



# MONTANA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF & BLIND Express

giving kids the building blocks to independence

Volume XIV, Issue 2, Spring 2016



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# NO-COST OPTIONS TO SUPPORT THE MSDB FOUNDATION!

**Bonnie DeNoma, MSDB Foundation,  
Executive Assistant**

**D**id you know you can support our Foundation by doing what you are already doing – shopping and eating? Simply sign up online or present coupons/vouchers on specific days and the MSDB Foundation gets money! How? Keep reading!



• **AMAZON:** Do you purchase things on Amazon? Try smile.

amazon.com Once you are registered on Smile Amazon, they will donate .5% to your favorite nonprofit or charity – at no extra cost to you! The MSDB Foundation is one of many non-profits you can choose!



• **SMITH'S GROCERY:** Do you have a rewards card? Sign up at [www.smithscommunityrewards.com](http://www.smithscommunityrewards.com) If you already have a rewards

card, sign into your account and follow the steps to select MSDB Foundation (Non-Profit Organization #33694). Smith's stores are located in Great Falls, Bozeman,

Columbia Falls, and Kalispell. There is no cost to you and you still get the same discounts as before!



• **MACKENZIE RIVER PIZZA:**

Present a voucher (found here: [www.msdb.mt.gov/foundation](http://www.msdb.mt.gov/foundation)) every third Tuesday of the month in Great Falls and MSDB Foundation will receive 20% of the proceeds! This is good for

dine-in and carry-out!



• **TARGET:**

Through Red Card purchases, the

Foundation gets 1% of the total. When you sign up for a debit Target Red Card, you get a 5% discount and the funds are withdrawn from your checking account! There is no annual fee and the cards have “chip and pin” security. Plus, you get 30 extra days to return any items and free shipping online. Sign up at [www.target.com/redcard/main](http://www.target.com/redcard/main) and select MSDB as your school!

Thank you for supporting MSDB and the MSDB Foundation! ❖❖

## MSDB Presents at Montana Council of Exceptional Children Conference



LEFT: Jen Wasson teaches her sign group Love in Any Language at MCEC. RIGHT: Snack signs being served by Sarah Eyer!



**S**ome of the MSDB Outreach staff presented at this year's Montana Council of Exceptional Children Conference (MCEC) in Bozeman. Outreach Consultant for the Visually Impaired, Kerri Norick and Sharon Woods, presented a session on instructional strategies entitled: “Hands On: Tactile Communication Schedules for Students with Blindness” and Visual Impairment and DeafBlindness. Outreach Consultants for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Sarah Eyer, Jen Wasson, and Michelle Betcher are pictured here presenting a session entitled: “Sign Language Don't Just Imagine It. Learn it, Improve it, and Laugh!” ❖❖

# BARBARA FAULKNER

## Much More Than a Secretary

By Jim Kelly,  
Dean of Students

Barbara Faulkner worked at MSDB from the fall of 2011 until her passing in November of 2015. Her position title was "Cottage Secretary" but she did so much more than answer the phone. She had a fun personality. It showed in the way she faithfully created a festive atmosphere in the cottage office for each holiday using various window clings and decorations. She truly enjoyed being able to help the students with various projects they brought to her, which usually involved enlarging documents on the copy machine. For the past three or four years, Barb was instrumental in the success



of the Expressions of Silence (EOS) fundraisers. She spent countless hours off-the-clock soliciting and gathering items for the EOS silent auction. She had a positive impact on each person with whom she had contact. The staff and the students at MSDB miss her very much. ❖❖



Teacher, Michelle Cross, Kaylee, and her mom, Pamela Schuster- Southon on Kaylee's graduation day from MSDB in 2013!

### STAFF REMEMBER 2013 GRADUATE KAYLEE MAE SCHUSTER

(April 6, 1995 – March 14, 2016)

"Kaylee was an inspiration to everyone she came in contact with. She made you want to be a better person. Her ability to complete a task was always at her own pace, but always accomplished. Keep on laughing my angel." — Michelle Cross

"It was a pleasure teaching Kaylee; she was a ray of sunshine."  
— Dessica McKeehan

"There is not one of us who doesn't smile when we think of her as we remember her infectious laugh and easy smile." — Denise Rutledge

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# MSDB Celebrates Counselor's Career

By Kristen Cates, reprinted courtesy of  
Great Falls Tribune - January 28, 2016

**I**t's hard to get a grasp on just how much impact Maeona Lee had on the students she served in her 40-year career at Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind.

It's hard, because at her retirement party Thursday afternoon — in between trying to answer questions about what drew a Billings girl with a degree in sociology to MSDB back in 1974 — Lee has to give hug after hug to students, staff and friends, signing words of encouragement and wiping away tears — some hers.

"I stayed here 41 years because my love of the kids and a good staff," she said.

When she arrived in Great Falls at MSDB in 1974, Lee didn't know sign language. It's not uncommon for her to continue signing while having conversations with people who are not hard of hearing.

"I sign at home," she said.

Her adaptability and compassion is what has made her an excellent fit at the school all of these years, said Dean of Students Jim Kelly. She started as a cottage house parent and has now worked her way up to being the supervising counselor and head of cottage and dining services.

"Without Maeona, we wouldn't have the success we have," Kelly said. "People ask me: 'How many people are you going to need to replace Maeona.' I said, 'Six.'"

Lee has gone from being a cottage parent to secretary to the dean of students, an interpreter for a long time, counselor and then supervisory counselor.

She low-ball estimates that she's worked with more than 200 students.

"I have no clue," Lee confesses.



Maeona Lee, a counselor and fixture at Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind for the past 25 years, hugs one of her students, Alysha Callantine, as they talk about Lee's upcoming retirement Thursday during lunch.

(Photos: TRIBUNE PHOTO/RION SANDERS)



Maeona Lee, a counselor and fixture at Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind for the past 25 years, signs "thank you" back to the Expressions of Silence group as they perform for her during a retirement celebration Thursday.

What she does know is that she's enjoyed every moment with the students. She said it's always been hard to see kids leave the program, even when they're transitioning to a different school system. There have been a few students who have died and that brings a tear to her eye.

But what brings an equal sparkle to

her eye is the thought of students who have had breakthrough moments in their learning and development.

Mikayla Ellermann, 17, said Lee has helped her a lot as her counselor in the independent living skills program. Ellermann, who is visually impaired, said Lee has taught her skills that are important to living on her own some day, like learning how to grocery shop.

"She's really nice and she has a really soft voice," Ellermann said. "I'll just miss her personality."

Lee treasures those moments and they haven't faded as she prepares for retiree life starting next week. She had a student who was finally able to sign to her how much money he needed to buy a snack.

"I was so proud of him and that was just the other day," she said. ■

Reach Tribune Staff Writer Kristen Cates at 791-1463. Follow her on Twitter @GFTrib\_KCates

# Maeona Looks Back...

I want to express my gratitude to all the students, their families and the staff I have worked with for the past 40+ years. I have nothing but fond memories of so many things it is hard to put into words. My time at MSDB has gone by fast. I have tried to put the students first in all I do which was possible with the support of my co-workers and supervisors. For that, I want to thank you.

I began working for MSDB in August of 1974 in the old dormitory working as a houseparent. Times were so different than they are now. I worked in several other positions during my tenure at MSDB. I was a secretary both in the old dormitory and in the present main school Bitterroot library area. I worked as a Parent Advisor with what was at that time the Parent Infant Program. I spent many years as an Interpreter at both East Middle School and Great Falls High School and interpreted for many students while they participated in various sports, clubs, special school events etc. I went on to become a Counselor in the Residential program and held my last 2 positions as Food Services Manager and a Supervising Counselor for many years. With all the jobs I have held, each and every one holds a special memory for me. As in any job, there are challenges, some memorable experiences, some unfortunate experiences; however, the special moments and the fond memories far outweigh the challenging ones. It's fun to say "Remember when...." It is so uplifting when former students come to me and share their fond memories of MSDB. Being at MSDB has taught me so much about life and about myself.

My most treasured memories are of the little steps students made that to me and to many other staff were milestones. I remember walking many parents to the door telling them....MSDB staff will take good care of their child...their precious loved one. Those parents had just made the heart-wrenching decision to have their child attend MSDB. I also have memories of walking those same parents to the door after their child has graduated from MSDB. Those same parents were happy and content with



Maeona promoted unity. Maeona was involved in programs for all of our residential, day, and outreach students. Thank you for your years of service, Maeona! We will all miss you!

their decision. I know at those times how blessed I am to have worked at MSDB. The memories I have, shall forever be in my heart. I have them all tucked away in my memory bank along with the "heart print" the students, their families and the staff have made on me. Getting to know many of the students and their families and the dedicated staff has been wonderful. I look forward to my new adventure. I look forward to spending more time with my family, possibly to warmer climates during the winter and spending time at the cabin, boating and fishing during the other seasons of the year. Life will be different, I know that. I will miss everyone and everything. Friends are difficult to leave and impossible to forget. Thank you everyone for the friendships I have made. You are a connection to my life, a tie to the past and a road to the future. ■■



For a wealth of information about MSDB as well as a detailed calendar of the school year, check out our website at:

[www.msdb.mt.gov](http://www.msdb.mt.gov)



ABOVE: Lynda Eddards, MSDB interpreter, talks Taylor through a lesson so she is ready for the slopes! BELOW: MSDB student, Doug, on the sit-ski with Eagle Mount Ski Volunteers. He flew down the mountain several times with a huge grin each time!

## SKI DAYS

By Carrie Dawes, Teacher

What do you have when you combine the great outdoors with snow, fun, kids and laughter? MSDB's Annual Ski Days, of course! On February 11th and 18th we loaded up the bus and a couple of vans and headed to Showdown ski resort in the beautiful Little Belt Mountains about 60 miles from Great Falls.



Our home base for the day was an upstairs room where we left all of our belongings not needed on the mountain. This was also where we ate our great sack lunches packed by our wonderful kitchen staff. We also met our Showdown and Eagle Mount folks in this area. We were divided into groups based on individual abilities and assigned daily activities.

During the day you could find MSDB students and staff skiing, snowboarding, snowshoeing, riding the chairlift (ask our favorite Speech Pathologist about this!), making snow angels, falling down, crying, looking for lost items, and best of all laughing hysterically at our own antics (ask Ally and Mrs. Rutledge about this!).

Of course the Annual Ski Days would not be complete without a minor injury or two and a bus mishap! We would like to say to all who made these two days so fun and memorable-- THANK YOU and we will see you next year at Showdown! ❖❖

## JR. NAD CELEBRATES MARDI GRAS

By Brenda LeMieux, Teacher

This year we have a group of enthusiastic, energetic youth showing their passion to broaden their knowledge, and learn what Junior National Association of the Deaf (Jr. NAD) is all about. We learn about Deaf Culture and the Deaf community. The objectives of Jr. NAD are to provide teenagers opportunities for growth and development, training in good citizenship, training in leadership and teamwork, and provide an opportunity to contribute to the development of their school and community.

Jr. NAD members hosted a fundraiser "Mardi Gras" party recently in the Mustang Center. We met several times to plan this fun event. The Mardi Gras party was a blast! Everyone wore beads around their necks and some of the guests wore Mardi Gras masks. We had about 30 attendees including students who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired and deafblind, community students, and staff members. We were involved in fun games, and dancing to the music "DJ". There was food to munch on, too. Everyone had a great time. ❖❖



A masked Jr. NAD member, Taylor, signs "I love you!"



Alyson Flamand works at a computer to complete a coding exercise in technology class.

# Coding!

By Denise Rutledge, Teacher

Students in low vision technology classes at MSDB are learning how to do simple coding on the computers this semester. Using Blockly, a web-based visual programming editor, students are able to create pixilated art, move characters through a maze and more! Many of this year's students learned accessibility modifications last year and are generalizing those skills in a wide variety of programs. Students use ZoomText to magnify their screens while working within the program. Blockly allows them to build algorithms to run programs in a simplified format. Fun new vocabulary includes words like algorithm, program, conditionals, pixels, looping and debugging.

Computer science, including coding, teaches students the fundamentals behind how and why technology works. It involves experimentation and thinking in both abstract and concrete terms. When asked about coding, Tevon Crawford exclaimed, "Computer coding is very fun! If you learn at a young age, it allows you to use those skills when you are older. Coding can be used in many ways, like making

games. It makes people happy. You can make games in your free time, which is how quite a few games are made, like Mine Craft. The developer was just doing it in his free time. I find this interesting, because it is now one of the world's most famous games." Dakota Randles said, "It is not as easy as you think. The more code you add, the harder it is. Sometimes it takes a few tries to get it right."

After spending a half hour using Blockly to code various diagrams to be drawn, Miracle Big Head had not only learned about coding language, but had also engaged her math skills to decipher the number of pixels to be drawn, as well as what angle to turn the on-screen pencil at to complete the drawing. When asked how she was able to accomplish a particularly difficult picture with multiple angles in it, she said, "I knew the guy needed to draw the angle more than 90 degrees, because 90 is the number to make the square, so I picked 120 because it was higher. And then it drew it the right way!"

The students are fully engaged in all coding lessons and show such pride in themselves when they complete the day's activities. They collaborate with one another and ask questions amongst themselves to find out how their peers accomplish certain tasks. The highlight for me, as their teacher, is to end each class period hearing the students ask, "What do you get to do next?"



# Montana School *for the*

## HELP US GIVE KIDS THE BUILD

## HOW THE FOUNDATION SUPPORTS MSDB

**T**hroughout the years of the Express, we have focused on community partners who have supported the MSDB Foundation. Articles have featured needed technologies purchased through grants to the Foundation – technologies such as braille embossers and refreshable braille displays. The Express has showcased students, soon-to-be graduates, and former students who have expressed their appreciation for all their experiences at MSDB. Many Foundation-supported events are the most memorable experiences for students and families.

Everyone associated with MSDB benefits from the support and generosity of the MSDB Foundation. Here are some of the ways the Foundation supports MSDB students, families, and staff members:

### FOR ON-CAMPUS STUDENTS:

- **Principal's Club** – award given to selected student each month for exceptional work and/or attitude
- **Holiday Parties** – students and staff celebrating a variety of holidays and other special days
- **Dean's Club** – award given to selected student/s for

exceptional work and/or attitudes in the Cottage

- **Prom** – our spring high school dance
- **Senior Trip** – support students up to \$300/student and pays for the class sponsors
- **EOS/VIP** – supports the various trips and events in which these groups perform
- **Dinners Out** – supports students in dining at local restaurants for celebration
- **Learn to Ski Program** – registration fees and/or supplies for students
- **Deaf Academic Bowl** – support for students to participate and travel to Gallaudet-sponsored Academic Bowl
- **Summer Camps** – support for students to participate in extra learning in language and social development and independence
- **Griz Game** – support for students to buy lunch, snacks, and/or souvenirs as well as the travel to the game
- **Super Bowl Party** – fun celebration of the Super Bowl football game
- **Computers and other technology** – additional support for technology access

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”*

*–Margaret Mead*

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

You can change the world for a student who is deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired, or deafblind by supporting the MSDB Foundation. With your

help, we have been able to provide funds for services, programs, and equipment for over 30 years.

**Donate at [justgive.org](http://justgive.org)**

***We appreciate you support! Thank you!***

# Deaf & Blind Foundation

## BRIDGING BLOCKS TO INDEPENDENCE

- **Weekend Activities** – especially Labor Day and Memorial Day long weekend activities
- **Off-Campus Work Stipends** – payment for students who have off-campus work experiences
- **Needy Student Funds** – support for students who need items their family is unable to supply
- **Cottage Remodel Program** – remodeling and updating cottages for a more home-like environment
- **Small projects** – accessible alarm clocks, new bulletin boards for cottage bedrooms, playground upgrades, etc...

### FOR OUTREACH STUDENTS (and on-campus students):

- **The MSDB Express magazine** – the printing and distribution to stakeholders across the country three times per year
- **Enrichment Weekends** – opportunities for all students to engage in specifically designed activities to support academic and social-emotional growth
- **Games for the Visually Impaired** – students are



We also thank the Griz Kids for their support!

competing in swimming, track and field, and gym events

- **Family Learning Weekends** – supports activities for families to travel to campus and engage in learning and networking with other families

### FOR STAFF MEMBERS:

- **Professional Development** – registration fees and lodging
- **Lunch during orientation** – Welcome Back Staff Lunch
- **T-shirts** during Camps and Learning Weekends
- **Staff holiday gifts** and other small tokens of appreciation
- **Staff awards** – Most Valuable Peer monetary awards
- **Fees for activities** such as movies, Deaf Community events, restaurant outings, etc...

Thank you for your past and your continued support for these incredible activities that benefit us all. We hope you would like to become (or continue to be) part of this life-changing effort for our students, our families, our staff members, and our community. 🦄

## MSDB Foundation Board of Directors

Shannon Hoiland, Great Falls  
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Ed VanTighem, Great Falls

# V.I.P.'s Singing Valentines

By Denise Rutledge, Teacher

The Visually Impaired Performers (V.I.P.) held their annual fundraiser on Friday, February 12th. Each year, the students practice during January and early February to prepare for delivering valentine songs to lucky recipients whose friends, coworkers, or loved ones ordered a valentine for them. The students in V.I.P. deliver handmade, paper valentines while also singing (and signing) short, fun valentine songs. This year, students sang the following songs:

*“Hey, Lolly”*

*“Skinamarink”*

*“You Are the B-E-S-T”*

*“A Valentine Cadence”*

Both the students in V.I.P. and the valentine recipients look forward to the annual tradition. The students love to see the embarrassment and delight on the faces of those they sing to and those



Sheryl Lute, Coordinating Interpreter, is being serenaded by the Visually Impaired Performers during the group's annual fundraising event.

receiving the award love to know that they are appreciated. In recent years, the singing valentines have even been made digital so that the valentine can

be sung and sent electronically to those not on the MSDB campus. Thank you to everyone that helped support V.I.P. this year by ordering a valentine! ❖❖

## “Total Communication” – What is it at MSDB?

By Sheryl Lute, Coordinating Interpreter

Total Communication in its broadest sense includes: manual communication (American Sign Language or ASL, English sign systems, gestures, body language), oral communication (spoken language, speech reading), auditory communication (listening, use of hearing aids, cochlear implants, FM systems), written/picture communication (pictures, print, writing, braille). It is everything we do, say, see, hear, taste, and touch to give and receive information. It's all of our “tools” in our “tool bag” that we can use to communicate, to understand and to be understood by others.

“Total Communication” is not the same as “Simultaneous Communication” (Sim Com). Sim Com is



signing and speaking at the same time and its goal is to provide the same information in two modalities. Because it is impossible to produce two different languages at the same time (e.g., ASL with spoken English), you would use an English sign system at the same time with the spoken English such as Pidgin Signed English (PSE), Signing Exact English (SEE), or Manually Coded English (MCE). The message given with Sim Com will be a mixture of spoken and signed English.

MSDB's goal is to use the broadest sense of Total Communication in order to better meet the communication needs of each individual student and staff! If you'd like more information, a great site to check out is “Hands and Voices” at [www.handsandvoices.org](http://www.handsandvoices.org). ❖❖



Ed VanTighem, his wife Betty celebrating 50 years of marriage!

## Where Are They Now? ED VANTIGHEM

By Gary McManus, Retired Teacher

Our featured former graduate for this edition is Ed VanTighem. He graduated from MSDB in 1959. Ed is married to Betty, a former MSDB Teacher. They have been married for 53 years! Ed and Betty have two sons: Greg lives in Seattle and Ted lives here in Great Falls. Ted's



wife, Sandra, is an interpreter here at MSDB. Ed and Betty have two granddaughters: Emma and Random.

Ed worked for Buttrey Foods for 38 years. He started as a box boy and worked his way up to store manager. He retired from Buttrey Foods 20 years ago.

Ed served on the board for Montana Telecommunications Access Program (MTAP) for about 25 years. In fact, Ed was one of three that advocated for the Telecommunications Act.

Ed serves on the MSDB Foundation Board. He is or has been a member of several organizations including Great Falls Club of the Deaf (GFCD), Montana Association of the Deaf (MAD), National Association of the Deaf (NAD), and Big Sky Recreation Association of the Deaf (BSRAD).

Ed loves to travel. "I have been to 45 states and over 50 countries," Ed says. His hobbies include woodworking and making cabinets and furniture. ❧

## PARALYMPIC FUN IN KALISPELL

By Jane Garrison, Outreach Consultant

In the cold, early morning hours of January 16, Stacey Gibbons pulled into the empty parking lot of the Peterson School gym in Kalispell to unload specialized equipment for the 2nd annual Paralympics event. Stacey is the Director of Programs for the North West Association for Blind Athletes (NWABA) based out of Vancouver, Washington. The special equipment included beeper goal balls, beeper kick balls, beeper softballs, beeper bases, indoor javelins and Frisbees that were transported by airplane with Stacey to Kalispell the day before.

The quiet of the empty gym was soon disrupted with the arrival of children with visual impairments and their mothers. Stacey broke out the sound balls for the kids to play with while she prepared the court for goalball by laying string and tape down on one end of the gym floor to mark boundary lines and provide position markers.

Soon she had all the children and moms ready for goal ball drill practice. Stacey has a natural skill of understanding how to adapt activities for children of all ages and abilities so everyone there was included. This event not only provided recreational activities for children with visual impairments, but also provided a venue for these children to spend time with other children with visual impairments and for families to connect.

Thank you Stacey for providing another fun filled event in Kalispell, as well as the other events you are hosting throughout Montana, which can be found at [www.nwaba.org](http://www.nwaba.org). ❧





Bob Corwin assists Maci with her perch. Look at the smiles on those faces!

# Fish, Fish, Everywhere a Fish!

By Erin Barrs, Teacher

Students in the Visual Impairment Department have been exploring native and non-native fish species in Montana through the Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) “Hooked on Fishing Program.”

“I had previously been involved in the program and was impressed by the curriculum, the engaging staff, and it also sparked my interest in Montana wildlife and conservation efforts being developed in students,” said Erin Barr, MSDB Hooked on Fishing Coordinator for the 2015 school year. “We were very fortunate to get a spot in the program.”

The Hooked on Fishing staff have presented lessons to hundreds of students across Montana;

however, some lessons needed to be modified for accessibility for our students in the VI Department. They certainly rose to the occasion

in a big way! For instance, Ryan Schmaltz made “Fish Math” tactile by wrapping marked beans with tape instead of using ink. Bruce Auchly and Laura Hajek created tactile “Fish Identification” with realistic, carved-wood fish that students were allowed to look at and touch.

FWP Hooked on Fishing Director, Dave Hagengruber said, “Everyone is excited for a chance to work with your students!” This seemed to be a reoccurring theme expressed by the staff.

Other lessons have included: “gyo taku” fish prints on t-shirts, fly-tying, and ice fishing at Bynum Reservoir! “Thank you so much to Ryan, Bruce, Laura, Dave, Kathy, and Matt for their fun, accessible, educational, and fabulous demonstrations! Our students are still talking about their wonderful ice fishing experiences,” said Dee Blake.

Ice fishing students were initially nervous about walking on the ice, but Dave Hagengruber alleviated any



# PRESCHOOL PEEPS



Look At 'em go! Shelly Vana Can barely keep up with Analiyah, Charlee, And Lucia As they practice snowshoeing in preparation for future opportunities when they might get to go to ShowDown Ski Resort "with the big kids" once they are old enough.



Love is in the Air! Eli, Henry, And Paisley Are showing off their Valentine gifts for their families.

fears and had students laughing before disembarking the bus with tales of kissing your first fish caught during ice fishing. Students were treated to hand warmers and four-wheeler rides to the fishing holes. The four-wheeler rides made quite an impression on students as Tevon Crawford remarked during his ride, "This is the best day of my life and it is just starting!"

In addition to the Hooked on Fishing staff, the MSDB staff was well represented with Bob Corwin, Carrie Dawes, Erin Barr, and Josh Rutledge assisting with ice fishing. Though she didn't catch a fish, Carrie Dawes had the opportunity to ice fish for the first time. Students were definitely luckier out on the ice, as every student caught at least one fish. Dakota Randles caught 5 perch and Trenton Dues caught the largest perch that anyone had seen come from the reservoir that month!

Carrie Dawes said of the program as a whole, "Hooked on Fishing exposes our students to activities they normally would not experience. The staff provides a fun, safe environment for learning."

"Hooked on Fishing is a great program for kids to learn something new that could possibly become their favorite past time," mentioned Geri Darko. Montana residents that are blind are eligible for a lifetime fishing license for \$10. Interested individuals can contact their local FWP Office or staff in the VI Department at MSDB for an application.

Upcoming activities for the spring include: fish dissection, water distribution, Jeopardy, and fish art.

As for kissing the fish? Some were braver than others! ❖



Bella O'Neill getting ready to pucker up!

# Sue Stewart of Great Falls honored as Montana's Education Support Professional of the Year

By Sanna Porte, reprinted  
courtesy of MEA-MFT

*"A top-notch, gold-star  
human being"*

*"Energizer Bunny for the  
whole school"*

*"A light post of positive  
energy and ambition for  
students and their families"*

*"Humble and loving and  
giving all wrapped up into one"*

That's how some of Sue Stewart's co-workers and parents of her students describe her. "Super Sue" is her nickname at the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind in Great Falls.

Sue Stewart is the kind of person you want in your corner. That goes double if you happen to be a child who is blind or visually impaired, or the parent of such a child.

Stewart works as a paraprofessional and media clerk at the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind (MSDB). For 25 years, she has devoted her life to helping Montana students who are blind and visually impaired live independent, happy, fulfilling lives.

"It's the most rewarding job I've ever had," she says. "I've watched these kids from age three through graduation."

Stewart was recently honored as Montana's 2016 Education Support Professional of the Year by MEA-MFT. MEA-MFT is the statewide union representing about 18,000 Montana educators and other public employees.

Stewart will now go on to



represent Montana in the National Education Support Professional of the Year event. The program honors the crucial work done by the unsung heroes in our public schools who work alongside certified teachers -- folks such as school bus drivers, custodians, secretaries, and paraprofessionals like Stewart.

In Stewart's role as a paraprofessional, a typical day could find her helping a five-year-old learn to read beginning braille, lifting a multi-handicapped student from his wheelchair, helping teach kids to swim, showing students how to navigate with a white cane, helping a math student with Nemeth (braille code for math), and providing job coaching to a high school student. And that's just for starters.

All of these tasks required hours of specialized training, but Stewart loves tackling new skills. She has taken numerous courses in braille. She learned sign language so she can communicate with deaf students. When the school needed a certified bus driver for its handicapped bus, Stewart studied for and passed a special

driving test so she could fill that gap.

In 2010, Stewart began training to earn national certification as a braille transcriptionist from the Library of Congress. This required four years of intensive braille classes -- all while holding down her full-time job at MSDB.

Today, she is just one of just five people in Montana certified as a braille transcriptionist. This skill allows her to take a document such as a textbook and translate it into braille. She embosses the final product, turning it into raised dots that children who are blind and visually impaired can read.

For the past three years, Stewart has taken on the part-time job of media clerk at MSDB, through the American Printing House for the Blind. In this role, she works with educators all across Montana to make sure they have the materials and books they need for their students who are blind and visually impaired. These materials range from toys for use with babies to high-tech electronic devices used by students in upper level classes.

Stewart also takes on many after-hours programs, such as coaching goalball, sponsoring Cane Club and senior class, and co-directing the school's Visually Impaired Performers (VIP). Last year she helped create a new club at MSDB called the Jogging Jokers to bring more physical activity into students' lives.

She has co-directed Montana's State Games for the Visually Impaired for many years. Through programs like Family Learning Weekends and Summer Skills Camps, she connects with children and families from all

**STEWART cont'd on page 15**

# Welcome to MSDB



**M**y name is Ashlyn Bourbeau and I'm the new lifeguard here at MSDB. I have absolutely loved getting to know the wonderful kids and faculty here. I am 16 years old and I have lived in Great Falls for about 9 years. I was on the Falls Aquatic Swim Team (FAST) swim team for 3 years and played basketball this past season and loved it! I enjoy reading, hanging out with family and friends, and being outdoors. I hope to attend culinary school after I graduate next year but would also love being a teacher. I am so grateful for all of the people that have been so kind and welcoming since I joined the MSDB team! Thank you! ❖



**M**y name is Laura Meyer and I come to MSDB from Billings, Montana. I have worked as an elementary and special education teacher PK-12, school guidance counselor, and as a teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing in Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado. I have loved the field of special education for years and am thrilled to be joining the MSDB team here in Great Falls, Montana! My husband, Steve, has also worked in education for many years serving as a school administrator for students with special needs, curriculum director, psychologist, and behavioral specialist. In my free time, I love singing, composing music on the piano, and gardening! Prior to becoming an educator, I owned and operated my own floral design, landscaping, and giftware business in Billings for over 10 years. I would like to thank all of the administrators, staff, students, and families at MSDB for giving me such a warm and supportive welcome! ❖



Lace



Peggy



Polly

**M**SDB would also like to welcome Elishya "Lace" Konkler, teacher in the DHH department; Peggy McNees, secretary in the cottage program

and Polly Bartoletti, house parent in the cottage program. ❖

## STEWART cont'd from page 14

over Montana.

Dream job: Stewart says working with these children is her dream job. "I'm doing what I always wanted to do," she says. "Every day I go to work happy and come home happy."

According to the people she works with, the happiness is contagious. "Sue spreads sunshine wherever she goes," says Staci Bechard, librarian at MSDB.

Former student Kayla Reed says Stewart's "fun-spirited nature" and "can-do, no-nonsense attitude" inspire the best in her students.

Reed remembers wanting to

compete in the 100-yard-dash as a student. Stewart trained with her as a running guide. "She said, 'What are you waiting for; let's get this done,'" Reed recalls. "The next thing I know, she's running my legs off so that she can fulfill a young girl's dream."

"I never really see Sue sit down," says co-worker Norma Kelley. "She arrives to work early and starts the coffee and makes sure the building is warm in winter. She is always working, and through it all she has a smile on her face."

"Knowing that my work touched the life of a student is what keeps me going," Stewart says. In her 25 years at MSDB, she has touched hundreds of

students' lives – if not thousands.

She points out that education support professionals' jobs often come with little recognition and a small paycheck. "I wouldn't be here as long as I have been if I didn't believe that what I am doing every day matters to my students, their families, and my co-workers," she says. ❖

*MEA-MFT represents around 18,000 k-12 teachers and school support staff, Head Start employees, state and county employees, university faculty, and private-sector health care providers working in communities all across Montana. MEA-MFT is a merged affiliate of the National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers and is the largest affiliate of the Montana State AFL-CIO.*



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# MSDB Summer Programs... Hope to See You Here!

**MSDB** offers a variety of enriching summer programs for children and their families. *Family Learning Weekends* offer opportunities for families to draw support from one another as well as from MSDB staff and other experts. Summer Camps are a chance for kids who attend school in their home communities and those who attend MSDB to come together for a week to socialize with their peers, develop independence, and learn new communication and technology skills.

## FAMILY LEARNING WEEKENDS

One Family Learning Weekend is designated for families of deaf and hard of hearing children, and one is for families of blind and visually impaired children. These popular weekends include dynamic national speakers and a wealth of information on learning to relate to a child's disability. The weekend provides opportunities for families to learn about their child's sensory conditions, share their experiences with other families, and communicate with one another in a warm and caring atmosphere.

**Learning Weekend for the Deaf/HOH: June 3-5, 2016**

**Learning Weekend for the Blind/VI: June 10-12, 2016**

## SUMMER CAMPS

Week-long camps for children who are Blind and Visually Impaired, or children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

are offered to students from across the state and offer skill-building in the key areas of communication, social interaction, independent living, and the use of technology.

The camps include structured leisure and recreational activities, including trips to the local water park, Great Falls White Sox baseball games, and exploring the historical, art and children's museums in Great Falls. The Montana School for the Deaf & Blind has a complete recreation complex where campers swim, bowl, and enjoy other group activities. For the blind and visually impaired students, learning these activities can be powerful accomplishments.

**Summer Camp for the Deaf/HOH: June 19-25, 2016**

**Summer Camp for the Blind/VI: July 10-16, 2016**

The Montana School for the Deaf & Blind provides room, board, entertainment, and transportation to and from the Great Falls campus at no cost to the student. Summer programs are co-sponsored by MSDB, the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI), and the MSDB Foundation.

**For more information please visit the MSDB website [www.msdb.mt.gov](http://www.msdb.mt.gov). Click on Campus, then Summer Programs. You will find further explanation of each event along with applications and program booklets. For additional information you can also call MSDB at 1-800-882-MSDB, videophone 406-205-0016, or email us at [info@msdb.mt.gov](mailto:info@msdb.mt.gov). ☐**