



Birding by Ear: To be Enjoyed by All

Council and Audubon volunteer, Kerry Wilcox, has been an avid birder since the early 1990s. The Madison native's interest in birding by ear, or identifying birds by their sounds instead of their feathers and colors, blossomed about 12 years ago. This was when he learned of the late Francisco Toledo, an artist/ birder in Oaxaca, Mexico, who provided birding by ear outings for people who are blind or visually impaired in the community. This knowledge led Kerry to reflect on his own birding practices.

"I realized that I do much of my birding by ear already," he says. "It is one of the most enjoyable aspects of birding to me. Also, these outings shifted the paradigm for me, in that I suddenly thought of how birding could easily be enjoyed in many different ways."

When he moved back to Madison from California in 2017, Kerry reached out to the Council and suggested a birding by ear class. To provide guides, Kerry and the Council worked with the Madison Audubon Society, a chapter of the national Audubon Society. The Audubon Society protects birds and their habitats throughout the United States.

About 50 participants have taken part in the Birding by Ear classes so far. Two webinars and three indoor classes teaching bird sounds have occurred, as well as three outdoor workshops to put the birding knowledge into practice. These classes are integrated, with members of both the BVI and sighted communities joining. Participants say the integrated experience



A group of six birders stands with leader Kerry Wilcox at Pheasant Branch Conservancy in Middleton.

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has enriched their notions about birding and given them insight into the lives of people who experience vision loss.

"I thought [having the mixed participation of people who are sighted and those who are visually impaired] was great," said a past participant. "It made everyone more aware of other's circumstances and what challenges others may be dealing with."

Kerry weaves this integrated experience into other areas of his life. The aspect that Kerry feels has helped him the most is learning to describe surroundings and birds using words that denote direction and are descriptive, instead of pointing. This knowledge has been particularly helpful when he is working as a part-time cab driver.

"I do not have family or friends who are visually impaired," Kerry says. "Techniques I learned through working with the Council are impacting my whole life. I appreciate everything I have learned."

The 2020 Birding by Ear dates are Thursday, May 28 and Saturday, May 30 for online classes. The outdoor field trips will be announced and will take place at the Pheasant Branch Conservancy, Marina Drive location.

This two-part class is for beginning birders who want to learn a new skill or how to bird in a new way. The class is fully accessible for persons who are blind or visually impaired. Attend one of the indoor sessions and one of the outdoor sessions. The registration fee is \$20 per person.

The outdoor portion of the class will offer sighted assistants at a 2:1 ratio to help participants safely maneuver through the Conservancy. Participants are encouraged to bring a friend or family member to serve as a sighted guide. There is no charge for the person you bring as your sighted guide. Those without a sighted guide will be paired with volunteer guides. Guide dogs are welcome. Note that leashed dogs are also allowed in the Conservancy.

In addition to the two-part Birding by Ear class offered in partnership with the Council, Madison Audubon now offers monthly birding by ear excursions in Madison. Watch Council social media, the events Council e-newsletter or the events page at madisonaudubon.org/events to learn when the next walk will take place. ■

"Techniques I learned through working with the Council are impacting my whole life. I appreciate everything I have learned."

—Kerry Wilcox

Submit Artwork to the Council's Fall Gallery Night

The Council seeks artists who are blind or visually impaired to submit their original artwork to be displayed at Fall Gallery Night. The exhibition takes place Friday, October 2 at the Council office in Madison. Artwork will be on display through mid-November.

"Participation in Gallery Night is important to me," says former Gallery Night artist, Alison Fortney, a photographer from Milwaukee. "Not only does it get the word out about artists who are blind and what they are capable of, it also inspires other people who are blind and visually impaired who may want to experiment with art."

Other mediums of artwork submitted in the past include wood carving, oil pastels, watercolors, alcohol inks, and ceramic masks, to name a few. The Council generally accepts three to five pieces from each artist. Exhibiting artists have the opportunity to give a gallery talk at the event and are featured in Council e-newsletters and on Council social media.

To be considered, send photos of artwork in jpeg format to Hannah at hwente@WCBlind.org by Friday, August 14. Thank you for your submissions.



Duncan Hamilton in front of his artwork at the 2019 Gallery Night.

Letter from the CEO/Executive Director



Denise Jess

Through my advocacy work, I've been deeply moved by the power of a personal story. In the blind and visually impaired community, we are well-versed at sharing real-life examples of how we are affected by legislative and policy decisions. I've also observed the impact of data; the numbers behind the stories. When I can partner a powerful story with a percentage or datapoint, that personal story is amplified. The story transforms from simply an individual's experience to the shared experiences of many.

It is in the spirit of amplifying our voices that the Council has launched an advocacy survey. We want to better couple personal lived experience with data to make powerful and compelling connections with law and policymakers.

You can play a vital role in our advocacy efforts by completing the survey. Here's how your experience can influence the state budget and policy process that directly impacts those of us living with vision loss.

Wisconsin uses a two-year budget cycle, or biennium. In even-numbered calendar years, state agencies develop budget proposals for the programs they administer. In the fall, agency secretaries present their proposals to the governor for consideration. The governor's office prepares its budget and unveils it early in the odd-numbered calendar year. The state legislature's Joint Finance Committee considers the Governor's budget and develops their version. The full Assembly and Senate consider JFC's budget, voting on it typically in the summer of the odd-numbered calendar year. State law requires that the budget is passed by June 30, though in recent years, a state budget has passed as late as September.

During the budgeting period, advocacy organizations like the Council meet with top-ranking officials in hopes of influencing budget decisions. Information from this advocacy survey is an important tool for offering accurate information about the needs of Wisconsin residents experiencing vision loss. Meetings focus on the Council's legislative priorities:

- **Transportation, Pedestrian Safety and White Cane Law.**
- **Healthcare** – vision rehabilitation through the Office for the Blind and Visually Impaired.
- **Employment** – services through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.
- **Education** – services for students with vision loss.
- **Civil Rights** – voter accessibility.

Our goal is to have initiatives that benefit people who are blind and visually impaired in each of the above state agency budgets.

Completing the survey is easy. Use this link, [surveymonkey.com/r/79SX5RH](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/79SX5RH), to access it on Survey Monkey. The platform is fully accessible, and the survey will take about 20 to 30 minutes to complete. In addition to responding to the questions, please consider sharing stories to provide concrete examples. After taking the survey, please share it with friends and family. If you are a family member or friend of someone living with vision loss, you are welcome to complete the survey as well, marking the appropriate demographic information. We hope to collect information from around the state. The survey will be open until the end of May 2020.

If you have questions about the survey or about the Council's advocacy work, please reach out to me at djess@WCBlind.org.

Your participation in the survey helps to shape policy initiatives and the direction Wisconsin takes as a state. Thank you for sharing your experiences with us.

Warm Regards,



Denise Jess
CEO/Executive Director
Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired

The Council is always working diligently to advocate in the Wisconsin legislature for the rights of people who are blind or visually impaired and more so as we navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic. Use the enclosed envelope or make a gift to the Council at WCBlind.org/donate to support these efforts.

Give Wisely

Donors are the financial lifeblood of nonprofits. If you donate to an organization like the Council, you deserve to know your gifts are being used as intended. Reputable charities strive to be transparent with how gifts are used.

As a sign of reputability, some organizations rate nonprofits based on certain criteria. These criteria could be the financial health of the organization, accountability and transparency within the organization, and the charity's ability to affect change.

The revenue generated by the Council is not enough to qualify for a rating by a national watchdog such as Charity Navigator. Even if a nonprofit is not ranked, you as a donor can determine if that charity is a worthy recipient of your gift by:

- **Asking for an annual report** (shows transparency, results, # of people served).
- **Examining the website** (contact information, staff and board member names, whether donors can choose to be anonymous).
- **Perusing social media** (their activities, collaborations, people and other organizations they connect with).
- **Reviewing the organization's Form 990**, available publicly at **Guidestar.com** (shows program expenses, sources of revenue, and fundraising costs).

If all of this research suggests the organization is a viable candidate for your gift, contact the organization directly and speak with the Fund Development Director or CEO/Executive Director. Ask questions about the organization's mission, goals, program successes and failures, as well as board and staff support.

The Council appreciates and relies on donations. Donors can remain anonymous. Gifts can be made online at WCBlind.org, by check, or by phone call. If you have questions about the Council or wish to make a gift over the phone, contact Lori, Fund Development Director, at **608-237-8114** or **lwerbeckes@WCBlind.org**. Thank you for your generosity.

Thank You and Farewell, Kathy Brockman

Since 1985, Kathleen “Kathy” Brockman served on the Council board of directors. After 35 years, she announced she is resigning to attend to her health.

Kathy most recently served as treasurer and chairperson on the Finance Committee. She also served on the Awards and Fund Development committees, and as a member of the Gratitude Work Group. Kathy says she plans to continue as a committee member as her time and health allow.

“Kathy approached her role as treasurer with professionalism, kindness and humility,” says Chris Richmond, Council Board Chair. “A true servant leader, Kathy set an example for others to follow.”

Having held many positions on the Council board, Kathy served in any capacity where she believed she could contribute or was needed.

“I have enjoyed the many years of serving on the Council and will miss that part of my life,” says Kathy. “Thank you for understanding and for the support.”

Kathy worked under twelve board chairs and five CEOs/Executive Directors.



Kathy Brockman (right) with Excellence Award winner Nona Graves (left) in 2019.

Council highlights during Kathy’s tenure include:

- 1990s** Orientation and mobility are added to Council’s services
- 1992** The Council adds Vision Services as a pillar program
- 2001** The Council moves from 354 West Main Street to current address at 754 Williamson Street
- 2005** Kathy wins the Louis Seidita award
- 2015** The Council’s Low Vision Clinic opens
- 2017** Assistive technology one-on-one appointments and classes available

We appreciate your many years of dedicated service, Kathy. Thank you. ■

Volunteer Spotlight: Peter Kaufman



Peter Kaufman

Verona resident Peter Kaufman was a Council donor before he became a volunteer. He says he got a flyer from the Council several years ago, thought it was a worthy cause, and made his first gift. He has remained a regular Council donor since then.

“I started volunteering in October of 2018,” Peter says. “My significant other, who knew I was a regular donor to the Council, happened to be in a meeting along with Lori (Werbeckes, Council Fund Development Director). Lori knew of me and suggested to my partner that I volunteer for the Council to do computer work.”

Peter began his volunteer service by digitizing images and articles for the Council’s archive project, completed in early 2019. Since that

project, Peter has helped the Council in many ways. He has read for the audio recording of the annual report, and applied braille and audio recorded tags in the Sharper Vision Store. Peter has done work to aid in the creation of the updated Sharper Vision Store catalog, and assisted in updating some of the Council’s PC computers. He also analyzed data identifying when the Council gets the most phone calls throughout the day and week.

“I have been able to do a variety of things at the Council,” says Peter. “It feels good to know I am being helpful.”

Peter says he is grateful he can take care of administrative tasks, so Council staff can focus on carrying out the Council’s mission.

Peter continues to be surprised by the reach and scope of the Council’s work.

“Before I became a volunteer, I did not know about the existence of the Sharper Vision Store, or about the extensive advocacy work the Council undertakes on behalf of people who are blind or visually impaired,” Peter adds. “As the population ages, more and more people are going to be impacted by vision loss. The work of the Council is important and necessary.”

During **National Volunteer Week, April 19-25**, the Council thanks all generous volunteers, including Peter, who share their time and talent to further the Council’s mission and work. Thank you for all you do. ■

Spreading Messages of Inclusivity & Respect Beyond the BVI Community: The Council and The Big Share

On Tuesday, March 3, the Council participated in an online day of giving called The Big Share. This day of donations is presented by Community Shares of Wisconsin, a membership organization of nearly 70 grassroots nonprofits making a sustainable difference in Wisconsin.

This year we chose to promote the Council's etiquette guide (available at WCBlind.org/media) to share how to interact with people who are blind or visually impaired. The tips include keep people involved, use person-first language and do not pet service dogs. It provides a framework so everyone can be treated with dignity, inclusivity and respect.

Your donation to the Council through The Big Share enables the Council to spread this important message more widely in Wisconsin. Funds from The Big Share support white canes, low vision evaluations, advocacy efforts and in-home vision rehabilitation visits.



Thank you to all those who gave through The Big Share, and who shared the Council's messages with their friends and family.

Who Lives with Vision Loss?

Ever wonder how common an eye condition really is? It is important to know the numbers to understand the prevalence of vision loss. Prevalence rates also help set budgets and numbers for teachers of the visually impaired, low vision therapists, vision rehabilitation specialists and more. Here are 8 facts about vision loss:

1. Vision loss is one of the top 10 disabilities among adults 18 years and older and one of the most prevalent disabling conditions among children.
2. 90% of blindness caused by diabetes is preventable.
3. In Wisconsin, at least 100,000 people live with vision loss.
4. An estimated 61 million adults in the United States are at high risk for serious vision loss, but only half visited an eye doctor in the past 12 months.
5. Two of the contributing factors for why Americans did not see an eye doctor are lack of awareness and cost.
6. According to the National Eye Institute (NEI), most people living with visual impairment in the U.S. are over 64. The number of people living with vision loss is expected to double in the next 10 to 20 years as the population ages. According to the CDC, 2020 projections for vision loss are 43.5 million people for macular degeneration, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy and cataracts combined.
7. The annual economic impact of major vision problems is more than \$145 billion for adults 40 and over.
8. Most people with age-related vision loss will not become completely blind; instead they will experience partial or moderate loss of vision.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control, National Eye Institute, CDC Vision Health Initiative, [cdc.gov/visionhealth/basics](https://www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/basics).

Upcoming Events

Visit WCBlind.org/events for updated information.



Legislative Day

Online format – details TBA



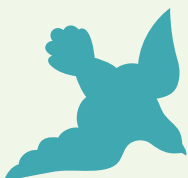
Assistive Technology Class:

Tuesday, May 19

Online via Zoom

Cost: Free

RSVP by Monday, May 18 to Jim Denham by calling **608-237-8104** or emailing jdenham@wcblind.org.



Birding by Ear

Online Classes: Thursday, May 28 and Saturday, May 30
Madison

Outdoor Field Trips: TBA

at the Pheasant Branch Conservancy, Marina Drive location.



Dining in the Dark

March 25 date moved to Wednesday, July 29, 6-9 p.m.

Vignette Dining Club, Fitchburg, Wisconsin

Cost: \$50

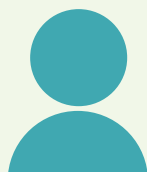


Council Webinar: Accessible Reading Options

Tuesday, August 18, 2020, 10 a.m.

Online via Zoom

Cost: Free



Council Webinar: Self-Management of Diabetes

Tuesday, November 10, 2020, 10 a.m.

Online via Zoom

Cost: Free



Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired

754 Williamson Street, Madison, WI 53703
608-255-1166 • 800-783-5213 • WCBlind.org

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Provide the Council with Your Email Address

The Council sends out four monthly e-newsletters: Events, Legislative Update, On Sight and News You Can Use. Each has important information to help you live your best life with vision loss. Email Ray at **rcubberly@WCBlind.org** or call **608-237-8109** to provide your email address.

Council Courier is available in large print, braille and CD. To request an alternative format or update your mailing address, contact Ray using the information above.

Contact Us

Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired
754 Williamson Street, Madison, WI 53703
608-255-1166 • 800-783-5213 • WCBlind.org • info@WCBlind.org

