



## In the News

### California teen wants to make braille embossers affordable

A California eighth-grader has launched a company to develop a low-cost braille printer—and he made his prototype out of Legos.

According to an Associated Press (AP) story, 13-year-old Shubham Banerjee asked his parents one day, how do blind people read? They told him to Google it—and when he did, he was shocked to discover that braille printers (also called embossers) cost at least \$2,000.

“I know that there is a simpler way to do this,” Shubham recalled thinking. So he built a braille printer with a Lego robotics kit. After the “Braigo”—a name that combines Braille and Lego—won numerous awards, he started Braigo Labs last summer with an initial \$35,000 investment from his father, the AP reported.

Shubham built a more sophisticated version of his printer using an off-the-shelf desktop printer and a newly released Intel computer

chip. The new model, Braigo 2.0, can translate electronic text into braille before printing. Executives at tech giant Intel were so impressed they invested in the project. Shubham also was invited to join more than 100 students, entrepreneurs, engineers, and researchers from around the country at the first-ever White House Maker Faire.

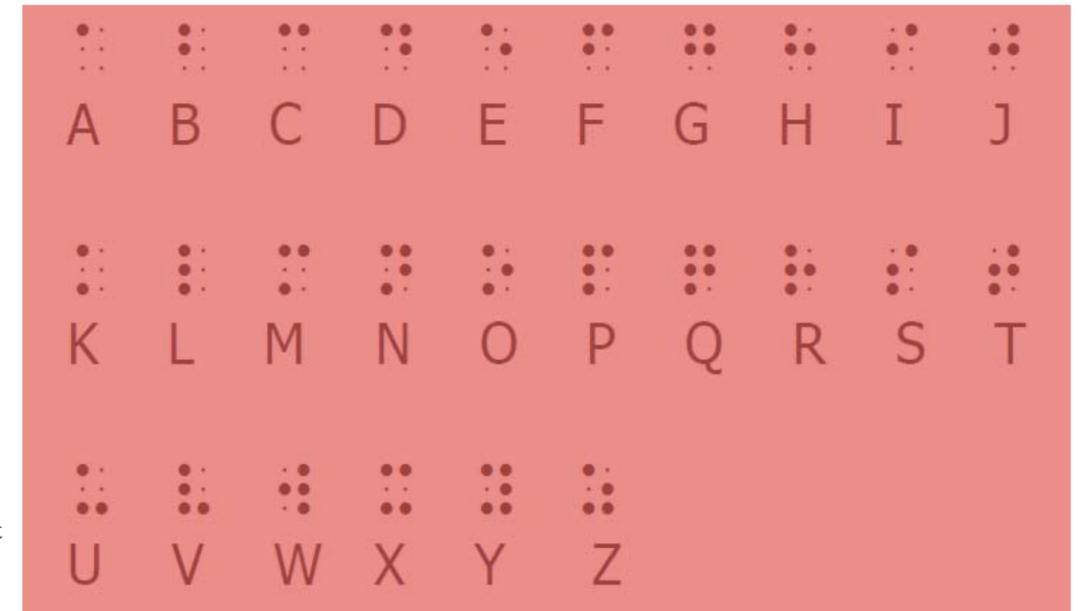
Shubham’s goal is to develop a desktop braille printer that costs around \$350 and weighs just a few pounds.

“He’s solving a real problem, and he wants to go off and disrupt an existing industry. And that’s really what it’s all about,” Edward Ross, director of Inventor Platforms at Intel, told the AP.

Braigo Labs aims to have a prototype ready for organizations that support blind people to test this summer and have a printer on the market later this year. Updates are posted at [www.braigolabs.com](http://www.braigolabs.com).



The basic braille alphabet doesn’t change in UEB—but other things will.



### NLS prepares to implement Unified English Braille

On January 4, 2016—the 207th birthday of Louis Braille—the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) will implement the Unified English Braille (UEB) code.

“This is the first extensive change to the English braille code since the 1930s,” said NLS director Karen Keninger. “The new code will be especially beneficial to students and other users of technology because it resolves persistent translation errors that occur when, for example, a student’s work is translated to print for a teacher to read or when print material is translated to braille.”

Those who use computers, smartphones, e-books, and texting features will also find UEB useful, as it uses the same six-dot cell pattern as the present code but drops some contractions, uses different spacing rules, and allows for

translating a wider array of symbols.

The Braille Authority of North America (BANA), which oversees the use, teaching, and production of braille in the United States, adopted the code in November 2012. It then began preparing constituents for the change to ensure implementation in 2016. Seven other English-speaking countries have already adopted UEB.

“Since many BANA members produce braille or transcribe braille, the NLS announcement will not be a surprise. They have already been preparing,” said Judy Dixon, NLS consumer relations officer and NLS representative to BANA.



Implementation of UEB will be tied to the 207th birthday of Louis Braille.

#### In this issue:

Narrator Ray Hagen retires .....	3
New NLS poster series .....	4-5
APH narrators retire ....	6
Colorado honors volunteer.....	6
New Multistate Center West director.....	7
Teen creates a less-expensive braille printer.....	8

**The Program**

The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Library of Congress, publishes books and magazines in braille and in recorded form for readers who cannot hold, handle, or see well enough to read conventional print because of a temporary or permanent visual or physical disability.

Through a national network of state and local libraries, the materials are loaned free to eligible readers in the United States and to U.S. citizens living abroad. Materials are sent to readers and returned by postage-free mail. Most books are also available for download on the NLS Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD) website, <https://nlsbard.loc.gov>.

**Books and Magazines**

Readers may borrow all types of popular-interest books including bestsellers, classics, mysteries, westerns, poetry, history, biographies, religious literature, children’s books, and foreign-language materials. Readers may also subscribe to more than seventy popular magazines in braille and recorded formats.

**Special Equipment**

Special equipment needed to play the audiobooks is loaned indefinitely to readers. Amplifiers with headphones are available for eligible readers who are also certified as hearing impaired. Other devices are provided to aid readers with mobility impairments in using playback machines.

**Eligibility**

You are eligible for the Library of Congress program if

- You are legally blind—your vision in the better eye is 20/200 or less with correcting glasses, or your widest diameter of visual field is no greater than 20 degrees;
- You cannot see well enough or focus long enough to read standard print, although you wear glasses to correct your vision;
- You are unable to handle print books or turn pages because of a physical handicap; or
- You are certified by a medical doctor as having a reading disability, due to an organic dysfunction, which is of sufficient severity to prevent reading in a normal manner.

**How to Apply**

You may request an application by calling toll-free 1-888-NLS-READ or download one from the NLS website at [www.loc.gov/nls](http://www.loc.gov/nls).

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“Over the past 80 years there have been a variety of subtle changes to braille,” said Tamara Rorie, NLS braille development specialist. “UEB will represent one more not-so-subtle change.”

NLS is taking steps to prepare for the upcoming implementation, including providing courses and training to ensure that braille transcribers and proofreaders are certified in UEB. Through the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), its transcription training and certification program contractor, NLS is offering an exam designed to determine the UEB proficiency level of transcribers and proofreaders who are currently certified in the existing braille code.

“Those who pass will receive a letter of proficiency in UEB from NLS, which will be a supplement to the certification document,” Rorie said. Transcribers and proofreaders who do not pass must wait at least 90 days before retaking the exam. Since a plethora of material is already available that can be used to learn UEB, NLS and NFB are not providing study materials, but will provide a resource list with links to the existing material for those who request it.

NLS/NFB literary transcription and proofreading courses have been updated to incorporate UEB code changes. Any applicant who starts the training program in 2015 and successfully completes it will be certified as UEB proficient. Applicants who began training prior to 2015 will be given the option to switch to the updated UEB course or take the UEB proficiency exam after

achieving certification.

NLS is also reviewing its recently revised specification for the production of literary braille books and will release them to braille producers this spring, although “the adoption of UEB is not expected to lead to substantial changes,” Rorie said.

Existing books in English Braille American Edition will remain in the NLS braille collection and be available to patrons. UEB books are not expected to be available from the collection for at least six months. Patrons who currently read books in English Braille American Edition can use the same equipment to read UEB books.

“Patrons have asked if we have any materials in UEB that would allow them to see how easy it is to read. I tell them that we have approximately 10 books on BARD (the NLS Braille and Audio Reading Download website),” Rorie said. “Also, BANA has a document called UEB Reader that they can request, along with quite a bit of related material at [www.brailleauthority.org/ueb.html](http://www.brailleauthority.org/ueb.html).” NLS also will distribute a document this summer that provides a list of commonly used UEB symbols, and patrons will have an opportunity to get a more detailed document upon request.

**Correction**

National Audio Equipment Advisory Committee member Craig Hayward’s name was misspelled in the October–December 2014 issue of *News*.

**Valentine promoted to director during a “hectic time” at Multistate Center West**

After serving three months as acting director, David Valentine was formally confirmed as director of Multistate Center West (MSCW) in Salt Lake City, Utah, in January.

It is a “hectic time” for MSCW, Valentine said. The transition from READS to WebREADS—an upgraded, remote-hosted circulation control system that interfaces directly with the Patron Information and Machine Management System (PIMMS)—is in full swing. And after a string of retirements the center is busy training new hires. But Valentine, who has been with MSCW for more than a dozen years, easily stepped into his leadership role.

MSCW and its eastern counterpart in Cincinnati, Ohio, have served as decentralized storage and distribution points for NLS materials since the 1970s. Valentine began helping out at MSCW long before he became an employee. “When I was younger, we would sometimes do Eagle Scout projects at the multistate center, helping to weed and sort the collection,” Valentine said. That—and his friendship with then-director Karnell Parry’s son—put the center on his radar. It was Karnell Parry who first mentioned to Valentine that MSCW was looking for a warehouse worker. He took the job in September 2002 and, in his words, “fell in love.”

“I had worked odd jobs here and there after high school,” Valentine said, “but the multistate center was the first place I wanted to stay.”

He wasn’t the only one. “I didn’t see a new person hired in my first 10 years,” Valentine recalled. “But it’s been crazy lately.” Four new employees have been



**“I’m excited to take on more leadership responsibilities while continuing to work with great people,” David Valentine says.**

brought on to replace recent retirees. Valentine himself was promoted to administrative assistant in May of 2014 after the former assistant, Carolyn Sweeney, retired. That put him working directly under then-director Paula Stuart and serving as her second whenever she was away. He also took a role in planning for the iBill currency reader distribution project. When the Utah State Library for the Blind and Disabled hired Stuart as a readers advisor librarian, Valentine was the obvious candidate for her former position.

“I’m excited to take on more leadership responsibilities while continuing to work with great people,” Valentine said. “I believe strongly in the value of our service.”

In today’s digital age, that includes more than simply circulation. Valentine wishes more network libraries took advantage of the multistate centers’ talking-book duplication service, through which they can create as many as 500 on-demand copies a year for each library. “I hope to promote that function more,” Valentine said. “It’s easy to miss some of the depth we offer, in terms of both content and services. Before I started working at the multistate center, I had no idea such a rich collection of talking books existed.”

## APH narrators Friedlander and Avers retire

Mitzi Friedlander and Roy Avers, longtime American Printing House for the Blind (APH) narrators whose voices are known by thousands of NLS patrons, recently rose from their microphones.

During her 53-year career, Friedlander recorded more than 2,000 titles for NLS—more than any other narrator in the program's history.

"She is an icon for generations of talking-book readers like me," said NLS director Karen Keninger. "One of my earliest memories of talking books is listening to Mitzi read *Ramona the Pest* when I was a young girl."

"Mitzi has many fans," said Steve Mullins, studio director at APH. "Many people have grown up listening to her, and now, with so many of her books on BARD, I am sure that many people in the future will be listening to her recordings and becoming new Mitzi fans."

Friedlander began narrating for APH in 1962 and has recorded titles of many different literary genres and



Friedlander

classic works, including *Gone with the Wind*. Her all-time favorite is *Charlotte's Web*. She was the first recipient of the Didymus Award for the narration of 1,000 talking books for the Library of Congress, and in 1993, she was honored with the Alexander Scourby Award.

Avers recorded his first talking book in 1971 and became APH's first Alexander Scourby Award winner in 1990.

Avers, who studied theater arts in college and sang with the Louisville Opera, was doing volunteer work as a textbook narrator but was directed to APH because his voice was so emotive, Mullins said. He recorded more than 1,750 titles for NLS. At an appearance before fans in Illinois, Roy was declared "legendary."

"Roy wanted nothing more than to return to narration" despite being plagued by ill health in the past few years, "but mobility issues proved too troubling," Mullins said. "We kept hoping Roy would return but it was not to be. He always brought books to life."

## Colorado Talking Book Library honors 35-year volunteer



CTBL volunteer narrator Norma Sierota receives a plaque from NLS Engineering Section head John Brown as CTBL studio director Tyler Kottmann looks on.

The Colorado Talking Book Library (CTBL) recently honored long-time volunteer Norma Sierota for 35 years of narrating talking books in its Denver studios. Sierota was presented a certificate from NLS by John Brown, head of the Engineering Section, on behalf of Karen Keninger, director, at the annual CTBL volunteer brunch.

Sierota also received a CD of her "greatest hits"—selected excerpts of books she narrated; a plaque inducting her into the CTBL Golden Microphone Club; and a certificate signed and presented by CTBL director Debbi MacLeod, along with a gift card.

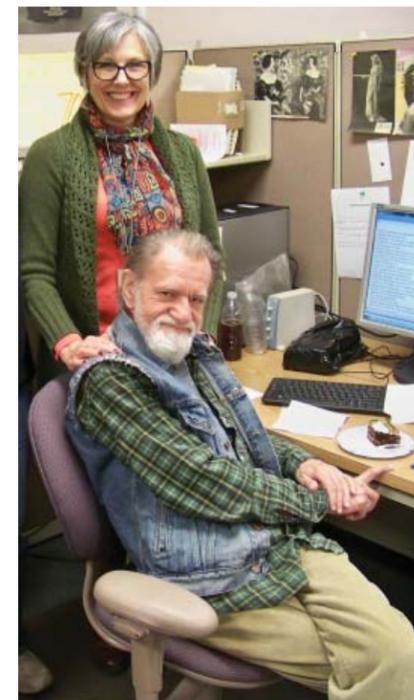
## NLS narrator Ray Hagen retires after 42 years

Ray Hagen, a "triple threat" actor-dancer-singer who performed on and off Broadway from the 1950s to the 1970s, brought a bit of glamour and celebrity to the NLS studio staff. By Hagen's count, he narrated more than 540 books over 42 years at NLS before his retirement in January. In 2000 he was given an Alexander Scourby

Lifetime Achievement award and cut back his recording hours. But that didn't reduce his acclaim or status as a narrator's narrator in the NLS studio or the network of recording volunteers.

"Ray's gift as a narrator is his ability to tell a story simply and directly, as if he's speaking just to you," said Celeste Lawson, NLS Recording Studio director. "He's proof that it's not about the voice—his is slightly nasally with a hint of a Brooklyn accent—but five to 10 minutes into the book you don't even notice the narrator's voice: You become immersed in the story. When Ray narrated *Catcher in the Rye*, he became Holden Caulfield.

"Also, he was extremely conscientious about doing his research. He tracked things down and was really dedicated to getting the pronunciation right," Lawson added. Getting the right pronunciation in a talking book is similar to getting the spelling right in a print book. Hagen counts among his greatest achievements as a narrator his conception and publication of *Say How?*, a pronunciation guide that is still one of the most popular items on the NLS website.



NLS Studio director Celeste Lawson shares a moment with narrator Ray Hagen at his retirement gathering January 30, 2015.

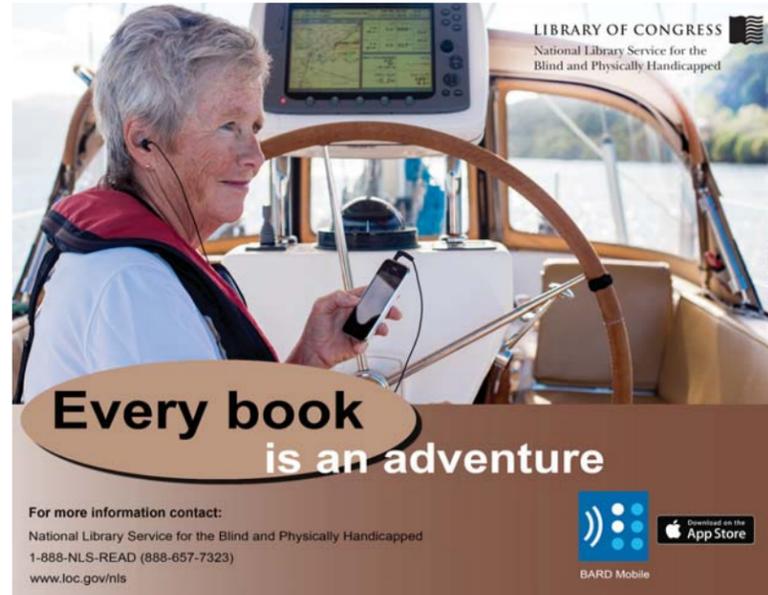
When Hagen began compiling the guide on index cards in the 1970s, pronunciation guides for the names of people in popular culture were nonexistent. "There were a few dictionaries that would tell you how to say dead people's names, but nothing about live, current people," he recalled. "So we began cataloging the names of every imaginable person. In the end I think we got more than 11,000 names. I feel that this is the main thing I've done that's made a contribution to the agency."

But Hagen's contributions loom larger in the minds of his fellow NLS narrators and his many fans. "He was a good teacher. He was my mentor," said veteran NLS narrator Laura Giannarelli, an award-winning narrator. "He's the only narrator I know who makes his own corrections to his narrations. He's also done some very long books. He did *On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio*. It's more than 84 hours' worth of reading time and catalogs more than 1,500 radio shows. He had the perseverance to stick with it and the dedication to get it right."

It was Hagen's passion for radio that drove him to become a narrator in the first place. "I grew up on radio—I preceded TV—and I always wanted to be a radio actor, but by the time I got into acting there were no parts for radio actors," he said. "This is the closest I've ever gotten to it. I just sit down in front of my books and read my lines. . . . I just loved the atmosphere of the studio and all the other narrators there. We grew old together."

Longtime APH narrators Mitzi Friedlander and Ray Avers retire.  
Page 6

Bev Collins of Seattle, Washington, enjoys reading with the BARD Mobile app as she and her husband sail around the world on their boat, the *Mersoleil*. Bev discovered NLS after being diagnosed with glaucoma, which is gradually narrowing her field of vision. This photo was taken by a visiting friend while the *Mersoleil* was docked in Fiji.

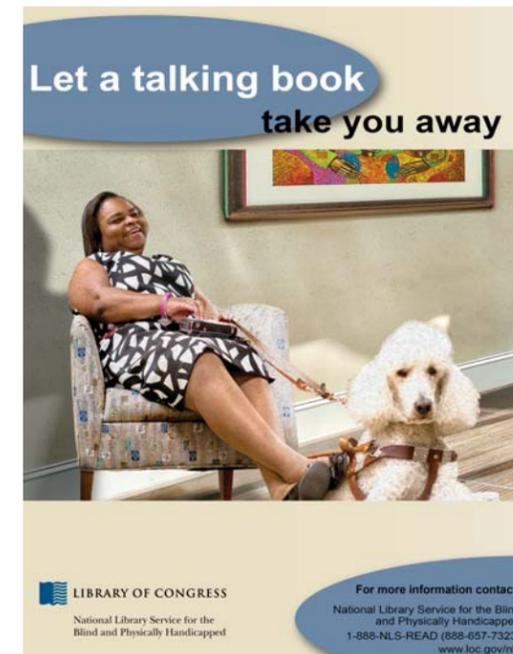


Page Fox, Bonne Brown, Joan Vogel, and Kate Armstrong, residents of Goodwin House in Alexandria, Virginia, share a talking book on the patio.

## NLS unveils new poster series

NLS welcomes the spring with a new series of posters featuring NLS patrons. Two of the posters highlight BARD and the BARD Mobile app. “The new posters tell a story of the many ways our patrons use the braille and talking book program and the ways NLS uses the latest technology to make reading easy and convenient for them,” director Karen Keninger said. Network libraries will be able to order posters customized with their contact information. Here is a look at the six new posters.

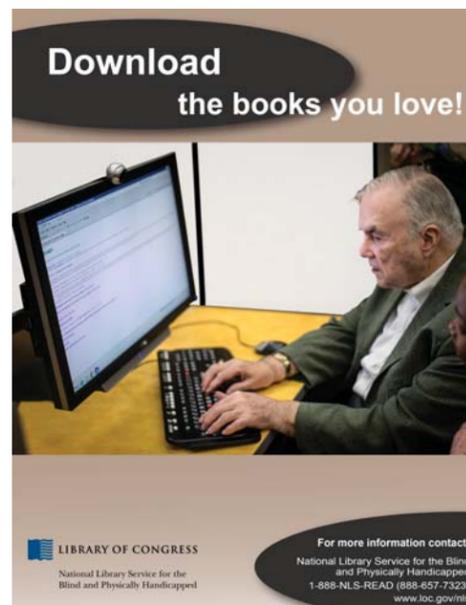
Maryland School for the Blind fourth grader Virginia Jacobs, 11, was born in Thailand and lives with her adoptive parents outside Baltimore. She reads as many as ten talking books a week. BARD Mobile makes it easy for her to read before going to sleep.



Tamara Rorie—photographed with her guide dog Jaya—is the NLS braille development officer. An NLS patron since she was six, Tamara particularly enjoys reading dramas, medical and legal mysteries, African American literature, and humor.



Bernadette Jacobs—Virginia’s mom—has been an NLS patron since she was seven. She uses the BARD Mobile app—“It’s so easy!”—and also reads braille books from the NLS collection. She began learning braille when she was four and finds reading “both relaxing and invigorating.”



Oral Miller reads both braille and talking books and was eager to learn how to use BARD, too. He got some help from Rose Asuquo in the Center for Accessibility at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library in downtown Washington, D.C.