

# LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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## Letter to the Editor

Further comments on Bruce Blasch's guest editorial, *Low Vision and Blindness* October 1999

In April, Dr. Robert W. Mann shared with me the guest article written by Dr. Blasch in the October 1999 issue - and he shared his comments. It has taken me these many months to take the time to add my own comments to those of Dr. Mann, who speaks with greater authority as past president of the Carroll Center and founder of MIT's Sensory Aids Evaluation and Development Center.

The October 1999 Report was certainly well intentioned in wanting to highlight the important role the VA has played in the development of training and devices for an independent life and the methodology to achieve this.

I concur that the funding the VA provided for research has been instrumental in bringing prototypes to market on many levels. However, one should not neglect the important role of other key pioneers in the field.

1. Father Thomas J. Carroll was so impressed with the important advances made at Valley Forge, Avon and at Hines that he brought all to Boston and founded the St. Paul's Rehabilitation Program modeled on those very ideas. He was passionate on the subject, appearing in *Time* magazine to promote them, and in some early TV programs. He continued and expanded on this model writing a leading book on these

ideas in 1961 *Blindness, What it is What it does and What to do about it*, a book which has been translated into many languages, thus disseminating to the world ideas that were first tried out in the VA hospitals.

The BVA has recognized Father Carroll's role by hosting an annual Thomas J. Carroll Luncheon. The VA memorialized his contribution to the field by naming the Rehabilitation Unit at the VA hospital in Palo Alto in his honor.

2. MIT Sensory Aids Evaluation and Development Center where pioneering work in artificial intelligence ultimately led to the Kurzweil reader and the Speech software used by TSI.

3. Dr. Richard Hoover, the young medic who developed the Hoover Cane, still in use today and who later became a leading ophthalmologist, worked for years with blind and low vision students at the Maryland School for the Blind helping to educate the field on the need to address low vision.

Surely Carroll, Hoover, and the MIT played a significant role during the early days of development that should not be overlooked. I hope that you agree, and that mention will be made in future issues.

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