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FAST FACTS:

✓ 368,885 people in the state of Pennsylvania are blind or visually impaired.*
✓ 40,000 people are blind or visually impaired in Philadelphia County.*
✓ ASB serves 20,000 blind and visually impaired people annually.
✓ 1/3 of ASB’s staff is blind or visually impaired.

*Source: National Health Interview Survey on Disability

The 49th Annual Louis Braille Awards Ceremony was held at the Union League on Friday, January 30th, 2009. Honorary Chairman Robert Barchi, M.D., Ph.D., President of Thomas Jefferson University, welcomed attendees saying, “Through a range of services and community partnerships, Associated Services for the Blind helps people with low vision cope, adapt and live, so that blindness is no longer a barrier.”

The crowd was awed by singing sensation Timmy Kelly, performing the Star-Spangled Banner. U.S. Supreme Court law clerk, Isaac Lidsky, was the Individual Award Recipient. The Honorable Lynne Abraham introduced Lidsky, with appreciation of Timmy’s moving rendition of the National Anthem. “When I hear Tim Kelly, my heart sings, when I listen to Mr. Lidsky, my soul will fly.” WHYY host and producer Ed Cunningham presented a very surprised MC, Connie Colla, with a Special Recognition Award, for her many years of dedicated service to ASB.

Lidsky summed up the event in his acceptance speech. “Our goal today is nothing short of meaningful, independent, fulfilled lives for the blind: a world in which blind people can achieve anything that they want to do, anything that a sighted person could do.” With the applause Lidsky received, all of the Louis Braille Awards Ceremony attendees were in agreement.
From the desk of Patricia C. Johnson...

I am very happy to announce the success of ASB’s 49th Annual Louis Braille Awards Ceremony! The true essence of the Louis Braille Awards is the opportunity to recognize those who have exceeded expectations and embraced opportunities to provide a better quality of life for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

Honorary Chairman, Robert L. Barchi, M.D., Ph.D., is a true visionary and a genuine asset to both Thomas Jefferson University and to the larger community. Performer Timmy Kelly is an inspiration to individuals who are blind or visually impaired. It was a privilege to be on the same stage with this year’s Individual Award Recipient and Keynote Speaker Isaac Lidsky. His energy is as contagious as his accomplishments are impressive.

I would also like to congratulate Connie Colla on receiving the Louis Braille Special Recognition Award. We thank her for her many years of service to ASB. The supporters of the Louis Braille Awards Ceremony help promote independence and self-esteem for our nearly 20,000 clients.

Thank you to all Louis Braille participants and attendees!

Lavera Diggins: Client Success Story!

Lavera Diggins of Philadelphia, PA came to Associated Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ASB) as a client in 1978. Thirty years later, Lavera is still an active participant in ASB’s programs and services.

While attending classes at ASB, Lavera wanted to be actively involved in all she could. Most importantly, Lavera realized she wanted to help - help those going through similar situations and help those who wanted to regain their independence. Raising children gave Lavera experience teaching, and she found it was something she enjoyed. Lavera began volunteering to teach braille to individuals who wanted to learn.

Lavera is a member of ASB’s multi-award winning "Hands On" gardening club.

In her spare time, Lavera is a member of the Nevilaires, a group of blind and visually impaired individuals who travel within the community to sing for those in nursing homes and community centers.

Lavera Diggins taking a break at the "Hands On" Garden.

Upcoming Events

Mark your calendars for these exciting events happening at ASB in the months ahead!

March 27, 2009
15th Annual Guide Dog Appreciation Day
ASB pays tribute to the tireless and hard-working canine companions who make it possible for so many people - including ASB clients and staff members - to lead independent lives. Visiting Guide Dogs are treated with extra TLC on Guide Dog Day.

April 24, 2009
26th Annual Volunteer Recognition Luncheon
To express our gratitude to ASB’s 200 hard working and dedicated volunteers, we will host the 26th Annual Volunteer Recognition Luncheon at the DoubleTree Hotel located at Broad and Locust Streets as a way to say "Thank You". The luncheon will be held from 11:45AM to 2PM. Call 215.627.0600, x3275 or visit our website at www.asb.org for more information.

June 16, 2009
5th Annual Vision Cup Golf Tournament
The 5th Annual Vision Cup Tournament will be held at The ACE Club in Lafayette Hill, PA. Space is limited so be sure to reserve your spot early! Call 215.627.0600, x3242 or visit our website at www.asb.org.

Estate Planning

Prepare for the future, organize the present and take care of the past with Estate Planning.

Your generous donations will help to provide services to our clients. By writing a bequest for ASB through wills, annuities, life income planning, life insurance or other vehicles, you can collect tax deductions. The blind and visually impaired clients of ASB will continue to be cared for, through your thoughtful Estate Planning.

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Kareem Dale Visits ASB
Recently, Vice President Joe Biden announced Kareem Dale as Special Assistant to the President for Disability Policy, stating, “This is our first step to ensure that we have a strong advocate for people with disabilities at the highest levels of our Administration.” Dale, who is partially blind, previously served as a volunteer for the Obama campaign on the Disability Policy and Arts Policy Committees. In his new position, he will report directly to President Barack Obama, coordinating efforts to ensure the disabled are on a level playing field with all Americans.

"Disability issues will be the front and center and will be considered on the front end and not the back end."

In October 2008, Dale toured ASB with President and CEO, Patricia C. Johnson, visiting and speaking with ASB clients. In an interview with Board Member and RICB volunteer, Connie Moore, Dale explained, “This position [of Special Assistant to the President for Disability Policy] will be close to the level of cabinet level positions, like the Secretary of Education.”

Deborah Groeber Receives Eagles Community Quarterback Award
The Eagles Community Quarterback Award honors individuals who exemplify leadership, dedication and a commitment to improving their communities. The ceremony was hosted on December 16, 2008. Deborah G. Groeber, was selected among hundreds, as one of the top three candidates for the Eagles Community Quarterback Award. Thanks to Deborah’s incredible work, the Philadelphia Eagles awarded ASB a $1,000 donation and an additional $1,500 for placing in the TOP THREE! Deborah is a remarkable individual who happens to be deaf-blind. Born a deaf-blind child, Deborah became deaf-blind by the age of twelve. Despite her disabilities, Deborah has achieved many accomplishments. She was the first deaf-blind individual to graduate from an American accredited law school and has been featured on ABC News as the “PERSON OF THE WEEK.” Deborah is an ASB Board Member and Chairperson of the Gilles Estate Fund Committee. As Chairperson of the Gilles Estate Fund Committee, Deborah helped provide over 100 items totaling in costs of over $100,000 to 28 deaf-blind individuals living under the poverty line. Some of the items were computers, doorbells, alarm clocks and smoke detectors.

Timmy Kelly Sings At Louis Braille Awards
Premature at 26 weeks, Timmy Kelly was born blind and diagnosed with cerebral palsy. Today, despite his disabilities, Timmy is living life as an average child—except for the fact that he’s Philadelphia’s own singing sensation. After seeing Beauty and the Beast and receiving encouragement from Andrea McArdle, the star of the show, Timmy began singing lessons.

Timmy has performed for many people, including former President George W. Bush and for stadiums full of fans at Philadelphia Eagles games. Timmy’s most recent performance was at ASB’s 49th Annual Louis Braille Awards Ceremony, where he serenaded us with The National Anthem.

“We have watched Timmy grow from an amazing child into an extraordinary young man,” said Patricia C. Johnson, ASB President and CEO. “His singing talent has developed significantly and as always, I am in awe.”

Dr. Roy Fitzgerald becomes ASB’s Board Chairman
Dr. Roy Fitzgerald has been a member of ASB’s Board of Directors since its inception in 1983. He was recently re-elected to be Board Chairman having previously served in this capacity for two consecutive two-year terms from October 2002 - October 2006.

Currently retired, Dr. Fitzgerald has been a member of the Medical Staff at Crozer Chester Medical Center and an Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Thomas Jefferson University. Dr. Fitzgerald earned his A.B. cum laude from Amherst College in Massachusetts and his M.D. from Case Western University in Cleveland, Ohio. Throughout his career, he has written numerous publications regarding blindness related psychological reactions and disorders including Reactions to Blindness: An Exploratory Study in Adults with Recent Loss of Sight and The Newly Blind: Mental Distress, Somatic Illness and Disability.

As Chairman, he participates in all ASB events and recently delivered the closing remarks at this year’s 49th Annual Louis Braille Awards Ceremony.
If you are interested in sharing your skills with ASB clients, contact Volunteer Coordinator, Linda Gaffney, at 215.627.0600, x3275 or e-mail lgaffney@asb.org.

ASB Volunteer: Judy Johnson

Judy Johnson of Philadelphia became a volunteer for Associated Services for the Blind & Visually Impaired (ASB) after undergoing three brain surgeries, one of which has left her partially blind. She has also survived a life threatening illness known as Stevens-Johnson Syndrome, which has left her with light sensitivity. Some might have thought that Judy, or anyone, would have given up – but then they would not know Judy.

With ASB’s mobility training, clients gain independence and expertise navigating the outside world. By teaching clients how to maneuver using a white cane to orient themselves, and to use public transportation, they regain independence and confidence.

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“My time at ASB wasn’t just important, it was necessary,” Judy says. “Last night I went to the Opera, but we couldn’t find a cab. I was the one who suggested we walk and we did! This may not seem like a big deal but a year ago, I would not have been able to do that. I have the ASB staff to thank for the training I received.”

To gain more experience before going back into the working world, Judy started volunteering at ASB as an administrative assistant in the Human Services Division. “I felt so comfortable here. It was like I was coming home,” explains Judy.

“Judy exemplifies what ASB encourages all of our clients to achieve – independence and freedom,” says Patricia C. Johnson, ASB President and CEO. “Judy has overcome incredible odds and yet, she’s concerned with helping others and empowering current clients.”

In Judy’s free time, she hangs out with her children Kenneth, Christopher, Alexandria, and her dog, Papi. She also likes to watch "Storm Stories", the show about filming from the eye of a tornado. “I like the unpredictability of the storm. No one knows exactly how it’s going to go or when it’s going to stop.” Like the tornadoes she watches, Judy is definitely a force to be reckoned with.

On December 15, 2008 ASB hosted our Annual Client Holiday Party. Clients enjoyed Christmas carol sing-a-longs, musical entertainment performed by other clients and a visit from Santa who presented each client with a goody bag. Dedicated to the spirit of giving, ASB gave out holiday goody bags with wallets, gloves, umbrellas, cologne and makeup by Mary Kay. Clients also received 10 lb. turkeys that were generously donated by United Way. Everyone seemed to enjoy the festivities!

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