Sights & Sounds

The Magazine of Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind

Summer 2023

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ON THE COVER

Students from Alabama School for the Band make AIDB history by marching in the International Parade of Nations representing Alabama’s Lions Clubs.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JACQUE CORDLE, BOB CRISP AND LAURA MARTIN

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A LETTER FROM DR. MASCIA

A headshot of Dr. Mascia smiling to camera.

AIDB has enjoyed a beautiful summer; full of activity and growth for our students and consumers.

I am incredibly proud of our students from the Alabama School for the Blind (ASB) who spent the past year working extremely hard to become the first marching band in AIDB history! Over a year ago, Alabama Lions Clubs selected the ASB band to represent Alabama in the Lions Club International Parade of Nations in Boston, MA. Our students chose to show the world what it means to be limitless and learn how to march to become AIDB’s first marching band. After months of hard work and steadfast support from the staff at ASB; our students not only made history, they even brought home the title for First Place in the Parade of Nations Division 1 High School Bands category. Congratulations to the ASB band!

This spring our students traveled to the Alabama State House to tell the AIDB story to Alabama’s Legislators. The opportunity to experience Alabama’s government at work is a tremendous opportunity. I thank Governor Kay Ivey and the State Legislature for welcoming our students to Montgomery and for their continued support of AIDB. I am also thankful for the AIDB Board of Trustees, AIDB Foundation Board of Directors and our donors who wholeheartedly believe in the mission of AIDB. Without them, AIDB would not be able to transform the lives of those we serve beyond all expectations.

We are gearing up for a busy and successful academic year. Every time one of our students achieves an accomplishment on the athletic field, in the classroom, or in their extracurricular activities; we know what is really happening: they are thriving and growing. They are building a foundation for a successful and independent future!

Together we are Deaf. Blind. Limitless.

Sights & Sounds is published by the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind Office of Institutional Advancement, P.O. Box 698, Talladega, Alabama 35161.

BAND! TEN HUT!

Members of the Alabama School for the Blind Band march in Boston, Massachusetts while playing their instruments.

By Jacque Cordle, Director, Marketing and Community Relations, Office of Institutional Advancement

WITH THOSE WORDS, the Alabama School for the Blind Marching Band was called to attention and marched down Boylston Street in downtown Boston and into Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind history!

Boston, MA is known as a “city of firsts”. The first public garden, Boston Common, was constructed in 1634 followed by the first public school and first subway system. Then there was the first vaccination and the first telephone. Its newer firsts include Facebook, the first social media network, and closest to our hearts at Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB), the place our own Alabama School for the Blind (ASB) made AIDB history as the first ASB band to march in a parade!

**THE BEGINNING**In early 2022, the ASB band accepted a nominationfrom the Lions Clubs in Alabama to representAlabama in the Lions Club International ConventionParade of Nations during the summer of 2023. This was a special invitation for the ASB becausethe Lions Club is known worldwide for improvingthe lives of visually impaired people and preventingavoidable blindness. No stranger to parades, theASB has a long history of participating in parades by riding on a float while they play their instruments. However, with this invitation, the band members knew it was time to show the world what it means to be limitless. “This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity they will always remember, and as a Lion’s member myself, this makes me especially proud for them to have this experience. Mr. Chad Bell, the band director, and the students worked incredibly hard and I enjoyed seeing them march in the parade and their hard work pay of,” said John Mascia, Au.D., President, AIDB.

The ASB band marching down Boylston Street.

The band took its first steps on the march toward AIDB history at the beginning of the 2022/2023 school year by holding its inaugural summer band camp. Since the students had no marching band experience, Chad Bell, Band and Choral Director, taught the band from scratch. The band started with the basics of marching band fundamentals: how to stand at attention, step of with the correct foot and stay in tempo while marching. The ASB athletic coaching staff also worked with the band and developed an athletic conditioning program to prepare the students to march several miles in a summertime parade.

Throughout the school year, the ASB band took advantage of every opportunity to practice their performance skills by marching on the field at Alabama School for the Deaf football games, participating in the National Veterans Day Parade in Birmingham, AL, as that parade’s first band with members who are blind and visually impaired and performing at Jazz in the Park at the Orion Amphitheater in Huntsville, AL. “I am so incredibly proud of the efforts of the students this year,” said Bell. “With each performance at venues locally, throughout the great state of Alabama, and around the country, they raise the bar pushing past differences to show their limitless nature. Their performances are inspirational!”

The ASB band utilized sighted guides to provide guidance to students who needed additional support. Pictured is band member Zachary Glasgow, a rising senior, with Gina Dulaney, ASB Guidance Counselor.

**A COMMUNITY EFFORT**The employees of AIDB and supporters fromaround Alabama rallied around the ASB band,holding fundraisers and awarding grants to makethe trip possible. As a first-time marching band,the band needed to purchase new band uniformsand instruments designed for use while marching.Two organizations, the Holle Family Foundation andAlabama’s Lions Clubs, were instrumental in makingsure ASB students had this once-in-a-lifetimeexperience. A generous donation from the Holle

Family Foundation ensured the band members were ready to make history. “The Holle Family Foundation was established in 2014 to continue the philanthropic commitments of Everett Holle and his family. Everett strongly believed in AIDB and the importance of music,” said Mike Royer, a board of directors member for the Holle Family Foundation and the AIDB Foundation. “When the Landreth Music Building at ASB was dedicated several years ago, Everett was there that day. I remember him smiling and talking about how much he enjoyed the event. Everett truly cared about the students at AIDB and wanted everyone to have the opportunity to enjoy music. He would have been so proud of the students and their accomplishments.”

The ASB band celebrating the successful end of the parade. They pose for a picture with representatives from the Lion’s Club behind their banner.

Lions Clubs throughout Alabama held their own fundraisers to support the ASB band. Right here at home, the Talladega Lions Club held a fundraising event that included an exceptional performance by the ASB band and a silent auction. “The Holle Family Foundation has been a long-time supporter of AIDB and the Alabama Lions Clubs have been a wonderful partner to ASB,” said Becky Watson, Executive Director of the AIDB Office of Institutional Advancement and AIDB Foundation. “We are so grateful for their support and belief in our students.”

**HISTORY IS MADE**  
In the early hours of Monday, July 3, 2023, band members, ASB school staff and sighted guides boarded the airplane headed to Boston where they would spend the week working hard each morning in marching band practice and enjoying the sights and sounds of Boston every afternoon with trips to Fenway Park for a Boston Red Sox game among many other fun activities.

On Saturday, July 8, 2023, in the heart of historic Boston, MA, a bright summer morning heralded the experience the students had been working for. This highly anticipated event brought together people from around the world to pay homage to the work of Lions Clubs International. Starting at

Boston Common, the ASB marching band was the second group in the parade lineup, including over 150 floats, bands and participants. The ASB band led the way with the lively tunes of “Sweet Home Alabama,” “America the Beautiful,” “This is My Country,” and “God Bless America” echoing through the city’s historic architecture.

“This was a really big leap for me,” said Clara Sclelsi, flutist, and rising eighth grader. “I am really honored that I got to play and march in the parade. We put in so much hard work and it feels like a dream has been finally accomplished!” As the parade reached its grand finale near the Hynes Convention Center, the band stopped to perform for the parade’s grand marshals and judges. Not only did the band make AIDB history that day, but they also brought home the Frist Place prize in the Parade of Nations Division 1 High School Bands category! As the last licks of the band’s marching cadence faded away, the true limitless spirit of the ASB band continued to shine with pride and accomplishment.

“This experience has meant more than anything to me,” said Tey Jones, who plays the tenor saxophone and just graduated from ASB. “To get to do this with my people and make history one last time before I leave ASB is amazing! I never thought I’d get to do this. This is a great achievement and I want people to see us and know that kids who are blind can do anything.”

AIDB LEGISLATIVE DAY: BRINGING LEGISLATORS AND LIMITLESS FUTURES TOGETHER

By Jacque Cordle, Director, Marketing and Community Relations, Ofce of Institutional Advancement

Student representatives from Alabama School for the Blind, Alabama School for the Deaf and Helen Keller School of Alabama pose on the front steps of the Alabama State House.

AFTER A BRIEF BREAK due to COVID-19, the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) revived its annual pilgrimage to the Alabama State House in Montgomery to bring the limitless spirit of AIDB’s students and consumers to Alabama’s lawmakers.

AIDB Legislative Day opens the world of state government to student representatives from Alabama School for the Blind, Alabama School for the Deaf, Helen Keller School of Alabama and E. H. Gentry Facility. They experienced sessions with both the Alabama House of Representatives and Alabama Senate. Students from Alabama School for the Blind and Alabama School for the Deaf led the Pledge of Allegiance to open the House of Representatives and Senate sessions, by reciting and signing the Pledge using American Sign Language (ASL). “It was so cool to see the things that Mr. Hesser (Alabama School for the Deaf history, government and economics teacher) has taught us about,” said Mia Teague, Senior, Alabama School for the Deaf.

Adult consumers and families who receive services through the Early Intervention program at AIDB Regional Centers enjoyed visiting with the elected officials who represent their home communities. “It is an honor to represent AIDB today,” said Bobby Sneed, an adult consumer served by the Montgomery Regional Center. “The services and support provided by the Montgomery Regional Center have meant so much to me and helped me achieve the success I have today. I know that all of us who are served by the centers around the state feel the same way!”

LEFT: Kris Williams (left), Junior, Alabama School for the Deaf and Tinsley Andrews (right), Senior, Alabama School for the Blind, pose with Alabama Lieutenant Governor Will Ainsworth prior to opening the Senate session by leading the Pledge of Allegiance.

RIGHT: AIDB students Daymion Winfrey, Junior, Alabama School for the Blind and Kris Williams, Junior, Alabama School for the Deaf, open the House of Representatives session by leading the Pledge of Allegiance. Winfrey voices the Pledge while Williams signs the Pledge using ASL.

Rep. Danny Garrett answers questions from students about how the state government works.

John Mascia, Au.D, President, AIDB, introduces Sen. Linda Coleman- Madison to AIDB students and consumers.

Rep. Napoleon Bracy answers questions from AIDB students and consumers while two ASL interpreters ensure communication accessibility.

Speaker of the House Nathaniel Ledbetter bumps fists to congratulate Timirra Spencer, Senior at Helen Keller School of Alabama and member of the school’s basketball team, on the team’s recent state championship victory at the Special Olympics.

Representatives (L to R) Andy Whitt, Danny Garrett and Laura Hall get an impromptu lesson from Alabama School for the Deaf students in using ASL to sign, “Hello, welcome to the Alabama State House.” Mike Hesser, Alabama School for the Deaf teacher, stands by.

DONORS SUPPORT: “SHINING THE STARS ON AIDB”

By Jessica Atkinson, Marketing and Community Relations Coordinator, Office of Institutional Advancement

(Left) Alabama School for the Blind students David Ventura, eighth grade (keyboard) and Sereniti Sanders (vocals), fourth grade along with Peja Brownlee, Sophomore, Alabama School for the Deaf perform with Grammy Award-Winning musician Dave Crenshaw. (Right) Gerry Russell, second grade, Alabama School for the Blind works on his masterpiece during the event.

THIS SPRING the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) Foundation hosted “Shining the Stars on AIDB” at Red Mountain Theatre in Birmingham. Thanks to generous donors, the event raised over $100,000 to support AIDB’s programs throughout Alabama!

“Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind is an organization that is dedicated to life-changing work,” said John Mascia, Au.D., President, AIDB. “We believe in the abilities of individuals who are deaf and blind – and they believe in themselves and in what can be! This commitment has turned AIDB into the nation’s most comprehensive education and service program for individuals who are deaf and blind.”

The event included a performance by Alabama native and two-time Grammy Award-winning musician and producer, Dave Crenshaw. Students from Alabama School for the Blind, Alabama School for the Deaf, and Helen Keller School of Alabama also took to the stage.

“I have been part of the AIDB Foundation Board of Directors since 2014, and it has been incredibly rewarding to witness the amazing impact that is made when our philanthropic partners come together,” said Allen Cope, Senior Managing Counsel, American Honda Motor Co., Inc. and President, AIDB Foundation Board of Directors. “Through AIDB Foundation funds, we are able to build new facilities, provide our students with the most innovative technology, and deliver on our promise of limitless opportunities. More importantly, AIDB is able to make the seemingly impossible possible by delivering hope, building self-esteem and fostering confidence and independence within every individual.”

TOP (Left) L ot R: Virginia, Ray and Katie Williams; Frank McKinnon and Carolyn; Jay and Rhonda Sims TOP (RIGHT) Allen and Laura Cope MIDDLE (Left) L ot R: Jerald Labovitz; Nancy Goedecke; Charles Collat, Sr.; Johanna Collat; Cheryl Collat; Charlie Collat, Jr. MIDDLE (Right) L to R: Julia and Andrew Alexander with Tim and Sharon King BOTTOM L to R: Dr. Ash Tilak, Grant Howard, Dr. Nancy Mascia, Dr. John Mascia, Teresa and Tony Petelos, Rebecca and Clay Carr

The event also featured a live auction of artwork painted during the event by AIDB students and renowned artists Krel Buckelew of Hanceville, Alabama; Lindsey Moses of Talladega, Alabama; Kennedy Park of Pensacola, Florida; and Mary Emily Galysh of Rome, Georgia. At the conclusion of the auction, guests attended a special screening of the play “Bright Star."

“We sincerely appreciate the sponsors and donors who made Shining the Stars on AIDB a success! It was a wonderful night for our students to showcase their talents and the Birmingham community to learn more about the AIDB story. We are also appreciative to Red Mountain Theatre for collaborating with us on this fundraiser. The venue was perfect and made for a fun evening,” said Becky Watson, Executive Director of the AIDB Office of Institutional Advancement and the AIDB Foundation. “The funds raised from this event will be used to support the AIDB mission. Every day we work to prepare individuals to reach their limitless potential by providing superior staff, facilities, training and programs. Together we are limitless!”

Pictured L to R: Chad and Elana Jones with Leanne and Keith McCullough

This event was made possible through the support of these generous sponsors.

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THE POWER OF GOOD

By Jacque Cordle, Director, Marketing and Community Relations, Office of Institutional Advancement

ABOVE: Staci Brown Brooks, Vice President of Charitable Giving for Alabama Power and President of the Alabama Power Foundation with ASD elementary students. LEFT: Terry Smiley, Vice President, Eastern Division of Alabama Power and member of the AIDB Foundation Board of Directors with Becky Watson, Executive Director of the AIDB Office of Institutional Advancement and the AIDB Foundation and John Mascia, Au.D., President, AIDB, standing by the plaque recognizing the Alabama Power Foundation.

FOR WELL OVER 30 YEARS the Alabama Power Foundation has partnered with Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) to do great things together for the good of Alabama’s students who are served by AIDB. The impact of Alabama Power’s investment in the future of AIDB students is evident in AIDB’s education, outreach, health and technology programs… and most recently in our student life program!

“The Alabama Power Foundation is one of AIDB’s long-time and generous supporters and we have always been thankful for their commitment to the students at AIDB,” said John Mascia, Au.D., President, AIDB. “Our students at ASD will be thrilled to see this recreation room when they return to campus.”

Renovations are complete, with new games ready and waiting for the return of students to Alabama School for the Deaf (ASD) this fall. With Alabama Power’s commitment to innovative philanthropy that empowers Alabama, providing students at ASD with a new space for recreation fits the mold of a very traditional concept with proven modern-day impact. Typically around 75% of ASD students are residential; they attend school and live on campus. A strong student life program, designed to meet the needs of students outside the classroom is critical to the overall success of ASD students. Recreation centers positively impact student lives through the promotion of well-being, diversity of programming and fostering a sense of community and inclusivity.

The new space includes new gaming consoles and seating areas, reading nooks where students can work on homework and games like air hockey and ping pong. “We want this space to become a thriving place of activity for the ASD students; a place where friendships can grow that will support the students throughout their lives,” said Terry Smiley, Vice President, Eastern Division of Alabama Power and member of the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind Foundation Board of Directors.

“The students at ASD truly touched my heart,” said Staci Brown Brooks, Vice President of Charitable Giving for Alabama Power and President of the Alabama Power Foundation. “Their positive spirit and attitude are qualities that we could all learn from.”

“Alabama Power is proud of our great relationship with AIDB and the opportunity we have to support the students and be a strong member of the AIDB community.”

— Terry Smiley, Vice President, Eastern Division of Alabama Power

THROW AN AXE. BE AWESOME. REPEAT!

By Sarah Patnaude, Home Management Instructor; Christopher Misterka, Travel Instructor; and Anna Trotman, Braille Instructor, Alabama Freedom Center for the Blind

Pictured L to R: Anthony Craig, Student; Demetrios Golfos, Student; Anna Trotman, Braille Instructor; Chandra Johnson, Student; Christopher Misterka, Travel Instructor; and Sarah Patnaude, Home Management Instructor.

IMAGINE handling sharp objects and throwing them while blind. Are you scared? Does it seem impossible? Adult students at the Alabama Freedom Center for the Blind (AFCB) learned that not only is this possible, it is doable.

Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind offers adjustment to blindness training for adults through AFCB. Multiple activities are offered to build students’ confidence and turn impossible into possible.This spring, AFCB students and staff went axe-throwing. Yes, throwing axes! Why? Let’s dig in!

Axe-throwing may not be the first activity AFCB students think a person who is blind can do. However, they learned axe-throwing is entirely possible, as this experience gave them an opportunity to use the skills they are learning at AFCB: braille, travel, home management and assistive technology.

Students navigated an unfamiliar space, communicated with the public, followed instructions, maintained spatial awareness and used audio cues. Just like in class, students made mistakes and solved problems. “The experience of hitting the ceiling, floor and walls was all part of the learning process, which inspired us to adapt and persevere in the face of challenges,” explained Demetri Golfos, AFCB student.

Students may not realize their potential until given opportunities to surpass their expectations. By participating in activities like this, students gain confidence and begin to embrace their limitless potential. “Before this activity, I believed that you had to have sight to go axe-throwing,” said Chandra Johnson, AFCB student.

Students also need to know they can participate in fun activities just like their sighted peers. Before coming to AFCB, students were often left out of fun activities, either because of fear or a lack of knowledge about how to participate. It may take some adaptation and problem-solving, but blindness does not have to keep anyone from having fun. Axe-throwing’s recent popularity made it the perfect confidence-building activity for AFCB students. They are already looking forward to the next “big activity” to shatter misconceptions of blindness. Snowboarding, anyone?

NEW BASE SUPPLY CENTER OPEN FOR BUSINESS!

By Kyle Gregg, Executive Director, Alabama Industries for the Blind

ALABAMA INDUSTRIES for the Blind (AIB) is proud to announce its fifth Base Supply Center, which opened at the Anniston Army Depot. AIB, a division of Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) opened the new center in April. With this Base Supply Center, AIB is supporting a community designated as a Center of Industrial and Technical Excellence for combat vehicles, assault bridging, artillery, small caliber weapons and locomotives, rail equipment and non-tactical generators.

“The Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind is pleased to become partners with the Anniston Army Depot through our AbilityOne Base Supply Store,” said John Mascia, Au.D., President, AIDB. “Last year, we employed 172 adults who are blind or visually impaired through the Alabama Industries for the Blind – individuals who proudly tell anyone who will listen that they are supporting the U.S. military every day when they come to work.”

AIB is one of nearly 500 agencies nationwide that participates in the AbilityOne Program. AbilityOne provides employment opportunities to over 40,000 people who are blind or have significant disabilities. It operates over 150 Base Supply Centers on many military installations and some additional supply stores in federal buildings. These convenient locations provide shopping and delivery options instore, over the phone, and online. A wide range of products are offered to support the needs of the local community.

“As someone who became visually impaired as an adult, I am thankful for the opportunities available through Alabama Industries for the Blind,” said Charissa Archield, Manager, Base Supply Center, Anniston Army Depot. “I am very grateful that my journey with AIB has led me to become the store manager in Anniston.”

AIB is proud to continue the tradition of serving our nation’s soldiers while demonstrating the limitless ability of our team members who are blind or visually impaired. “AIDB believes in the limitless potential of our students and consumers,” Mascia said. “We look forward to a future of limitless opportunities and service with the Anniston Army Depot through our AbilityOne Base Supply Store.”

Charissa Archield, Manager, Base Supply Center, Anniston Army Depot at the newly-opened store.

BUILDING GIRLS OF COURAGE, CONFIDENCE & CHARACTER

By Jessica Atkinson, Marketing and Community Relations Coordinator, Office of Institutional Advancement

Anna Theiss joined the Girl Scout troop at Alabama School for the Blind (ASB) during her senior year of high school. It had a profound impact on her life. After graduation, Anna’s local Girl Scout council, Girl Scouts of North-Central Alabama, provided her with a grant to support her during her transition to E. H. Gentry Facility (EHG), Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind’s (AIDB) adult program that provides job skills, adjustment and academic training.

Throughout Anna’s time at EHG — and as she began her career at AIDB — Anna remained in contact with Ginger Garner Hanson, Girl Scouts of North-Central Alabama Membership Manager. In August 2021, Anna received a call from her mentor inviting her to become the Troop Leader at her alma mater.

“Girl scouting builds girls of courage, confidence, and character – girls who make the world a better place,” said Hanson. “We are proud to welcome girls of all backgrounds and abilities to be unapologetically themselves as they discover their strengths and rise to meet new challenges!”

A recent focus of the ASB troop has been on leadership and team building through STEM education. The troop was charged with creating small-scale models of bridges and designing an assistive technology device.

“I’m thankful for the mentorship I received from Girl Scouts,” said Theiss. “And as a Troop Leader, I’m thrilled to continue that legacy and mentor the next generation of students at Alabama School for the Blind. Whether it’s running their own business, advocating for their community, or discovering adventure, the Alabama School for the Blind Girl Scout Troop members will work together to discover their strengths and know that they are limitless!”

TOP: Anna Theis, Troop Leader, holding the troop’s favorite flavor of Girl Scout cookies. LEFT: Members of the ASB Girl Scout Troop with Troop Leader, Anna Theis. Front Row (pictured L to R): Sereniti Sanders, fifth grade; KaNiya Rucker, fourth grade; Dreana Jordan, fourth grade; Anna Theiss, Troop Leader; Taeja Mayes, tenth grade; Latisha Jordan, seventh grade Back row: Carlie Kimble, seventh grade; Avalee Williams, tenth grade; Za'Riah Hurst, seventh grade; Angel Meyer, eleventh grade; Shontia Weaver, eighth grade.

VISUAL LANGUAGE, VISUAL MATH

By William Jennison, High School Math Teacher, Alabama School for the Deaf

LEFT: William Jennison, High School Math Teacher, Alabama School for the Deaf, uses ASL to teach. ABOVE: Jennison, utilizing a touch-screen TV while teaching tenth grade geometry to make mathematical concepts accessible visually.

VISUALIZE THIS: You are a high school math student who is deaf and uses American Sign Language (ASL) to communicate with others. You rely on your eyes to get information about everything around you, even your language. At Alabama School for the Deaf (ASD), we combine math with visual learning to ensure all students receive the best education in the most accessible way possible. In my math classroom, everything revolves around visual learning. Desks are set up to allow the students to see the board while communicating with each other and me. I have a large touchscreen TV that allows me to create visual aids, and I use markers to visually show the students the process for solving complex problems. There are concrete resources such as fraction bars, integer cubes and pattern blocks to promote a deeper understanding of concepts.

I take advantage of ASL, a visual language, to teach math. For example, a recent geometry problem asked us to find the height of a tree if we know its shadow is 25-feet-long. A 4-foot-tall boy is standing next to the tree, and his shadow is 5-feet-long. How tall is the tree?

I used ASL to create a visual representation of this problem using the space in front of the signer. I signed “tree” on the left side. The imaginary tree is now locked in that space. I pointed to the tree and signed that its shadow is 25-feet-long. Next, I shifted to the right side and signed “boy standing.” Now the imaginary boy is set in the area next to the tree. I then signed that the boy is 4-feet-tall and his shadow is 5-feetlong. Lastly, I pointed to the imaginary tree and asked, “How tall is the tree?” The ensuing discussion with the students uncovered the process of using proportions to solve the problem.

It is my goal to empower ASD students to become independent problem solvers using a variety of visual tools. By the way, my students love bonus points. So, before I close… Can you find the height of the tree in the problem above? Bonus points if you can!

HELPING KIDS SOAR ALL YEAR LONG

By Samantha Godbey, Academic Secretary, Helen Keller School of Alabama

THE 2002-2023 school year was full of exciting changes for Helen Keller School of Alabama (HKS)! At the start of the school year, the school opened its new, fully accessible playground designed to accommodate students’ sensory and physical needs.

“The Most Wonderful Pine Tree in All the World!” Christmas Program told the story of how a beautiful pine tree changed Christmas for two special families. Students and staff had a wonderful performance in front of a packed audience.

HKS also formed a cheerleading squad. With cheerleading tips from the Alabama School for the Blind cheer squad, the HKS squad made its debut during an HKS basketball game against the Exceptional Foundation. This spring, the HKS basketball team claimed gold at the Alabama State Special Olympics tournament. Go Eagles!

“A History of Firsts” was presented at Talladega’s Historic Ritz Theater for our annual Black History Program. Gladys Swain, retired Talladega College professor, was the keynote speaker. Several notable African Americans from Talladega were also featured, including former Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) Vice President Vera Hendrix. The Talladega College Choir also performed. Read Across America Week kicked off with a big birthday party honoring Dr. Seuss. Volunteer readers visited classrooms, and afterward, students had cake and activities in the Student Center. The celebration continued with a dress-up theme for each day.

A new Functional Skills Enrichment Teacher, Boncynthia Graham, joined the HKS team in the spring, and had an immediate positive impact on students. HKS also strengthened its partnership with the AIDB RISE Autism Program, which serves students who have Autism Spectrum Disorder and sensory loss. A Board-Certified Behavior Analyst and a Registered Behavior Technician work with HKS students to help them succeed in academics and independence.

LEFT: Boncynthia Graham (second from left), Functional Skills Teacher, is working on shapes, weight and three step assembly skills designed to help prepare students for various jobs after graduation. BELOW: This year's gold medal basketball team showing off their championship rings. Pictured (L to R): Chanz McCall, Timirria Spencer, George Meyer, Conrad Chapman, Taylor Gannon, Keimonta Carr, Gabriel Locker, Grey Mayfield and Tierece Wilson.

THE BRIDGES WE BUILD

By Jessica Edmiston, Executive Director, E. H. Gentry Facility

Hareem Averitte, Services for the Blind (right) with Steve Dickerson, MBA (left), Talladega College Outreach Coordinator and Adjunct Professor.

Edith Kelley (standing), EHG Transition Coordinator, works with students from the EHG College Preparation and Dual Enrollment Program. Pictured (L to R): Jordan Walter, Services for the Blind; Benjamin Aust, Services for the Deaf; Kayla Marshall, Services for the Deaf and Emily "Emma" Pedro, Services for the Blind.

WHEN IT COMES TO the bridge between high school and postsecondary pursuits, E. H. Gentry Facility (EHG) students are only confined by their imaginations. “With our College Preparation and Dual Enrollment programs, EHG can serve as a bridge for students who are transitioning from high school to college, or who have been out of high school for an extended amount of time and have decided to pursue an advanced degree,” explained EHG Transition Coordinator Edith Kelley.

EHG, a division of Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB), partners with Central Alabama Community College and Gadsden State Community College to provide opportunities for students to take short-term, certificate-based classes or pursue associate’s degrees. Tutoring and academic remediation are provided, and students can participate in additional specialized classes in braille, orientation and mobility, assistive technology and independent living.

"We appreciate the partnership between the Alabama Community College System (ACCS) and AIDB,” said Kathleen Jones, Central Alabama Regional Director of Adult Education. “The Adult Education program, funded in part by the ACCS Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act grant, is truly making a difference in the lives of the students it serves. We are so proud of their accomplishments."

“College Preparation prepared me for college in a great way,” said Benjamin Aust, EHG student. “It allowed me to get an understanding as to what to expect from instructors and classroom accommodations. The Dual Enrollment program has supported me while attending college by allowing me to get help with a college assignment from EHG Instructors.”

EHG has also partnered with Talladega College to establish an Entrepreneurship Program for students. During the six-week program, participants will complete modules related to business basics, innovation, problem-solving strategies, and the development of a viable business.

“One of my goals is to expand my brand and business as far as it can go,” explained EHG student Hareem Averitte when talking about launching his clothing line, Blind Limitless. “I want to be the best entrepreneur that I can be for myself, my family and my communities.”

STUDENTS IN ACTION

From Basketball and Track to Cheerleading and Wrestling, athletes from Alabama School for the Blind (ASB), Alabama School for the Deaf (ASD) and Helen Keller School of Alabama (HKS) won championships and showed their limitless spirit!

The ASB Wrestling Team competed against five other states to win the South Central Association of Schools for the Blind wrestling competition title for the 19th consecutive year. Front Row (L to R): Troy Haynes, Kentavious Tinniehill, Chris Weaver, Ricky Weaver, Daymion Winfrey, Cole Young, Jaxson Stephens, Jay Tinniehill Back Row (L to R): Cedric Caver, Moises Francisco, Andre Garrett, Ny'Dariun

Jones, Rindariuos Pollard, Jimmy Dean, Abby Theiss, Josh Haynes

The ASB Girls Goalball Team competed against four other states to win the gold medal at the South Central Association of Schools for the Blind Goalball Tournament in Texas. Front Row (L to R): Head Coach Troy Haynes, Belle Williams, Tamya Dewitt, Brittany Garner- Braxton, Breana Garner- Braxton, Asst. Coach Brittany Marshall Back Row (L to R): Tealor Robinson, Zoe Catoe, Diamond Jackson, Abby Theiss, Shardea Gray, Asst. Coach Armisha Williams

The ASB Track Teams traveled to Texas to compete against five other states to win the South Central Association of Schools for the Blind track and field competition. The Boy's Track Team defeated GA, LA, MS, OK and TX to win the title. First Row (L to R): Taelor Robinson, Tamya Dewitt, Shymiria Broadnax, Latisha Jordan, Chrislynn Oliver, Narissa Swaim, Shardee Gray, Belle Williams, Tinsley Andrews, Ameerah Jones Second Row (L to R): Brittany Gardner, Ava Williams, Cassidie Worrell, Abby Theiss, Saja Elawad, Braxton Gardner, Diamond Jackson Third Row (L to R): Dalton Harris, Billy McMicheal, David Ventura, Kentavious Tinniehill, Christopher Weaver, Ricky Weaver, Andre Garrett, Clinton Sanders Fourth Row (L to R): Coach Amber James, Zachary Glasgow, Noah Price, Daymion Winfrey, Moises Francisco, Miguel Andres, Coach Troy Haynes

The ASB Cheerleading Team competed against five other states to win the South Central Association of Schools for the Blind cheer competition title. Front Row (L to R): Tamya Dewitt, Diamond Jackson, Taelor Robinson, Narissa Swaim, Belle Williams, Cassidie Worrell, Shy'miriya Broadnax, Zoe Catoe. Back Row: Jennifer Hammock, Coach

The ASD track teams competed in the Alabama High School Athletic Association State Track Meet in Cullman, Alabama where they brought home several top-three finishes. Boys Team (L to R): Front Row: Lakendrick Agee, Keith Young, Dominick Jefferson, David Vaden, Edson Rojas, Kaleb Buck, Brayden Weeks, Lemarcus Jordan. Back Row: Joshua Kirk, Noah Merritt, Austin Hayes, Peter Brownlee, Triallen Washington, Kristopher Williams, Austin Brown

ASD Girls track team (L to R): Sha'Ron Armstrong, Peja Brownlee, Tusi Silas, Melika Washington, Aiyanna Fanning, Ashley Wentworth

PEARLS

By Lillian B. Smith, M.S., D.P.C; Interim Director of Senior Services

Wanda Jefferies, Senior Services Social Worker, and a PEARLS client take advantage of the pretty weather in a recent session to combine exercise and discussion.

THE SENIOR SERVICES Department at Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) offers a variety of services, programs and opportunities to assist senior citizens with making informed choices in all areas of their lives. One service that supports their mental health is the Program to Encourage Active, Rewarding Lives (PEARLS).

PEARLS is offered through a collaboration with the Area Agency on Aging of the East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission. The free, confidential and evidence-based coaching program helps seniors manage and reduce feelings of depression and isolation.

Using practical problem-solving strategies, exercise and social activity, PEARLS helps reduce these symptoms in older adults. Coaches work one-on-one with clients over the course of six-to-eight sessions to identify stressors and develop solutions. This approach gives individuals tools and strategies to effectively manage their emotions.

"Navigating stress and overwhelming issues can affect how you feel emotionally," said Lillian Smith, M.S., D.P.C., Interim Director of AIDB Senior Services. "But it doesn’t have to be this way. With the right support, the cycle can be broken."

AIDB PRESIDENT NAMED HERO FOR SIGHT

John Mascia smiles to camera.

JOHN MASCIA, Au.D., President of the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) was named the Hero for Sight at the 10th annual Hero for Sight event held by Sight Savers America on May 10, 2023.

The annual celebration brings together Alabama's eye care community, as well as corporate and community leaders across Alabama. This event honors the recipient of the Sight Savers America Hero for Sight Award. The award is presented to an individual or organization whose impact on children’s eye care has been both lasting and profound.

*“I am so humbled to receive the Hero for Sight Award, it’s about serving children and making sure that every child has a level playing field. Sight Savers America, along with its partnership with Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind, works to achieve just that: To make sure that every child has the accessibility they need to live the life that they want.”*

— John Mascia, Au.D., President

SPECIAL EQUESTRIAN PROGRAM

By Jessica Atkinson, Marketing and Community Relations Coordinator, Office of Institutional Advancement

Vanderbilt University students pose with a hay feeder that they constructed.

TWELVE VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY students spent their Spring Break with horses and students from Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB). The students were hosted by AIDB’s Marianna Greene Henry (MGH) Special Equestrian Program as part of Vanderbilt University’s Alternative Spring Break. This student-run service organization is dedicated to motivating students to become active citizens through intentional community engagement.

Throughout the week, the Vanderbilt students gained a deeper understanding of a horse-centered approach to therapy (hippotherapy) by assisting students from Alabama School for the Blind, Alabama School for the Deaf, and Helen Keller School of Alabama during therapeutic classes. They also built hay feeders and painted fences surrounding the pastures.

One of the volunteers, David, commented, “This has been an amazing experience! It’s so rewarding to have interacted with AIDB’s students and staff and learned about all of the work that goes on behind the scenes to support the mission of MGH! From grooming and feeding the horses to cleaning the pastures each day, it’s an amazing operation.”

“All of the projects we’ve been working on, and interacting with the students using hippotherapy, have been super rewarding,” agreed Sam, another volunteer. “But I also loved being able to see Alabama Industries for the Blind while touring AIDB. Seeing the employees who were blind achieve the same things, if not more, as someone who’s sighted makes me want to advocate more for people who are blind.”

"These students sacrifice their Spring Break to volunteer with sites all over the world,” said Tim Greene, Arena Coordinator of the Special Equestrian Program. “They have a unique opportunity to view different cultures, collaborate with fellow students, solve problems, accept new challenges, and provide great service. Our program is honored not only to be chosen as a site, but also to have spent many years hosting these students and making many lifelong friends along the way. It is always sad to see them leave, but we do get to look forward to a new and enthusiastic group next year. Thank you, Vandy!"

Volunteers Sam (left) and David (right) smile to camera.

HEALTHY AND WELL IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

By Isaac Beavers, Executive Director, Office of Field Services

Tanika Patton’s healthy eating habits class for Talladega Regional Center consumers.

ALABAMA INSTITUTE FOR DEAF AND BLIND’S (AIDB) 10 regional centers across the state are focusing on health and wellness. Case managers contact individuals served by an AIDB regional center to provide support related to health needs and to encourage involvement in their local communities.

Summer is the perfect time for community fun in the sun, including America’s favorite pastime, baseball! The regional centers in Decatur and Huntsville have partnered with Ability Sports Network to offer Beep Baseball, an adaptive version of baseball for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

Regional centers are also working in conjunction with AIDB Senior Services to host benefit and health fairs across the state. These ensure that consumers who are senior citizens are receiving the most out of their Social Security benefits and have the knowledge and resources they need to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, regional centers are especially focused on mental health concerns tied to isolation and loneliness. The Regional Centers are committed to ensuring consumers are connected to and involved in their local communities. One fun way they accomplish this is by hosting an assortment of weekly and monthly events. Support groups for individuals who are blind and visually impaired also give consumers the opportunity to socialize and learn about local resources. Case managers for the deaf coordinate monthly social events based on the requests of their local consumers, such as silent dinners, American Sign Language (ASL) family story time and local trips as well as conduct ASL classes for their local communities.

For AIDB consumers, it’s easier than ever to get involved in the activities taking place statewide. Visit AIDB.org/RegionalCenters to learn more.

Health screening for a Talladega Regional Center consumer.

STEM INTEGRATED CURRICULUM IN DEAF EDUCATION

By Jason Roop, Director, and Harry Wood, STEM Service Provider, NTID Regional STEM Center

ACCORDING TO the U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics, careers in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) are projected to grow 10.8% over the next 10 years, while traditional jobs will grow 4.9%. In addition, STEM careers typically pay higher salaries and often task individuals to work in teams with people from other specialties.

With that future in mind, the NTID Regional STEM Center at Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) exists to change the approach to STEM education for educators and students at Alabama School for the Deaf and throughout the Southeast. The Center provides workshops and training for teachers, students, parents, interpreters, employers and vocational rehabilitation programs.

A typical use of STEM curriculum in schools is a silo approach where there is a designated class that teaches STEM content. While this is an excellent approach, research shows that a traditional emphasis on rote memorization and lecture-based classes paired with classwork is not enough to help students apply knowledge to real-world problems.

STEM education works best when it connects disciplines to each other. The Center accomplishes this in a variety of ways. Learning is infused with hands-on activities and student-centered learning. The content remains the same, but the methods are designed to encourage critical thinking, inquiry skills, collaboration, and soft skills. Even social-emotional learning, highly discussed in today’s education circles, is addressed by a well-designed STEM curriculum.

Alabama School for the Deaf students receive instruction from Brett Grayson, STEM Trainer - Robotics/Math. Students pictured L to R: Derek Irizarry-Ruiz, Ashley Wentworth and Triallen Washington.

“Getting to see students get excited completing a project and the confidence it builds makes our work incredibly fulfilling. The knowledge students gain from the NRSC will continue to grow as they transition into successful careers.”

— Brett Grayson, STEM Trainer - Robotics/Math, NTID Regional STEM Center

CHRISTMAS CHEER IN JULY!

FOURTEENTH ANNUAL CHRISTMAS IN JULY RAISES OVER $106K FOR STUDENTS AT ALABAMA INSTITUTE FOR DEAF AND BLIND.

By Jacque Cordle, Director, Marketing and Community Relations, Office of Institutional Advancement

ABOVE: Wendy Little (far right), winner of the Poker Run, with (L to R) John Mascia, Au.D., President, AIDB; Johnny Vetra, event auctioneer; and Tim Chiasson, event volunteer. LEFT: Gary Wiginton won the custom-designed, gas-powered Yamaha Golf Cart for his son Peyton (shown).

THE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS of a festive event, worthy of the best Christmas spirit, could be heard on July 15, 2023, at Pier 59 in Vincent, Alabama. The annual day-long event, this year held in memory of Jesika Kitchens, concluded with a live auction featuring vacation packages, sports memorabilia and specials from local favorites. Christmas in July raised over $106,000 to ensure that the students of Alabama School for the Blind, Alabama School for the Deaf and Helen Keller School of Alabama have a magical Christmas later this year, full of gifts and Christmas fun.

A core group of volunteers led by Tim and Rita Chiasson and Janet Swann, owner of Pier 59, as well as staff from the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB), begin preparations in January each year for the summertime event. By July, they are ready to host several hundred people who participate in a variety of events held at Pier 59. The event has raised over $450,000 to date.

Clockwise from top left: 1) Janet Swann, owner of Pier 59, with Jimmy Kitchens and Kay Zarzour, grandparents of Jesika Kitchens (portrait). 2) April Womack (right) with Advance Tank and Construction, an event sponsor, enjoys lively conversation with a friend during the event. 3) Event volunteers Dr. Claire Keel and Rita Chiasson enjoy the sunshine and music on the back deck of Pier 59 with friend, Dot Barnett. 4) Jada Hamer (second from left), winner of the 50/50 drawing, with (L to R) John Mascia, Au.D., President, AIDB; Johnny Vetra, event auctioneer; and Tim Chiasson, event volunteer. BELOW: Boaters return after enjoying a day on the lake playing the Poker Run which featured stops at some of Lake Logan Martin’s best lakefront businesses.

“We are very appreciative of this committee; they are such a blessing to all of our students.”

—John Mascia, Au.D., President, AIDB

KELLER KIDS

By Stephanie Pizza, Director, Shoals Regional Center

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.” These famous and inspiring words by Helen Keller were at the core of how the staff at the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) Shoals Regional Center planned and facilitated the annual Keller Kids event on July 21, 2023.

Case Managers from the AIDB Shoals Regional Center worked with staff from the Center for Assistive Technology Training Program (CATT), a collaboration between the American Printing House for the Blind and AIDB, to develop fun, hands-on activities focusing on vision and hearing loss for over forty children. Bethany DeVries, Case Manager for the Deaf at the AIDB Shoals Regional Center, lead one activity that centered on Deaf culture and hearing loss. Dr. Lillian Smith, Case Manager for the Blind at the AIDB Shoals Regional Center, lead an activity that focused on blind culture and vision loss. From the Center for Assistive Technology Training, Jennifer Oldenburg, DeafBlind Trainer; Jill Dunaway, Assistive Technology Trainer/Specialist; and Katy Reid, Aide, developed an activity that provided the opportunity to learn about braille and assistive technology devices.

In line with the mission and vision of AIDB, the children participating in this year’s Keller Kids were able to better understand the limitless potential of individuals who are deaf, blind, deafblind and multidisabled. They had the experience of writing their name in braille using a Perkins Braille Writer, traveling by using a sighted guide, communicating with each other using basic American Sign Language and completing various daily living tasks under vision simulation. The children learned that despite having vision or hearing loss, independence is possible by utilizing unique accommodations and strategies.

“We are committed to continuing to serve the local community in every way we can. Through ongoing community education like the Keller Kids event, we strive to help individuals learn more and increase their understanding and acceptance of what it means to live with vision and hearing loss,” said Stephanie Pizza, Director, AIDB Shoals Regional Center.

The AIDB Foundation, the statewide network of AIDB’s ten Regional Centers, the Tuscumbia Lions Club, the Tuscumbia Kiwanis Club and the Helen Keller Festival Board of Directors, supported the event.

ABOVE: The 2023 Keller Kids pose in front of a Helen Keller Statue at the AIDB Shoals Regional Center while holding up the American Sign Language sign for, “I love you.” BELOW (Left): Jill Dunaway, Assistive Technology Trainer/Specialist with CATT shows two participants how she utilizes assistive technology. BELOW (Right): Bethany DeVries, Case Manager for the Deaf at ADIB Shoals Regional Center leads a session.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2023 HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

On May 25, Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind celebrated the graduates from Alabama School for the Blind, Alabama School for the Deaf and Helen Keller School of Alabama.

ALABAMA SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

FRONT ROW (L TO R): Tinsley Andrews, Saniya Sanders, Belle Williams, Narissa Swaim, Maria Abac-Quintino BACK ROW (L TO R): Rindarious Pollard, Zachary Barnes, Cassidie Gorig-Worrell, Isaiah Merrill, Jacquarious Tinniehill NOT PICTURED: Ny'Darium "Tey" Jones and Zania Abdullah

ALABAMA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

FIRST ROW (L TO R): Kerstan Johnson, MaKenzie Farmer SECOND ROW (L TO R): Iranzi Beatrice, Emily Cash, Juan Vasquez, Mia Teague, Kiya Manson, Haylie Rizor, Angelica Duran-Carr THIRD ROW (L TO R): Ellen Demouey, Deshauna Wallace, Austin Brown, Bogdan Dailey, Carly Ortega, Joshua Kelley FOURTH ROW (L TO R): Taylor Dubose, Stacey Phillips, Joshua Kirk NOT PICTURED: Denijah Swain

HELEN KELLER SCHOOL OF ALABAMA FRONT ROW: John Joseph Hamilton

BACK ROW (L TO R): Brianna Elizabeth Jones, Angel Marie Williams, Taylor Calvin Gannon, Jennifer LeAnn Hulsey, Jacqueline Shandanna Gosha

Congratulations to all graduates

THANK YOU FOR REMINDING US THAT TOGETHER, WE ARE DEAF, BLIND, LIMITLESS!

YOU Can Make a Difference

The AIDB Foundation provides limitless opportunities for students and consumers across Alabama who are served by AIDB. For more information about how you can transform the lives of those we serve beyond all expectations, please contact us!

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