

## NEWSLETTER



## EYE ON ALABAMA

## For Your Eyes Only: Medical Updates in Low Vision

A “Big Tip of the Hat” to Dr. Dawn DeCarlo, director, of the UAB Center for Low Vision Rehabilitation and Board member of the Alabama Chapter for coordinating the special workshop addressing “Medical Updates in Low Vision”. The one day event was held February 4, 2011, at the Callahan Eye Foundation Hospital. Over 90 persons interested in eye related issues attended. A variety of informative topics related to the medical aspects of the eye, blindness and low vision ranging from “Bioptic Driving” to “Ocular Genetics” and the eyeGENE Project were presented. A BIG thank you to all the UAB Doc’s and specialty staff who took time from their busy schedules to share their knowledge, enthusiasm and passion for their work with us. This one-day specialty workshop was presented as an AER member benefit and was free to all AER members which included an excellent box lunch from Zoe’s catering. The UAB Center for Low Vision Rehabilitation is a joint program between the UAB School of Optometry and the UAB Department of Ophthalmology and is located next door at the Callahan Eye Foundation Hospital. The director, Dr. Dawn DeCarlo, is a graduate of the UAB School of Optometry, and is nationally recognized as an expert in low vision care. If you are interested in information about AER or joining the Alabama Chapter of AER contact Ms. Susan Harrell, President at (245) 314-6222 or [susan.harrell@rehab.alabama.gov](mailto:susan.harrell@rehab.alabama.gov) .



**Dr. Dawn DeCarlo, OD,MS, Associate Professor and Director of the Center for Low Vision and Rehabilitation at the Callahan Eye Foundation Hospital.**

## AER Billy Don Sims Scholarship Update! Big Surprise!

The AER Board of Directors recently received a GREAT phone call from Marion Mark, BEP Representative from Mobile, AL. It seems that Marion had contacted Providence Hospital back in 2008 requesting a contribution to the Billy Don Sims Scholarship Fund. Unknown to Marion or AER, Providence had written a check to the BDS Fund back in 2008, however, they discovered that the check had never been cashed. Providence called Marion and inquired if AER was still interested in receiving the donation and Marion stated “Yes, by all means!”

On February 28, 2011, Marion received the following letter:

Dear Mr. Mark:

Providence is pleased to make a donation to the Billy Don Sims Scholarship Fund. Your department provides a valuable service to visually challenged individuals who seek employment in the Mobile area. The training you provide, not only gives them skills, but also self-confidence as they enter the market place. Please accept this \$1,500 donation to assist with this vital service. May your program continue to grow in service to others.

Signed: Clark P. Christianson, President and CE)

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## AER Board of Directors Names Louis M. Tutt as Association's New Executive Director

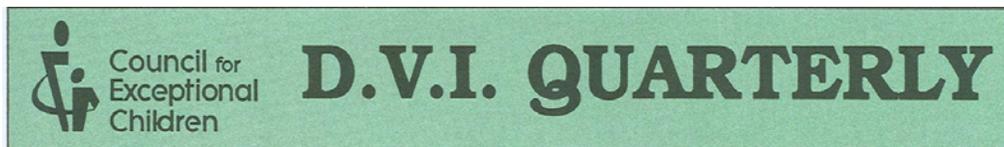
(Alexandria, Va.) The Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) is pleased to announce that Louis M. Tutt, M.S., M.Ed., has been named as the association's new executive director.

Tutt will begin in the position April 1, 2011, and will be responsible for the day-to-day operations of the 4,600-member association which supports professionals who provide education and rehabilitation services to people with visual impairments.

Tutt comes to AER from the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind where he was principal. He served as president and CEO of the Maryland School for the Blind from 1990 to 2003 and was also affiliated with the Michigan School for the Blind and Missouri School for the Blind.

With degrees from Norfolk State University and Michigan State University, Tutt is nationally recognized in the field of educating children who are blind and multi-handicapped. He has written articles on motor skills for young deafblind children, co-authored *Movement and Fundamental Motor Skills for Sensory Deprived Children* and contributed to and wrote the forward for *Accessing the General Physical Education Curriculum for Students with Sensory Deficits*.

"Lou brings to AER a solid background in leadership, communication and organization," said Patricia Leader, president of the AER Board of Directors. "His long-time membership and involvement in AER and past leadership roles with the Council of Schools for the Blind and Council for Exceptional Children bring a strong knowledge of our field to the position," she said.



### The Following Interview was reprinted from the DVI Quarterly People You Should Know Interview by Stuart Wittenstein

**Name:** Louis M. Tutt

**Organization:** Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind; Principal, School for the Blind

**Contact Information:** CSDB, 33 N. Institute, Colorado Springs , CO 80903 ; 719-578-2200; ltutt@csdb.org

**Please explain what you do:** I am the principal for 60 blind and low vision students and 40 staff that make up the School for the Blind, the residential program, transition program, and nursing staff, as well as the Colorado Instructional Media Center (CIMC). My greatest pleasure is working with the teachers and families of the Colorado school. **Continued on page 6.....**



## AER OFFERS SCHOLARSHIP

The Alabama Chapter of the Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) is offering an academic scholarship in the amount of \$2000 to a resident of Alabama who is pursuing a degree in one of the following disciplines:

Rehabilitation Teaching  
Orientation & Mobility  
Teacher of the Visually Impaired  
Rehabilitation Counseling  
Related degree at the discretion of Scholarship Committee

The scholarship recipient will be announced at the 2011 AER Annual Training Conference to be conducted in October 2011. Applicants should apply in writing to the Scholarship Chairperson. The following information is needed in the letter of application:

Name  
Address  
Hometown  
Degree Pursued  
Educational Institution Attending  
Statement of Purpose (one page describing your career plans including stated plans to work in the field of blindness)

Recipients must be enrolled in school for the 2011 school year

Applications must be postmarked no later than June 30, 2011 and should be mailed to:

Julie Brock, AER Scholarship Chairperson  
608 Brookside Drive  
Northport, AL 35473

Please share this information with interested students.

## NEWS from Mississippi State University's Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision (MSU-RTC)

MSU-RTC has begun work on six research strands as the new NIDRR-funded RRTC on Employment Outcomes for Individuals Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired. We are excited about the opportunity to do this work, which is expected to produce new knowledge and to support the development of effective innovations in vocational rehabilitation practices. Here, in brief, are descriptions of these projects:

"A Customized Transportation Intervention" involves research design and implementation of a new model to address transportation barriers to employment for persons who are legally blind, and the accumulation of data from its use. This research will be conducted in the state of Alabama.

Our "Business Mentoring Intervention" will employ a randomized-controlled trial of a program matching college seniors who are legally blind with profession-specific mentors who are also legally blind.

"Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Agency-Employer Practices" will identify employer interaction practices that improve employment outcomes for consumers, and will develop evidence-based guidelines from research findings.

The fourth project is the "Randolph-Sheppard Program Evaluation," where elements of this historic blind vendors program which require modifications and/or improvement will be identified, and training and recruitment materials will be developed to address demonstrated needs.

The RRTC's fifth strand, "Outcomes of Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) Beneficiaries," will evaluate VR practices and outcomes, and will develop evidence-based guidelines for VR service delivery personnel and state VR agencies.

Finally, project 6 is a subcontract with American Foundation for the Blind (AFB): "Accessibility in the Workplace." AFB will evaluate the usability of multifunctional document centers and business internet voiceover phone systems for individuals who are legally blind, and will use their findings to develop an online, searchable database for use by employers, consumers, and practitioners.

These research strands are expected to produce new and improved training and technical assistance mechanisms. Dissemination activities will adopt the Knowledge Translation model, which optimizes the beneficial impact of research findings upon the population studied.

As we begin these projects, MSU-RTC anticipates welcoming an accomplished group representing both blindness professionals and consumers to Mississippi State University's campus for our first new RRTC advisory council meeting here, March 30-31.

To learn more about MSU-RTC, visit <http://blind.msstate.edu>.

***AER Board Announces 28<sup>th</sup> Annual Training Conference***  
***October 2-3-4, 2011***  
***Lakepoint State Park Resort***  
***104 Lakepoint Drive***  
***Eufaula, Alabama***

**Mark Your Calendar!**  
**Save the Date!**

***"Why aren't blind people working?"***  
***Challenges, Responsibilities, Solutions***

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The AER Board of Directors wants to take this opportunity to say a HEARTFELT THANK YOU to both Mr. Marion Mark and to President Christianson and all those who represent Providence Hospital for their generous donation to the Billy Don Sims Scholarship Fund. The Providence contribution represents the largest single contribution ever made in the funds' history. This support coupled with the 2010 fundraising efforts brings the BDS Funds CD to \$61,500. Also noteworthy, the AER Board at its January meeting voted to increase the 2011 scholarship amount from \$1,000 to \$2,000 for the 2011 recipient. To date this effort has provided \$6,500 in scholarships to those selected.

**Thanks to all of you who continue to support this effort in the memory of Don and his contributions to our lives and the blindness profession!**

### **CHILDREN'S HARBOR EVENT HOSTED FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN WHO ARE BLIND OR HAVE LOW VISION**

The weekend of April 8-10 the UAB Songs For Sight (S4S) Support Group and the Alabama Association for Parents of Visually Impaired Children (AAPVI) will host a weekend event at Children's Harbor on Beautiful Lake Martin. Children's Harbor is a camp that is fully accessible to individuals with disabilities. The weekend will have a social, recreational and educational component for all who attend.

These two support groups target the low incident population of children, teens and young adults who are blind or have a vision loss. This includes children that have multiple disabilities. The support groups provide a network for families with children who have vision loss. Many parents with blind or partially sighted children feel isolated when it comes to the challenges of raising a child with low vision. Blind and partially sighted individuals can have the same successes as someone without a vision loss. To that end, the S4S/AAPVI support group maintains that it is beneficial to for our families to become acquainted with successful blind adults and the blindness skills needed to become independent. Blind professionals, college students with low vision and professionals in the field of blindness and low vision play an important role in events hosted by the S4S/AAPVI support group.

The facilities at Children's Harbor will allow our groups to meet collectively to share successes and struggles in a secure environment. While parents are taking part in structured educational activities, their children will be making new friends or getting reacquainted with old ones who share some of the same challenges in everyday life. During the weekend, there will be plenty of time for families to participate in recreational activities such canoeing, fishing, beeping Easter egg hunts and ball. Campfires for hot dog and marshmallow roasts are planned for both Friday and Saturday night. A sing-a-long, with a guitar accompaniment, around the campfire will close out each night.

**Upcoming events involving AAPVI/NAPVI-**Our Beeping Easter Egg Hunts are fast approaching. We have dates set for the Hunt at Triple S Farms in Harpersville- Saturday April 2nd beginning with lunch at 11:00. RSVP'S for all who plan to attend should go to Chantal McManus, AAPVI State President. Send an e-mail to [chantalmcmanus@yahoo.com](mailto:chantalmcmanus@yahoo.com) and please include the number of attendees so we have enough food for lunch. AIDB Regional Center in Birmingham-April 14<sup>th</sup> beginning at 10:00am. This is for the Pre-school kids from AIDB Regional Centers in Birmingham, Tuscaloosa and Talladega. We also have beeping eggs at the Talladega School for the Blind. Our Fishing Rodeo for the AAPVI kids, AIDB kids and others is set for May 14<sup>th</sup> at Sunshine Farms in Shelby County. More information to come as the date approaches. Many volunteers are needed to help the children fish this year. **Contributed by Chantal MacManus**

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**How did your career begin? Why did you choose the career that you did?**

I took leave of absence from teaching physical education in Virginia to pursue a Master's Degree at Michigan State. While at MSU, I visited the Michigan School for the Blind and got turned onto the idea of teaching phys. Ed. And motor skill to blind children. I never went back to Virginia—did both a Master's degree in phys. Ed. And one in blindness education. My mentors, Lou Alonzo and Janet Wessel, told me "we're going to change your whole career and guided me onto this path. I was in the right place at the right time.

MSB needed a motor skills teacher for their rubella deafblind children. The P.E. teachers at MSB were struggling with how to engage this new population of students – and in fact the deafblind students were segregated from the rest of the school population. Graduate students from MSU and experts in deafblindness mentored me and taught me to "be consistent and repetitious" in my teaching deafblind children. I soon began to see progress with these students and found that enormously rewarding. The need for these kinds of services was great and soon I was being asked to present at other schools for the blind and help them develop similar programs, eventually collaborating on the book, "Movement and Fundamental Motor Skills for Sensory Deprived Children" (Kratz, Tutt, & Black, 1987).

**What 2 or 3 accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?**

The first two are described above:

- (1) Developing a formal motor skills program at the Michigan School for the Blind.
- (2) Co-authoring a book with Dr. Betty Kratz and Dr. Laura Black from Bowling Green University back in the late 1980's.
- (3) Nomination for member-at-large CEC's Board of Directors. I lost by only 100 votes (smiles).

Then in my "second career" as an administrator:

- (4) I became the first African American superintendent of a school for the blind in Missouri (for 9 years) and then was the first African American president and CEO of the Maryland School for the Blind for 13 years. Both of these schools were moving toward serving more students with deafblindness and multiple disabilities, so my experiences in Michigan helped me implement programs for this population.
- (5) I served the Council of Schools for the Blind (COSB) as president from 1991-1994 and was awarded COSB's prestigious William English Leadership Award in 1995. This was particularly rewarding for me since Bill English was a mentor, fellow coach and superintendent, and a personal friend.

**What is the most important lesson you learned from your work?**

The most important lessons that I have learned from my work are patience and flexibility. Our patience is always tested by the unexpected, and so flexibility is a must. Patience is needed to get one through in critical moments.

**Who has been your mentor or greatest inspiration throughout your career?**

Bill English, retired teacher, coach and administrator of several American schools for the blind, had a profound impact on my work in the field of blindness. His encouragement and friendship helped me to believe I could succeed in leadership positions. He always impressed me as gracious, down-to-earth, and accessible –attributes I have tried to emulate.

**What do you think it takes to be successful in our field?**

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Obviously, it takes patience and flexibility, but also perseverance and tenacity. One needs the skills of the long distance runner, endurance, confidence, the ability to deal with pressure and come back re-energized. More than anything, however, is a love for blind and low vision children and wanting the best outcomes for them.

**How would a friend, colleague, or professor describe you?**

Probably a good listener, having a good sense of humor and pretty good organizational skills.

**What are your interests outside of work? What do you do with your time off?**

Playing racquetball when I can, and reading books written by Larry McMurtry.

**What is your favorite book? What are you reading now?**

My favorite book is Lonesome Dove and I am reading Gabriel, a book about a young African American boy whose family moved from Baltimore to a small western town in Kansas back in the 1880's.

**If you could do so, how would you plan your career differently?**

If I could, I would start out in the blindness field as an undergraduate as opposed to a graduate at Michigan State University .

**What words of wisdom would you like to share with the members of DVI?**

Love what you do and don't be discouraged by the bureaucracy.

I encourage each member of DVI to volunteer in professional organizations – not out of obligation as much as out of their own need for professional growth. Through my service to DVI, I have met so many other professionals and learned and grew and shared with them through their perspectives on our field.

It's an honor to serve, as I have served DVI, as a Board member, Governor, and Representative. I was actually DVI's last Governor and first Representative as we saw CEC through their structural reorganization. I was thrilled to be recognized for my service by receiving the DVI Distinguished Service Award in Baltimore in April 2005.

**What challenges do you see before us?**

Of course, funding and keeping the need for specialized services for blind and low vision children before the powers that be.

**What's next for you?**

I retired once and I will retire again in the next few years. I would like to serve on a board at a specialized school for the blind.

**Anything else you'd like to add...**I wish to thank those 35 rubella deafblind children who gave me a chance back in 1971 and the many professionals I met in the field over these last 35 years at four different schools for the blind. I wish to thank them for their patience and flexibility with me. I especially want to thank my friend and colleague, Herb Miller. Herb pulled me out of my shell. He was one of a kind. I was fortunate to know him and to be one of his professional and personal friends. I miss "Red Socks!"