



I can feel the words!



Children who are blind or vision impaired are now able to hear and feel their favourite bedtime stories thanks

to an inspiring new project run by the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind (RVIB).

▲ Sigrid Thornton, *Feelix* Patron

The Braille Book Project, known as *Feelix*, is a borrowing library of picture books that have been made accessible for the first time to children with a vision impairment so that they can read and have fun with the same stories as their sighted friends.

Each storybook kit contains the original picture storybook annotated with braille, a CD or tape of the story, some tactile aids to help the child enter the world of the story and a little tactile book so that children can tell the story to themselves or others.

Coordinator of *Feelix*, Louise Curtin, said that this is a unique project that

fills the gap in the availability of literature for young children who are blind or vision impaired.

“The reading of storybooks to young children who are blind or vision impaired is one of the earliest steps in the child understanding that print or braille tell a story,” Ms Curtin said.

The audio tapes and CDs in the *Feelix* kits aim to present expressive readings that engage the child in the meaning of the story. Children who are blind or have a vision impairment may memorise stories or favourite parts of stories, which is a vital part of pre-literacy skill development.

The project's corporate sponsor, Tattersall's, has donated \$100,000 towards the project.

Tattersall's Trustee, David Jones, said that the organisation was delighted to be supporting such a worthwhile project.

“We support a number of community projects but I have to say that giving the gift of literature to young children is particularly satisfying because you know that it is opening a whole new world of experiences for them,” he said.

The project would also not have been possible without help from the Helen Smith Memorial fund, which gave the project the start it needed.

Stars who donated their time to read for the project include *Feelix* Patron Sigrid Thornton (*The Blue Room*), David Treddineck (*The Secret Life of Us*), Jon Faine (*ABC 774*) and Kick Gurry (*Looking for Alibrandi*).

For more information contact Louise Curtin on (03) 9522 5222. See page 6 for more photos.



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RVIB

> *Vision: To be the leading provider of services, resources and information which enable people who are blind or vision impaired to maximise their independence and quality of life.*

I think all of you who caught a glimpse of RVIB Carols by Candlelight 2002 would



Thank you to the family, friends & colleagues of the late Helen Smith for their generous donations, which allowed this project to begin.

To our corporate sponsor, Tattersall's, thank you for your generous support that enabled Felix to grow into a full-scale venture.

It's a wonderful project and a shining example of the work that we do at RVIB with the help of so many friends.

Yours sincerely,

Doug Kent
Chief Executive Officer, RVIB

have to agree that it was a spectacular night. 30,000 people added sparkle to the communal festivities as they gathered at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl with their family and friends.

More than two million television viewers across Australia, New Zealand and, for the first time, South East Asia tuned in to watch. Host Ray Martin introduced a wonderful line-up of stars who spread their Christmas cheer.

Thank you to everyone who continues to support RVIB's biggest annual fundraising event. You are not just contributing toward the work of RVIB, but also to a Melbourne tradition.

A very special thank you to all the volunteers who gave their time to help keep the evening running smoothly.

RVIB Carols by Candlelight would also not be possible without the help of our sponsors. Thank you to Qantas, our presenting partner, Channel Nine, 3AW, Magic 693 and all our other sponsors.

The Braille Book Library, *Feelix*, was launched at the Melbourne Zoo last month and has since received enormous interest from all over Australia. Young children who are blind or vision impaired can now access the same picture books that are loved by so many other Victorian youngsters.

RVIB Speaker's Panel



▲ *Russell Short, paralympian and Speaker's Panel member*

Would you like to understand the common difficulties faced by people with a vision impairment?

Would you know how to offer help to, or guide someone who is blind?

Would you like an insight into the life of someone who has lost his or her eyesight?

Would you like to be inspired?

RVIB is offering you a chance to understand life from the perspective of someone who is blind or vision impaired through a visit from a member of the RVIB speaker's panel.

The panel comprises RVIB clients with limited or no vision, such as Russell Short, who is featured in the cover letter received with this edition of *RVIB News*. Our speakers vary in age, gender, eye condition and life experience. On booking, an appropriate member of the panel will be assigned. Their visit, of up to two hours, will include a talk, role playing if required, and time for questions and discussion.

The talk will include the topics above, but will be tailored to your environment.

For details of fees, other inquiries or bookings, please call Fiona Smyth at RVIB on 9522 5299.

Thank you Victoria



The 65th Qantas presents RVIB Carols by Candlelight was one of the most successful ever with more than two million people across Australia, New Zealand and South-East Asia enjoying the night's festive spirit.

Qantas' Regional General Manager Victoria, Ken Ryan, said the airline was delighted to be the presenting sponsor of the RVIB Carols by Candlelight for the third successive year.

"Qantas is a supporter of many community-based events. The RVIB Carols by Candlelight bring a smile to many faces across Australia at a special and family oriented time of year," he said.

The Christmas Eve event, telecast live from the Sidney Myer Music Bowl by the Nine Network, has long-been a traditional part of Melbourne Christmas celebrations.

Jeff Johnson, Events and Projects Manager at RVIB, said that RVIB Carols by Candlelight is the organisation's main fundraising event.

"All proceeds from ticket sales, from merchandise including candles and candle holders, and from donations benefit RVIB," he said. "This event means so much in helping us continue to provide services to children and adults who are blind or vision impaired across Victoria."

RVIB's core services are provided free and include training in literacy, adaptive technology and mobility, employment



▲ Vanessa Amorosi



▲ Byrne, Stapleton and Nicholls



▲ Hi 5

counselling, education services for children and library services.

Because of Australia's ageing population and environmental factors, an increasing number of Victorians are suffering from vision loss, placing a growing demand on RVIB services.

"RVIB is indebted to all Victorians who have supported Carols by Candlelight this year and in the past," said Mr Johnson.

"Without your support, RVIB could not provide the same level of high quality services to people who need them to maintain their independence and quality of life."



▲ Host Ray Martin

RVIB Carols by Candlelight, proudly sponsored by Qantas, the Nine Network, Southern Cross Radio, 3AW and Magic 693, was attended by more than 30,000 people.

The event was broadcast nationally by the Nine Network and featured performers including Marina Prior, Vanessa Amorosi, Daryl Braithwaite, Annalisa Kerrigan and, in her first ever public appearance in Australia, New Zealand sensation Haley Westenra.

Thank you also to Crown, Victorian Arts Centre, Medownick Laser Clinic, City of Melbourne, Treasure Planet, CUB and Coates Prestige.

RVIB Partner Opens New Laser Clinic in Wodonga



Meddownick Laser Clinic has a strong community responsibility and as a sponsor of RVIB works actively to promote community eye care.

Meddownick Laser Clinic in Wodonga was officially opened on Wednesday, 19 February 2003 at 2pm by Cr Lisa Mahood, Mayor of the Wodonga in the presence of Dr Meddownick, Sophie Panopoulos MP, Tony Plowman MP, and Ian Glachan MP.

Meddownick offers a comprehensive range of professional eye care services and expert fitting of glasses, contact lenses and sunglasses. The clinic has state of the art equipment and is directly linked to Dr Meddownick and his highly trained staff at Epworth Medical Centre in Richmond, Melbourne. The clinic will provide the best possible standard for eye care.

Laser Pioneer Dr Mark Meddownick now offers services that include check and assessing patients' suitability for laser and cataract surgery, general eye care, diagnosis of eye conditions, prevention of blindness, all aspects of clinical optometry and fitting of glasses, corrective lenses and sunglasses.

For further information please call Meadownick Project Manager George Kazanis on 0407 305 540 or Managing director Dr Alla Geiro on 0414 661 952.

Melburnians Dare to Date



▲ Singles kicked up their heels at the Valentine's Day RVIB Dare to Date Ball

RVIB played matchmaker on Valentine's Day. 300 fun loving and single Melburnians turned out to the Dare to Date Ball at Albert by the Lake in search of their Valentine.

The night also hosted 10 Mix 101.1 Dare to Date competition winners. By completing a questionnaire attendees were computer-matched, not to just one person, but to tables of 10 like-minded people. Then amidst good food, fine wine, music and dancing the magic began...

Dare to Date organiser and RVIB Donor Relations Manager, Mr Jayson Hanrahan, said that whilst match-up events are often primarily about finding that "special person", Dare to Date is just as much about making friends.

"There's always going to be success when you bring people together in a relaxed atmosphere and Valentine's Day added to that social spirit."

"We had some wonderful feedback from patrons on the night. The guests were continually on the dance floor and were very complementary on the matching process, the food, venue and overall look of the event."

Mr Hanrahan said that aside from raising funds for RVIB, the event also gave the organisation positive exposure to a new audience.

A big thank you to Mix 101.1 who sponsored the event. Thank you also to Hepburn Spa Resort, Edward Beale, Melbourne Marriott, Melbourne Aquatic Centre, Flower Drum Restaurant and Domain Chandon.

2003 Further Education Bursary Awards



▲ One of the 2003 winners, Michael Curran.

Nine Victorian students who are legally blind each received \$4,500 of adaptive technology equipment after being selected RVIB's Further Education Bursary.

RVIB awarded the bursaries to enable each of the students to continue their studies in fields as diverse as engineering, social work, massage therapy and music.

Education Consultant from RVIB, Ms Jo Webber said that the awards are designed to make it easier for people who are blind or vision impaired to undertake further education and help to create equity in the learning environment.

"The high cost of the technology, essential to students who are blind or vision impaired, prohibits many of them from participating in further education and ultimately pursuing their chosen careers," Ms Webber said.

"The RVIB Bursary aims to address this situation by enabling the students to

purchase adaptive equipment, such as Braille note-takers, computers with voice output, voice operated organisers and scanners."

Jo Webber said that these awards have significantly reduced the barriers faced by people who are blind or vision impaired in the field of further education.

"As basic requirements, students who are blind or vision impaired need laptops, screen reading software and equipment to translate print into braille or audio formats just so that they are able to take and read lecture notes," she said.

Up to ten bursaries are awarded each year and applications are open to students of any age. They must be able to demonstrate financial need, that they are enrolled in further education and that they are legally blind.

The recipients were presented with their awards by Stonnington City Council's Mayor, Cr Sally Davis.

RVIB Events

RVIB Gold Ball
10 May 2003
Melbourne Town Hall

► The RVIB Gold Ball will showcase the glitz & glamour of Hollywood's golden years. This exclusive black tie dinner and RVIB fundraiser will feature a live and silent auction and Elvis, Frank Sinatra and Marilyn Monroe live! For details contact Nathan McEwan on (03) 9522 5295.

AQUA
14 June 2003
Melbourne Aquarium

► RVIB is proud to be hosting the 2nd annual AQUA event - a concept designed for young professionals looking for a non-traditional charity event experience. The fun-filled night will include plenty of fun, celebrities and music. As a special offer to the loyal supporters of RVIB, family members from existing RVIB donors are eligible for a 10% discount. For more information phone (03) 9522 5294.

Our winners!

Congratulations to the winners of the RVIB raffle that was drawn at the Melbourne Town Hall on 16 November 2002.

Mr Robert Smythe won first prize and drove away his new Toyota RAV4 valued at \$35,175. The \$1500 Myers Grace Bros gift voucher and the \$1000 Myer Grace Bros gift voucher were picked up by **Mrs W Sims** and **M Halls** respectively. **Mrs Q Terry**, won a travel holiday to the value of \$4000.

Feelix launch continued from page 1



▲ *Feelix Patron Sigrid Thornton entertained youngsters*



▲ *One of the storybook kits*



▲ *Peter Franich, Tattersall's Corporate Affairs Manager presents the inaugural Feelix membership to a young reader*

RVIB History Project



Documenting the history of RVIB is no easy feat - but Patsy Vizents is up for the challenge and enjoying it every step of the way.

Q: Who are you?

A: Patsy Vizents - Project Manager for the History Project at RVIB.

Q: What do you do at RVIB and how long have you been working here?

A: I began on 13 January 2003 and will spend the next six months collecting as much information on the history of the RVIB as I can, developing a data base for cataloguing all the information (including photographs, objects and ephemera like invitations and posters), and putting together the ideas for exhibitions, publications and tours for the future.

Q: Tell us about your recent working background.

A: I have most recently been working at Rippon Lea and Como Historic House and Garden. I was the manager of visitor services and interpretation so I delved into the history of both houses and collections. Interpretation included developing education programs, designing exhibitions, tours and public programs. My working career has been in heritage and cultural tourism.

Q: Why do you see it as important to document RVIB's past?

A: RVIB is part of the history of Melbourne and Victoria and its past encompasses the history of people, not just an organisation. This sort of documentation reinforces why we continue to value or maintain those parts of our culture, and I think the way that the RVIB has assisted the community is worth valuing.

Q: How do you intend to approach the project? Will you need help from volunteers and other staff members?

A: I am developing the storage facility on the second level at St Kilda Road and will need help with entering data into the catalogue system. There will be plenty of jobs for volunteers and those who wish to assist me may like to think of a project or come and discuss with me possible areas to be involved.

■ *For more information please call Patsy Vizents on (03) 9522 5238.*



RVIB

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