systems & Technology, the Outreach Department and the Personnel Preparation Program. When completed, it will also house a large training room and extra offices.

The Ditzler Auditorium and Recreation Center will undergo extensive renovations to also include renovations to the bowling alley. Students and staff alike are very pleased to, once again, reopen the bowling alley for student use. Minor renovations to the Central Receiving Building will be done in order to house staff from the Instructional Resource Center (IRC) and the Braille Production staff will move into the Tapia Building.

Along with the renovations to these buildings, demolition of the San Andres Building and the Bert Reeves Learning Center will occur. Renovations are scheduled to be completed by late summer and demolition of the buildings by mid fall. Following these projects, renovations to the Quimby

Gymnasium and Natatorium (swimming pool) Building will occur. The school is in the final stages of executing the contract for design of this work.

*Shown below, the old education building displays many empty-paned windows while construction workers renovate its intricately tiled roof.*

### **Re-Envisioning Blindness Awareness Training**

***by Loana Mason, Ed.D., COMS, Visual Impairment Program (VIP) Director, New Mexico State University; Michelle Chacon, NMSBVI Outreach Itinerant/Mentor; and Mark Carter, COMS, NMSU Adjunct Instructor, Personnel Prep Program***

Blindness Awareness Trainings have long been part of the professional development opportunities provided to NMSBVI employees. Traditionally, residential campus staff from all departments gathered together to participate in simulation activities (e.g., traveling, eating, sewing, etc. under blindfold). This year, Mark Carter was tasked with re-designing these trainings. According to Mark, "Simulation activities often make sighted people erroneously believe that being blind is difficult simply because they do not know how to use appropriate compensatory techniques. Thus, I felt it was important to include blind adults in the training so that staff could benefit from their first-hand experiences and develop high expectations for our students in the long-term. As people with different visual abilities, Michelle Chacon and Loana Mason bring diverse perspectives, which will hopefully help staff realize that there are multiple paths our students can take to reach their desired destinations." During the 2016-2017 academic year, approximately 140 NMSBVI employees have participated in Blindness Awareness Training. Instead of doing campus-wide trainings, Mark, Michelle, and Loana have been tailoring the trainings to individual departments. For example, transportation staff practiced basic travel skills (including entering and exiting vehicles), dorm staff practiced living skills (including making beds, folding/hanging laundry, and grilling/cutting/baking), staff at the Early Childhood Program practiced task analysis and route planning, and education staff analyzed videos of poorly-executed compensatory techniques. These trainings are intended to be ongoing and to address current issues as beliefs and expectations are constantly evolving.

*Shown here, presenters Loana Mason, Michelle Chacon, and Mark Carter share a moment of laughter during one of their presentations to Alamogordo campus staff.*

### **Holloman Air Force Base and the "Big Give"**

***by Margie Macias, Director of Institutional Support Services***

In July, NMSBVI was selected as a recipient of Holloman Air Force Base's "Big Give" community event.

The military base, located 10 miles from Alamogordo, created the Big Give event nine years ago to show appreciation and support to the Alamogordo community. Holloman's Airmen and Women, and their families, spent hundreds of hours volunteering in the local community during the annual Big Give day. Thirty-two teams of 412 volunteers participated in this year's Big Give. This year's theme, "Grow Community", racked up 4,997 man hours over the span of three weeks and saved the local community an estimated \$200,000.

A group of 15 Airmen and Women formed a team and selected NMSBVI as their project. Prior to the event, a representative of the team met with Doug Shoemaker, NMSBVI Plant Operations Manager, to plan and schedule work identified by NMSBVI. On the weekend of July 23-24, the Holloman team worked tirelessly on painting the exterior of the South Cottage on the Alamogordo campus. Plant Operations staff members also participated that weekend in support of the team's generous efforts.

The team and others contributed to over 25 local organizations and numerous individuals during the Big Give. In an air base publication, 49th Wing Commander, Col. Houston Cantwell stated, "In my short one month here in Alamogordo, it is readily apparent to me how close the relationship is between Holloman Air Force Base and the Alamogordo community."

NMSBVI salutes our local military men & women, and thanks Holloman AFB for the "Big Give!"

*Shown here, several participants of the Big Give program work together to give the school's South Cottage a fresh coat of tan-colored paint.*

## **Birth-to-Three Program Updates**

***by Luanne Stordahl, Developmental Vision Specialist***

NMSBVI's Birth to Three Program is staying busy! The program is saying good-bye to Lin Coachman, who will be retiring in June of this year. Lin is a friend and mentor to all in the program and will be sorely missed. Recently, two new staff members joined the Birth-to-Three team: Lizzie Philips will be entering the O&M (Orientation & Mobility) program to provide services in the Northwest corner of our state; and Charity Bailey will be entering the O&M program to provide services in Albuquerque. And a big congratulations to Sophia Diaz who recently passed her O&M exam and is now a COMS (Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist)!

Training is a large component of the Birth-to-Three staff's work. Their O&M staff continues to provide trainings about O&M services for children 0-3, and on use of the O&M assessment tool. The group was accepted to present at the International AER (Association for Education & Rehabilitation of the Blind & Visually Impaired) O&M conference in Pittsburgh this July. A new training opportunity during 2017 is a partnership with the Hadley School for the Blind to offer

online training courses on the ECC (Expanded Core Curriculum) for birth-3. NMSBVI's staff is also taking part in a year-long grant/study through the University of Northern Colorado concerning mealtime routines for children 0-3 with visual impairments. We look forward to another year of continued collaboration with the early intervention community in NM and with our NMSBVI family!

### **Our Goalball Season...Filled with Successes!**

***by Jeremiah Vaughn, Transportation Supervisor & Athletic Coordinator***

In the 2016 Goalball season, student interest in the sport was high enough for our school to field both a boys' and a girls' team for the first time in many years. This season, the teams traveled to the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind for their Goalball Invitational and to Grand Prairie, Texas, for the Region X Goalball Extravaganza.

In Colorado, our teams competed against both Colorado and the California School for the Blind. After a very hard-fought tournament, both NMSBVI teams came out victorious, taking first place. The Golden Bear boys were unblemished at 3-0 and the girls went 3-1. Favian Calderon and Deanna Casarez were selected as tournament MVPs for their respective teams.

In Texas, NMSBVI players competed against multiple teams from across Texas including the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Once again, NMSBVI teams played their hearts out and came out victorious! This time both teams went undefeated, with the boys going 4-0 and the girls going 3-0. In Texas, there was an opportunity to field a beginners' team known as the NMSBVI Bear Cubs. The school's future Golden Bears started off rather slowly, losing their first game, but quickly found their rhythm and were able to defeat their next three opponents to go 3-1 and finish in second place!

In mid-December, NMSBVI hosted the school's 3rd Annual "Community Goalball Tournament"... and Alamogordo continues to have a high level of interest & participation in this event; six teams participated from the community along with the NMSBVI Golden Bears. After a fun-filled evening of sport & camaraderie, the Alamogordo Police Department "Bacon Bombers" came out as champions. We cannot wait for next season to see what our amazing athletes will do!

*The NMSBVI Goalball team is shown here: Feliz Ruiz, Omar Rascon, Iridiana Fresquez, Favian Calderon, Deanna Casarez, Shawn McHugh, Nadine Smith, and Andres Romero. Team coaches Dana Lyons and Jeremiah Vaughn stand nearby.*

## **Family Weekend on the Residential Campus** ***by Brenda Holmes, Academic Support Director***

On an annual basis during the first weekend of November, families come together at the NMSBVI residential campus to network with other families and to learn more about blindness/visual impairment. This season, 45 family members, 16 students and 5 visitors totaling 67 participants visited NMSBVI. This event provided families an opportunity to make new friends and share their experiences. As always, the goal of this well-attended event was to provide a weekend of making memories while learning the latest information in the field of blindness/visual impairments.

Many activities provided opportunities to enhance the Expanded Core Curriculum. An interactive Goalball demonstration, a descriptive movie, a game of Jenga/Bingo, and gym activities (swimming, climbing wall, & scooter boards) were just a few. Breakout sessions were organized on a rotation basis for all families to participate in technology access, family fun activities, daily math applications and a career overview. Hands-on activities were provided by teachers, educational assistants and related service providers. Families had an opportunity to speak one-on-one with each staff member involved with their child's academic and functional performance. Life Skills played a large part of this event, as each participant increased their awareness in independence for students. The weekend came to a close with a student panel discussion in which current students and alumni answered questions regarding their eye condition and post-secondary experiences. A new session to assist children in self-advocacy was also introduced, and was very well received by all.

Mark your calendars! Our next Family Weekend is scheduled to take place in Alamogordo on November 3 through 5, 2017.

*During Family Weekend, Isaiah Watts shows his mom, Amber, how he works on the Mountbatten Braille, as she too practices her name on the Perkins Braille Writer; Jerri Young assists.*

## **Summer Programs** ***by Ron Later, Orientation & Mobility Specialist / TVI, and Summer Program Coordinator***

During the 2016 Summer Program, NMSBVI brought one-week camps to Clovis, Gallup, Santa Fe, Carlsbad and Rio Rancho Schools before hosting a two-week camp in Alamogordo; twenty-eight of the students who were seen in the camps had never before come to the NMSBVI Alamogordo campus.

Working in conjunction with district teachers of students with visual impairments to host camps around the state allowed NMSBVI to reach students who might otherwise not have any direct connection to NMSBVI. This, in turn, helped families become more aware of the services that NMSBVI can offer; as well as more comfortable with letting their students make the trip to

Alamogordo for the two-week summer camp and for subsequent short term stays during the school year.

In our relationship-driven field, holding camps around the state allowed NMSBVI staff to spend time with parents and families. Opportunities available through NMSBVI, including the Low Vision Clinic and Braille Challenge event, tend to come up naturally in conversations with parents. In turn, this helps parents to develop a better understanding of the breadth of services provided for students with visual impairments in New Mexico. While parents benefit from this broader understanding... students are generally more drawn to the fun aspects of summer camp, like the trip to the San Diego Zoo and Coronado Beach which capped the two-week camp in Alamogordo.

The school's various Summer Program offerings for 2017 are currently under development.

*Shown here, NMSBVI student Pedro Garcia (shown on the right) happily mixes up some slimy "science goo" while a fellow camper attends to his own gloppy experiment.*

### **Glowball Returns! Foundation Hosts Two Successful Golf Fundraisers** **by Herb Wright, NMSBVI Foundation Director**

Thanks to community support, the Foundation's two Glowball tournaments were a great success – raising a combined "net" total of nearly \$21,000. The first tournament was held on Saturday, April 8th, at the Desert Lakes Golf Course in Alamogordo; Desert Sun Motors was the tournament's Title Sponsor. Other sponsors were: Legacy Financial Partners (gala sponsor), 1st National Bank and Tularosa Basin Telephone Company (drink cart), Wilbanks Commercial Holdings LLC (putting contest), High Country Agency, The Rutherford Group (hole and tee); and cart sponsors were Bank 34, 1st National Bank, and Tularosa Basin Telephone Company.

The second tournament took place on Saturday, September 23rd, at the Los Altos Golf Course in Albuquerque. Sponsors were: Modrall, Sperling, Rohel, Harris & Sisk P.A. (title sponsor); Rodey, Dickason, Sloan, Akin, & Robb P.S. (birdie sponsor); Family Eye Care/Children's Eye Center of New Mexico (drink cart sponsor); and NorthRidge Alzheimer's Special Care Center (putting contest sponsor.) Tee/hole sponsors were: Senior Relocation Services, Brian Colon, High Desert Investment Advisors LLC, Dick & Iris Bracket, G & S Enterprises, Alaskan Desert Seafood, Zia Trust, and Rio Grande Financial Network.

Both events began around 4pm with a 9-hole shotgun start and once finished, golfers gathered at the clubhouse for dinner, a silent auction, and a putting contest. Around 8pm, the golfers played the last nine holes... in the dark.

It's been a few years since Glowball tournaments were last played in both cities. Community interests ran high, while player fees were kept low to encourage people to come out and play. New LED technology has made the golf balls more visible in the dark and has added to the fun.

Glow sticks and LED lights marked the tees & putting greens, and a few players decorated their carts with LED lights. Some players even accessorized their golfing attire with glow sticks, glow necklaces/bracelets, glow shoelaces, headlamps, and other decorations to make their presence known both on and off the course. The take-away from both tournaments: players discovered that flashlights are a necessity to navigate the courses at night.

In 2017, the Glowball Tournaments are scheduled for April in Alamogordo, and September in Albuquerque. For information about the 2017 golf tournaments, please call 575-437-0290 or 505-271-3064.

*The Glowball tournaments were well-attended by the public as well as by NMSBVI staff; here, Groundskeeper Paul Mancuso snaps a photo of three NMSBVI staff ladies “all dolled up” in their golfcart, while wearing colorful glow-in-the-dark necklaces.*

### **“Communication in Action”** **by Beth Lyle, Innovations & Development Specialist**

The NMSBVI Innovation & Development Department was fortunate to collaborate with Jessica Mount Matney and Philip Schweigert to work on developing the “Communication in Action” web-based resource guide. To accomplish the goal of creating an accessible website, “Communication in Action” entered a competition called OpenAIR that paired nonprofit organizations with web developers to create the best, most accessible website.

OpenAIR is a global web accessibility awareness and skills development program. Started by Knowbility in 1998 as a local accessibility hackathon – the Accessibility Internet Rally (AIR) – the program has evolved into a global teaching and learning competition that puts accessibility front-and-center where it belongs. Teams of web developers sign up, learn about accessibility, are matched with an experienced accessibility mentor, and then put their skills to work building an accessible web site or application for a nonprofit group.

NMSBVI was assigned a team of web professionals who signed up to participate in OpenAIR. Our team called themselves the Cookie Scouts and are a great group of college students at Lone Star College in The Woodlands, Texas. The Cookie Scouts were then trained in the latest web accessibility tools and mentored by leading experts in the field of accessible web design to create a high quality, professional website for NMSBVI’s Communication in Action project. NMSBVI and the Cookie Scouts worked together for 5 weeks to design our website. The website was then submitted to a panel of judges and the winning project was chosen. Although NMSBVI did not take home the trophy, we had a great time learning more about web accessibility and now have an attractive and accessible website for the “Communication in Action” project.



## **Technology Leadership Service Learning / Partnership**

***by Velina Chavez, Director, Community Engagement, Technology Leadership High School***

A collaboration between the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NMSBVI) and Technology Leadership HS (TLHS) started in 2015-2016 through a program called service learning. TLHS provides students the opportunity to learn and practice 21st Century Skills and the “soft skills” young people need to be successful in the future. Through partnerships with schools, community centers, and organizations TLHS students get to work alongside professionals who mentor and guide our youth.

Recently, TLHS students have been working at NMSBVI's Early Childhood Campus (ECP) in Albuquerque. Our partnership with NMSBVI has been invaluable, and such a rich experience for our youth. In addition to the 21st Century Skills our youth are learning, they are also learning about compassion, empathy, kindness, and patience. The young students at NMSBVI have touched many hearts among our Tech students. “This is an amazing school and I love coming here,” said Tech student Alexander Castaneda when asked about his experience.

TLHS students support classroom teachers with projects, free play, and outside recess. Our students' favorite is the pretend play happening in the outside stations, where there's a make-believe school and fire house. According to Dustin Bryant (9th grade TLHS student), his service learning is “the best experience ever” and he enjoys the opportunity to work with students in the gym room. TLHS is grateful for this partnership & the opportunities that NMSBVI has given us. We look forward to continuing and strengthening this partnership in the years to come.

### ***(Photo section of the booklet...)***

- Congratulations to NMSBVI's Graduating Class of 2016: Lavon Smith, Sabrina Madrid, and Aaron Kysar!
- NMSBVI Alamogordo students worked hard to perfect their Veterans Day Program performances; the November event was very well-attended by family and friends.
- In autumn, our ECP students celebrated White Cane Day with a very festive parade!
- Students in Albuquerque's Early Childhood Program spent every day learning about their world... and playing, too! A wide variety of field trips and on-site adventures keeps everyone engaged and learning.

- Students have been busy in the greenhouse at NMSBVI Alamogordo; each year, after planting and raising to maturity a variety of flowers, herbs, and vegetables, the students hold a plant sale.
- ECP's fall carnival provided an array of games and activities for families to enjoy in costume.
- NMSBVI's campus in Alamogordo offers plenty of sidewalks on which to practice emergent orientation & mobility skills, for even the youngest students.
- The first day of school is always an exciting time for staff and students alike! In the vestibule of the Watkins Education Building, Mandy Blaes greeted her friend Carybeth Walsh with a very big hug.
- Andres worked on pottery at the "Crafty Kids" after-school program; and Ricky enjoyed reading in the new residential Library.

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