



Not Singing the Blues: Musician Ken Lonquist Focuses on the Sunny Side of Life

Fans describe his music as energetic, warm and inspirational. He has been dubbed the "Fifth Beatle" by the Minnesota Parenting Magazine. He performs songs for kids and adults alike, about topics ranging from whales, to recycling, to politics. He is Madison's own singer-songwriter Ken Lonquist.

Ken wrote his first song when he was seven and got his first guitar at the age of twelve. He has performed professionally since his days as a college student.

As stated on his website, "In 1982, Ken won a national audition to become 'Minstrel for the Environment,' writing and performing about nature, environmental and related issues in schools and colleges. On the college circuit he honed his skills at improvisation and topical humor (as heard on NPR, Air America, the CBC, Pacifica Radio). A series of recordings for adults and children followed."

Ken has also been a composer for the Children's Theater of Madison with fifteen full-scale musical productions to his name.

In 1999, he started losing his vision due to macular edema and is now considered legally blind.



Ken Lonquist shares his musical art at Council Gallery Night.

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Ken articulates that his vision loss has impacted the way he performs and interacts with his audience.

“During shows, if I noticed some people were distracted or were goofing around, I would make a little song up about them on the spot,” he explains. “This was something that served to get their attention back on track, and the other audience members found it hilarious. Since I can’t see people who are more than a few rows back in the audience, that has become trickier for me to do with the same effect.”

The hardest thing about losing his vision, Ken says, has been finding transportation. He travels frequently for performances and it is not easy to ask friends or family members for rides. He has several friends who are of retirement age and are usually available to drive. He is grateful for their help and support.

“I’ve found it comforting and inspiring to meet other artists who are visually impaired. We can grow and learn from each other.”

— Ken Lonquist

In spite of these limitations, Ken has always tried to remain positive and look on the sunny side of life.

“I just didn’t see the point of getting depressed about my vision loss,” he expounds. “I try to remember that everybody has stuff happen to them, and a lot of the stuff is worse than vision loss. I believe that keeping a positive mindset is the best thing anyone can do when overcoming challenges in life.”

Ken found out about the Council long before he needed services. He used to live at the corner of Jenifer and Livingston streets, so he was familiar with the location of the building. He also participated in some research done by Marshall Flax, former Council Orientation & Mobility Specialist/Low Vision Therapist, about diabetic eye diseases, since Ken has diabetes. He now visits the Council to pick up any assistive devices he might need to empower himself as he continues to lose his vision.

For the previous three years, Ken has been the featured musician at the Council’s fall Gallery Night event. He says participating in Gallery Night has helped affirm a sense of community with other artists who are blind or visually impaired.

“As you are losing your vision, it can impact the way you make your art,” Ken states. “You have to discover alternative ways of creating your artwork. I’ve found it comforting and inspiring to meet other artists who are visually impaired. We can grow and learn from each other.”

In addition to playing music, Ken enjoys drawing cartoons and hiking on family property in the Ashland area. He also likes to play cards and board games, as well as teach drama to children and teenagers.

“My main love is my music,” he muses. “I feel so lucky that my work is also my pleasure. My guitar is an emotional outlet for me. Songwriting is my journal.” ■

The Big Share is March 6!

The Big Share is a single day of online giving hosted by Community Shares of Wisconsin. More than 60 local nonprofits, including the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired, promote their good works on social media in hopes of raising much-needed funds and spreading the word about their services.

The Big Share creates a sense of excitement as we share the Council’s story with hundreds of people learning about us for the first time. Join in the fun by clicking here, www.thebigshare.org, to make a gift to the Council or any of the other organizations.

We encourage you to give between 10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. on Tuesday, March 6 at www.thebigshare.org! If the Council receives the most donations during that hour, we could win an incentive prize of \$750! Your gift is welcome anytime, but the chance to win an extra \$750 to use for vision services is enticing!

Please share this link www.thebigshare.org with people who may be interested in learning more about The Big Share!



Assistive Technology Training Offers Improved Knowledge Base and Confidence

Technology is ever changing. It can be frustrating to try to keep up with the advances on your own. Fortunately, the Council's Assistive Technology Specialist, Jim Denham, is here to help. A little additional training might be all that is needed. That's what Melinda Dresen is discovering as she works with Jim to hone her skills.

Melinda is 38 years old and lives in Madison. She wanted to enhance her workplace skills. She recognized she needed to improve her knowledge and confidence using screen-reading software JAWS and other pieces of adaptive equipment, so she came to the Council seeking technology training.

"I've been using JAWS for years," Melinda explains. "I was trying to navigate the screen visually, but with my progressive eye condition,



Melinda Dresen peruses items in the Kitchen Environment while visiting the Sharper Vision Store.

it wasn't feasible or efficient to do that anymore."

Melinda says Jim has been encouraging her to listen to what JAWS is saying. He explains what the details of each screen look like so she can picture it in her head. She is happy to report this has made accessing the computer non-visually much easier. Currently, Melinda and Jim are working on improving her knowledge of using JAWS, specifically with the Google Suite.

"I'm now able to use technology for things I thought I would never be able to do without help from someone who could see."

— Melinda Dresen

"Things that were a lot harder to do have been made easier with software updates," Melinda points out. "I'm now able to use technology for things I thought I would never be able to do without help from someone who could see. For example, Jim taught me how to use the Seeing AI app to read printed materials. I take it to the grocery store and read bar codes of products while I shop."

Melinda has been receiving services from the Council since her diagnosis of juvenile macular degeneration at the age of eight. She likes the positive, can-do approach staff always offer, so receiving technology training at the Council seemed like the best next step in preparing for a career in human services.

"Jim talks in a way that is easy to understand, and he focuses on how you can use the technology in your day-to-day life," she praises. "I would recommend Jim's training to anyone who is looking to brush up on their technology skills or learn how to use new equipment."

For his part, Jim says working with Melinda has been a pleasure.

"Melinda is an enthusiastic and curious learner," Jim notes. "She definitely takes what I teach her in training and runs with it, finding practical applications for the skills in everyday life. I taught her how to create drop-down menus in Excel, for example, and right away she used that function to create a form for a volunteer group."

In addition to one-on-one training, Jim offers technology classes for those interested in learning as part of a group. See class list on page 6. ■

Assistive Technology Classes in March and April

Did You Know JAWS Can Do That? Research it, Flexible Web and Speech Manager

Wednesday, March 14

3:00 to 5:00 p.m. at the Council office – 754 Williamson Street, Madison

Registration Deadline: Monday, March 12, at 4:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 20

1:00 to 3:00 p.m. via Zoom online meeting

Registration Deadline: Friday, March 16 at 4:30 p.m.

A New Kind of Laptop: Using ChromeVox Screen Reader on a Chromebook

Wednesday, April 18

3:00 to 5:00 p.m. at the Council office – 754 Williamson Street, Madison

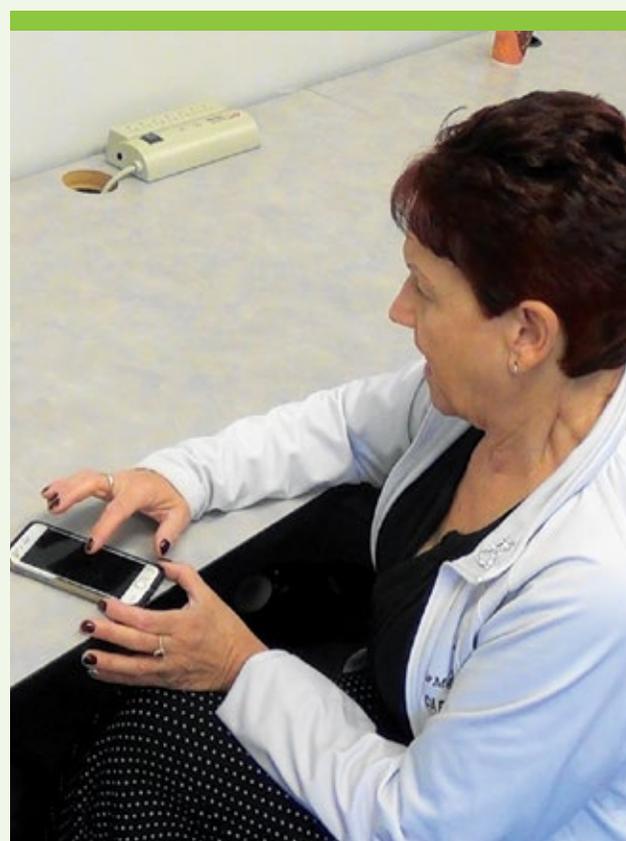
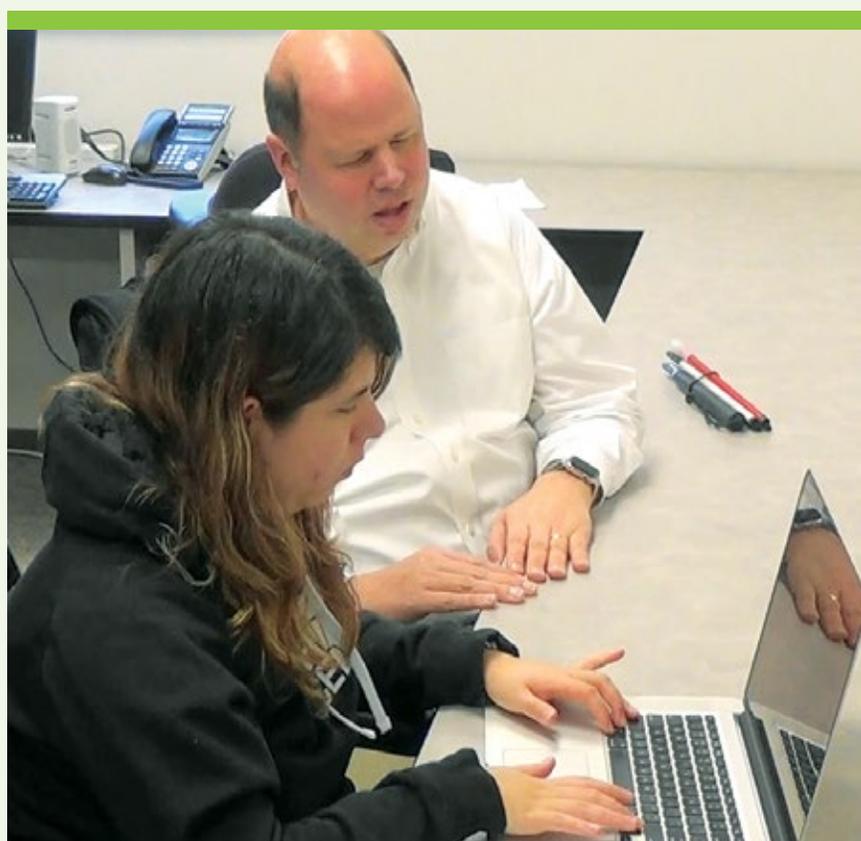
Registration Deadline: Monday, April 16 at 4:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 24

1:00 to 3:00 p.m. via Zoom online meeting

Registration Deadline: Friday, April 20 at 4:30 p.m.

All four classes are free to attend. Watch our publications and social media for more details. To register for a class or learn more about one-on-one technology training, call the Council at 800-783-5213.



Council Backs Legislative Initiatives to Support Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities

Two new bills will improve employment opportunities for people with cognitive, learning and behavioral disabilities! The Partners with Business Bill (AB819/SB689) allows employers to train a co-worker to provide natural job supports to the individual with the disability while they are at work. The Employment First Bill (AB 625/SB 514) requires state agencies to collaborate, streamline policies and set goals to increase the employment of people with disabilities.

Both bills were first presented at a press conference on Tuesday, December 19 at the Wisconsin State Capitol. Council CEO/Executive Director, Denise Jess, was in attendance to show support for the bills.



Representative John Macco (R - 88th District) addresses the press from behind a podium. To his left stands Council CEO/Executive Director Denise Jess, with her white cane in hand.

Upcoming Council Events

Thursday, March 22

Dining in the Dark

The Council is thrilled to announce Charlie's on Main of Oregon as a new Dining in the Dark restaurant partner! The four-course menu will remain a secret until the day of the event. Chef Dave Heide will describe the meal to you as it

is served. Vegetarian, vegan, and gluten free options will be available for all courses. Cost is \$60 (plus tax and fees) with the option to add a wine flight for \$20. Proceeds will be donated to the Council.

To register for Dining in the Dark and to learn more about Charlie's on Main, go to <https://www.charliesmainevent.com/dining-in-the-dark>.



Tuesday, April 10

Legislative Day

Please join us for the Council's 2018 Legislative Day on Tuesday, April 10 at the State Capitol. This is an excellent opportunity to hear from state officials, discuss the issues of importance to our blind and visually impaired community and to visit with state legislators and their staff.

Registration will open on March 2nd. Please monitor Council publications for further details.

Monday, April 16

Vision Services Open House

Join us for a spring open house and see what's "blooming" at the Council. Talk with Jim Denham, assistive technology specialist, who will demonstrate magnification and screen reading software, as well as Amazon Echo and Google Home. Chat with Amy Wurf, low vision therapist, who will use the LuxIQ to determine your preferred lighting strength and color. Learn about the Council's assistive technology and low vision evaluations and services. Visit with Brent Perzentka, Sharper Vision Store manager, see products and try the new online store. Experience the ExpressVote, the newest accessible voting machine. Meet others on our talented staff. Come and go as your schedule permits. Light refreshments will be served.

Monday, April 23

Webinar: Birding by Ear

Do you hear the birds singing and wonder what bird you are hearing and what is the meaning of that song? If you would like to get started “Birding by Ear,” join Kerry Wilcox, avid birder and volunteer with the Madison Audubon Society, and get tips on how to listen and interpret what is heard. Kerry will have support from the Madison Audubon Society and persons with vision impairment who enjoy this outdoor activity. The focus of the webinar will be the calls of common Wisconsin spring birds. Apps and websites to hone your bird song listening skills will be shared. This 1-hour webinar will take place from 11:00 a.m. – noon. For more details and to register go to www.wcblind.org.

Friday, May 4

Spring Gallery Night

Mark your calendars and join us as we participate in Spring Gallery Night! On Friday, May 4, we will proudly showcase work from artists who have vision loss. This event is in partnership with the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art (MMoCA). Participating artists will display and discuss their work during the opening reception at the Council office. Attendees are welcome to browse the artwork, enjoy refreshments and talk to the artists. Artwork will be for sale for those interested in purchasing.

Saturday, May 19

Council Annual Scholarship and Awards Luncheon

The Council is continuing its tradition of supporting post-secondary education, as well as recognizing outstanding volunteers and employers of the blind and visually impaired community. This spring, the Council will hold its annual scholarship and awards luncheon. Up to ten scholarships for \$2,000 will be available to full and part-time students—whether undergrad, graduate, professional, or doctoral—who are Wisconsin residents and are blind or visually impaired.

Wednesday, June 20

Webinar: Accessible Voting

Is voting a challenge for voters who are blind, visually impaired, or with another disability? There are voting options that may make voting easier to do. Join Sara Linski, WisVote Elections Specialist, and Jennifer Haar, City of Madison Clerk’s Office, to learn about the voting options available to individuals with disabilities who want to vote, whether it is voting prior to an election day or voting on an election day at the polls. Find out how to have a positive voting experience. This 1-hour webinar will take place from 10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. For more details and to register go to www.wcblind.org.

Alliant Energy Grant Allows Council to Purchase AED and Training Provided by American Red Cross

Thanks to a \$1,300 Hometown Safety Grant awarded by the Alliant Energy Foundation, the Council was able to purchase an automated external defibrillator (AED), as well as provide training for all staff.

On Thursday, October 19, the American Red Cross provided AED and Adult CPR Training. All Council staff received training and now hold the appropriate certification!



Pictured left: Lori Werbeckes (Fund Development Director) Ray Cubberly (Database Manager) and Brent Perzentka (Sharper Vision Store Manager), kneel on the ground each in front of a test dummy. They wait for instructions on how to provide CPR.



Pictured right: Jim Denham (Assistive Technology Specialist), Jean Kalscheur (Director of Education and Vision Services), and Katherine Corbett (Communications Coordinator) kneel, while Denise Jess (CEO/Executive Director) sits and Amy Wurf (Certified Low Vision Specialist) stands. All awaiting directions from Charles Fischer from the American Red Cross on what to do next.

Volunteers Needed: Archivist and Special Event Staff

Whether you like working quietly in a small group or enjoy mingling and getting to know new people, the Council has volunteer opportunities to consider.

Become an Archivist

As the Council turned 65 in 2017, staff decided it was time to gather documents pertinent to our organization's history. We are seeking Archivist volunteers to help us sort through literature we have amassed throughout the years. Volunteers are responsible for sorting through paper files and separating them into five-year increments. Afterward, volunteers will work closely with an assigned individual connected with the Council who knows the historical value of the material. The pair will work together to decide if the material will be kept or discarded. The volunteers must be able to read printed text, as the person from the Council will likely be someone who is blind or visually impaired.

Mix and Mingle at Council Special Events

If you have a friendly smile and like talking to people, consider volunteering for the Council during various special events. In this role, you will serve as a greeter, a way-finder for guests, or an assistant at a refreshments table. A typical shift is 2-3 hours and requires standing for most of that time.

To see available volunteer positions, visit our "How You Can Help" webpage on the Council's website. If you are interested in more information, please contact Heather Buggs at **608-237-8101**, or email at **hbuggs@wcblind.org**.





Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired

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Speaking about Changing Vision

Are you looking for an experienced, outgoing speaker who can talk about issues related to changing vision? The Council organizes a Speakers Bureau which consists of staff, board members, and friends of the Council who can speak about a variety of subjects related to vision.

You can explore the list of topics on our website at www.wcblind.org/speakersbureau. Contact Jean Kalscheur, our Director of Education and Vision Services, at **608-237-8106** or via email at jkalscheur@wcblind.org to learn more about our talented speakers and what they can offer you or your organization.

Stay Connected



Would you like to keep up with the Council's events, news, and current trends related to blindness or vision loss? We would love to send you our weekly email, as well as our monthly e-newsletter, "On Sight." Please send an email to Justin Lemke at jlemke@wcblind.org or call **608-237-8119** to join our mailing list. You can also follow us on Facebook, Twitter (**@TheCouncilWI**), and find many resources at www.wcblind.org.