

Contact Information FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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***Local Lions Club Brings the Gift of Literacy to Blind Youth***

The 2011 Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning (BELL) program scheduled for July will be able to host more students this year thanks to a generous donation to the National Federation of the Blind of Virginia (NFBV) from the Arlington Host Lions.

The Arlington Host Lions Club donated one thousand dollars to support the BELL initiative that will help students learn new skills to do well in school and to eventually be employed.

The BELL program teaches blind and low vision children below the age of fourteen how to use Braille effectively for reading and writing. “The goal of the BELL program is to introduce children who cannot read regular print to how useful Braille can be in hopes that they continue using it throughout their lives.” said Dr. Fredrick K. Schroeder, President, of the NFBV and Arlington Host Lions member.

“When they become adults, the one factor that enables them to be employable is their Braille skills. Odds are, if you don’t know Braille, you don’t have a job.”, said Sandy Halverson, the Coordinator of the BELL program, who was present to accept the donation at the May 3, 2011 meeting of the club.

This is the second summer where the NFBV will be organizing a BELL program in our area. In a pilot program in August of 2010 held in Arlington, VA, seven blind and low vision students participated in a two-week program of exploration of how many uses there are for Braille in school and at home.

Theresa Willis from Virginia Beach, a blind parent of a blind student who attended the 2010 pilot program, said, "I have Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP) and have never read a book in my life. I would try to read a chapter but would give up because it was too hard with eyestrain and headaches. I don't want that for my child and this program has given her what our school district could not. My daughter also has RP and if she learns Braille, she will not have to come home from school crying because her eyes are tired and she has headaches. I want her to be able to read the books that I have never been able to."

Braille is a system of raised dots that blind people can use to read and write. It was invented by Louis Braille nearly 200 years ago and is one of the most effective methods for bringing literacy to those who cannot read print.

The Arlington Host Lions Club was established in 1935 and serves Arlington by creating and fostering a spirit of understanding among all people for humanitarian needs by providing voluntary services through community involvement and international cooperation. The club is also a member of Lions Club International which has over 1.35 million members in over 206 countries and geographic regions.

The National Federation of the Blind of Virginia consists of fifteen chapters throughout the state and serves its members and all visually impaired citizens by promoting fellowship as well as supporting programs that increase the educational and economic opportunities of the blind.

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