

Hawaii Association of the Blind Newsletter

February 1, 2023

In Memory of Donald Thomson

Donald Lee Thomson was born on MAY 25, 1931. He died on DECEMBER 1, 2022 at the age of 91. Born in Modesto, California, Don was Blind from childhood. Because of this, Don's life was dedicated to overcoming adversity. Anyone who knew Don understood his passion and commitment for the equal rights, opportunities, and advocacy of independence for the blind community. His understanding, knowledge, and experience of addressing advocacy for persons with disabilities was invaluable.

But those persons that Don surrounded himself with also knew the other side of him. While Don could certainly be loud, opinionated, and give off a gruff, curmudgeonly disposition, it only disguised the big heart underneath. Some will remember Don's love of music--jazz in particular---and his love of baseball and liberal politics. On a memorial page for Don, a friend, Stephen O'Harrow said, "...he was a true friend, a friend I miss talking to everyday. Don Thompson was one helluva guy and I doubt we'll see anyone like him again for many a years."

In his professional life, Don obtained a Master of Arts degree in Sociology and a concurrent Master of Arts degree in American Studies from the University of Hawaii at Manoa in 1971. From 1971 until 2007, Don was a Professor at Leeward Community College in the Social Sciences Division. After this appointment, Don went on to the University of Hawaii at Manoa, where he took the position of Professor Emeritus.

Other accomplishments include president of Friends of Jazz Hawaii from 1990 until 1998 and having served on the State Rehabilitation Council. And of course, many know also that Don dedicated a good portion of his time to the Hawaii Association of the Blind.

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Upcoming Events

Access to Independence welcomes all consumers who are visually impaired and completely blind to a peer support group. The group is non-judgmental, as we learn how to thrive despite our blindness and navigate our environment.

The intention of this club is to teach how to be a self-advocate, explore success stories, build lasting friendships, see things in a positive view, mentorship for newly blind, and gain empowerment among peers. So, please join us as we learn about career choices, decision making, structured-discovery, assistive technology, software training and more!

Date: FEBRUARY 10, 2023

Time: 2:00 to 3:00 PM

The event is virtual. CONTACT Keao Wright at 808.731.0878

Or at kwright@accesstoindpendence.org

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The Hawaii Association of the Blind Invites you to attend our 56th Annual Convention at Ala Moana Hotel

Join us for Fun, Games, Prizes and More!

Friday, March 3, 2023

Ala Moana Hotel, Garden Lanai, Level 2

Time: 5:00-9:00 pm

Dinner Fees: Members - FREE=Guests - \$45

A Big Mahalo to our HAB Vendors of their generous donations for prizes!

Saturday, March 4, 2023

Ala Moana Hotel

410 Atkinson Drive

Honolulu, Hawaii 96814

Hibiscus II Ballroom, Level 2

Free continental Breakfast will be provided at 7:30 AM

Registration: 8:00-9:00 am

Day Program starts at 9:00 am & concludes around 3:00 pm

Hosted Cocktails @ 5:30 pm – Banquet to Follow – Program Ends at 9:00 pm

Lunch Fees:

Members \$15

Guests \$25

Banquet Fees:

Members \$25

Guests \$40

HAB Membership Dues:

\$10

RSVP for the convention by February 10, 2023 to Vickie Kennedy at 808.222.8862

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Dear Hawaii Association of the Blind,

A heartfelt Mahalo for all that you do for our students who are blind and visually impaired. Your most recent act of generosity is so greatly appreciated. I received the variety of white canes and cane tips for my students. I feel like the holidays are continuing with all the fun I am having giving my students a brand new shiny cane, with a couple of different tips to try. My youngest cane user is three years old and my oldest is 21 years old. The variety of high quality canes are outstanding and the metal, ceramic and nylon cane tips allow these students to decide which they like best. Thank you so very much and please let your members know how grateful we are!

Mahalo,

Amy Downard

A picture shows newly arrived, still in the package, white canes arranged in a circle with extra tips in the center.

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Holo Holo Assisted Shopping

By Sherri Martinez

Picture Description: HAB members and O&M Instructors had a spectacular time at HMart in Pearl City. From left to right: Dez, O&M Nancy, Anthony, Natalie, Sharon, Ernie, Lisa, Crata, O&M Amy, Laureen, and O&M Hazelle

Picture Description: HAB members and O&M Instructors had a spectacular time at HMart in Pearl City. From left to right: Anthony, O&M Nancy, Natalie, Sharon, Lisa, Crata, Kenny, Laureen, O&M Troy, and O&M Hazelle

Sharon Ige said, "Wow, Sherri is a really good O&M instructor. I bought more items since she gave very good details of the space."

Amy Downard said, "It was so great to see HAB Members and O&M instructors and interns take over the HMart food court with 14 people altogether. I saw lots of smiles and lively conversations with old friends reconnecting and new connections create. The HAB Ohana is growing!"

Dez Lacewell said, "It is so nice being with everyone out in the community and having fun and getting support."

O&M skills that were worked on:

Orient to HMart store entrance, customer service, food court, exit, and bathrooms

Assisted shopping

Verbal descriptions of menus in food court

Checking canes and tips for wear and tear

Exploring Ambutech No-Jab canes and ceramic tips

Picture Description: Crata trying out Ambutech's No Jab cane!

Thank you to HAB for making an enjoyable O&M shopping experience at HMart in Pearl City! We shopped, socialized, ate Korean food and French macaroons, and most of all: we had a SPECTACULAR time! Mahalo to everyone that attended! An extra mahalo to Amy Downard, Nancy Parker, Hazelle Magaoay-Baniaga, and Troy Kato for assisting with O&M support!

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Reflections on Personal Growth and development along Life's Journey

By Tony Akamine

As I anxiously wait in anticipation for my ferry ride with the cool breeze blowing at my face, the sound of the ferry horn blowing, I take a few moments to reflect on this past year. I think about Forrest Gump and how he said, "life is like a box of chocolate you never know what you're going to get." Some parts of life you might find a little sticky and hard to swallow. Other times life is delightful filled with nuggets of goodness and you go back for more. I am grateful for all those that poured into my life through life's ups, downs, twists, and turns... my friends, my mentors, my family, and you my HAB ohana. Life can be filled with many challenging moments my mom says, "best be humble and be thankful, an attitude of gratitude goes a long way." Brian Huffman shared with me a little nugget to get some fresh air and go for a little walk. It totally works to become refreshed and renewed.

I recently had an opportunity to take a retreat to the northwest and came across this message board in a hotel, grateful to the guest service agent for sharing with me the powerful thoughts on the message board. May you reflect on these and may you consider how it can move you to grow.

8 powerful words

Author unknown

1. believe in yourself believe you can, and you will
2. stay strong dream, believe, achieve
- 3 never give up a little progress each day makes big results.
4. be grateful a grateful heart is a magnet for miracles
- 5 work hard good things come to those who wait.
- 6 stay humble work hard in silence let success makes the noise.
- 7 be kind kindness makes you beautiful.
- 8 keep smiling: because of your smile and you make life more beautiful.

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STEAM event Number 2

By Leah Anderson and Chloe Rose

Saturday, January 28 marked the second Hawaii Association of the Blind PAY STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, math) event at Ho'omaluhia Botanical Garden. Rain did not stop our families from coming out and having fun.

The kids worked on developing and strengthening their orientation, sensory and tactile awareness skills while learning how to fish! They read tactile diagrams, tied fishing knots and worked on understanding the concept of projectile motion while casting.

Next month we will be going fishing in Wahiawa!

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ACB Media Holiday Auction Tradition Continues

By Terri-lynn Higashi & Leslie Spooone

How is a turkey cooked? One hour at a time. This is how the ACB Media Holiday Auction went on this year for a total of about 5 hours. As I write this I pause and reflect upon the rich participation HAB has done through the years. I laugh as I think of Norman bidding on a pom pom kitty nobody else bid on. I smile as I think of a story about Warren's constant bidding for a piece of jewelry for Julie and he wouldn't stop till he won that jewelry for the love of ACB and his wife Julie. The ACB auction continues to be a fun and engaging event. Every year after Thanksgiving the ACB holds a virtual auction to help raise funds for the American Council of the Blind. Proceeds from the event helps to support programming of the ACB media. Because there is so many people listening to ACB programs throughout the year, this auction is essential as well as beneficial.

The ACB auction committee greatly appreciates The Hawaii Association of The Blind and its members for your continued support of the ACB Auction. The unique collection of items that Hawaii provides truly helps share the Aloha spirit and adds to the fun of the event. A special mahalo (thank you) to Amy Monthei, Brian Huffman and Stephine Tsai for helping to put together the items for the auction. This year a few members even donated auction items in memory of their loved ones who have since passed. Terri-lynn Higashi in memory of her mother Margaret Higashi donated a necklace that consisted of the solar system. Kenny Johnson donated in memory of his wife Vicki: beautiful salt/pepper shakers, wind chimes, and Vicki's favorite place to eat cheesecake factory. Even our president Dan Spooone led the way and donated an auction item in loving memory of his dad. As Dan Spooone would say "Hip, Hip, Hooray!" We look forward to seeing you at the summer auction.

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Ten Things Hospitals Can Do to Be More Inclusive and Accessible

By David Goldfield,

Blindness Assistive Technology Specialist

Original Source:

<https://davidgoldfield.wordpress.com/2023/01/29/ten-things-hospitals-can-do-to-be-more-inclusive-and-accessible/>

During the past twelve months I have spent a lot of time visiting and supporting my wife in two different hospitals. I have become keenly aware of how these places often lack accessibility which would make the experience easier and more inclusive for both patients as well as their visitors. I have nothing but admiration and respect for the medical professionals who have done so much to assist and support my wife. The following list is in no way meant as a criticism of the doctors, nurses, surgeons, respiratory therapists and other specialists who have provided support to us. These people should be honored and respected as much as our military and its veterans. Indeed, some of the people I have met in the medical field are true warriors and war heroes and I am in awe of them and what they do. They see death on a regular basis. Many of them are called to save lives. Sometimes they do save those lives. Other times they are unable to do so. I cannot imagine the effect on them of this amazing and necessary work. That being said I've had some ideas of how hospitals could be so much more inclusive. These ideas would not require technology that we don't already have. Some would require a financial investment but they wouldn't require new technologies to be designed. While I don't have time right now to work on this I'd like to help engage in advocacy at a later and more convenient time to see if we can turn some of these ideas into reality.

1. Have either Velcro or a magnetic dock on the call bell/TV remote.

This would allow the patient to be able to place the item in a reachable spot without

constantly losing it or having it fall off of the bed out of the patient's reach.

2. Place Braille labels and/or raised icons on the other buttons on the call bell/TV remote. They might have a Braille N for Nurse but no other buttons are Brailled. Do they think blind people have no interest in watching TV?

3. Braille signage on all doors.

4. Ensure that all elevators contain Braille on all buttons and have audio alerts to indicate what floor has been reached.

5. An optional TV voice remote for patients who can speak just as you have with Comcast, Fire TV, Roku, etc.

6. Allow the patient to send text messages to the nurse's station.

This way, a patient who can't speak could text "I need help being repositioned" or "my Purewick came loose." This way, the nurse who comes in to help the patient already knows the reason for the call. Someone who can't speak doesn't have to find a way to communicate with the nurse and the nurse doesn't need to ask what the problem is, saving a lot of time and effort.

7. Indoor beacons to allow blind visitors to easily locate and identify a room using an app on their phone, such as Goodmaps.
<<https://www.goodmaps.com/>>

8. An Alexa in every room. It could include special hospital content containing health information as they do on the TV. It could be trained to recognize specialized commands, such as "call the nurse" or "what's my heart rate" not to mention just being able to listen to a full catalog of music and radio

streams.

9. Talking telemetry. Patient should be able to press a button on the remote to access heart rate, latest blood pressure, etc.

10. Required disability awareness training for all hospital staff. You would think that the medical community is the most knowledgeable regarding how to interact with people with disabilities but I have found them to be in serious need for training, such as how to navigate "sighted guide" with a blind person.

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411 is going out of service for millions of Americans

By Nathaniel Meyersohn

CNN's Editorial Research team contributed to this article.

<https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/07/business/telephone-operators-411-att-ctpr/index.html>

The operator is going off the hook for millions of customers.

Starting in January, AT&T customers with digital landlines won't be able to dial 411 or 0 to reach an operator or get directory assistance. AT&T in 2021 ended operator services for wireless callers, although customers with home phone landlines can still access operators and directory help. Verizon, T-Mobile and other major carriers still offer these services for a fee.

On a notice on AT&T's website, the company directs customers to find addresses and phone numbers on Google or online directories.

"Nearly all of these customers have internet access to look up this information," said an AT&T spokesperson.

But a century ago, the operator functioned as Google. Everyone knew it as "Information."

"The operator was the internet before the internet. There's a wonderful circularity there," said Josh Lauer, an associate professor of media studies at the University of New Hampshire who is writing a book on the cultural history of the telephone.

The human telephone operator, a job that came to be dominated by White women during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Operator services were a selling point to customers during the late 1800s and early 1900s. The operator was the essential link in the dominant Bell System, owned by American Telephone & Telegraph (AT&T), telecommunications network.

The operator became the early face of the telephone, a human behind an emerging and complex technology. The job came to be occupied mostly by single, middle-class White women, often known as "Hello Girls." The Bell System, known as Ma Bell, advertised its mostly female ranks of operators as servile and attentive – "The Voice with a Smile" – to attract and maintain customers.

Well into the 20th century, AT&T offered weather, bus schedules, sports scores, time and date, election results and other information requests.

"Telephone users interpreted her as an efficient way to locate any information," wrote Emma Goodmann, an assistant professor of communication at Clarke University, in her 2019 paper on the history of telephone operators.

Believe it or not, gas station bathrooms used to be squeaky clean. Here's what changed.

On Halloween eve in 1938, during Orson Welles' radio broadcast of "War of the Worlds," New Jersey residents believed martians were invading and frantically phoned the operator for information on the invasion and to connect them with loved ones before the world ended.

Three decades later, a Bell company said a customer called to ask the operator if he was a mammal, “like a whale,” while a woman wanted to know how to get a squirrel out of her house, according to Goodmann.

The advance of technology like the internet and smartphones, the deregulation of the telecomms industry in the 1980s, and other factors have left human operators virtually extinct. In 2021, there were fewer than 4,000 telephone operators, down from a peak of around 420,000 in the 1970s, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

But there are still people who call the operator and request directory help.

“411 usage is not insignificant,” the FCC said in a 2019 report. The FCC estimated then that 71 million calls annually were placed to 411.

‘She’s your telephone operator’

The first telephone exchange took place in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1878, two years after Alexander Graham Bell patented the telephone.

It was designed to handle business communication, not social calls between local residents. Physicians, police, banks and the post office were some of the first subscribers.

To connect a call, an operator at a switching office would take a request from a caller and physically plug one line into another.

Bell and other telephone exchanges spread throughout the Northeast. Initially, telephone companies hired mostly men and boys to take calls. But the operator quickly became a gendered job.

Male managers decided that women were better suited to answering and connecting calls from rude customers because they were seen as more docile and polite. Companies could also pay them less than men.

Telephone companies sought female operators who would project a “comfortable and genteel image to their customers,” Kenneth Lipartito, a professor of history at Florida International University, wrote in a 1994 paper “When Women Were Switches.”

Companies rejected Black and ethnic workers with accents, and policies barred female operators from being married. By 1900, more than 80% of operators were White, single, US-born women.

A 'Hello Girls' school at the Clerkenwell telephone exchange in 1932.

Operator jobs were frenetic and repetitive.

Workers had to scan thousands of tiny jacks, always keeping an eye open for lights indicating new calls and ones that ended. During peak times, operators handled several hundred calls an hour, Lipartito said.

Training was also rigorous and procedures were strict. Women were instructed to modulate their voices to sound more polite answering calls and used approved language with callers.

“Through training in the art of inflection she gains in those gentler qualities of unfailing courtesy,” a 1926 AT&T video, “Training for Service,” says.

Although many of Bell’s independent telephone rivals began using “girlless” automated switchboards in the first decades of the twentieth century, the Bell System was committed to human operators. Automation could not provide the same level of personal service, Bell believed.

“She’s one of 250,000 girls who help to give you good service, day and night, seven days a week. She’s your telephone operator,” read one typical Bell Systems magazine ad.

Information

Operators played a crucial function because telephone books were often inaccurate and customers could not be counted on to remember updated numbers and addresses.

During the first decades of exchanges, operators also unintentionally became a catch-all for information. It was common for people to call and ask the operator for directions, the time and weather, baseball scores and other questions.

By early part of the twentieth century, telephone companies began to separate requests for information and requests for telephone numbers.

In 1968, the Bell System changed the name of its information service to “directory assistance” because too many people were taking the name too literally.

“When she was called ‘Information,’ people kept calling her for the wrong reasons,” one Bell company ad said at the time. “Now we call her ‘Directory Assistance’ in the hope that you’ll call her only for numbers you can’t find in the phone book.”

The fall of the operator

Strikes, competition for labor, and rising wages during and after World War I drove Bell to speed up its automation plans.

In 1920, fewer than 5% of Bell exchanges had automated switchboards. A decade later, more than 30% were automated, according to a 2019 article by the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond.

The growth of automatic switchboards led to the direct-dial telephone in the 1920s. (The “0” for operator appeared with dial phones, said Lauer from the University of New Hampshire. On the new Bell dials, “Operator” was printed in the “0” position. The use of “411” also emerged with the dial era. “0” became universal for operator assistance and “411” was the number for directory assistance. In later years, if you dialed “0 and asked for directory assistance, the operator would transfer you over to “411.”)

But electronic switchboards and direct dialing were phased in gradually and did not eliminate the need for human operators.

An old dial telephone. The introduction of the dial in the 1920s eliminated the need for phone operators to connect local calls.

Automatic switchboards were mainly used for local telephone calls. For decades after the introduction of direct dialing, operators still handled long-distance calls, toll calls, and calls to the police and fire department. This meant that operator jobs continued to rise until around the 1970s.

Directory assistance was also mostly free for customers until the 1970s, when AT&T began charging customers to curb the “misuse” of the service and shift the high costs of employing operators and handling time-consuming queries for information.

“Some people just simply don’t want to bother to look the number up themselves,” AT&T’s chairman complained in 1974.

The breakup of AT&T in the 1980s and the deregulation of the telecommunications industry altered operator and directory services. Phone companies began to cut their ranks of operators, automate services and charge customers fees for calls.

As companies increased prices, demand for directory assistance plunged. Meanwhile, the internet and smartphones emerged to replace these services for most callers.

In 1984, there were 220,000 telephone operators. A decade later, there were 165,000, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. By 2004, at the dawn of the smartphone age, 56,000 people were employed as telephone operators.

An operator in 1988. The ranks of operators fell sharply in the 1980s and 1990s.

David McGarty, the president of US Directory Assistance, which provides services for major carriers, has watched the transformation of the operator firsthand.

Calls to operators have decreased an average of 3% a year and around 90% overall since he started in 1996, he said.

“We’re content with riding the Titanic down,” he said.

While operator services may be nearly obsolete, it’s important to consider emergency circumstances where a caller may need to reach an operator and the customers who still rely on these services, such as low-income callers, the elderly and people with disabilities, said Edward Tenner, a technology historian in the Smithsonian’s Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation. (AT&T said it would still offer free directory assistance to elderly customers and people with disabilities.)

“Often tragedies happen when something is exceptional,” he said.

He also empathized with people who are being forced to keep up with technological change, whether they like it or not.

“There are a lot of people who, for various reasons, haven’t adapted,” Tenner said. “Why should they be forced to migrate to the web if they don’t want to?”

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Listen to the audio described version of our brochure at this link:

<https://unidescription.org/account/project/export/816>