One of the more difficult aspects of adjusting to living with a brain injury is the number of transitions required to ease back into daily life. For an individual experiencing physical and cognitive changes, returning to a past routine may prove impossible without major adaptations and adjustments.

When the individual experiencing the effects of a brain injury is a child, particularly a child re-entering the mainstream classroom, the challenges faced can require a strong support team comprised of family, educators, medical professionals, as well as other support entities. Many parents and caregivers have little to no experience organizing support teams. In order to aid families, the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota works with the Statewide Traumatic Brain Injury Network Committee, a low-incidents project that is sponsored out of the Department of Education. It has been established to help students transition from the hospital back into their community and schools after experiencing a traumatic brain injury (TBI). The committee consists of 42 members who meet twice a year to learn about topics pertaining to TBI and educational issues. They also develop initiatives and plan the Fourth Annual TBI Family Weekend Retreat: Hearts*Heads*Hands Together.

Kathryn Clark, a resource facilitator, at the Association heads up the yearly back to school mailing. For the last two years, Clark has worked directly with the committee to create informational packets containing tips for parents and contact information always a nervous time,” Clark says. “Parents are concerned about
Back to School continues on page 12

Russ and Leticia – Two Captains

By Phil Gonzales

Russ Philstrom and Leticia Harnung are different ages, come from different backgrounds and experienced their brain injuries under different circumstances, but they both experienced the impact brain injury has on the lives of their friends and family. And, they both chose to participate in the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota’s Walk for Thought. Russ has had a team with the Walk since its inception in 2001 and Leticia is leading her first team this year.

In 1994, Russ experienced his brain injury as the result of a night of drinking and snowmobiling. “Would it have happened if I hadn’t had anything to drink? Probably not. I wasn’t falling down drunk,” he recalls, “but nobody expected me to live, including the doctor that put my head back together!”

Leticia received her brain injury last April at an all-girl getaway in Tampa, Florida. “I was riding with a tour guide on a jet ski. The tour guide crashed and I ended up hitting a tree,” she says. But, she wasn’t hospitalized. Remarkably, she flew back home to Minnesota the next morning.

Leticia states, “Things started getting messed up from there. By the next day, I couldn’t talk anymore, my walking was slowing down very quickly and I was losing all of my memories.” Russ and Leticia’s lives were instantly altered. Things they were once able to accomplish with ease, such as driving or navigating a stairwell, had suddenly become difficult tasks. Fortunately, for both of them, support was close by.

Back to School: The Journey

Russ and Leticia continues on page 9
JOIN us today to CHANGE tomorrow!

Every 23 seconds, one person in the United States sustains a traumatic brain injury. The Brain Injury Association of Minnesota is the only statewide nonprofit dedicated to helping people navigate life after brain injury.

Please join us to raise awareness and provide help, hope and a voice to the thousands of Minnesotans affected by brain injury.

Any commitment you can make – from volunteering to becoming a Citizen Advocate to sharing your story through the media – can help enhance the quality of life and bring the promise of a better tomorrow for all people affected by brain injury.

Simply fill out the section to the below and mail it to the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota at 34 13th Ave. NE, Suite B001, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55413 to get started today!

Name: __________________________________________
Address: _______________________________________
City: ______________________ State: ______ Zip: ______

Phone: _________________________________________
E-mail: _________________________________________

☐ Subscribe me to the bi-weekly Headlines Online e-newsletter, which is filled with up-to-date information of interest to the brain injury community (e-mail address required above)

Please send me information about:
☐ Membership
☐ Resource Facilitation program
☐ Case Management program
☐ Educational opportunities
☐ Public Policy opportunities
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Headlines

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☐ Internships

Full lives for people with disabilities

Vinland National Center helps adults with brain injuries live full and rewarding lives. Through training, counseling and physical activity, Vinland empowers people with brain injuries to live independently and achieve new levels of physical, mental and social health.

Harold, one of the thousands of people helped by Vinland who is living with a brain injury.

For more information, please call 763.479.3555 or visit our web site at www.vinlandcenter.org

Brain Injury Association of Minnesota

34 13th Avenue Northeast, Suite B001
Minneapolis, MN 55413
612-378-2742 • 800-669-6442
Fax: 612-378-2789
www.braininjurymn.org
E-mail: info@braininjurymn.org

Mission

The mission of the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota is to enhance the quality of life and bring the promise of a better tomorrow for all people affected by brain injury.

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All donations are tax deductible. The Brain Injury Association of Minnesota reserves the right to refuse letters for publication, and any specific method, facility, treatment, program, or support group for persons with brain injury and their families. Please call for advertising rates.

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the Editor are solely those of the author and do not represent the opinions or positions of the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota.

Letters to the Editor should be limited to 300 words. Letters may be edited for spelling, grammar and length. In order for letters to be considered, please include your name, address and the daytime phone number of the author. The Brain Injury Association of Minnesota reserves the right to refuse letters for publication, and submission of material does not guarantee publication. Opinions expressed in Letters to the Editor are solely those of the author and do not represent the opinions or positions of the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota.

Editorial Policy

Headlines is published quarterly by the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota. The editor reserves the right to edit submitted materials for style and space. The Brain Injury Association of Minnesota does not endorse, support, or recommend any specific method, facility, treatment, program, or support group for persons with brain injury and their families. Please call for advertising rates.

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Greetings to all Headlines readers. I’m three months into my new position as Executive Director and am pleased to say that the Association has already exceeded all of my expectations. While I knew coming in that this was a place run by a hard-working, knowledgeable staff and supported by dedicated volunteers and board members, I had no idea as to the extent of their insight and passion. This realization has the double impact of making me feel incredibly at ease knowing that this organization is already in good hands and incredibly pressured to live up to their standards. I look forward to meeting and exceeding those standards just as those who have come before me have done.

In this issue, we’re looking at students with brain injury returning to school, the upcoming Walk for Thought and your role in the upcoming November election. It’s quite a full plate with three very important topics.

Back to School
Our Back to School mailings have gone out across the state to parents and guardians of children with a disability due to brain injury. Hopefully, the information they receive will be useful in preparing children to re-enter the sometimes intimidating educational community. Back to School time is stressful for any parent and child. And the addition of a brain injury only heightens fears and concerns. The work our Resource Facilitation (RF) staff has done with the Statewide TBI Network Committee is one step in the process of providing the tools needed to make the transition back to school easier and less stressful for parents, children and educators.

2008 Walk for Thought
The 2008 Walk for Thought is right around the corner and I am very excited about the amazing work that has been put into it by staff, sponsors and volunteers. We have lined up former Twins player Corey Koskie as our Honorary Chair and Ambassador and WCCO-TV’s Don Shelby will emcee the St. Paul Walk. When the Association secures the participation of celebrities and large media outlets, it is in order to meet our second strategic goal, which is to increase awareness and understanding of brain injury causes, brain injury prevention, and the Association as a leader in the field. The Walk for Thought not only raises much needed funds for Association services and supports, it also, and some would say most importantly, raises statewide awareness of brain injury as a disability, a killer and as a silent epidemic. The Walk serves as a touchstone in the brain injury community where hundreds of individuals whose lives have been touched by brain injury can come together in a spirit of life, hope and healing.

It’s not too late to get involved in the Walk. You can still register online at www.braininjurymn.org/walk.html or even register in person on October 4, 2008 at one of our three Walk locations. If you want to lend a hand, give our Volunteer Manager Lee George a call at 612-378-2742, 800-669-6442 or e-mail Lee at leeg@braininjurymn.org. He would love to hear from you.

Elections
Finally, the November election is approaching and with it comes the opportunity for you to help select your leadership for the next few years. Many individuals who live with a disability tend to put politics towards the bottom of their priority list. This is entirely understandable. Life with a disability can be overwhelming, and keeping up with politics does not always seem so important when you are trying to schedule doctor’s appointments or support group meetings.

But, keep this in mind. The leaders we elect into public office are the very people who shape the policies that determine the future of healthcare and medical support. They decide where the money goes that supports waivered services, and which organizations receive grants and which state, county and citywide services receive staff and funding. Their decisions are not out of your hands.

By casting your vote, you are participating in American democracy, the greatest experiment in the history of humankind. By researching a candidate’s policies for ten minutes a day, you can help make a difference in the lives of tens of thousands of individuals living with brain injury. Please see more on Public Policy on page 7. Having your voice be heard is your right and freedom. Cast your vote. Participate in your community. The future is in our hands.

The Diving Bell
There is a movie called The Diving Bell and the Butterfly that is a true story, an autobiography, about a man, Jean-Dominique Baube, who had a stroke and awoke out of a coma only to discover that he was completely paralyzed. All that he could do was blink with his left eye. From there, his therapist works with him and he is able to dictate the book by blinking his eye. It is a powerful testament to the human spirit. He died ten days after his book was published, granting him immortality.

It was an interesting analogy to having a severe brain injury. I say an analogy because his inability to communicate with speech was very phenomenal; it was grounded in very specific physical limitations. Having a brain injury also makes communicating with speech a challenge; not because it is seemingly impossible, but because it is seemingly impossible to say what you mean and to communicate practically with the rest of the world.

Like Jean-Dominique, my mind works fine but it is my ability to communicate with the outside world that is the issue. He was very much trapped in his body, his “diving bell,” and all he had left was his memory and his imagination—his “butterfly.” All I have left is what I imagine is my memory. He was the physical representation of how I felt: trapped in a body and unable to communicate.

Speech communication was always very important to me. When I saw myself on video tape about a year after my accident and I realized how bad I sounded when I spoke, I decided I would not accept that and began working to speak clearly. A few years after my accident, I was able to read well enough that I could read a whole book. About ten years (and hundreds of books) after that, I began writing.

Writing is my most effective form of communication. I don’t feel like I speak as well as I’d like, but I am much more confident with my writing; certainly because with writing I can go back and revise it and make sure it makes sense. That is a luxury I just don’t have with speaking, unless I’m giving a prepared speech.

And began writing as a desperate hope that maybe I could communicate my experience in the written medium. I felt so isolated, I was like someone who was drowning and gasps for air when they reach the surface. Having this column lets me reach out and touch others in a way that breaks down the barriers.

I have a favorite quote by Richard Bach from his book “Illusions.” In it, he says:

“The mark of your ignorance is the depth of your belief in tragedy and injustice; What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the Master calls a butterfly.”

He chooses to believe that the reason we are here is not to have as easy a time as possible, but to learn and learning comes from facing adversity. So the attitude that the situation to us is not fair is missing the opportunity to gain from our misfortune. It is like we are saying “this isn’t fair.” And his reply is, “Nor is it just, but we can learn to live and to love in spite of everything. Save fairness and justice for heaven, this is Here and Now.”
Getting the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota’s message out to the public is an important part of our mission. Here’s where you may have heard or seen us in the past months.

This summer presented many opportunities for the Association to spread its message of awareness and prevention.

In the Media

Media activities for the summer centered on the announcement that Corey Koskie, former third baseman for the Minnesota Twins, would be our Honorary Chair and Ambassador for the 7th Annual Walk for Thought and that Don Shelby, WCCO TV news anchor and host of the Don Shelby Show on WCCO Radio AM weekdays will host the pre-Walk program in St. Paul.

We kicked off the news with a press conference held at the Association’s offices. Koskie, Jon Roesler from the Minnesota Department of Health, Ardis Sandstrom and Pat Marciniak were all on hand to speak before reporters from various media outlets including KARE 11, FOX 9 and the St. Paul Pioneer Press.

Stories concerning Koskie’s appearance at the Walk appeared on KARE, Fox, and in a Star Tribune sports column which included our Web site link. The Pioneer Press will be running an in-depth article at a later date around Corey Koskie and his involvement with the Association.

The Association also is excited to have WCCO Radio as our media sponsor for the Walk for Thought and, together with Shelby, will be airing promos throughout the month of September in addition to interviews with Koskie on the Don Shelby show, Mike Max show and the Dave Lee morning show.

Keep listening to the air waves for more media to come in the month of September as well as feature stories on WCCO TV news and Rosen Sports Sunday.

Hennepin County Medical Center sponsored ads on 89.3 The Current and 99.5 Minnesota Public Radio Classical.

At Events

The Association was featured at several events during the summer months.

In June, Resource Facilitation staff attended the Minnesota Critical Access Hospital & Rural Health Conference in Duluth.

In July, Multicultural Outreach service attended eight health fairs. Red Lake health fair was well attended by members of the community with 250 attendees. Multicultural also gave nine presentations on bike and helmet safety to underserved communities throughout the state.
Two New Faces

By Breanna Berthelsen

This summer has welcomed two new faces to the Education Department; Cindy Largay Swanson, the new education manager, and Breanna Berthelsen, the new education specialist.

Cindy was most recently with Gillette Children’s Specialty Healthcare as their Inpatient Rehabilitation Coordinator. She is excited to be at the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota, as her position allows her to fulfill her dream of becoming a teacher by educating numerous constituencies on these critical issues.

Breanna comes to us from Lincoln, Nebraska where she handled fundraising for a women’s and children’s shelter. She is looking forward to a great year of educational opportunities and working with other professionals to bring information to people who are affected by brain injury.

Family and Consumer Conference

On August 9 at Thompson Lodge in Dakota County, the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota hosted the 2nd Annual Family and Consumer Conference. Over 100 people attended anticipating an inspirational and informative day. They were not disappointed!

The day began with a great and highly motivating keynote speech from Nick Mezacapa. Workshops covered various topics including addictions, communications and brain injury, fatigue management, and how the brain heals. There also was a resource fair for consumers and family members to get more information about services that are available.

It was a delightful day full of good weather, and the opportunity to make new friends and share information. One attendee put it best, “Today made me see that after one and a half years since my brain injury that some of my issues will be with me the rest of my life. But there are things I can change to make it better.”

Happenings in Education

This summer has been full of site visits and new staff trainings. Between learning sessions the education team has been busy serving the community in a variety of education environments. Presentations were made at the National Association of Social Workers Conference, Department of Corrections in Dakota County, and also Fairbault. The Brain Injury Association of Minnesota’s booth was also at the grand opening of the Lakeville Police Department Station, and Job Corps of America.

A Long Term Care class was taught this quarter preparing attendees to return to their residential settings to train other staff on working with persons living with brain injury. Brain Injury Basics (BIB) classes were offered as well at the Association office and at Bethesda Hospital in St. Paul.

In addition, Wednesday Workshops sessions on Behavior Strategies, Socio-Sexuality and Ethics were topics for professionals to gain additional knowledge this quarter. Education Services provides onsite training sessions for providers throughout Minnesota with content customized to fit the interests and needs of the providers. If your staff are new to serving people living with brain injury or if you would like to learn more on a specific topic related to brain injury (i.e., shaken baby, domestic violence, supported employment) call Cindy Swanson to schedule a training session at 612-378-2742 or 800-669-6442. Also, visit the Association’s Web site at www.braininjurymn.org for information about classes and other information about the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota.

Education Calendar

Save the Date – Upcoming Education Opportunities!

Registration is required for all education opportunities. Call 612-378-2742 or 800-669-6442, or visit our Web site at www.braininjurymn.org to register or for more information.

Wednesday Workshops

Wednesday Workshops are held at the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota’s Education Center, 1:30 - 4 p.m. on the dates noted below. The cost to attend is $40 per workshop. Wednesday Workshops are geared towards professionals, offering 2.5 CEU’s.

September 24 – Disability Law Center & Legal Aid: Compare and Contrast presented by Lawyers from the Minnesota Disability Law Center and Minnesota Legal Aid. Both of these organizations provide legal services to individuals with disabilities. What is the difference between the two models and who do they serve and why?

October 22 – Self-regulation after Traumatic Brain Injury: Self-monitoring and Self-control presented by Mary Kennedy, PhD, Associate Professor, University of Minnesota. Regulating our attention, learning, communication and behavior is critical in order to adapt to the demands of everyday living. This presentation will provide a working knowledge of how TBI affects self-monitoring and control and which instructional techniques make these processes explicit when training individuals to use strategies.

November 19 – Pediatric Brain Injury presented by Susan Ellerbusch-Toavs, SLP, CCC, Gillette Children’s Hospital. Many of the adults that are served in various settings (e.g. residential, mental health, chemical dependency, corrections) sustained brain injuries as children. Sustaining dependency, corrections) sustained brain injuries as children. Sustaining brain injury as a child has a unique set of issues and impacts life long development.

Brain Injury Basics

Admission for Brain Injury Basics classes is free for persons with brain injury and their family members. The fee for professionals is $20.

Brain Injury Basics II: Adjustment to Brain Injury: It’s a Journey – This class discusses various approaches and strategies for productive emotional adjustment to life with an acquired disability. Class is held on October 21 from 5:30 – 7:30 p.m. at the Bethesda Rehabilitation Hospital, 550 Capitol Blvd, St. Paul in the 7th Floor Conference Room.

Brain Injury Basics III: Caregiving - This new class is focused on how brain injury impacts the caregiver and their efforts at caregiving. Caregivers play an important role in enhancing quality of life and promoting adjustment to life after a loved one’s brain injury through their caregiving. This class is held on November 18 5:30 – 7 p.m. at the Bethesda Rehabilitation Hospital, 550 Capitol Blvd, St. Paul in the 7th Floor Conference Room.

Long-Term Care and Participants with Brain Injury – Attendees will learn to enhance relationships between staff and residents, create quality home environments and review methods to manage intrusive behavior. Class is September 25 and November 20 from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Association’s office in Minneapolis. Call the Education Manager at 612-378-2742 or 800-669-6442 or for more information.
Join Corey Koskie and Don Shelby at the Walk for Thought

By Phil Gonzales and Pat Marciniak

The Walk for Thought is the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota’s biggest fundraising event of the year. It is a community celebration of life, hope and healing taking place in three cities: St. Paul, Rochester and Duluth. Individuals from all over the state come to have fun, meet new people and most importantly raise awareness about brain injury and funds for support services and programs provided by the Association to individuals living with brain injury.

Raising brain injury awareness is a constant goal of the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota. Putting a face to the injury helps people witness the full impact a brain injury can have on an individual and that individual’s friends and family. However, when that individual is in the spotlight, the impact of a brain injury is there for the world to see. Such is the case with former Minnesota Twins third-baseman, Corey Koskie.

Koskie experienced a brain injury in July of 2006 when he took a seemingly innocuous tumble in pursuit of a pop fly during a game. His concussion left him unable to return to play, because he was plagued by dizziness, vertigo and chronic headaches. Since then, Koskie publicly disclosed his disability and rehabilitation, which has made him an inspiration to the community—a “home-town hero” in another capacity.

Today, Koskie continues to work towards getting his life back. He also wants to help others who have experienced a brain injury and help high-school athletes understand brain injuries. He became involved with the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota’s Walk for Thought earlier this summer and was appointed Honorary Chair and Ambassador of the Walk. He joins the Walk and partners with the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota because, “For the past two years my family and I have suffered through the unseen pain and frustration from my brain injury. I want to help raise awareness about brain injuries.”

The Minnesota Twins also are getting involved as a sponsor and partner with the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota and the Walk for Thought. TC Bear will be joining us at the Walk along with other Twins representatives (based on post-season play) on October 4, 2008. In addition, on September 24, 2008 at the Minnesota Twins vs. Chicago White Sox game, the Minnesota Twins will be highlighting the Association at their pre-game show during “Brain Injury Awareness Night at the Dome.”

With WCCO Radio as the media sponsor for the Walk for Thought, the Association has received extra coverage through promotions with Corey Koskie on Shelby’s radio show, the Mike Max show and the Morning Show with Dave Lee. Koskie and Shelby will both be at the St. Paul Walk for Thought and participate in pre-Walk activities. Shelby will be hosting the festivities and Koskie will be leading his own Walk team. Pre-Walk activities begin at 9:15 a.m., so get registered and join the fun.

Koskie invites everyone to “Join me in the Walk for Thought to raise funds to support resources and education services to help the 100,000 Minnesotans that are affected by a disability due to brain injury. Together we can bring this injury to light.”

Registration begins at 9 a.m., and the Walk begins at 10 a.m.

For more information, please call the Association offices at 612-378-2742 or 800-669-6442 or visit www.braininjurymn.org/walk.html

There is life after a brain injury!

If you or someone you know has sustained a brain injury, call us. Mains’l Services, Inc. can assist you in defining, or redefining, your hopes and dreams for a life that is personally meaningful.

Mains’l Services, Inc. employs Certified Brain Injury Specialists, who have extensive experience and training working with people who have sustained brain injuries. Our employees:

- Understand the functions of the brain, and the functional impact of a brain injury;
- Can share with you different service options, including hourly and 24/7 supports, in your home or ours;
- Are trained in effective treatment approaches;
- Can help you manage health and medical concerns;
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For more information, please contact us

763-494-4553; www.mainsl.com

Barb Mohrziel, Program Director
Certified Brain Injury Specialist
763-416-9180

Sharon Parkhouse, Registered Nurse
Certified Brain Injury Specialist
763-416-9169
The November elections are rapidly approaching. Now is the time to make sure you are registered to vote. October 14, 2008 is the last day to pre-register for the general election on November 4, 2008. Even though Minnesota is a state where you can register on Election Day, you can avoid hassles and long lines by registering ahead of time. Please remember that brain injury can affect anybody and is not a Democratic or Republican issue. The Brain Injury Association of Minnesota does not endorse candidates or tell people who they should vote for. It is up to you and me to decide who we will support.

I heard a great quote on the radio the other day. Somebody said, “Democracy is not something we have, it is something we do.” Voting in elections is one way for all of us to participate in our democracy. Remember, the people we elect to the state legislature this fall are the ones who will be making decisions about Minnesota’s budget, health and human services initiatives, transportation, housing, education and many other issues. You count! Help make a difference. Register to vote now.

Advocacy Action Center
To make an informed decision about a candidate, you may want to spend some time finding out how he or she stands on issues important to you. This way, when Election Day rolls around you can vote for the candidate that most closely reflects your values. You also need to know where your polling place is. Locating this information is not always easy. How do I register? Where do I vote? Do I need my ID? Just head over to our Web-based Advocacy Action Center. We have set up a one-stop, centralized “2008 Elections” Web page that will link you to everything you need to know to become a more informed voter. Just follow these steps.

• Go to http://capwiz.com/braininjurymn
• Click on “elections” near the top or the “Elections 2008” banner near the bottom
• Enter your address
• You now have your own “my elections” page where you can research the candidates that will actually be on the ballot when you go vote.
• There is also a wealth of other information there to help you with voting information.

A couple of other great Web sites for election information include:
• The Minnesota Secretary of State Office: www.sos.state.mn.us. This is the official site for elections in Minnesota.
• Election Protection Guide: www.braininjurymn.org/voting.html This is a great fact sheet on voting and elections in a question and answer format and also provides links to other resources.

Please feel free to contact me at jeffn@braininjurymn.org if you have any questions or need help navigating these Web sites.

2009 Policy Priorities
At its August meeting, the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota Board of Directors began the process of setting priorities for the opening of the 2009 legislative session, which starts on Tuesday, January 6, 2009. Over the course of the next few months we will be gathering information and seeking input and feedback from you as to what policy issues the Association should be working on in the coming year. If all goes according to plan, the full board will vote on the policy priority agenda at its December 2008 meeting.

Public policy advocacy continues to be one of the top priorities in our strategic plan. The 2009 legislative session will be critically important for the future of brain injury supports and services in Minnesota for years to come because it’s the budget year. The 2009 legislature will set Minnesota’s budget through 2011. We also are excited to continue our policy advocacy efforts to prevent brain injury on our roads and highways. While we do not know for certain what these priorities will be, some of the issues under discussion include:

• The State Budget. Many economic experts are predicting that Minnesota may be facing a $2 billion deficit in the upcoming budget cycle. Some are saying it could be even higher. If past budget battles are any indication, we need to be prepared for massive proposed cuts to health and human services. It is critical that we be ready to advocate for protecting the supports and services that people with brain injury and their families depend on. We must pay special attention to protecting the supports that keep people living independently in the community and out of costly hospital and nursing facilities.
• Strengthening Minnesota’s seat belt law. We came within 10 votes of seeing primary seat belt legislation clear the Minnesota House. Perhaps 2009 is the year we can finally get over the hurdle and see this passed into law.
• Improving health care services, medical assistance, education, transportation, housing and employment opportunities for people with brain injury. A number of health care reforms passed during the 2008 session as we worked to improve services. We need to continue monitoring these changes and participate in the various task forces and advisory committees that were set up to move health care reform forward. There are still many more changes and improvements that are needed and we intend to continue being part of the legislative health care reform debate.

Contact Us
If you think there are issues we should consider please contact me at jeffn@braininjurymn.org. The challenge is not finding important work to do. The challenge is identifying our priorities, figuring out where we can make the most impact and then develop an action plan for real improvements in people’s lives. The key to all this is you. Our success depends on people who are willing to get involved and join our growing group of citizen advocates. I hope you will consider joining us in these efforts. Please go to our Advocacy Action Center at http://capwiz.com/braininjurymn to sign up or get in touch with Jeff Nachbar at 612-378-2742, 800-669-6442 or jeffn@braininjurymn.org.

The Brain Injury Association of Minnesota’s WALK FOR THOUGHT presented in partnership with

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By Lee George

On behalf of the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota and the people of Minnesota, I would like to congratulate the recipients of the 2008 Up Up and Away awards and thank them for their service.

These awards are given to volunteers who have shown outstanding dedication throughout the past year, have gone beyond what is expected of them and have, through their work, exemplified the Association’s core values and mission.

Dick Evans — Dick volunteers with Community Health Charities of Minnesota (CHCM) once a week doing a variety of tasks. Dick has decided to donate a large portion of his hours to the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota which in turn allows us to complete our goal of volunteering 70 hours a year with CHCM. Because of his generosity we are able to receive funds from CHCM which helps us to provide services to thousands of Minnesotans. Through Dick’s kindness and consideration he has exemplified the core value of Collaboration.

Cally Stutsman — During Cally’s time with the Association she has worked on many projects. Cally has helped to streamline procedures and creatively think about volunteer recognition. She has brought new ideas to the volunteer program and helped to keep volunteers engaged in their work and returning to volunteer. Through her insight and creativity, she has exemplified the core value of Innovation.

Julie Zallek — Julie has been able to connect with individuals in places outside of the metro area in order to educate and bring awareness about brain injury to communities who don’t always have access to information and services that people in the metro area do. Because of her work with the Speakers Bureau and her drive to find venues to connect with people, she has exemplified the core value of Equal Access.

Mary Jo Seviola — Mary Jo has been a consistent administrative volunteer with the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota since 2006. Over this past year, Mary Jo has been an enthusiastic volunteer and taken her job very seriously. She has worked to improve her professional skills by making sure each task she takes on is done to the best of her ability. Because of her work ethic, she has exemplified the core value of Quality.

Erwin Concepcion and Patty White — Erwin and Patty have been consistent members of the Multicultural Outreach Committee. This is a group who is concerned with the availability of support and services to underserved communities in Minnesota. They have dedicated themselves to the idea of a better life for all Minnesotans and realize that sometimes change takes time and can be slow. Their enthusiasm, passion, and compassion for Minnesotans affected by brain injury exemplify the core value of Social Change.

2008 Outstanding Volunteer of the Year

Andy Schoeberl has been a volunteer with the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota since September 2007. He has helped to fill a vital role at the Association.

Andy studied computer science at the Northwest Electronic Institute. He enjoys volunteering here because he is able to gain valuable work experience on what it means to work with computers and networks in a professional setting.

As the Technology Specialist Volunteer for the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota, Andy Schoeberl primarily works behind the scenes. His impact on the Association, however, is extraordinary. Volunteering 10 to 15 hours a week, Andy makes the most of his experience and knowledge of the IT world and his degree in computer programming to assist the Association with system troubleshooting, repairs and construction. Through Andy’s efforts and hard work, the Association is able to continue it’s tradition of utilizing the latest technology to offer the best services and support possible to all people affected by brain injury. The Association could not do what it currently does without Andy’s support and dedication.

Where we have been

Even though the summer is filled with vacations, volunteers gave much of their time helping the Association reach people in Minnesota. To date, Speaker Bureau volunteers have spoken to over 500 Minnesotans! Volunteers have reached out to a variety of different communities through safety and informational fairs and provided the community with valuable resources. Thank you for your help, everyone!

Where we are going

One of the biggest events of the year is approaching quickly! The 7th Annual Walk for Thought is being held in St. Paul, Duluth and Rochester. Last year, volunteers were a vital part of making the Walk a success. There is still time to get a Walk team together! If you would like to come out and help at any of the three Walks, we have many volunteer opportunities for people the day of the Walk! Visit our Web site for a complete listing at braininjurymn.org/events/walk-volunteers.php.

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Visit Rise’s web site at www.rise.org

FALL 2008
Russ and Leticia, continued from page 1

Russ and Leticia both have families and friends to support them. As anyone with a brain injury will tell you, a strong support network is vital to recovery.

Russ’s wife, Virginia, and their children come with him to the Walk each year. Russ was on the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota board of directors when the idea for the Walk was introduced. The board decided to hold an event that the entire community could participate in, that was fun for everyone and would also raise money for the Association.

“We started with the first walk and we’ve made every one. There’s just a slight change in which family members show up. But, my mother has been at every one,” Russ says, “My grandsons go every year around the neighborhood and get funds from the neighbors. They get a better response from the neighbors than I would! It’s a big family event.”

Leticia’s family life has been profoundly changed due to her brain injury. Her husband Paul and her two sons, T.J. and Brady, have had to adjust to having a wife and mom who can no longer do some of the things she used to. But, the support has been tremendous.

“I can drive anymore and a friend of mine from church drives me forty-five minutes to the doctor. I haven’t cooked a meal since the injury because we keep getting food from people at church!”

Russ and Leticia will both be on hand at the St. Paul Walk; Russ with Team Philstrom and Leticia with Leticia’s Angels. Both teams consist of friends and family.

“It’s a tremendous educational opportunity for the kids,” Russ says, “They get to see how making a mistake like I did tremendously changes lives. They see how change becomes a tough mountain to climb.”

“I really hope it shows that people with brain injury aren’t sitting back and playing the victim,” Leticia says, “We’re proving to the world that we can take care of this. That we can raise funds to take care of our brain injuries. I’m trying to prove that people do care and the more you tell them the more they care. The more they understand what’s happening, the more support you’ll get.”

Russ’s experience with the Walk has always been positive.

“We’ve always had beautiful weather!” he laughs, “All you have to do is plan on having a good day. You will see people making an effort to help people improve their lives to the best that they can be.”

Leticia is equally positive,

“I’ve asked people to help me on this walk and they are all excited about it. They’re charged up! Sure they love me, but it’s also that they understand that this is a really big deal.”

Russ and Leticia work every day to overcome the limits their brain injuries have imposed on them. But, they both go forward with optimism and strength.

“You have to fight,” Leticia says, “You have to fight because if you don’t fight, you’re never going to get back. I know I’m not back, I have a lot of problems. But if I sit there every day and cry and mope about my problems instead of focusing on one thing at a time I’ll never get better. Patience is such a key in this. I can’t do anything to make the progress go faster. All I can do is try to be as positive as possible and do a lot of praying.”

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Thank You Hennepin County Medical Center

By Melissa Albert

Nonprofit organizations rely on partnerships with likeminded groups as a way of fulfilling their missions. The Brain Injury Association of Minnesota is no exception to this. The Association is proud to have Hennepin County Medical Center (Hennepin) as one of its most active partners. Hennepin has the largest TBI center in the state. It treats more TBIs that result in hospitalization than any other hospital. Their Mild to Moderate Brain Injury Clinic has revolutionized brain injury diagnosis and treatment. This year, Hennepin has entered into a campaign to raise public awareness about prevention, recognition and treatment of traumatic brain injury.

To kick off this campaign, Hennepin started the year with a resource fair for Hennepin County employees on “falls” prevention in seniors. To grab headlines, they rolled a bathtub complete with shower steam and bathers up Nicollet Mall on August 19, 2008 to raise awareness of this specific and leading cause of brain injury. To further draw attention to this issue, they brought their “Brain Bar,” an educational interactive kiosk, to the State Fair. On October, 4, 2008, they will again bring this fun kiosk to another event – our event – the Association’s Walk for Thought, a fundraising event, which they are helping to sponsor.

In its seventh year, The Walk for Thought is a celebration of life, hope and healing. It continues to be a positive event bringing together the brain injury community with lots of family and friends.

By helping us sponsor this event, Hennepin is assisting us in raising the visibility of this silent epidemic as well as partnering with us in achieving our goals and mission. For this, we are truly grateful.

Donor Spotlight

Why They Give

A Spotlight on Terri Traudt

By Beth Skwira

“The Association found me; I didn’t go looking for it.”

Terri Traudt doesn’t need much prompting when asked why she gives to the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota. Her niece, Nichole, sustained a severe traumatic brain injury (TBI) in an automobile crash.

“I took a six-month leave of absence from my job, which turned into two years to help take care of her,” Traudt says. “My sisters and I all took time off from our professional positions to help Nichole.”

She and her sisters worked with Nichole on her range of motion activities and cognitive therapy, all the while hoping for some sort of recovery. During this time, they also started shopping for other resources for her and were feeling overwhelmed with the task ahead. At the time, Nichole was experiencing seizures and had returned to the emergency room. Traudt and her sisters were sitting in the waiting room when a man they were talking with mentioned the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota. They thought it could help their situation.

Terri recalls how the person who answered her call at the Association said “you don’t need to worry – we’ll help you!” Terri and her family decided to get directly involved with the Association because of the tremendous support they received during Nicole’s journey with brain injury. One year later, Traudt joined the Association’s board of directors and later served as board chair.

Today, Terri is the Association’s out-going chairperson, and the chair of the development committee. When you ask why she gives to the Association, she will tell you when this crisis hit, she started looking for a positive way to channel the energy that was driving her. The cause “became important to me overnight” and being involved by volunteering her time and resources was her way of doing something constructive in the face of overwhelming odds.

In 2001, she worked with her sisters to start Nichole Mistic Gift of Hope, a non-profit organization that would benefit brain injury research, support and the performing arts that Nichole loved. A friend taught the sisters how to make jewelry and they established a jewelry business called: Ant Hill Designs in 2002, a portion of the proceeds going to the Nichole Mistic Gift of Hope organization.

“Like most people I am motivated first and foremost by a heart for the cause, especially when it hits close to home.” Her tribute to Nichole has turned into a larger effort on behalf of the Association, such as providing supports and services to a wider variety of populations affected by brain injury, including returning soldiers, the homeless and persons who are incarcerated.

Terri lives her life and believes “keeping your eyes and ears open to the opportunities that will naturally find you. Everybody has two resources – time and money. Manage it, be honest with yourself, commit to an issue and get behind things that are important to you in a personal and meaningful way.”

For Terri, her future with the Association is clear: this issue will always be close to her heart, even though her physical commitment may change. Terri and her husband recently signed up for individual lifetime memberships to the Association, solidifying her commitment to the Association and its mission. Being on the Board of Directions has enabled her to dig deeper into what the Association stands for. “I am extremely proud to be a part of it.”

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FALL 2008

TBI might not have the memory parents experience, parents are renewed and anticipation that most “Instead of vicariously enjoying TBI Network Committee, adds, and currently chairs the Statewide world of childhood.

To help with the planning, Resource Facilitation (RF) sends a back to school mailing to each of its school aged consumers/families at the beginning of August. The mailing consists of one page of general questions about the student, a checklist to go through before the school year begins and a page of useful resources. Parents and guardians can use the information included in the mailing to organize their child’s days leading up to the school year, as well as organize their child’s school day.

Clark says that one of the challenges a child with TBI faces in school is that of inexperienced staff or staff who have not been trained to work with children with TBI. Also, there is the lingering fear of additional injury brought on by the, at times, rough and tumble world of childhood.

Deb Williamson, who developed and currently chairs the Statewide TBI Network Committee, adds, “Instead of vicariously enjoying that ‘back to school’ sense of renewal and anticipation that most parents experience, [parents] are fearful that their child will have difficulty making new friends, or finding their way to the right classroom, or wondering how long it will take before they get a call about their child’s behavior on the bus or playground.”

Clark suggests visiting the school in August and walking the child through their daily schedule. That way, they get used to unfamiliar routes before being exposed to them on the first day minimizing the distractions when possible. Communication with school officials also is important if the child needs special arrangements. One thing a child with TBI might need is to leave class early, so the majority of their transitions between classes can be conducted in a relatively empty corridor, thus aiding in reducing stress and unforeseen distractions.

“One of the goals of the back to school program,” Clark says, “is to encourage the parents to set up a communication notebook or regular e-mails between teachers and parents to let them know if they are missing any assignments and how they did that week to try to encourage communication.”

“In middle school and high school, the teachers tend to want to communicate primarily with the kids because they want them to take responsibility for their own actions. Sometimes a student with TBI might not have the memory or the organizational skills needed to remain “caught up” with their educational responsibilities. Suddenly they are missing assignments, and come mid-term they are failing a class. The parent didn’t know that the child was in trouble in this class and then they are kind of scrambling.”

Williamson adds, “Parents and guardians will want to ensure that everyone has the same information and that there is a clear understanding and acknowledgement on the part of both the parents and staff, as they relate to implementing health care procedures, meeting behavioral needs and identifying academic expectations. The Individual Education Plan (IEP) and Individual Health Plan (IHP) are two documents that can assure consistent and open communication in all of these areas.

“Social anxieties quickly rise to the surface [for students with TBI]. For example, who will they sit with at lunch? Will someone tease them in the hall? Will their social cues and impulsive behaviors make them more vulnerable to mistreatment? Although mailings went out before the school year began, materials are available throughout the year for parents and guardians.

Clark says, this mailing is part of the Association’s goal to close the gaps found in many communities.

“We are trying to supply more structure and information to families because what is available across the state and across school districts is often inconsistent. One district may have a hundred kids with TBI and there may be a rural area that one or two, so this helps close the gaps.”

And closing the gaps means parental, as well as administrative involvement.

“We try to encourage the families to be proactive,” Clark says. “For example, contact the school and go over the IEP. Be sure the School is aware of the particular needs of the student and family. Bring your child to the school when there is no one there, get their schedule and practice going from classroom to classroom so the student has the visual mapping prior to anybody else being in the school.”

Prior planning can make all the difference in the world. For more information about the Brain Injury Association of Minnesota’s Back to School packets, please call Resource Facilitation at 612-378-2742 or 800-669-6442.