

**COLLABORATIVE SPIRIT... ALIVE IN NORTH DAKOTA**

Judie Lee, IPAT Director

The "Keys to Independence ... Assistive Technology for All Generations Conference" was a first-rate example of how assistive technology impacts the independence of people, regardless of age or disability, whether at work, play, school, home, or in the community. Senior citizens sat next to parents holding infant children, both having selected an AT session topic representing a mutual information need. In both formal and informal ways, users of AT shared their wisdom and knowledge of the potential solutions technology can provide for simple tips on traveling, to highly technical, voice-activated computer systems.

The conference offered over forty concurrent sessions led by consumers and professionals. Sessions provided specific information on assistive technology in the areas of funding, computer use, communication, mobility, recreation, employment, advocacy, education and independent living. In addition to sessions, the gym was full of exhibitors and vendors that participants could access at their leisure. It buzzed with activity as individuals tried devices, sought answers to specific questions and renewed or built friendships. The open computer labs running throughout were in great demand, with frequent cries of "more time needed" voiced as sessions ended.

Steve Mendelsohn, a national expert on AT funding, presented a pre-conference session and remained to answer individual questions. We continue to read, talk and hear about the need for the many different groups representing individuals with disabilities to come together in a collaborative spirit for support and unified strength. The unequivocal success of the "Keys ... Conference" is the exciting result of a diverse group of people getting together to pool resources, ideas, energy, and interact in positive ways. The collaborative spirit is alive and well in North Dakota and there is nothing that can't be accomplished when the right people are united in a worthy cause.

**FUNDING NEWS: PASS STATUS**

An important Social Security Income (SSI) work incentive is the Plan to Achieve Self Support (PASS) which makes it possible for SSI recipients to retain higher SSI payments while working. The key to retaining higher payments is that the monies be used to offset expenses directly related to the achievement of work-related goals. With a PASS, an individual with a

disability is allowed to set aside income and resources for achieving self-support. The plan must provide detailed information about the amount of money involved, how it will be used, and what outcomes are expected. As well, a PASS requires advance approval from the Social Security Administration (SSA).

A PASS is as varied as the individual who designs it. People have used PASS to purchase transportation (including vehicles), tuition, education, training, assistive technology, tools, meals, attendant care, child care, items to start a business, and other goods and services needed to work. In April of 1996, following the publication of a critical report from the General Accounting Office regarding SSA's management of the PASS program and a temporary suspension of plan approvals, the SSA published new guidelines governing PASS. Although there are increased restrictions on allowable expenses and more stringent rules governing the program, PASS continues to be a means by which some individuals with disabilities may purchase assistive technology. To find out if you qualify, contact your local SSA office.

### **TRY BEFORE YOU BUY**

The purpose of the Interagency Project for Assistive Technology's (IPAT) Equipment Loan Library is to provide North Dakota residents an opportunity to try a variety of assistive technology (AT) devices prior to purchase. It was developed in direct response to an identified need for such a service and is designed to promote informed AT choices by individuals with disabilities and their service providers at little or no cost. The IPAT Equipment Loan Library is housed in the North Dakota School for the Blind. To organize a loan or have questions answered about device availability, contact Judy Smith at 1-800-421-1181. Devices are loaned for a six week period on a first-come, first-served basis. When a requested item is ready for shipment, the borrower receives an Equipment Request Form. As soon as this form is signed and returned, the item is packed and mailed. After use and within the established time frame, the borrower insures and returns the item (in good working order) to the IPAT Equipment Loan Library with a completed Equipment Evaluation Form. The overall goal of the IPAT Equipment Loan Library is to increase appropriate AT choices while providing funding justification support for individuals with disabilities.

### **IS SCIENCE IN YOUR FUTURE?**

Information provided by Anthony Arnold ND DO-IT Scholar

Only a short time ago, careers in science, engineering and mathematics might have seemed like pipe dreams for individuals with disabilities.

However, with the developments in adaptive technologies, more extensive use of computers and an explosion of electronic resources, opportunities are growing. One such opportunity is DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking and Technology) which is earmarked for high school students with disabilities interested in science related fields.

The program is based at the University of Washington, Seattle, and provides an opportunity for selected students to explore those fields via computers and the Internet. Funded primarily by the National Science Foundation, DO-IT accepts students from Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota and Alaska. Individuals from those states with a strong interest in pursuing post-secondary study; DO-IT is for you.

To Participate in DO-IT, students must apply during the fall of their sophomore or junior year of high school. The application process is easy- the student, their legal guardian and teacher or administrator just fill in a short section of the DO-IT application, and submit a current transcript. Once accepted, computers and adaptive technologies are selected for each participant. Students are taught to use the computers to explore academic interests, local Internet connections are established and inhome training is provided.

For more information contact: DO-IT University of Washington JE-25/Room 206 Seattle, WA 98195-4842 (206) 685-4045 [do-it@u.washington.edu](mailto:do-it@u.washington.edu), [do-it@u.washington.edu](http://do-it@u.washington.edu)

## **CONSUMER CONNECTION**

"KEYS TO INDEPENDENCE...ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY FOR ALL GENERATIONS CONFERENCE"

(Six pictures-following are captions under the pictures.) 1. The "Gobot" from Innovative Products of Grand Forks was a popular smile-maker on the vendor floor.

2. Opportunities for food, fun and conversation were plentiful.

3. The pre-conference session on funding AT by Steve Mendelsohn provided pertinent information for "Keys" participants.

4. With 40 sessions listed, participants often sought advice from conference organizers to finalize decisions.

5. "Keys" provided a venue for lively discussion regarding the potential of AT.

6. Being part of the first-ever AT conference in North Dakota was exciting and network building.

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### **MARK YOUR CALENDAR!**

- October 17, 18 Bismarck North Dakota Education Association Convention
- October 21-24 Minot, Grand Forks, Fargo, Bismarck Assisting People with Acquired Brain Injury and Their Families
- October 24-26 Minneapolis, MN Closing the Gap
- November 7 Bismarck Funding Communication Devices Through Medicaid
- November 14, 15 Minot Every Move Counts

### **EQUIPMENT SPOTLIGHT**

The "Arkenstone Open Book Unbound" is a software package that turns a personal computer into a reading machine. It works by assembling the following components: 1) IBM compatible PC 386 (or higher) with 8MB RAM, 2) a scanner with software and interface enabling the computer and scanner to communicate, 3) Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software and 4) an internal or external voice synthesizer. This combination of technology allows the written word to be accessed independently. This system is available for trial use by ND residents. If interested, contact the IPAT coordinator in your region. Further information is also available from Arkenstone, 1 (800) 444-4443. Base cost: \$995.

### **Assistive Technology Info-Line 1-800-451-8693**

### **Interagency Project for Assistive Technology Post Office Box 743 Cavalier, North Dakota 58220**

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