

# The Spectacle

**-Dare to stand out**

**January 2021**

## Just for Fun

2020 has definitely been a difficult year. One thing we can try to do is to recognize the good. In [“Good News Prevails: 100 positive things that happened in 2020,”](https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/2020/07/29/100-good-things-from-2020-positive-stories-news/3257222001/) we see a list of silver linings. “From small acts of kindness to new albums that got us dancing. Here are 100 good things that happened in 2020 so far, compiled by USA TODAY's Life staff”:

* Drive-in movie theaters made a come-back.
* Restaurants shared their secret recipes.
* “Tiger King” somehow connected us.
* Americans rushed to adopt and foster pets.
* Puzzles and board games became cool again.
* [Crayola launched a box of crayons with diverse skin colors](https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2020/05/21/crayola-launches-different-skin-tone-crayons/5240502002/) for children to "accurately color themselves into the world."

## Upcoming and Ongoing

### Chill & Chat

We are excited to offer informal Zoom meet ups for students to connect with peers, problem solve, and support each other. Meet ups happen the first Tuesday of every month at 4pm. Email [Sheila.koenig@state.mn.us](mailto:Sheila.koenig@state.mn.us) for details and for the Zoom link.

**College Shadow**

SSB’s College Shadow is similar to a job shadow. High school students can virtually tour a college, talk with college students, and sometimes attend a college class. Email [Sheila.koenig@state.mn.us](mailto:Sheila.koenig@state.mn.us) if you’d like to participate.

### American Council of the Blind of Minnesota State Conference

“Join the American Council of the Blind of Minnesota for their state-wide virtual conference January 22-24. Enjoy an exhibitors’ fair and audio described performance on Friday. Saturday features a round table discussion from blind authors, a presentation on obtaining health care services as a blind person, and a presentation on self-driving vehicles. Learn about the importance of balance including a balance class, enjoy a presentation from an Emmy nominated blind film composer, and hear from ACB president Dan Spoone. There will also be time to reconnect with our vendors, and a Saturday evening auction with lots of goodies!”

Click [here](https://acbminnesota.org/2021-state-convention/) for more information and to register.

### Minnesota Association of Blind Students Activities

Start off 2021 by participating in activities with the Minnesota Association of Blind Students (MNABS)!

* Meetings take place on the first Sunday of every month at 7pm. “Come find out what this group is all about, and bring your thoughts and suggestions.”
* Join MNABS for Monday Madness every Monday at 7pm to play games and socialize.
* For additional upcoming opportunities such as the Midwest Student Seminar, follow the Facebook page [Minnesota Association of Blind Students](https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Organization/Minnesota-Association-of-Blind-Students-1534210496870926/).

Contact President Samantha Flax at [students@nfbmn.org](mailto:students@nfbmn.org)  with any questions and to get Zoom links for any of these activities.

### SSB Communication Center

The Communication Center is here to put your books into accessible formats that work for you. Custom audio, e-text, DAISY markup, and Braille - we can do it! The Communication Center is Minnesota’s Accessible Reading Source – we’re here for you. Email us at [ssb.audioservices@state.mn.us](mailto:ssb.audioservices@state.mn.us)

### Year-Round Programs for Students

[BLIND, Incorporated](https://www.blindinc.org/), [Duluth Center for Vital Living](https://www.lcfvl.org/), and [Vision Loss Resources](https://visionlossresources.org/) offer opportunities for students to build skills and connect with peers throughout the school year. Contact [Sheila.koenig@state.mn.us](mailto:Sheila.koenig@state.mn.us) with any questions.

### M-Power for Students with Combined Vision and Hearing Loss

Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) is pleased to announce, M~POWER, a four day virtual program for transition aged youths who are DeafBlind, to be hosted on February 16 – 19th, all provided online! The virtual four day program includes an introduction to the world of work and emphasizes the five areas of Pre-ETS: job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling on post-secondary educational opportunities, workplace readiness training, and self-advocacy. For more information contact your regional representative! [www.helenkeller.org/hknc/nationwide-services](http://www.helenkeller.org/hknc/nationwide-services)

### Scholarships for Students who are Blind, Visually Impaired, or DeafBlind

Both the American Council of the Blind and the National Federation of the Blind offer scholarships to students who are legally blind. [Scholarships from the American Council of the Blind](https://www.acb.org/scholarships) range from $2000-$7500. [Scholarships from the National Federation of the Blind](https://www.nfb.org/programs-services/scholarships-and-awards/scholarship-program) range from $3000-$12,000.

**PACER**

“These are challenging times for everyone. As we all navigate this public health crisis, PACER is committed to being a valuable resource for families of children with disabilities and students who are bullied, as well as the professionals who serve them. Go to [https://pacer.org/special/covid-19.asp](https://www.pacer.org/special/covid-19.asp) for COVID-19 resources and to <https://www.pacer.org/workshops/> for a list of upcoming workshops.

**Call or email us!** PACER’s parent advocates, assistive technology specialists, bullying prevention associates, and all staff are available to assist families and professionals. **Call 952-838-9000 or email** [pacer@pacer.org](mailto:pacer@pacer.org) **for assistance.”**

### Blind Abilities Podcasts

Check out Blind Abilities on the web at [www.BlindAbilities.com](http://www.BlindAbilities.com). You can also download the app or use the Blind Abilities Alexa skill on your Alexa device just by saying, “Alexa, enable Blind Abilities.”

Here are just some of the people and topics featured on Blind Abilities recently:

* From Google’s Accessibility Lead for Search and News, “[Tech has the power to change lives](https://blindabilities.com/?p=6331).’
* From Apple’s Director of Global Accessibility Policy & Initiative “[Make something wonderful](https://blindabilities.com/?p=6376).”
* Learn about [BlindCricket](https://blindabilities.com/?p=6346), and help bring this international sport to the U.S.
* “[We can all achieve greatness in our own unique way](https://blindabilities.com/?p=6366),” says athlete and adventurer Pardy Gill.

## What’s Up?

We’d love to hear from you! Text 651-425-0636 your response: What are you most looking forward to in 20221? We’ll share some of your answers in our next issue.

## Fast Forward: Potential and Possibilities

**Steve Decker**

  
I'm a Lead Accessibility Consultant on Target's digital accessibility team, a team of 12 in the U.S. and 7 in Bangalore India. I work with designers, web developers and others to ensure our website and apps are accessible to everyone. I do the same kind of work on digital tools that Target develops or purchases for internal use by our employees, or as we call ourselves, team members. This includes the system everyone uses to apply for jobs at Target. I also lead the partnership Target has with Airauyk8i to make their service available in all Target stores, and to assist blind and low vision people with  
shipping on target.com. Finally, I work to build accessibility in to the processes and culture at Target.

When I'm not working, I'm raising three girls (8, 6, and 3) with my wife Kallie, at our home in Brooklyn Park. I enjoy reading anything I can get my hands on, cooking and eating new foods, and experimenting with new technology.  
  
I use a variety of access technology, including screen readers, to review digital experiences. I also use braille displays heavily for taking notes, inspecting code, editing documents carefully, and using  
my computer when on numerous Zoom calls. Despite the plethora of technology I have, I also rely a lot on colleagues to verbally describe things to me, particularly when I review designs for new features that haven't been built yet. It takes some practice to build the skill of asking questions and getting people to describe things in a way that you can understand without seeing. Before the pandemic, I also worked with my web designer colleagues to sketch raised line drawings using a Sensational Blackboard tool. Doing these things has helped designers think more about how the experiences they design will be used and by everyone.  
  
It can be tempting to look to technology as the solution to all problems, particularly when the problem is a lack of accessibility. Sometimes it is, but just as often, it's the relationships you build that help get the job done. As a blind person, Braille has been an indispensable tool, and it's made it much easier to adapt as I've lost hearing. It means I don't have to listen to a screen reader and to people talking at the same time. Try to see your disability as a strength in school and beyond. It can often help you find different ways to solve problems that others wouldn't think of. Finally, you and your future are not defined by whatever level of vision you have.

## Tech Tidbits

JAWS, ZoomText, and Fusion have all released major updates. If you are on a traditional SMA upgrade license, these updates do count toward SMA upgrade. If you are on the annual subscriber license, this upgrade should be included.

In addition to Zoom, many people also use Discord as an online meeting and messaging platform. Discord is used more for gaming and entertainment uses, but is quite popular. Discord has recently added some additional keyboard navigation shortcuts to their desktop app:   [https://support.discord.com/hc/en-us/articles/225977308--Windows-Discord-Hotkeys](https://gcc01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fsupport.discord.com%2Fhc%2Fen-us%2Farticles%2F225977308--Windows-Discord-Hotkeys&data=04%7C01%7Csheila.koenig%40state.mn.us%7C5442a2dff3ea4dc2056e08d8a6a336a9%7Ceb14b04624c445198f26b89c2159828c%7C0%7C0%7C637442567205441302%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=EcLXAgdYwQWoNMqpfR9icaCV1i3RNHMWfncld%2BTeZ5c%3D&reserved=0)

## Building BRIDGEs

Picture of a well-built and stylish bridge.
As students navigate the world of high school and begin thinking about the future, we offer services and resources that provide a foundation for success. Each of the core areas of our **BRIDGE** framework highlights an essential component that teenagers need in order to succeed after high school:

* **B**asic Skills
* **R**ole Models
* **I**nitiative
* **D**iscovery
* **G**oal Setting
* **E**xperiences

[“Tips for Success as a Student in the Midst of a Pandemic”](https://www.nfbmn.org/bulletin/fall-2020/tips-success-student-midst-pandemic) offers excellent tips for staying balanced and healthy during these tough times.

The article [“How to Manage Senior Year of HS amid Covid-19”](https://insights.collegeconfidential.com/high-school-amid-covid) offers insights into the difficulties high school students are facing right now. It also offers some strategies for staying engaged and agile. Though written in August of this year, much of the information is still relevant. Younger students will also find this information helpful.

[“New Years resolutions idea: 70 Achievable Goals to Set for Yourself”](https://collegelifemadeeasy.com/new-years-resolution-ideas/) offers goal-setting ideas as we begin a new year. The article suggests to start small and choose just a goal or two.

From New York Public Library, check out “[Best books for teens 2020](https://www.nypl.org/books-more/recommendations/best-books/teens).”

## Looking Ahead in High School

Thinking about what comes after high school is an important skill. The links below offer steps to take to prepare and plan for life after graduation.

[Freshman](https://mn.gov/deed/assets/freshman-transition-timeline_tcm1045-292477.pdf)

[Sophomore](https://mn.gov/deed/assets/sophmore-transition-timeline_tcm1045-292483.pdf)

[Junior](https://mn.gov/deed/assets/junior-transition-timeline_tcm1045-292478.pdf)

[Senior](https://mn.gov/deed/assets/senior-transition-timeline_tcm1045-292482.pdf)

## Ideas?

We are always looking for ideas you’d like to see featured in this newsletter. Please email [sheila.koenig@state.mn.us](mailto:sheila.koenig@state.mn.us) with any suggestions or brainstorms. ☺