

Library for blind books open house

By Philip A. Sherman
staff writer

A special library in Oakland County is about to celebrate its 15th anniversary with an open house.

Not many people know about the library; most people can't use it. But the library's 2,100 patrons wouldn't be able to get along without it.

"Everything is done with the blind patron in mind," said Carol Hund, of the Oakland County Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. Housed in the basement of the Farmington Community Library on 12 Mile Road in Farmington Hills, the library caters to people who would use a regular library if they could.

But they can't, so this facility has books — including very recent titles and best-sellers such as E.L. Doctorow's "World's Fair," Garrison Keillor's "Lake Wobegon Days" and Rena Jaffe's "After the Reunion" — on cassette tape, flexible disks or in a large-print format.

"WHEN I'M AMONG my friends and all, I know what they've read," said Lillian Siegel of Southfield, who has been a patron of the Wayne and Oakland libraries for 40 years. "I've been losing my vision all that time and reading is something I feel I can't do without."

"They know your needs, they know your limitations and they're able to fit into that very, very well," Siegel said.

Hund said the library is designed for people who no longer can use a traditional library due to conditions such as blindness, dyslexia or other handicaps that prevent them from holding or reading a regular book. That includes people who are temporarily unable to hold a book due to an operation or illness.

"We need an application signed by a professional who knows of their disability," Hund said. Applications are available from Hund; that's the only requirement for loan privileges.

The library, part of the National Library Service under the Library of Congress, receives the bulk of its funding from the county, Farmington and Farmington Hills, Hund said. Its services are free to patrons.

HUND'S COLLECTION of materials has been carefully placed together. Materials for young and old are represented, including preschool books. Besides recorded materials, there are "twin vision" books — regular print on the left-hand page, braille on the right, so parents and children can read along together.

Traditional braille materials also are available. Hund thinks they're very important, particularly for students who need to review material. "It's much easier for them than constantly rewinding a tape," she said.

Special players, also available free on a loan basis, are necessary to play the cassettes and flexible disks. Hund said authors agreed to have their works represented only if they were protected from being rerecorded.

The solution was to record the books at a different speed, so they couldn't be played on conventional

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— Lillian Siegel
sight impaired
Southfield resident

tape decks or turntables. That way, only people with access to the special recorders could listen to the books.

Hund even provides magnifying glasses for patrons, available for a month at a time. One of the more popular machines, called a closed-circuit magnifier, allows the user to slide a book under a camera lens and the image is then broadcast to a large screen. "We only have two — they're \$2,500 each," Hund said. "But they're popular because you can put anything on it, even letters."

Patrons don't have to come to the library, although Hund expects a large crowd for their open house. Library users can call and request a book and Hund will mail it out. It's returned the same way, all free as part of the library service.

OPEN HOUSE at the library will be held 2-4 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 23. Hund said new advances in technology for handicapped readers will be on display, including the Xerox/Kurzweil personal reader that converts printed books and magazines into synthetic speech.



Paul Truchan of Royal Oak, a member of the Wolverine chapter of the Telephone Pioneers of America, volunteers two days each month with other members of his group to help repair the electronic equipment the library loans to the blind and handicapped.

"A lot of people have called and said they've seen a commercial with Stevie Wonder using a Kurzweil. They used to be \$50,000. Now they're \$10,000. We don't have one, but maybe, at that rate, we'll be able to get one some day."



Margaret Bluhm, an aide for the special Oakland County library, checks in records and tapes that have been returned from the public.

photos by RANDY BORST/staff photographer

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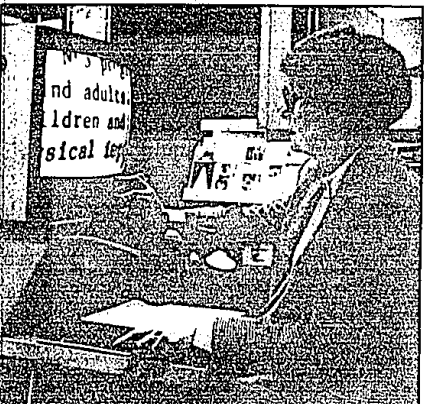
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Carol Hund, head librarian for the Farmington Hills-based special library, adjusts a closed circuit magnifying device similar to the type the library loans to the public.