

THE RHODODENDRON

# THE RHODODENDRON

**FALL 2015**

Edited by:  
Carol McGhee



A Publication of:  
MOUNTAIN STATE COUNCIL OF THE BLIND, INC  
PO Box 834  
Ridgeley, WV 26753  
[www.msrbwv.org](http://www.msrbwv.org)

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## President's Message By: Kevin Maynus



As the newly elected President of MSCB, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for your support and confidence in me to lead this organization over the next two years. I truly look forward to meeting and working with everyone to continue to strengthen this organization, and to continue the great leadership the MSCB has had over the past several years. Since many of you don't know me, allow me to introduce myself and tell you a little about me.

My name is Kevin Maynus, and I graduated from the WV School for the Blind in 1989. I then went on to earn my Bachelor of Science Degree's in Criminal Justice and Sociology from Fairmont State College in 1995. After my under graduate work I earned my Masters of Education degree in Special Education to Teach the Blind and Visually Impaired from the University of Alabama, Birmingham in 1998.

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I am known for my expertise and advocacy efforts in the area of disability civil rights for people with disabilities for over the past 20 years.

I have advocated and worked with WV State and national legislators on Braille Literacy, Bi-Optic Driving and many other legislative issues, which Blind and the disabled community faces on a daily basis.

I was appointed by former Governors Underwood and Wise to serve on the State Rehabilitation Council and I was appointed to former Governor Elect Manchin's transition Team where I served on the Disability Committee. I've also served on many committees and boards such as the Fair-shake Network, ADA Coalition, the state Wide Independent Living Council and the DRS State Wide Consumer Advisory Committee for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

I worked 12 years for the Mountain State Center's for Independent Living in Beckley, WV and then I accepted an offer of employment by the WV Division of Rehabilitation Services to serve as the Counselor for the Blind in District IV (Beckley) in January 2010. On September 1, 2013 I accepted a new position with the WV Division of Rehabilitation Services to serve as the Program Specialist, Blind and Visually Impaired Services for the state of WV.

Again, I'd like to personally thank everyone for your support as the new President of MSCB. I'd like to invite and encourage everyone to get and stay involved with MSCB, and if you know someone who is Blind or visually impaired, please encourage them to join and become a part of a great organization.

## Polo Shirts

The Mountain State Council of the Blind is seeking your input in whether or not you would be interested in buying a polo shirt!

This blue shirt with gold lettering would have the same MSCB logo on the left chest, although it would be smaller, due to the front opening. The shirt has a collar and there are buttons on the front and it has no pocket. The price is \$20 per shirt with an additional \$2.50 if you should want it mailed to you.

If interested, contact Ninetta Garner at **304-381-2729** or email her at **garner9@frontier.com**.

## New Phone Numbers for ACB Programs

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** There are new phone numbers for ACB Radio, ACB Braille and E-Forums and ACB Reports.

You can reach ACB Radio on the phone by dialing **605-475-8130**.

And you can reach the ACB Braille Forum, E Forum and ACB Reports by dialing **605-475-8154**.

## Convention Recap



Better When Working Together was the theme for the 2015 state convention of the Mountain State Council of the Blind. This convention was held October 9-11 at beautiful Alpine Lake Resort in Terra Alta, WV. The staff and residents of Alpine Lake Resort definitely worked very well together to make this convention one of our best ever.

The residents of Alpine Lake made sure the hotel information guide was in braille for convention attendees as well as the soap and shampoo dispensers. Resort staff actively participated in some of our convention programming, and several items were donated to our auction by the staff and residents.

The convention speakers presented valuable and timely information, and the interaction between presenters and convention attendees was great!

Thank you Alpine Lake Resort for being such great hosts to the Mountain State Council of the Blind.

Another MSCB member said: "The warm welcome extended and assistance provided to us by the folks at Alpine Lake Resort and community was superb. A big thank you to those who made the braille labels and



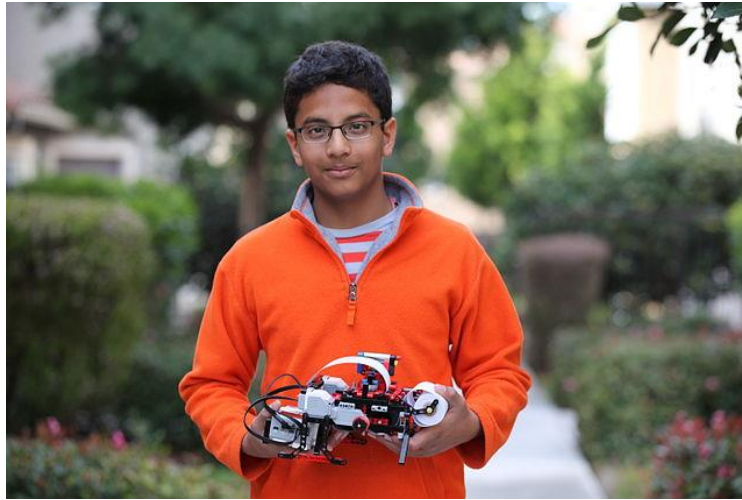
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information sheets, helped us through the buffet lines and served our meals, acted as sighted guides, donated auction items and door prizes or worked behind the scenes. It was wonderful to have their participation and support. West Virginia hospitality at its finest."

One more member commented: "The staff at Alpine Lake Resort made each person feel like he or she was the only guest there and that their services were for that person alone. Never have I wanted to return immediately to a place after leaving the resort. They will see my smiling face again! As stated above, everyone including the staff and the residents of Alpine Lake deserve a heartfelt thank you and best wishes for the future.



## The Innovative Spirit



Meet the 13-Year-Old Who Invented a Low-Cost Braille Printer.

One California teen has a vision to make Braille materials more widely available and more affordable.

It took several weeks and a number of attempts before Shubham Banerjee built a working prototype of his Braille printer.

According to the National Federation of the Blind, fewer than 10 percent of 1.3 million blind Americans can read Braille. By comparison, in the 1950s, more than half of blind children learned to read the series of raised bumps.

This change has been brought on, in part, by the growth in assistive technology. In the past decade, voice-to-text software has dramatically changed the lives of the visually impaired. There are software programs that read text aloud, and most consumer hardware devices such as smartphones and tablets come equipped with software that can answer questions or provide small bits of information. A surprisingly few people with low vision or blindness even have access to Braille materials.

Shubham Banerjee stumbled across these facts, just as he was trying to come up with an entry-level engineering project in January 2014 for a science fair.



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The 12-year-old realized that while many people have devices able to read aloud in some capacity, assuming voice-to-text should replace Braille is a costly proposition and one many people simply can't afford. What if he could significantly reduce the cost of a Braille printer from \$2,000 the going rate for a traditional Braille printer-embosser to \$200? Some Silicon Valley startups had been trying to do the same but with little success.

It took several weeks and a number of attempts seven, to be exacta before Banerjee built a working prototype, using a Lego Mindstorms EV3 robotics kit and some small electrical components that cost a few dollars that printed the six dots of the Braille sequence. He'd often stay up until 2 a.m., toiling away on the device, his father Niloy, a software engineer, right there beside him at the kitchen table. Shubham notes that because his encouraging parents are always happy to purchase educational toys, it wasn't that hard to convince them to shell out \$350 for a Mindstorms kit.

Shubham built the prototype for Braigo with a Lego Mindstorms EV3 robotics kit. (Lego Mindstorms Build 4 Good)

Now 13 years old and a Santa Clara, California high school freshman, Banerjee is the inventor of Braigo, a groundbreaking low-cost Braille printer-embosser. The Braigo printer is a small, portable machine that looks a lot like any other printer only it spits out strings of raised bumps instead of flat text on a page.

Banerjee co-founded a small company, Braigo Labs, to help further develop the printer for educational and home use, as well as provide open source documentation to anyone who wants to buy the Mindstorms kit and try making a Braigo v1.0 at home. Braigo is a portmanteau of Braille and Lego. Braigo v2.0, an assembled off-the-shelf version, will hit the market this fall.

Some [people] said that the market is not that big, or [that this is] a specialty product Banerjee is unfazed. "I just went ahead with what I thought was right."

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Will Butler, the media and communications officer for San Francisco non-profit LightHouse for the Blind, says that Braille isn't in the same category as a dying language. "Braille doesn't die off or become irrelevant over time. It's simply code he explains. And it's the only code that allows blind people to fully comprehend concepts like punctuation, homophones and other grammatical details note-for-note the way a sighted person could. For that reason, Braille is essential to literacy, particularly for those who have been blind from a young age."

Henry Wedler, a PhD candidate in organic chemistry at the University of California, Davis, was extremely impressed when he read about Banerjee's invention in the news. Wedler, who was born blind and has been honored by President Barack Obama as a Champion of Change for his work leading a chemistry camp for visually impaired students, took a chance and reached out to Banerjee. Several weeks later, Banerjee and his father took the printer to the university to demonstrate the device for Wedler in person.

"What I witnessed was a state-of-the-art, inexpensive and perhaps most importantly unique Braille printer that produced accurate Braille characters," says Wedler, who is now an advisor to Braigo Labs. Inventors have been attempting to do what Shubham has done with Braille embossers for many years. Sometimes, it takes a young, fresh imagination and a will of iron to be truly innovative. This is the energy and quality that Shubham's knowledge and passion as an inventor bring to Silicon Valley.

Butler adds that a low-cost Braille printer could be a game-changer for the blind, as physical aids, software and Braille materials can be expensive, and rehabilitation funding offered by the state is often only available for blind people who can show that they are working on specific job placement. "That's a narrow slice of the population, even more so in the blind community", he adds. "So for everybody else who can't qualify for state aid, any technology costs come out of pocket."

Banerjee has plans for other projects. But for now, he says, those are secret.

## Blind Bloopers By Kathy Gerhardt



Recently, Chris Cook and I shared a couple of blind/visually impaired bloopers that we experienced. We thought you may all enjoy them too.

Here's mine: In September, my sister and I drove (actually she drove and I passengered) to Gatlinburg, TN. On the way home, we stopped at the Fairfield Inn in Beckley, WV to break up the ten hour drive. Since I was keyed up from sitting in one place all day, I decided to go to the fitness room and use the equipment. Looking into the window, I decided it was too crowded to go in. I told my sister it was a pretty big room and there was one woman and three men using it and the guys all had on the same shorts. I told her they must have been on some sort of a team or were maybe "weird triplets" all wearing the same shorts. When I returned later, I found it was actually a rather small room with a large mirror and there was really only one guy, not three. We shared a good laugh.

Chris told me last month she placed two pieces of a recently cut up and frozen arm roast in her crock pot for the evening meal. When her son walked into the kitchen later he said, "Mom, there's only one package of meat in your pot and some other thing floating around." Chris, who keeps tabs on the contents of her kitchen, said that was impossible. She knows what's where in her freezer. Well, it turned out her son's friend put a couple of ice packs in there and didn't let Chris know and one of those went in the crock pot. And no, they weren't able to rescue the portion of the meal that was actual meat. It too tasted like plastic!

If anyone wants to share more blind bloopers for the newsletter, please let me know. Contact Kathy Gerhardt at [kathy39lg@aol.com](mailto:kathy39lg@aol.com) or call **304-283-7424**.

## **Accessible Labeling in Your Own Home!**

**AccessaMed, the next generation in accessible labeling.**

Introducing the optaPHONIC System:  
Accessible Labeling Right in Your Own Home!

AccessaMed is excited to announce the expansion of our accessible labeling solution, the Digital Audio Label. Previously only available in select pharmacies for prescription and over-the-counter medications, we have now made our products available to everyone. Now, anyone with product labeling needs can directly purchase the full system, including the Digital Audio Labels, Docking Station and Text-to-Speech software for your own home.

We introduce to you the optaPHONIC System, AccessaMed's new online ordering that offers you the opportunity to have the pharmacy prescription drug labeling experience in your own home. Now, with the purchase of a Home Starter Kit, you can record your own Digital Audio Labels for your prescription medication, over-the-counter purchases, and more!

### **Chapter News**

Vandalia Chapter

We have been busy this summer and fall here in Morgantown. This past July, two of our chapter members attended the ACB National Conference and Convention in Dallas, Texas. In August, Andrew Vecchio who is working to start up a new taxi service, spoke to our group. At that time, it was felt that service should begin almost immediately but there has been a setback. We are advocating the Public Service Commission, (PSC) to approve Motown Taxi's application.

We are also planning our Christmas social to be held on December 11. The election of officers will be held at our November meeting. Stay tuned for more information.

## Marcia's Munchies

### HELPFUL HINT:

This is a way to solve that soggy problem with left-overs.

The steam hole in a rice cooker or any steamer can be plugged with tooth picks, a birthday candle holder works perfectly. The container can then be stored in the refrigerator and warmed up; microwave is best but can be oven-warmed. Sprinkle a few drops of water, soy sauce or the like to add moisture. The drying out of food occurs less when heating leftovers in the microwave rather than the oven.

A friend told me, if you are doing a lot of baking before Christmas, and don't want to get extra calories by nibbling on the goodies as you are preparing them, just brush your teeth before you start. You won't want to ruin the nice minty taste you have with treats. Also, you can put a piece of minty gum in your mouth to keep yourself out of the goodies.

### **Cheese Ball**

A cheese ball and crackers is a nice thing to take to a Christmas party. It won't spill and you don't have to keep it warm on the way.

2 oz8 packages of cream cheese set out of refrigerator for an hour

½ cup mayonnaise

1/3 cup parmesan cheese

¼ cup bacon bits or BacOs

¼ cup dry or fresh chopped onion bits

Combine above ingredients and roll in to a ball. Next roll it in chopped pecans. Wrap in waxed paper, and refrigerate until ready to serve.

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### **Molasses Cookies**

1 cup sugar

$\frac{3}{4}$  cup shortening

2 eggs beaten

$\frac{1}{4}$  cup molasses

2 cups flour

2 tsp baking powder

$\frac{1}{2}$  tsp salt

1 tsp ginger

1 tsp cinnamon

$\frac{1}{2}$  tsp ground clove

1 tsp vinegar



Combine all ingredients and roll in to marble size balls, then roll in sugar. Place on greased cookie sheet, about 2 inches apart. Press tops with fork dipped in sugar. Bake in 350 degree oven, about 10 minutes.



**Letter from the Editor  
Editor's Farewell  
October 26, 2015**

To my Readers: I would like to thank you for taking the time to read the Rhododendron each quarter for the past two years. I have enjoyed assembling this newsletter but it's time to move on to another position. Many of our articles have come from board members and friends, but I know there are plenty of you out there with ideas, articles and news to share. If you would, please assist by flooding the new editor's mailbox with items for the winter newsletter. For that matter, you can submit anything any time and it will be very much appreciated.

Sincerely,  
Editor Carol McGhee

**Calendar of Events 2015**

ALL MSCB Conference Calls begin at 9:00 pm. The Number is **832-551-5100** Pass Code: **186679#**

Google Voice Number: **304-933-9540**

**Thursday November 26:** Thanksgiving Day

**Monday December 14:** MSCB Conference Call

**Friday December 25:** Christmas Day



## MSCB OFFICERS AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President: Kevin Maynus  
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Email: [president@mscbwv.org](mailto:president@mscbwv.org)  
2015, first term

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2015, first term

Secretary: Carol McGhee  
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Email: [secretary@mscbwv.org](mailto:secretary@mscbwv.org)  
2015, first term

Treasurer: Ninetta Garner  
Phone: 304 381-2729  
Email: [treasurer@mscbwv.org](mailto:treasurer@mscbwv.org)  
2015, first term

### **Board of Directors**

Mucie Allred 2018, unexpired term

Debbie Cain 2016, first term

Josh Metz 2018, second term

Glen Pinkard 2016, second term

**MOUNTAIN STATE COUNCIL OF THE BLIND, INC.**

PO Box 834 • Ridgeley, WV • 26753

[www.msbcwv.org](http://www.msbcwv.org)

**Membership Form**

Updated January 2015

In order to update our records, it is most important that you complete this form and return it by **February 1<sup>st</sup>**. Please make sure you fill in the format preferences and visual status for **each person**. You are encouraged to make extra copies to share with others.

Please return this form with appropriate dues to your local chapter contact, OR to Dennis Dennison, MSCB Treasurer, at the above address, OR email to [treasurer@msbcwv.org](mailto:treasurer@msbcwv.org).

Membership may also be completed online by clicking on the Membership link at [www.msbcwv.org](http://www.msbcwv.org).

For questions or more information, call President Donna Brown at **(304) 822-4679** or Treasurer Dennis Dennison at **(304) 738-8930**.

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**Please Print:**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

New Member \_\_\_\_\_

Renewal \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address (Street): \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Alternate Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

I live in \_\_\_\_\_ County.

**Preferred Format for:** (indicate 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> choice)

**MSCB Newsletter and Information:**

\_\_\_\_ Email      \_\_\_\_ Large Print      \_\_\_\_ CD

**ACB Braille Forum Magazine:**

\_\_\_\_ Braille      \_\_\_\_ Large Print      \_\_\_\_ Email      \_\_\_\_ Cassette      \_\_\_\_ CD

**I am:**      \_\_\_\_ Blind      \_\_\_\_ Legally Blind      \_\_\_\_ Sighted

**Please check all that apply:**

MSCB At-large (state & national) Dues: \$10.00

**Chapter (local, state & national) Dues:**

\$15.00 Potomac Valley Chapter (Romney and area)

\$15.00 Tri-County Chapter (Eastern Panhandle area)

\$15.00 Vandalia Chapter (Morgantown and area)

We are in the process of starting a chapter in the Charleston area. If you would like to be contacted about joining, please check here:

MSCB Junior Member (ages 12 to 18): \$5.00

Supporting Member (Minimum \$10.00): \$\_\_\_\_\_

**Donations:** I want to make a donation to (please specify amount):

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Barbara Fierst Memorial Technology Grant

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Anna L. Hunt Memorial Academic Scholarship

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ General Fund

MSCB is an IRS 501(c)(3) non-profit charitable organization. Donations are tax deductible.

**TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED:** \$\_\_\_\_\_

Please make check or money order payable to MSCB and return as indicated above. We also accept payment through PayPal at [www.msbcwv.org](http://www.msbcwv.org).

**Thank you for joining MSCB!**