

Success Stories

Michigan Commission for the Blind
2010 Consumer Achievement
Honor Roll Award Recipients

For more than 30 years, the Michigan Commission for the Blind has been changing lives by providing opportunities for people in Michigan who are blind or visually impaired to achieve independence and employment, and changing attitudes about what it means to be blind or visually impaired. For more information, call 1-800-292-4200 toll-free or visit www.michigan.gov/mcb.



Ruthann Bryer (67) of Oshtemo (nominated by MCB Rehabilitation Teacher Shig Toda) was referred to the Michigan Commission for the Blind by her son. At first she was hesitant to come to terms with her vision loss and begin learning skills of blindness, but once she made up her mind, there was no stopping her! She learned to find her way using a white cane, organize her medications, sew, label her clothes, and organize coins and paper money. She attended a week-long MCB Mini Adjustment Program in Monroe, and said, "I thought it was great! It was wonderfully organized and people were so helpful and kind. I met people I hope to stay in contact with. It was so nice to be with other people who are struggling with this challenge. I learned about dots to put on appliances to be able to still cook—a myriad of small things. I feel much more confident." She's currently taking an art class with a friend in Swedish weaving, and she's looking forward to going to the residential MCB Training Center for additional instruction in Braille, adaptive computer skills, and mobility training.



Bill Jones (60) of Bellaire (nominated by MCB Rehabilitation Counselor Julie Clark) has owned and operated Jones Pest Control for 20 years. After losing his vision, he came to the Michigan Commission for the Blind (MCB) with the goal of continuing to run his business. He received training from MCB including skills of blindness such as how to find his way using a cane and how to label clothing, and he learned how to use adaptive technology like talking computer software to run his business without vision. During challenging economic times, he has overcome a number of hardships while maintaining his good reputation in the community. Due to his business skill and networking, his business is doing well, and he looks forward to hiring two employees this summer. He says of MCB, "I have never found a group this fine in my life. They're compassionate, knowledgeable, and there when you need them. I feel privileged to deal with MCB, and also the Lions." About his secret for success, he says, "You just have to have a positive attitude and keep at it, and have goals. You have to believe in yourself."



Priscilla Miley (43) of Detroit (nominated by MCB Rehabilitation Counselor Euan Singleton) previously worked as a nurse. After her vision loss in 2001, she contacted the Michigan Commission for the Blind (MCB) and spent six months at the residential MCB Training Center in Kalamazoo learning new ways of doing things without vision. She said, "I was nervous at first, but after the first week I fell in love with it." While at the center, she also became interested in her instructors' profession of rehabilitation teaching, and she decided that this was what she wanted to do. With some help from MCB, she enrolled in the distance learning training program at Western Michigan University. She received excellent grades and did internships at both Visually Handicapped Services and the Veterans Administration in Augusta, Georgia. After graduation, she worked as a contract teacher with MCB's Detroit office. In January 2010 she accepted a teaching position with Visually Handicapped Services. Speaking about MCB, she says, "They're there to help you learn to do things on your own, and they're willing to help you to be independent. MCB gives you back your independence."



Frances Rea (92) of Dearborn (nominated by MCB Rehabilitation Teacher Betty Rush) became a client of the Michigan Commission for the Blind in 2008. She attended a week-long MCB Mini Adjustment Seminar in Detroit to learn how to do things in new ways without using vision. "I was very impressed and learned a lot," she said. Using her new skills and the low-vision equipment that she purchased and some that she received from MCB, she maintains her own home, walks every day using her cane, and works in her garden during the summer. She writes her own checks and pays all her bills herself. She said, "I think MCB's services are very helpful and encouraging. When you lose your vision, you lose confidence in yourself and slack off. You say 'why did this happen to me?' I really felt that Betty Rush helped me a lot in my attitude. I'm doing the same things now that I was doing when I had good vision—the only thing is that it takes longer and I have to study it longer. I do everything that I used to do."



Steve Scott (40) of Portage (nominated by MCB West Region Assistant Manager Lisa Kisiel) has been building engines since he was 10 years old. He became totally blind at the age of 17, but that didn't stop him from working on engines. In 2008, he and his wife Rhonda started a lawn mower repair business out of their garage. With the goal of expanding into a new location, Steve approached the Michigan Commission for the Blind. Steve explained his goal, and MCB provided the services of a small business consultant, some inventory and tools, and adaptive technology including talking computer software and software to scan print and convert it to audio. In March 2010, Scott became the owner and operator of his business, Something for All Seasons, a new small engine lawn and outdoor equipment sales and repair store near Kalamazoo. His business is doing well, and this summer he plans to hire two employees. Scott said, "I really want to thank Lisa (Kisiel) of MCB." Rhonda added, "Without the commission's help, it would have been more of a struggle. We were able to be even more successful with their help."



Jeff Smith (46), formerly of Owosso, (nominated by MCB DeafBlind Specialist Cindy Caldwell) contacted the Michigan Commission for the Blind's DeafBlind Unit in 2000 after experiencing increasing problems at home and at work due to his hearing loss and vision loss. Eventually, he was laid off from his job doing CAD design work in the automotive industry. He attended the MCB residential Training Center in Kalamazoo and, with MCB assistance including a computer and new hearing aids, pursued vocational training. With the encouragement of Cindy Caldwell, his MCB counselor, in 2009 he applied for and was accepted into the Lions World Services IRS training program. He did very well, and he and his wife moved to Atlanta, Georgia, where he began work with the IRS in January 2010 as a tax examiner. He said, "I will never be able to express my gratitude for how much Cindy and the Michigan Commission for the Blind have done for me. For nine years Cindy and MCB have been there, through the thick and thin of my life. The only word I could use is 'Patience.' MCB has supported me every step of the way, including a couple of detours, to finally have a full time job."