

Message from the Executive Director

Dear Friends...



Joseph J. McNulty

AS I WAS WORKING ON MY COMPUTER the other day, an instant message popped up on my screen. It wasn't the content of the message that grabbed my attention so much as the fact that the sender was a person who is deaf-blind.

A few years ago, this cyber encounter would not have been possible. However, with advances in technology and the ever expanding reach of the Internet, people who have combined vision and hearing loss can now interact with their friends, family and co-workers using computers with voice output, screen magnification programs and Braille displays.

HKNC is presently working with researchers from Stony Brook University, Towson University and Virginia Commonwealth University on projects to develop additional vital technology. These efforts will allow individuals who are deaf-blind greater independence and access to important information, including local and national emergency alerts. You can read more about one of these projects in this newsletter.

I also invite you to visit the Center for our annual Open House on April 29, 2008. This is a wonderful way for you to experience, first hand, the marvels of how technology is changing lives. Our staff and students will be present to demonstrate various adaptive devices, and technology, giving you an inside perspective on the exciting things happening at the Helen Keller National Center.

We are working hard to ensure that each individual who is deaf-blind has access to the technology they need to stay connected with their com-

munities, their social networks and the world at large. Thanks to the interest and support of people like you, HKNC is able to provide the resources and services that make this possible.

Joe McNulty



HKNC is the only agency that provides vocational and independent living skills training on a national basis exclusively to youths and adults who are deaf-blind.

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What If?

A NEW AND DISCONCERTING FACT in America today is that we are not as safe as we had once thought. Potential climate changes, terrorism, and virus growth in a mobile world population have given rise to some of the most tragic disasters any of us can remember. The notion that a heroic “someone” will come to save us in an event such as 9/11 has been superseded by a national call to be prepared as a nation. We are all advised to keep enough water, food and supplies for a three-day period in the event of a disaster such as a hurricane or a tornado and to watch the local news for more information. But what if you were deaf-blind?

HKNC staffer, Val Chmela, wondered how the deaf-blind students at the Center would be able to save themselves should a catastrophic event happen. That thought gave rise to Helen

Keller National Center’s newest curriculum, Emergency and Disaster Preparation Training. Teaching the fundamental strategies of disaster preparation and utilizing state of the art technology so that individuals can gain information independently are the mainstays of this course. “It is about empowering individuals to become their own best defense,” said Ms. Chmela. Coursework includes lectures, hands-on drills, technology training and role playing.

The success of the program has been immediate and courses are now offered at HKNC to high school youths and senior citizens who are deaf-blind as well as to staff working in assisted living facilities. As stated by one student who recently completed the training: “The more I learned the less I feared. I feel so much stronger now.”

HKNC Battle at the Point

ON AUGUST 13, 2007, an exciting event took place when the HKNC “Battle at the Point” teed off at the Sands Point Golf Club. Sponsored by Rolex USA, the event drew forty of the most talented amateur and professional golfers together for a 36-hole stroke play event to benefit the Center.

David Pierce, Echo Lake Golf Club in New Jersey, shot 69-68=137 to win by one over Kevin Foley, the 2007 Freshman Big Ten Player of the year. In addition, Nationwide Tour Pro, Steve Shellock, recorded the low round of the day, firing a 66 in the afternoon, finishing in a tie for third at 141.

Unlike any other local tournament, the “Battle at the Point” brought together golf’s elite players with HKNC’s top sponsors. By combining the players with the sponsors on the course in the afternoon, and then again during the awards reception, the event offered all participants the oppor-

tunity for energetic dialogue and discussion about the Center.

Special thanks go to The George Link, Jr. Charitable Trust; Standard & Poor’s; Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz, PC; Oppenheimer Funds; Mr. Jim Daly; and Mr. John Codey, our club sponsor, for their collective contributions to this inaugural golf tournament.



HKNC—Reaching Out to the Community

HKNC Students Give Back



A NEW PROJECT WAS INITIATED AT HKNC in August involving a group of students who are currently in training. Their acronym, HKNC-ROCs (HKNC—Reaching Out to the Community) says it all. The goal of the project is to learn about community service and giving back to others who have given so generously to HKNC.



For a starter, the committee collected a basket with an assortment of coffee, tea and other goodies which they presented to the Sands Point Police Department for

the help they give HKNC throughout the year—especially during the annual Walk-A-Thon. To thank the staff at HKNC, the ROC students spent a day of performing “random acts of kindness” at the Center.

At Thanksgiving, a food drive was conducted and several baskets of food were delivered to local families in need. The committee then sponsored a 50/50 raffle and a bake sale to raise money to participate in the United Methodist Church’s Angel Tree where they chose the names of two lucky children who received toys and games for Christmas.

With the New Year upon us, the group is busy planning new ways to give back to the community.

HKNC and University Researchers Tackle Technology

IF YOU WERE DEAF, blind and diabetic, how would you test your blood sugar level? On January 10, 2008, Dr. Diane Pawluk, Ravi Rastogi and David Burch from the Biomedical Engineering Department of Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), visited HKNC to discuss technology and assistive devices that people who are deaf-blind can use to “tactually read” graphs, diagrams, and maps as well as medical equipment such as glucometers and thermometers.

Students and staff from HKNC identified a need for technology that allows individuals with combined vision and hearing loss to better understand graphic images. Topographical maps and tactile schematic diagrams were suggested to the research team as viable ways for a person who is deaf-blind to access graphic information.

The joint meeting of HKNC and VCU also included a discussion about the need for glucometers and thermometers with tactile readouts for deaf people who are experiencing vision loss due to diabetes. The incidence of diabetes is growing and the need for this technology is becoming great.

After touring the Center and brainstorming with the students and staff for two days, the biomedical team returned to Virginia Commonwealth University to explore grant funding so they can begin developing prototypes for the technology. HKNC is also exploring funding for this vital project. If you are interested in more information about this research, please contact Suzanne Ressa at Ext. 254.



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Helen Keller National Center
For Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults

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For more information please contact Suzanne Ressa
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August 11, 2008

HKNC INVITATIONAL GOLF TOURNAMENT

June 8, 2008 • Registration begins at 9am

HELEN'S WALK

April 29, 2008 • Drop in between 4pm – 7pm

OPEN HOUSE

save the date