

BRaille FLAG CEREMONY AND ESSAY CONTEST.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2010. 10:00 A.M.

CITY HALL, CHICAGO

SPONSORS: BLIND SERVICE ASSOCIATION

KANSAS BRaille TECHNICAL INSTITUTE

MAYOR'S OFFICE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITES

10:00 TO 10:15:

REFRESHMENTS (Coffee, Orange Juice and Sweets brought in by Margaret Lastick).

10:15 :

TED GERTZ: I want to thank you all for coming. My name is Ted Gertz and I am the President of Blind Service Association. To start off today's proceedings let us begin with the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag followed by Tim Paul on flute playing the Star Spangled Banner.

10:20:

TED GERTZ: Thank you, Tim. This day is a very historic day not only for people who are blind and visually impaired who live in Illinois but for all of Illinois in recognizing the importance of the Braille American Flag to over 1.3 million blind and visually impaired citizens over the age of 25 in the United States. In 2008, the United States Congress passed the Braille American Flag Memorial Act authorizing the installation of the American Braille Flag as a bronze monument at Arlington National Cemetery. This definitely meant a lot not only to blind Americans but to blind veterans of all wars who have given so much of their lives to keep the United States safe.

When Blind Service Association was approached by Randolph Cabral, who is not only the creator of the braille flag but also the Executive Director of Kansas Braille Transcription Institute, asking if we could help him to introduce the flag in Illinois not only were we honored to do so but felt it was part of Blind Service Association's responsibility to bring awareness to the people of the State of Illinois of something as important as the braille flag. In the next few days we received one of the flags from Randolph which was shared at the next Board Meeting. A long time Board Member who is an attorney and happens to be totally blind summed it up best when he related that he knew there were thirteen stripes and 50 stars to the flag, but he had no idea how the stars were laid out. For the first time in his life he was able to really see the flag that had meant so much to him. Soon we contacted The Mayor's Office of People with Disabilities and they, too, were as committed as we were.

It is Randolph Cabral's intention to introduce the braille flag to all 50 states of the U.S. President Obama has officially recognized the braille flag and if you go to the Kansas Braille Transcription Institute's Web site at KBTI.org you will see a picture of President Obama holding the Braille flag. The state of Illinois will now join the states of Kansas, Nebraska and Missouri in recognizing this monumental moment in history.

A lot of people deserve to be thanked today for making this event possible. They are Randolph Cabral from the Kansas Braille Transcription Institute, Mayor Richard M. Daley, Commissioner Karen Tamley, Deputy Commissioner Joe Albritton, Melissa Stratton, Margaret Lastick, Kirk Miller, Tim Paul, Debbie Grossman, Karine Rosvold, Allen West and the judges of the essay contest Art Shapiro, Reva Hairston and Beth Finke. Could we give them all a round of applause?

Unfortunately, Randolph Cabral could not be with us today. But he has sent a few words our way and I'd like to introduce John Powen, Past President and current Treasurer of Blind Service Association who will read his words to you.

10:25:

JOHN POWEN: Reads letter.

10:30:

TED GERTZ: Thank you, John. Commissioner Karen Tamley has dedicated her entire career to furthering the rights and opportunity of her community. Ms. Tamley was named commissioner of the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities in 2005. MOPD promotes total access, full participation and equal opportunity to more than 600,000 people with disabilities who live and work in Chicago. Will everyone please welcome Commissioner Tamley.

10:31:

COMMISSIONER KAREN TAMLEY: Reads proclamation and remarks.

10:37: Margaret comes up to the podium.

MARGARET LASTICK INTRODUCES HERSELF AND RELATES HER PERSONAL STORY ABOUT HER INVOLVEMENT IN THE EVENT.

She will then ask Ted to come up to help her distribute the plaques for the city and the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities. She will then introduce each of the students who will read their essay.

10:47: John approaches the podium.

JOHN POWEN: The Department of Defense estimates that 16% of the members of the Armed Forces who have been injured in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom have severe vision loss as a result of their injuries. Today there are more than 175,000 blind veterans in the U.S. We can't underestimate what the flag means to these brave veterans. Each year the Department of Veterans Affairs issues almost a half a million burial flags to drape the caskets of our deceased veterans. Old Glory has had its place in many events of our veteran's life from parades to battle scenes and then to their final resting place. Today, I would like to introduce you to Veteran Erwin Linkman who has served in two wars, World War II and the Korean War. He has been a member of the American Legion for over 50 years and is a life-time member of the Blind Veteran's Association. Will everyone please give a warm welcome to Erwin Linkman.

10:50:

ERWIN LINKMAN: Speaks.

10:55: Ted approaches podium.

TED GERTZ: That concludes our program today. Will the essay winners please stay a few extra minutes for some more photos. Thank you all for coming and Congratulations to us all on this historic event in our life time.

10:56: Tim Paul begins to play America the Beautiful on the flute.