



WINTER 2016 NEWSLETTER

Message from the President, Lynn Pensari

The 2016 annual conference is already starting to take shape. Please save the dates of April 28 & 29, 2016 at the Marriott Hotel at Laurel Park Place in Livonia. Watch our website (www.maerbvi.org) registration, the conference agenda, award nominations and additional updates. Member e-mail blasts will alert you to these additions as well.

The 2016 AER International Conference “Connect, Collaborate, Achieve” will be held July 20-24, 2016 at the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront in Jacksonville, Florida. Call for papers are being accepted now until February 3, 2016. You can go to http://aerbvi.org/?page_id=56 for more information.

The Michigan Chapter of the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (MAER) will pay \$25 towards the renewal of your AER/MAER membership for any current MAER members. Current member is defined as a member appearing on the April 2015 current membership list and whose membership has not expired. If you have a question as to if you are a current member please email bradlesk@aol.com. This campaign runs from **April 1, 2015 to March 31, 2016**. The coupon code to use when renewing is **MIRebate2015**.

Lynn Pensari
President, Michigan AER

Updates for AER

O&M Division

Hello O&M Division members! We’ve had a busy summer. Several of the O&M Division Executive Committee members attended the IMC15 in Montreal in July. This was an exciting experience with an opportunity to not only connect with our international counterparts, but with other O&M Division members from around the US. The O&M Division presented a poster outlining the work of the ad hoc committee on Strategic Planning and Initiatives and gathered input from international attendees.

A number of committees related to the 2016 International AER conference have begun their work and reports follow.

Following in the steps of the Division on Aging, the O&M Division hosted two “Watercooler” sessions in November as part of the activities of the ad hoc Committee on O&M Division Strategic Planning and Initiatives. We’re hopeful that future topics of interest will encourage Division members to meet in a phone conference to share ideas and connect in a new way.

As always, the O&M Division leadership wants to hear from you. Questions, comments, ideas and complaints! Our contact information can be found on the O&M Division website

Susan Langendonk, Chair
susanlangendonk@gmail.com
517-281-7864

ACVREP Proposed Change to Eligibility Criteria: One-time Alternative Pathway to Eligibility

This initiative by ACVREP resulted in a huge response by COMS. Many comments were made on the AER O&M listserv and the AER FaceBook page. O&M Division Executive Committee members reached out to many COMS, read the many messages and developed the following comment which was sent to ACVREP on August 27, 2015.

AER O&M Division Executive Committee Comment for the ACVREP Alternate Pathway to Certification

While the Executive Committee of the AER O&M Division applauds ACVREP's efforts to expand the number of individuals who are certified as professionals teaching orientation and mobility to persons with vision loss, the alternate pathway that leads to certification identical to those professionals who have attended a university program, successfully completed a supervised practicum/internship, and passed the ACVREP examination cannot be supported by the O&M Division Executive Committee.

It is understood that ACVREP considers this as a first step towards establishing certified professionals who could then supervise those in training. However, university programs in international countries are declining rather than increasing. Future COMS in these countries would continue to have preparation that is inconsistent with established standards in the United States. Why would the professional O&M community in the US want to be compared with COMS in other countries who do not have the same preparation? The O&M Division does not sit in judgment over the quality of instruction being provided by O&M instructors in other countries, but does feel strongly that the same certification should not be granted to professionals who have not successfully completed university programs which require the same set of standards.

With the multitude of distance education opportunities and remote supervision for clinical experiences, there is no reason why international certification following the current standards in the United States cannot be met. Currently, the University of Pittsburgh has an agreement with New Zealand to provide coursework towards certification including an internship for individuals going into the O&M profession. Alternatively, a certification which differentiates the type of preparation many O&M instructors in other countries receive could be developed.

ACVREP is encouraged to work with AER, the O&M Division and individual O&M Specialists to explore ways that all can support quality services to individuals with vision loss around the world without degrading what ACVREP certification represents.

Submitted by Susan Langendonk, Chair

Blasch Scholarship Winners 2015

On behalf of the 2015 Blasch Scholarship Award, I would like to thank committee members all for their time and efforts in selecting this year's winners.

After reviewing all of the scores that were submitted, this year's winners of the 2015 Blasch Scholarship Awards are:

Lynn Campbell & Ashley Peterson

Lynn has worked in the field of visual impairments for 30 years in rehabilitation teaching, low vision, early intervention, case management and as a teacher of students with visual impairments. She has served AER regional boards throughout her long career, demonstrating leadership in the profession as well as commitment to the needs of individuals with visual impairments and/or blindness.

She is currently enrolled in North Carolina Central University in Durham, North Carolina.

In her own words, "I am making many sacrifices, both financial and familial, to attend the NCCU program - which is five hours away from my home - while continuing to teach full-time, but I don't have a single regret about it and am very much looking forward to being ACVREP certified later this year!"

Ashley is a candidate that consistently goes the extra mile in being a creative leader who exhibits diversity, discipline, a big heart and a strong work ethic. She is currently enrolled in Stephen F. Austin State University. In the words of one of this year's judges, "The statement in Ashley's application that won me over was her definition of orientation and mobility. 'To me, orientation and mobility provides individuals with all different abilities the necessary tools to make their own decisions, no matter how big or small; thus increasing their independence and creating a sense of control over one's life.'"

Dr. Danene Fast, Chair

Nominations and Elections Committee Co-Chair Eileen Siffermann

The Nominations and Elections Committee members who attended IMC 15 in Montreal in July 2015 had an informal meeting with the current Division Chair and Past Chair. The first announcement for Nominations was sent to members via email blast. One member responded to this blast.

Considering the events of the last few months, it has led me to a heightened concern that the O&M Division must seek committed and knowledgeable O&M professionals to serve as safeguards of our O&M Professions.

I ask that each member of the Division given consideration to identifying those committed individuals (including yourselves) to serve the profession by running for an O&M Division office.

Anyone wishing to nominate a colleague please seek their approval before submitting their name to the committee. You can also nominate yourself.

Deadline for submitting nominations is February 1, 2016.

Please contact Eileen Siffermann Co-Chair, eieensiffermann@comcast.net for a Nomination Application. If you have any questions or need more information, please contact any member of the O&M Division Nominating and Elections Committee.

Meg Robinson, Co-Chair, mobilitymeg@aol.com

Mary Ball-Swartwout, maryswartwout@gmail.com

Mickey Damelio, mdamelio@fsu.edu

Erica Ihrke, Eihrke@leaderdog.org

Awards Committee for 2016

The O&M Division Awards Committee members are Bryan Gerritsen, Susan Langendonk (ex-officio), Kevin Hollinger, Brenda Naimy, Joe Macdonall, Justin Kaiser and Gala Brooks, Chair.

The Committee is actively reviewing procedures for soliciting nominees and selecting recipients of the Lawrence E. Blaha Memorial Award, the Sandy Kronick Distinguished Service Award, and the Orientation and Mobility Citation of Excellence for Direct Service Award. Determining the best way to present these recipients to the Division and celebrate their achievements is also being addressed. To this end, ten past award recipients were surveyed to seek input and comment regarding their personal experiences. The Committee looks forward to planning the epitome of an awards presentation and celebration at the AER International Conference in Jacksonville, Florida July 20-24, 2016. You will not want to miss it!

Nominations for the awards and letters of support may be submitted at any time. For detailed information regarding the criteria for each award, refer to the O&M Division webpage. <http://oandm.aerbvi.org/awards.htm> An Award announcement with the criteria will also be sent to Division members before the last week of September. The deadline for submissions is April 30, 2016. Submissions should be sent to Gala Brooks at brooks6242@sbcglobal.net. Due to a travel commitment of the committee chair, nominations received between 1/1/16-4/30/16 will not be acknowledged until May 1, 2016. Nomination packages sent before January 1, 2016 will be greatly appreciated! While traveling, I will have limited e-mail access but will be available to answer questions. Award recipients will be announced by June 1, 2016.

Should any Division member have questions or comments regarding the awards, the presentations or the celebration, please contact Gala Brooks at brooks6242@sbcglobal.net or 708-345-5689.

Advocacy and Legislation

Advocacy Alert

The Alice Cogswell and Anne Sullivan Macy Act (H.R. 3535)

On September 17, 2015, a comprehensive bill to reform the education of students who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired, and deafblind was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives. Sponsored by Congressmen Matt Cartwright (D- PA 17th) and David McKinley (R-WV 1st), H.R. 3535 will amend the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to address the unique needs of these populations.

H.R. 3535 is named for two pioneers in the education of students with deafblindness; Alice Cogswell was the first student with deafness to be formally educated in the U.S. while Anne Sullivan Macy was the beloved teacher of Helen Keller. If enacted, the Cogswell-Macy Act will ensure that:

- every child who is deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired, or deaf-blind, regardless of whether they have additional disabilities, will be properly counted and served;
- each of a child's unique learning needs will be properly evaluated;
- states will engage in strategic planning to be sure that they can in fact meet each child's specialized needs;
- the U.S. Department of Education will do its part to hold states and schools accountable;
- students who are deaf will be served by qualified personnel;
- students who are blind will receive state-of-the-art services and skills supported through a new major national collaborative initiative addressing their unique learning needs;
- and students who are deaf-blind will have access to trained and qualified interveners.

There is much work to be done, if this bill is to be enacted into law. The bill needs to gain the sponsorship of many more House members, and it needs to be introduced in the Senate. AER and your MAER board urges all members to contact their Congressional members to ask them to sponsor this bill. Your voice matters! Below are some resources to help.

Not sure who your members of congress are? Find them here:

<https://www.opencongress.org/people/zipcodelookup>

Need a sample letter to write your House Member, [Click here](#)

Need a sample letter to write you Senate Member, [Click here](#)
For a summary of the Alice Cogswell and Anne Sullivan Macy Act, [Click here](#)

HELPFUL INFORMATION

Tips and Tricks Corner

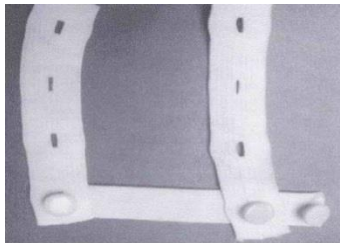
The Buncher

Because of visual impairment and/or motor problems, some children are unable to pick up an object again once they have let go of it. Since it is the repetition of grasping and letting go that lead to the ability of grasping and holding, the user will benefit from holding the object with the use of a buncher. This enables the user to grasp and let go whenever he/she wishes, to repeat the activity as many times as he/she needs, and to experiment with the duration of the grasp as well as the intervals between each repetition. Use of the buncher also permits the user's hand to touch the surfaces of the objects, which allows him/her to experience the tactile qualities of the items. The buncher can be used to hold/grasp a variety of items including spoons, brushes, massagers, toys, or other items.

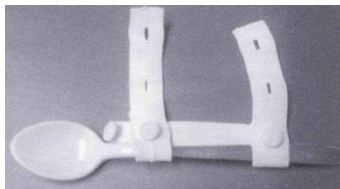
The Buncher is made from two pieces of buttonhole elastic (average length used is 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches,) once piece of $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ inch wide elastic and two buttons. Three buttons can be sewn on the elastic strap if the Buncher is being used in a classroom with various sizes of hands.

The solid elastic without buttonholes should be approximately 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, spanning across the back of the user's hand. The buttonhole elastic should be long enough that it will loop around whatever object the user wishes to hold. "Fray Check," a liquid seam sealant by Dritz (available at most fabric stores) can be applied to the ends of the elastic to prevent fraying.

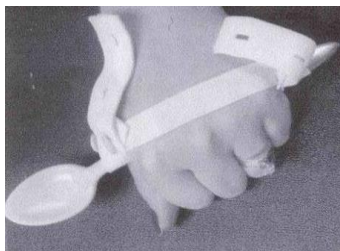
References: Lilli Nielsen, 1993, SIKON: Early Learning – Step by Step.



Buttons should be sewn on solid elastic, encompassing the width of the user's hand.



Buttonhole elastic should loop around object.



The solid elastic is placed at the back of the user's hand.

Suppliers of Buttonhole Elastic

Home Sew
PO Box 4099
Bethlehem, PA 18018
1-800-344-4739

For further information, contact:
Penrickton Center for Blind Children
26530 Eureka Road
Taylor, MI 48180
(734) 946-7500
www.penrickton.com

Reminders

As MAER Board members, we find ourselves at the end of another board cycle awaiting another year of elections. If you are interested or if you know of someone interested in running for an officer or board member position on the MAER Board, please click [here](#) to fill out the form to nominate yourself.

Also, we are accepting nominations for the MAER Award, please click [here](#) to fill out the form to nominate a person. And for the David and Joann Search Lifetime Achievement Award. You can click [here](#) and open the form and nominate the person you feel would best deserve this award.

The board nomination form should be returned no later than **March 9, 2015** and the award nomination form should be returned no later than **March 9, 2015**.

We will need the forms filled out, as we need to contact the nominees prior to the spring conference to verify their interest.

Calendar of events

January 2016

Jan. 30	Family Adventure Day at Camp T	Greenville, MI
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February 2016

Feb. 27	Michigan Regional Braille Challenge	Flint, MI
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April 2015

April 27	MAER Board Meeting	Livonia, MI
April 28 & 29	Annual MAER Conference	Livonia, MI

May 2016

May 2	WMU/MBAA Junior Sports Camp	Kalamazoo, MI
May	WMU/MBAA Senior Sports Camp	Kalamazoo, MI
May 15 & 16	WMU/MBAA Michigan State Games	Kalamazoo, MI

Members Speak Out

Do you have an article, resource, or other information you would like added to the MAER newsletter? Use this opportunity to get information to other members. Please send all ideas to lori@penrickton.com

MAER BOARD OFFICERS

PRESIDENT

Lynn Pensari pensaril@michigan.gov

PAST PRESIDENT

Susan Langendonk
susanlangendonk@gmail.com

TREASURER

PRESIDENT ELECT

Johanna Anand Johannaanand@gmail.com

SECRETARY

Roberta McCall mccallr@michigan.gov

Mary Beth Kullen kullen@gdabvi.org

MAER BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Elyse Connors elyse.m.connors@wmich.edu

Julie Unatin julie.unatin@oakland.k12.mi.us

Lori Vargo lori@penrickton.com

Stephanie Steffer stephanie.steffe@kresa.org

Tina Smith tsmith@inghamisd.org

Kathy Christensen kchris@washtenawisd.org

Our AER Mission: *To render all possible assistance to the promotion, development and improvement of all phases of education and rehabilitation of blind and visually impaired persons of all ages.*