

For Immediate Release

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Maryland State Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped Celebrates Fifty Years of Service!

- LBPH celebrates golden anniversary
- Library serves over 8, 000 people in Maryland
- Library honored this past year for outstanding achievements

Baltimore, MD – The Maryland State Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (LBPH) is celebrating its golden anniversary this year and they are taking a look back at the changes and advances the library has made in *Making Maryland Accessible*.

What began in 1967 as an amendment to the State Board of Education's regulations has grown into a Regional Branch Library serving over 8,000 Marylanders with print-disabilities. Prior to the founding of the library in 1968 and the opening of the Charles Street Library, Marylanders who participated in the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped's Braille and Talking Book Program had to rely on other regional libraries – Washington DC and Virginia specifically – to provide them with reading materials.

"It is amazing what has changed in just fifty years," Leslie Bowman, Director of the Maryland State Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped stated. "Even in the last three or four years, LBPH has made so many changes, made so many advances – with the help of public libraries across the state and with the help of the Maryland State Library Agency – and we're very different now from when we first opened our doors."

In 1968, the library served nearly 1,000 people from its North Charles Street location in Downtown Baltimore. Initially, the library was founded under the Division of Library Development Services, which operated under the Maryland State Department of Education. Within a decade, the library had outgrown the 7,700 square foot building, and had to be expanded. By 1987, the library was serving nearly 6,000 people and was once again pressed for space. Governor William Schaefer toured the Charles Street location and immediately appointed an ad-hoc committee to address the future needs of the library. Between 1988 and 1990, the Department of State Planning and the Maryland General Assembly passed a capital grant amendment, allowing the Division of

Library Development Services and the Maryland State Department of Education to plan and build a state-of-the-art facility on Park Avenue, in Downtown Baltimore.



State Treasurer Lucille Maurer (far left), Mayor of Baltimore Kurt L. Schmoke (center), Governor Schaefer (second from right), and others at Groundbreaking Ceremony for the Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. Photo Credit: Maryland State Archives. Date: 7/09/1991

The new building officially opened in 1992 and doubled the interior space from the previous location. The site, which is leased to the library for a dollar per year, boasts a total of 55,000 square feet, and houses more than books. The library's five level structure is partially accessible to patrons, with the meeting room, reading area, computer/training lab on the main floor, circulation on the main floor, and some staff office on the second level. The remaining three levels are below ground and house the over 300,000 circulating audio, large print and braille books.

"I think one of the best things," Irene Padilla, State Librarian said, "was the support that the library had from the Friends of the Library, the Department of Education, the General Assembly, the Governor and the Division of Library Development Services (now the Maryland State Library). They truly believed in the mission of the library and wanted to see it succeed. They still do – the people may have changed, of course – but they still truly believe in the mission of the library and want to see it succeed."

The library currently employs twenty full time staff members to manage a wide variety of services; the library also relies heavily on volunteers to help circulate the nearly 800 book requests they receive per day. The library serves over 8,000 patrons across the State through its direct mail and digital download service. They provide a myriad of services in addition to accessible reading materials:

- Accessible Technology Training
- Accessible College Textbook Conversion
- ADA Computer Workstations
- Accessible Events for Youth and Adults

“While our mission has largely stayed the same over the last fifty years,” Mrs. Bowman stated, “how we accomplish that goal has evolved to be more inclusive, more adaptive to the needs of our patrons.”



The Cast and Crew of the Center Stage’s Mobile Theater stands before the library’s entrance after a crowd pleasing production of Twelfth Night, which included a touch-tour and audio-description for the Visually Impaired. Photo Credit: MD-LBPH. Date: 3/7/18

“A prime example of this is our partnership with Center Stage. Their mobile theater brings exciting events to the library, and they make it accessible by providing audio-description and touch tours of costumes and props,” Mrs. Bowman continued. “This is a great opportunity for someone in the Visually-Impaired community who hasn’t been to the theater – maybe is nervous about going – to enjoy a great production.”

The technology behind the library has changed dramatically over the last fifty years. These changes have allowed the library to serve more people, provide more materials, and provide technology training.

“The National Library Service started by providing Braille and long play records. Mail carriers would haul these massive boxes back and forth from the library to the patrons on a daily basis. Eventually, recordings were offered on cassette. Now the books are primarily on digital cartridges that are about the size of an index card,” Mrs. Bowman continued. “Many of our patrons now download books at home, directly to their preferred reading device. As a result, we started offering Assistive Technology Training. We help patrons, one-on-one, learn how to use various technologies. These range from the ADA computer workstations, to iPhones and applications, to eBraille readers.”

Eventually, the library began working to help others in the print-impaired community by providing them with college assistance. “The library launched the Maryland Accessible Textbook Program in 2007 and what started as a way to help Visually Impaired students attending Maryland colleges succeed,” Ms. Padilla stated. “The program now serves many forms of learning disabilities, including Dyslexia, PTSD, and Dyspraxia. The program is operated entirely in-house, and we have a specialized team that will convert standard print textbooks into audio, PDF, or large print formats.”

A large part of the library's success, Mrs. Bowman stated, comes directly from nearly 200 branch public libraries across Maryland. “Without them, without their support and their frontline efforts, our library would not have been able to achieve what it has achieved. They work directly with patrons, who come into their local branch library every day. The libraries have helped launch projects like the ADA Computer Workstations, have helped provide players and books, have helped with assistive technology training – they've really helped to spread the word about the library's services that may help some of our shared patrons.”

The library is planning to host a small celebration, in conjunction with the Friends of the Maryland State Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped Annual Meeting, on October 27th at its Baltimore location. The program, which will feature Maryland Poet Gayle Danley, Secretary of Disabilities Carol Beatty, and Sam Seavey from the blog *The Blind Life*, will be the culmination of a landmark year for the library and the Friends group. “This year, the library and the Friends were recognized for their respective works in delivering accessible reading options and tools to Marylanders,” Sharon Maneki, President of the Friends of the Maryland State Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped said. “This event will be a wonderful way to end a great year.”

For more information about the library, or library events, please visit the library's website: www.lbph.maryland.gov, or call 410-230-2424.