



National Federation of the Blind-Omaha
Breaking Barriers for the Blind
Bridgit Pollpeter, director, media relations
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Betsie Freeman
Omaha World Herald
1314 Douglas St.
Omaha, NE 68102

June 1, 2011

Dear Ms. Freeman,

“With proper training and positive attitude, blindness can be reduced to a mere physical inconvenience.” This is the motto for the National Federation of the Blind (NFB). This statement may sound impossible, but members of the NFB live this message every day.

The goal of the NFB is to break the barriers and perceptions built from years of stereotypes and negative attitudes that hold the blind back from reaching their full potential. There is life after blindness, and the NFB is on a mission to instill independent mindsets in society towards blindness.

With a 70 percent unemployment rate among blind people, and only 10 percent of blind students being taught Braille, the NFB works through advocacy and educational programs to change perceptions that insist blind people are not as capable. “The most difficult part about blindness is not blindness itself, but the attitudes people have about blindness,” according to the NFB website.

On Thursday, June 16, 2011, the National Federation of the Blind-Omaha Chapter (NFB-Omaha) will hold its annual picnic, 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., at Halleck Park, 500 E. Halleck St., Papillion, NE 68046. The picnic is an opportunity for NFB-Omaha to meet potential members as well as engaging with the public. NFB-Omaha is on a campaign to revitalize its mission and grow. The chapter seeks fellow blind Omahans and continues to advocate for equal opportunities in the community.

We provide the following items in this media kit to provide information about NFB-Omaha’s campaign:

- Backgrounder about NFB-Omaha
- Fact sheet about chapter
- News release on meet-and-greet picnic
- Feature story on importance of independence to the NFB
- Brochure explaining goals of NFB-Omaha
- Talk points used for speaking engagements
- Radio PSA

The NFB seeks equal opportunity and fair treatment in its communities. After 70 years campaigning for change, the NFB looks to the future hoping for growth. Independence is a reality for blind people. For more information or to arrange interviews and photo opportunities, contact Bridgit Pollpeter, director, media relations, NFB-Omaha, at 402-350-1735, or email Omaha@ne.nfb.org. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Bridgit Pollpeter, director, media relations



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Backgrounder

Breaking Barriers for the Blind

NFB-Omaha Works to Ensure Equality and Independence for all blind People

The National Federation of the Blind-~~(NFB)~~ Omaha chapter (NFB-Omaha) has spent the last 40 years creating an environment of equality for the blind in its community. Through education, advocacy and fundraising events, NFB-Omaha is changing what it means to be blind.

The NFB was founded in 1940 by Dr. Jacobus Tembroek and Dr. Kenneth Jernigan. For centuries, blind people were not afforded the same opportunities as most sighted people. Expectations were low, and blind people were taught to accept perceived limitations. The NFB was established in an attempt to organize the blind to seek and define their own opportunities.

The motto for the NFB is: "With proper training and a positive attitude, blindness can be reduced to a mere physical inconvenience." The NFB is now the world's largest and oldest advocacy group of the blind. An integral aspect of the organization is that they are blind people advocating for themselves.

The NFB is a national group with state affiliates and local chapters. Eventually, the organization developed divisions catering to specific interest. Founded in 1971, NFB-Omaha changed its name from the Tri-County chapter to the NFB-Omaha chapter in the mid-1980s.

From its inception, NFB-Omaha's priority has been to promote the independence of the blind and seek equality. During the early years of NFB-Omaha, members focused their efforts on employment and the restructuring of The Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI).

White Cane Banquet

The NFB is relentless in demanding equality for the blind in employment. In the early days of the organization, most doors were closed to blind people because it was believed they could not efficiently manage the task of most jobs. Through educational outreach and legislation, the NFB has helped to give blind people an equal foot to step ahead in the world and pursue whatever employment they dreamed of.

Following suit, NFB-Omaha created its White Cane Banquet in 1988. The banquet concentrates on promoting the employment of the blind by honoring local employers who hire blind people as well as providing necessary accommodations.

Twenty-three years later, the White Cane Banquet is still an annual event encouraging employment for the blind, but it is also the biggest fundraising event for the chapter. Funds raised go toward an academic scholarship offered annually during the Nebraska affiliate's convention. The chapter also offers programs cultivating independence among the blind through various activities, both educational and social.

In 2009, the Board of Directors for NFB-Omaha decided to revamp the White Cane Banquet. While the banquet still recognizes local employers, the main focus is on education. Organizers select a theme each year spotlighting an issue important to the group. NFB-Omaha hopes to develop more changes in an effort to establish the banquet as a fundraiser instead of an outreach event.

[Restructuring the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired](#)

In the 1970s, NFB-Omaha was instrumental in restructuring the Nebraska Services for the Blind, which is now the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI).

Initially, NCBVI concentrated on services to help people retain vision. Knowing this was not a practical goal, the NFB worked with the state government to develop a program that could offer services to those who were unable to retain vision.

In 1974, due in large part to members of NFB-Omaha, NCBVI hired Dr. James Nyman, who is blind himself, as director for the agency. Dr. Nyman sought the help of the Iowa Department for the Blind, and NCBVI adopted the "Iowa Model," which focused on teaching alternative skills such as Braille and white cane mobility along with instilling a positive, independent attitude.

Many blind Nebraskans have experienced the positive results of these modifications. The Iowa Model employs the Structured Discovery method developed by Dr. Jernigan who served as director for the Iowa Department for the Blind from 1958 to 1971. This method teaches fundamental skills that can be applied to any situation. The goal is complete confidence and independence in oneself.

NFB-Omaha Today

As NFB-Omaha has grown, it has created committees to focus on specific efforts. The Outreach Committee works to promote the primary goal of the organization, which is educating communities about the capabilities of the blind and issues important to the NFB. The Membership Committee seeks new members and provides material about the organization and blindness, which includes partnering veteran members with new members, acting as mentors. The Fundraising Committee focuses on events and activities that bring in funding. The White Cane Banquet Committee works to coordinate the banquet each year.

NFB-Omaha strives to spend another 40 years fighting for equality and educating about blindness. Members of the chapter are involved in different areas of the NFB as well as their communities. Each step they take breaks more barriers, allowing blind people to seek opportunities in employment, education and personal life.

Information taken from the following:

<http://www.nfb.org/>

Vetter, Hank. April 16, 2011. (Email interview), w0egn@cox.net

Newman, Robert. April 16, 2011. (Email interview), newmanrl@cox.net



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Fact Sheet

Breaking Barriers for the Blind

- The Omaha chapter works to decrease the 70 percent unemployment rate among the blind.
- Promotes the use of alternative skills such as Braille, white cane travel and adaptive software and technology.
- Encourages blind people to use the services offer by the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI).
- Advocates for Braille literacy to help the 90 percent of blind children denied Braille education.
- Provides local groups and agencies information about the abilities of the blind.
- Offers support and information to those with varying levels of vision loss.
- Works with Nebraska affiliate of the NFB to draft legislation dealing with fair and equal treatment for the blind.
- offers a \$500 academic scholarship to a blind student during the annual affiliate convention.
- Recognizes local employers who have hired blind employees during annual White Cane Banquet.



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Feature Story

NFB Fights for Independence and Equality for the Blind

By Bridgit Pollpeter

Imagine waking up one day and you could no longer see. Your vision was gone, what would you do?

Now imagine that once you woke up with no vision you went about your day as usual. You relaxed in the shower; you prepared a breakfast of eggs, bacon and toast; you hurried off to work then finally returned home to tend the garden, exercise, watch television, read a book—whatever your pleasure may be.

Blind people all over the world follow a similar routine everyday. Losing their vision did not mean they lost their independence. Through use of alternative tools and methods, positive attitudes and common sense, many blind and visually impaired people live active lives just like their sighted peers.

“There is life after blindness,” says Robert Leslie Newman, president of the National Federation of the Blind-Omaha Chapter. “We’re trying to bring this message to our community, to help blind individuals adjust and realize their potential as well as educate the public.”

The National Federation of the Blind (NFB) is an organization created in 1940 by Dr. Jacobus Tembroak and Dr. Kenneth Jernigan. Tembroak and Jernigan were both blind, and they lived during a time when opportunities for the blind were limited. The intention of the NFB was to organize people who are blind and fight for equality in all areas of life. Independence was important and key to the founding fathers of the NFB.

Seventy years later, the NFB has grown to a 50,000-member organization involved in political, educational, professional and social arenas. Always it has recognized that independence is possible for any person experiencing vision loss. With so many varying levels of vision loss, the NFB uses blind as a blanket term describing any level of legal blindness.

“I didn’t always get why the NFB insisted on referring to everyone as ‘blind,’” Newman says. “Eventually I came to understand that blindness is more a matter of perception. We embrace a certain way of life and recognize that as blind people—no matter how much we ‘see’ or don’t ‘see,’—we can be independent.”

Blind people are adapting and seeking new opportunities. In terms of employment, there is very little blind people are not doing. The blind are lawyers, teachers, accountants and even scientist, engineers and medical doctors. Growing technology has opened doors that were once considered closed to the blind.

Blind students carry full work loads and do all the same assignments as their sighted peers. They have the ability to keep up in the classroom and excel. Many students pursue higher education with success too.

Blind people also have families.

Not too long ago, parents and doctors recommended blind children be sterilized so they could not procreate. Blind parents still are fighting for the right to raise their children, but it is possible. Many blind people—even blind couples—are raising children successfully.

Sighted people take many things for granted—employment, education, families—which were not always considered possible, or even allowed, for blind people, according to the NFB website. For centuries the blind have struggled for equality in fundamental, daily activities. The NFB fights to turn the perceptions and stereotypes society has created, according to the NFB website.

“So much of what we know- what we think we know- about blindness is really just a perception built up over time,” says Ross Pollpeter, treasurer of NFB- Omaha. “I wasn’t always on board with the independence thing, but once I discovered how capable I was, my world opened up.”

Independence is possible for the blind, but it does not happen over night. With training and positive attitude, blindness can be reduced to a mere physical inconvenience, according to the NFB website. In order to reach this mindset, a few steps must be taken.

Most states have agencies for the blind that can instruct blind adults. The NFB has three training facilities in Colorado, Louisiana and Minnesota. After extensive research along with visiting centers, participants must choose what training center best fits their needs. NFB centers are not government-ran agencies and have more room to individualize the program, according to the NFB website.

In these programs, you will learn how to:

- Read and write Braille.
- Learn the technique for the long white cane allowing independent mobility.
- Work with adaptive technology on computers, note-taking devices, digital readers and other pieces of technology.
- Learn alternative household skills from cleaning and cooking to shopping and budgeting.

These programs will take six to nine months, but once finished, participants have the skills to allow them to live independently.

The NFB centers along with a few state agencies follow an instructional method known as Structured Discovery. This method, developed by Jernigan, takes everyday skills and helps you learn alternative techniques to apply to any situation. A controversial, but vital element to Structured Discovery is learning under sleep shades. Any student with some level of vision will have to wear sleep shades during training. Staff, sighted or blind, will have undergone the same training before working with students.

“Structured Discovery is like riding a bike. Once you learn, you don’t forget. It is a similar application with Structured Discovery,” Pollpeter explains. “And the sleep shades build confidence. Once you learn how to do something with no vision at all, you have a boost to your confidence, and you realize just how capable you are.”

Another element of a good program is cultivating a positive attitude towards blindness. This is accomplished through different methods like philosophical discussions about blindness issues to hands-on experience in real life situations.

Discussion may center on why people often are uncomfortable around people with disabilities, or should blind people take a store discount offered only because you are blind, Pollpeter says. Often, you may go camping or white-water rafting in an attempt to build confidence. These activities build confidence that is vital if a blind person hopes to be independent, according to the NFB website.

“We’re not super-humans, we’re just regular people who use different tools at times to accomplish things,” says Bob Burns, board member of NFB- Omaha. “Anyone can do this stuff. Once they learn how to.”

Diabetic retinopathy and macular degeneration are two leading causes of blindness today, according to the NFB website. This means a good portion of people are experiencing vision loss later in life. Many of these people have active lives and participate in various community events as well as their own hobbies. Blindness does not have to be a reason to hold them back. Independence is still an option.

NFB- Omaha is breaking barriers for the blind.

“We want to reach our community and find those people who could benefit from the NFB,” Newman says. “So many blind people and the agencies that work with them are not aware of the complete independence that can still exist. We in the NFB are trying to change these perceptions. We are often referred to as ‘radicals,’ but all we hope for is equality and opportunity; we can be independent, and we are hopeful that our independence will be recognized by all one day.”

Burns, Bob. April 25, 2011. (Personal interview), blcburns@cox.net

Newman, Robert. April 25, 2011. (Personal interview), newmanrl@cox.net

Vetter, Hank. April 16, 2011. (Email interview), w0egn@cox.net

National Federation of the Blind website at: www.nfb.org



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For Immediate Release

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NFB-Omaha Seeks Fellow Blind People in Community

Omaha, Neb., April 28, 2011- The National Federation of the Blind-Omaha Chapter (NFB-Omaha) <http://www.nfb.org> seeks new members during its annual picnic.

NFB-Omaha will hold a picnic on June 16, 2011, 6:00 to 9:00 p.m., at Halleck Park, 500 E. Halleck St. in Papillion. NE 68046. The picnic is an opportunity for the chapter to invite the community and encourage people to join.

The NFB is a consumer organization of the blind. Local chapters stimulate membership. NFB-Omaha plans a picnic every year as a meet-and-greet so the public can become acquainted with the organization.

“Our monthly meetings do not always allow us the time to socialize or provide much information to guest and new members,” said Robert Leslie Newman, president, NFB-Omaha. “The picnic is an opportunity to meet and speak with people in a casual setting.”

NFB-Omaha works to break barriers built through stereotypes. The organization looks to provide equal opportunities to those who are blind and visually impaired.

“Membership is vital to our chapter so we can continue our mission,” said Bob Burns, board member, NFB-Omaha. “We also hope to educate other blind people as well as the public at large that there is life after blindness.”

Only 10 percent of blind and visually impaired students are taught Braille, according to the NFB’s website, and a staggering 70 percent of blind and visually impaired people are unemployed, according to the Department of Labor. The NFB has spent 70 years cultivating positive attitudes about blindness and seeking equal opportunities in order to change these statistics.

For more information about the NFB, visit, <http://www.nfb.org>; for information about the picnic or NFB-Omaha, contact Robert Leslie Newman at 402-556-3216, newmanrl@cox.net.

With more than 50,000 members, The National Federation of the Blind is the largest and most influential membership organization of blind people in the United States. We are breaking barriers for the blind. The NFB improves blind people’s lives through advocacy, education, research, technology and programs encouraging independence and self-confidence.



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Radio PSA

National Federation of the Blind-Omaha Chapter

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BREAKING BARRIERS FOR THE BLIND

SFX: Louie Armstrong's What a Wonderful World will play in background

MALE ANNOUNCER: THE WORLD CAN BE A WONDERFUL PLACE ONCE YOU REALIZE VISION IS A STATE OF MIND.

WITH TRAINING AND POSITIVE ATTITUDE, BLINDNESS IS JUST AN INCONVENIENCE.

IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING ANY VISION LOSS, THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND (NFB) HAS ANSWERS FOR YOU.

THE GOAL OF THE NFB IS TO INSTILL COMPLETE INDEPENDENCE FOR THE BLIND.

THE NFB IS BREAKING BARRIERS FOR THE BLIND.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE NFB IN YOUR COMMUNITY, CONTACT OMAHA@NE.NFB.ORG. THAT'S OMAHA@NE.NFB.ORG.

SFX: What a Wonderful World will crescendo before ending

THIS MESSAGE HAS BEEN BROUGHT TO YOU BY NFB-OMAHA AND KQCH-FM



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Talk Points

NFB-Omaha

Breaking Barriers for the Blind

What You Can Expect From NFB-Omaha

- Meets each month to discuss NFB-Omaha business.
- Educates about blindness through various events and activities
- Promotes unique philosophy instilling idea of complete independence for the blind.
- Directs members to NFB training centers for the blind.
- Seeks equal opportunities for blind Omahans.
- Provides information related to blindness.
- Advocates on behalf of blind Omahans dealing with unfair or unequal treatment in the community.
- Mentors new members.
- Provides information to NFB-National divisions and publications.
- Welcomes all blind people in the community with varying levels of vision loss, abilities, age and gender.

The Blind Leading the Blind

The National Federation of the Blind is comprised of members speaking for themselves in their communities. State affiliates and local chapters continue the efforts that provide equal opportunities for the blind around the country.

Since 1971, NFB-Omaha has been working in the community to improve the lives of blind Omahans.

- NFB-Omaha provides advocacy for the blind.
- Educates the community about the abilities of the blind.
- Encourages independence among the blind in Omaha
- Works with local and state agencies providing services to the blind.
- Raises awareness of issues and causes important to the organization at the national level.
- Donates a \$500 academic annual scholarship during the affiliate convention.
- Recognizes local employers hiring blind employees during annual White Cane Banquet.

For more information about NFB-Omaha and how to get involved, email us at Omaha@ne.nfb.org, or call, (402) 557-2143.

We're changing what it means to be blind by breaking barriers.

IMAGE!!!

With more than 50,000 members, The National Federation of the Blind is the largest and most influential membership organization of blind people in the United States. We are breaking barriers for the blind. The NFB improves blind people's lives through advocacy, education, research, technology and programs encouraging independence and self-confidence.

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The logo for Omaha features a stylized figure in blue, red, and yellow colors, resembling a person or a flame, positioned to the left of the word "Omaha" which is written in a blue, sans-serif font.

**NATIONAL
FEDERATION OF THE
BLIND-OMAHA
CHAPTER**

NFB-OMAHA

Breaking barriers for the blind

IMAGE!!!

Did You Know...?

Did you know most “blind” people have some level of vision—from light perception to “useable” vision?

Losing vision is not the end of the world. We often place stigmas on blindness, but if your vision loss no longer allows you to use sight for certain task, you may benefit from alternative skills and tools.

Did you know Louis Braille was only 12 when he created the Braille code?

Braille is often considered difficult to learn and cumbersome to use, but a child was able to develop a form of reading and writing. Most people learn Braille in 4 to 6 months.



IMAGE!!

Did you know that blind people use technology like computers and I-phones?

With accessible software, many pieces of technology are used efficiently by blind people including computers, mobile phones, E-readers, MP-3 devices and much more.



IMAGE!!!

Did you know the long white cane is the most used mode of independent mobility for the blind? A long skinny stick may look like a dubious way to travel, but many blind people successfully use the long white cane to independently navigate the world.



IMAGE!!!

Did you know blind people are leading active lives and participating in their communities? Many blind people live normal lives enjoying professional and personal pursuits just like everyone else. They have families, work and participate in a variety of interest in their communities.

For more information about alternative skills, or other blind-related topics, visit <http://www.nfb.org>.