

# Braille translates to language of love

By SHIRLEE IDEN



When it comes to filling a need, 200 Braille volunteers in the metropolitan area take a back seat to no one.

Fay Isackson says her motivation to help the blind came when she was a high school student.

"We had a blind student in our class. One day we had a substitute teacher and she became quite annoyed at the sound of the stylus he was using to write in Braille. She didn't understand, but I never forgot that incident," she said.

Mrs. Isackson's empathy with blind persons was reinforced years later when a brother-in-law of hers lost his sight.

For Emily Buchman, a Southfield homemaker, Braille is a way to help blind children lead a more normal life, and it's a rewarding kind of social work.

Both women are active in the Tri-County Braille Volunteers. The organization was founded in 1959 and today has members all over the metropolitan area.

Mrs. Isackson was certified to transcribe Braille by the Library of Congress in 1965. Today, the Oak Park homemaker, is president of the Tri-County Braille Volunteers.

"It becomes part of you after such a long time," she said. "And guess what? Once in while I've known the answer on a TV quiz show from something I've Brailled."

SHE IS adept at Braille in Hebrew as well as English, and currently translates titles of tapes on Readings for the Blind each week.

the Library of Congress," Mrs. Buchman explained. "It isn't an easy test, either. You have to get about an 80 percent to pass."

The classes are offered at several locations, and smaller Braille clubs join together for the instruction. The teachers are also volunteers.

"The need is tremendous," Mrs. Buchman said. "Our main function is doing school books."

"In this area, many school kids don't want to go to places like the Lansing School for the Blind; they want a more normal life."

SHE SAID the volunteers transcribe texts for schools in Detroit, Livonia, Oakland, Macomb and Washtenaw counties.

"We also accept assignments from other schools," she said.

"Once we did something for a blind young man in Punjab, India. It was a text he could get no other way."

She added that all Braille literature is sent postage free anywhere in this

country and many other places, as well. "But if we had to send it airmail, that would be very expensive and we just can't do it. We're all volunteers."

Mrs. Buchman estimates that the group Brailles about 22,000 pages from textbooks each year, which breaks down to about 68 books.

"A history book of 500 pages in regular printing will add up to 1,500 pages in Braille," she said. "In addition to fiction and texts, we do menus for any restaurant that requests it."

Area restaurants that have Braille menus available include Merricks, the Bijou and Hudsons, all in Southfield.

Last year the volunteers did voter's guide for Southfield in Braille, and they are often asked to do greeting cards

and personal notes.

"One family sends cards regularly to their blind Uncle Max," she said. "We never turn down those kinds of requests, nor do we charge anything."

"Anything that can be done in ink can be transcribed into Braille," she said.

"THERE'S A code for every language. You only need to know the code, not the language, to put it into Braille."

In her job as assignments chairwoman, Mrs. Buchman sees that the flow of work goes smoothly from requester to Braille and back to the blind students and readers.

While she spends many hours on the telephone making the assignments,

most Brailers spend about two or three hours working each day.

"We aim for perfection," she said.

"The blind have enough trouble without dealing with mistakes. You try never to erase, but there is a tool for it. If there's more than one error, you take that part out."

She said most Braille volunteers can read the dots by sight, but not without their fingertips.

"Everyone always needs the texts soon," she said. "The teachers seldom know their schedules very far ahead."

Mrs. Buchman keeps a portable Braille machine in a bedroom of her Southfield home. Many volunteers take them on trips and continue their work while vacationing.

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