

Braille Flags Give Blind Students a ‘Hands-On’ Experience

An idea spawned at a VFW national convention allowed a Maryland Auxiliary to help blind students learn the history of the U.S. flag

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For a classroom of young students in Maryland, school begins like every other day — by reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. Thanks to members of Auxiliary 8509 in Baltimore, these students got to feel these words recently — by reading them in Braille.

They study at the Maryland School for the Blind (MSB) in Nottingham, Md., where Cynthia Palmer Davis, life member and president of the Department of Maryland Auxiliary, recently gifted a supply of “tactile,” or perceptible by touch, U.S. flags to school administrators and faculty.

“The students really enjoyed the tactile flags, and teachers wove it into their curriculum lessons,” said Carol Seckington, principal of the Functional Academic and Autism Blind programs at the MSB.

“They were excited and curious when the flags were distributed. The explanation about the colors of the flag and what the stars and stripes represented was interesting and helped students understand the representation of having the hands-on tactile representation.”

Davis said distributing the flags gave her a sense of pride.

“I was excited to learn they have students starting as early as pre-kindergarten, and that these young people would have a tool to help them learn the Pledge of Allegiance,” she said. “Guilt is what I felt when a staff member told me that no one had ever approached their students to participate in our scholarships, but that feeling quickly gave way to joy. Because this opens new possibilities not only for the students, but the VFW and Auxiliary as well.”

The tactile flags also led to sharing information about the VFW Auxiliary and VFW

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

scholarship programs, such as the Auxiliary's Young American Creative Patriotic Art Contest and VFW's Patriot's Pen and the Voice of Democracy contests. By giving the flags, Auxiliary membership introduced them to the scholarship programs.

"I was determined to make sure that the VFW and VFW Auxiliary extend educational opportunities to all youth populations," Davis said, "and special-needs youth are included in that outreach. Now my heart is led to share all available resources with them."

Davis discovered the tactile flags at VFW's 119th National Convention in Kansas City, Mo., last year. The Kansas Braille Transcription Institute (KBTI) in Wichita produces the flags.

Randolph Christopher Cabral created the American Braille flag in honor of his late father, World War II veteran Jesus Sanchez "Chuy" Cabral. The elder Cabral lost his sight to glaucoma later in life.

Randolph, who had taken an interest in Braille and services for the blind, founded the institute in Wichita the same year his father passed away. In his father's memory and with the intention of aiding those who are blind or low-vision, Randolph hatched his idea of the Braille American flag.

Today, this resource is made for portability and ease of distribution. Randolph and KBTI are hopeful for and interested in making it possible for all of America's blind and deaf/blind children to learn the Pledge of Allegiance.

In the upper Midwest, Lucetta Jasinski, a member of Auxiliary 2895 in Cudahy, Wis., distributed tactile flags to Vision Forward (formerly Badger Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired) in Milwaukee. Vision Forward provides a continuum of services from birth to adulthood to individuals with visual impairments. It focuses on helping them achieve important developmental, educational, personal and professional goals.

Jasinski said giving the tactile flag to them was "near and dear" to her heart because she has family members who have lost their sight.

To obtain tactile U.S. flags from KBTI, visit kbt.org or call 316.265.9692. Proceeds generated by these flags benefit blind and low-vision veterans and other blind/low-vision Americans.

This article is featured in the 2019 November/December issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by Amanda Cook. Amanda is the editor-in-chief of the VFW Auxiliary Magazine.