

Library of Congress honors Oklahoma City and San Francisco libraries for service to print-disabled readers

The National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS) at the Library of Congress has honored two of its cooperating libraries for their outstanding service to readers who are visually or physically disabled.

The Oklahoma Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (OLBPH) in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, received the Regional Library of the Year Award. The Talking Books and Braille Center (TBBC), San Francisco Public Library, in San Francisco, California, received the Sub-regional Library/Advisory and Outreach Center of the Year Award.

Each prize comes with a \$1,000 award and a commemorative plaque. The two libraries will be honored this November at the National Library Service's biennial meeting and at a luncheon in the historic Thomas Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., planned for the spring of 2021.

"Each year the Library of Congress recognizes the work of state and local libraries that provide braille and talking-book services to people who cannot use print materials," NLS Director Karen Keninger said. "The programs and services these two libraries offer are outstanding examples of innovation and outreach and demonstrate their commitment to ensuring that all may read."

OLBPH served 5,402 patrons last year, a seven percent increase from 2018. It circulated more than 150,000 braille and audio books, magazines and other collection items.

The library has innovative programs to expand access to information to people with print disabilities. It manages the Oklahoma Telephone Reader, an on-demand, dial-up information service staffed by volunteers that features local articles of interest, sales ads and obituaries from the *Oklahoman*, the *Tulsa World* and other Oklahoma newspapers. And its Accessible Instructional Materials Center provides textbooks and other instructional materials in braille, large print and assistive technology to 1,258 children and teens in 523 public, private, charter and home schools.

OLBPH staff spread the word about its services at large state conferences, including LeadingAge, Oklahoma Transition Institute and Oklahoma Library Association, as well as the Dean McGee Eye Institute's Macular Degeneration/Low Vision/Glaucoma Seminar and state-level organizations of the American Council of the Blind and National Federation of the Blind. OLBPH also participated in the Oklahoma Book Festival.

The OLBPH recording studio has contributed more than 100 items to BARD, the NLS Braille and Audio Reading Download website, including 56 issues of *Cowboys & Indians* magazine, 28 issues of *Oklahoma Today*, and 21 books of regional interest.

The Oklahoma Library Association honored OLBPH last year with its Library Excellence Award. In nominating OLBPH for NLS Network Library of the Year, Melinda Fruendt, executive director of the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services, called it “a treasure.” A comment from one patron captured the role OLBPH plays in the lives of those it serves: “I live by myself, and over the years I have spent hundreds of hours listening to your books. Please don’t ever stop.”

San Francisco’s TBBC served nearly 900 patrons in 2019 and circulated 31,290 braille and audio books, magazines and other items—two-third of them via BARD.

TBBC’s monthly programs include its Talking Book Club, a large-print book club called Easy on the Eyes and audio-described movies that are shown in the main library’s auditorium. It hosts frequent musical jams, with patrons bringing their own instruments or using the library’s drums and keyboard; quarterly braille story times for children; and the annual Hooray for Braille! celebration with the San Francisco chapter of the California Council of the Blind.

The library’s outreach efforts include supporting families of children with disabilities, offering tours to school groups, participating in Select the Right Tech program, sponsored by the LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and partnering with the San Francisco Public Library’s Jail and Reentry Service to help prisoners with print disabilities. It also worked with the San Francisco Department of Elections to provide voter information in accessible formats.

“Our library represents community and a joy in reading,” Jane Glasby, TBBC’s program manager, said in her nomination letter. “Our staff is not afraid to explore new technologies to support patrons where they need it most.”

One of those patrons told the library, “I have been bedridden and this past week I have travelled all over the world through the books you sent me.” Another put it more simply: “Many an evening, those talking books keep me sane.”

NLS administers the braille and talking-book program, a free library service available to U.S. residents and American citizens living abroad whose low vision, blindness or disability makes reading regular printed material difficult. Through its national network of libraries, NLS provides books and magazines in audio and braille formats and playback equipment directly to patrons at no cost. Materials are also available online for download and are accessible on smart devices through the BARD mobile app. Music instructional materials are available in large-print, ebraille, braille and recorded formats. For more information, visit loc.gov/ThatAllMayRead or call 1-888-NLS-READ (1-888-657-7323).

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