



A FAITHLETTER FOR UNITED METHODISTS WITH DISABILITIES AND THOSE WHO CARE ABOUT THEM
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FROM WHERE I SIT: THE COMMUNION SERVER GIVETH AND... By Jo D'Archangelis

The Communion server approached me in my wheelchair, tore off a piece of bread from the loaf he was carrying, and offered it to me to take. After I indicated with a kind of “floppy wrist” motion that I couldn’t take it in my hand and bring it to my mouth, he dipped the piece of bread in the cup of grapejuice held by the server next to him and attempted to place it in my mouth.

Unfortunately, I couldn’t open my mouth wide enough to accommodate what seemed to be a golfball-sized chunk of bread—whereupon the Communion server, without another word, turned around and returned to the chancel area from whence he had come. (What he did with the soggy piece of bread I have no idea.)

The singing of the final hymn filled the sanctuary as I sat there in stunned silence. When the server had tried unsuccessfully to push the bread past my front teeth into my mouth, I had been embarrassed for the both of us. Now I was feeling totally devastated: Communion had been offered to me and then it had been taken away, and it was all because of my disability. Tears began

to well up in my eyes, and by the time the pastor said the benediction, I was in full-blown sobbing mode—sobbing quietly to be sure but still sobbing.

As fellow congregants started to stream out of the sanctuary, I heard the voice of a church friend behind me. “What happened, Jo?” she asked. She knelt down beside me and put her arm around my shoulders. Between sobs and apologies for my unseemly behavior, I told her about the case of the disappearing Communion—whereupon my church friend dispatched her husband to go get the pastor who was greeting people at the sanctuary door. The pastor arrived a few minutes later with bread and grapejuice in hand, said the words about the body and blood of Christ that I had previously heard spoken to me that morning, dipped a pecan-sized piece of bread into the juice, and placed it in my mouth. I slowly chewed and swallowed it. There were smiles all around.

Although I now realize that this whole fiasco could have been avoided, I cannot blame the Communion server. After all, such situations are not covered in Communion Serving 101, and it

is human nature to retreat from an unexpectedly embarrassing situation as quickly as possible.


No, if it was anybody’s fault, it was mine. I simply had no business assuming that everyone automatically knew the do’s and don’ts of dealing with me and my disability in church. When Communion is served in my church (which is normally the first Sunday of each month), I am usually sitting next to someone who knows how to assist me. This particular Sunday, however, I was sitting next to someone who had not assisted me before. For some reason, I didn’t say anything to her, or to the Communion server when he approached me, about any reasonable (or unreasonable) accommodations I might require. I just took it all for granted—much to the resulting dismay and confusion of everyone concerned.

I had also up to this point taken Communion itself pretty much for granted. I must have participated in Communion hundreds of times during my life, and as is the case with many religious rituals that are repeated over and over again, Communion had sometimes become more of a dutiful habit than a meaningful experience for me. From now on, though, whenever I am blessed to be

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 able to participate in a Communion service, I will try to fully appreciate what those ancient words and that bit of bread soaked in grapejuice say to me about the love that God in Christ has for each one of us. Even after the bread and juice have been consumed and the words float off into the air, I know that love will not be taken from me.

AFTER-WORDS

A month later and I'm sitting beside the same church friend who was sitting next to me at the infamous Communion of the month before. We talk before the service begins about how she can best assist me: "Take the bread from the server for me," I instruct. "If it's too

big, tear it in half. Dip it into the juice and put it in my mouth. Do it with your left hand because it's kind of awkward to put something in my mouth with your right hand when you're sitting on my left. Okay? Okay."

We watch and listen intently as the pastor goes through the Communion ritual he has gone through so many times before—speaking the words of confession, forgiveness, and thanksgiving; washing the hands of the servers; and distributing the cups and loaves among them. This time, however, as soon as he finishes, the pastor takes a loaf of bread and, beckoning to one of the cupbearers to accompany him, makes a beeline towards me and serves me Communion first.

No problem.



A non-official quarterly newsletter for United Methodists with disabling conditions and all others interested in the issues of disability, accessibility, and the church

FOUNDER/EDITOR COMPUTER LAYOUT/GRAPHIC DESIGN

Jo D'Archangelis

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E-WINGS Two electronic versions of *Wings* are available: 1. A full newsletter-formatted version with color graphics in PDF format, and 2. A partially-formatted text-only version without graphics in Microsoft Word Document 97-2003 or higher (screen readers seem to work better with the Word Document version). Attached files in PDF format can be opened with Adobe 6.0 or higher software which is easily downloaded from Adobe.com at no charge.

WINGS ON THE WEB Selected back issues of *Wings* in PDF format plus information about the newsletter and its founder/editor may be found at the United Methodist Association Of Ministers With Disabilities (UMAMD) website, www.umdisministers.org. Click on the *Wings* banner near the bottom of the home page.

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WONDERFULLY MADE

By Jeff Steinberg

The psalmist wrote, "I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

— Psalm 139:14 (NRSV)

Since I was born with no arms and two badly bent legs, you might not think that I am "fearfully and wonderfully made." Often when my wife and I go out, people act shocked to see a short man whose one artificial arm has a hook attached to it. They cannot get past my appearance to see me. But I have come to realize that it is not my outward form that makes me wonderful.

My parents were unable to care for me, but my heavenly Father was always directing and guiding me as I was moved from place to place. At the Shriners' Hospital, I was fitted for my first arm and had many surgeries that enabled me to walk. Just down the street from Good Shepherd Home, my last group home, was a storefront Mennonite Church whose Sunday school teachers came week after week to take me and other children to church. They made me a part of their lives and loved me. Together with one of my nurses, they taught me that I, Jeff Steinberg—born with no arms and twisted legs—am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Since the day I asked the Lord Jesus to come into my life, what others call "handicaps" have become a springboard for me to share God's love with a lost and dying world.



From *The Upper Room*
(Jan./Feb. 2005).



CHURCH EMERGENCY PLANNING FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES: PART III

By Naomi Mitchum

(The following is the final part of a three-part series on how a church or church-related facility can plan to assist people with disabilities during an emergency.)

COMMUNICATING WITH SHUT-INS OR SHELTERED-IN-PLACE

Emergencies such as a chemical spill or threatening air pollution cause officials to declare a shelter-in-place. This means to go immediately indoors, close all doors and windows, and turn off air conditioning. If a shelter-in-place is declared while persons are in the church building, emergency plans should include drinking water, snacks, and possibly a simple meal as well as diversion. Confinement can be stressful, and something to keep people occupied, especially during a lengthy period of time, is desirable.

If congregants are sheltered-in-place in their homes, the church database can send out multi-language and TDD messages offering emergency help in contacting the correct authorities. The same is true for shut-ins. A shut-in is someone who is homebound because of an illness or disability. If sheltered-in-place, they may need reassurance that someone knows they are alone and will keep in touch with them by a phone call or email. It is important to have cell phone numbers as landlines may be down in an emergency.

The church can help shut-ins prepare by gathering local emergency numbers including a church help number, and, with the help of a home visitor, post a list in highly visible places in the home. The church should know which parishioners have a telecommunications device (known as text telephone or TTY or TTD), and, if the church does not have one, should know the number of the local telecommunications inter-

preter that enables them to communicate through a central switchboard.

WHAT CAN THE CHURCH DO TO HELP PARENTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES PREPARE?

Older family members or children who are caregivers for their parents may find that emergency planning information given for parents of children with disabilities can also guide them in their preparations. The fragility of some older parents means that special identification, a grab bag, and the following information will make their caregivers feel more secure.

What can the church do to help parents of children with disabilities prepare for an emergency in the home or community?

First, establish a trusting relationship with parents. Listen to their concerns and help them share their emergency information with the church. Gather personal information about each child and his or her disability. This information should be kept under lock and would be used only in case of a mass in-house emergency or personal injury.

Second, help parents accept the fact that in an emergency it is possible for them to become separated from their child, so their child of any age needs to be prepared. The confidence of preparing for an emergency reduces stress when an emergency happens. Persons with disabilities of any age should carry identification at all times, and each person should have a "Go Bag" at home that is never moved from its location unless it is an emergency. (The con-

(EMERGENCY continued on page 4)

We Speak To Nations...Be Free!
"Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples."—Psalm 96:3

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(EMERGENCY continued from p. 3)



tents of a typical “Go Bag” for a person with a disability are given at the end of this article, but contents should be tailored for each individual.)

Identification by name, address, and impairment is of prime importance when a child of any age becomes separated from a parent. Most emergencies involve water damage, so laminate this information and carry a copy in a plastic bag in the “Go Bag”. Some parents of autistic persons have an identification microchip embedded under the skin of their child, and the child needs to be taught to proudly point to it. A laminated pocket or wallet card that says, “I am deaf” or “I cannot speak” or other information along with the person’s

name can help an escort or rescue worker.

Third, help each family prepare an at-home emergency plan that includes emergency contact numbers, the location of the “Go Bag”, and a memorized list of what to do first for each person’s safety. For example: 1. Grab your Go Bag, 2. Exit the building, 3. Meet at your family’s pre-arranged location. 4. Stay out of an emergency house and do not return for pets or phones or anything. Also provide key words for a shelter-in-place directive. For example: 1. Grab your Go Bag, 2. Go to ____ room. 3. Stay there and do not leave.

In summary: The church has a responsibility to keep people safe, to keep them informed, and to help them plan for emergencies. The church has a

responsibility to maintain contact with shut-ins and persons who are sheltered-in-place. The church can work cooperatively with parents of children of all ages with disabilities to help keep them safe during emergencies. The church family is founded on a love that reaches out to keep each member not only safe but also cherished. Preparation can spell I-o-v-e.

PERSONAL GO BAG

A Grab and Go bag (clearly labeled and not similar to other tote bags in the house) should always be kept in the same place. It should contain:

- ◆ Identification of person with list of disabilities and medications in a plastic zip-lock bag
- ◆ A list of all doctors
- ◆ Extra set of eyeglasses and hearing-aid batteries
- ◆ List of the styles of medical devices used
- ◆ Extra copies of insurance documents
- ◆ A flashlight and extra batteries
- ◆ A set of clothing
- ◆ Bottled water
- ◆ Snack food
- ◆ Favorite toy or book
- ◆ Story board for emergencies, if appropriate



DID YOU KNOW IT SAYS IN THE UMC BOOK OF DISCIPLINE...?!?

Planning and Financing Requirements for Local Church Buildings

If any local church desires to build..., purchase, or remodel an existing church, educational building, or existing parsonage, but the cost of the re-modeling will exceed 10 percent of the value of the existing structure, then the local church shall first establish a study committee to...
(4) develop an accessibility plan including chancel areas....

- 3.b ...In the case of the purchase of a parsonage, the board of trustees shall either: (1) purchase a parsonage that has on the ground floor level: (a) one room that can be used as a bedroom by a person with a disability; (b) one fully accessible bathroom; and (c) fully accessible laundry facilities; or (2) purchase a parsonage without the accessible features for persons with disabilities specified above and remodel it within one year's time, so that it does have those features....
4. The building committee shall:...c) develop preliminary architectural plans that: (1) comply with local building, fire, and accessibility codes; (3) provide adequate facilities for parking, entrance, seating, rest rooms, and accessibility for persons with disabilities, but providing for such adequate facilities shall not apply in the case of a minor remodeling project; d) provide on the ground-floor level of a newly constructed parsonage: (1) one room that can be used as a bedroom by a person with a disability; (2) a fully accessible bathroom; and (3) fully accessible laundry facilities.

From *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2000*, ¶2543

Mitchum is the Coordinator of Special Needs at Chapelwood United Methodist Church in Houston, Tex. The author of several books, she has also written resource materials in the areas of church environment, worship, and leadership for parents of children with disabilities and for those ministering with people with disabilities. Mitchum has served in her Houston community as a disability advocate for accessible transportation and voting booths and was recently honored to receive the Mayor’s 2010 Disability Advocacy Award. All copyrighted materials she has authored may be reproduced from her website, naomimitchum.com, if not for profit.



GOD LIVES UNDER THE BED

By Kelly Pinson Adkins

I envy Kevin. My brother Kevin thinks God lives under his bed. At least that's what I heard him say one night. He was praying out loud in his dark bedroom, and I stopped to listen, "Are you there, God?" he said. "Where are you? Oh, I see. Under the bed..." I giggled softly and tiptoed off to my own room. Kevin's unique perspectives are often a source of amusement. But that night something else lingered long after the humor. I realized for the first time the very different world Kevin lives in.

He was born 30 years ago, mentally disabled as a result of difficulties during labor. Apart from his size (he's 6-foot-2), there are few ways in which he is an adult. He reasons and communicates with the capabilities of a 7-year-old, and he always will. He will probably always believe that God lives under his bed, that Santa Claus is the one who fills the space under our tree every Christmas, and that airplanes stay up in the sky because angels carry them.

I remember wondering if Kevin realizes he is different. Is he ever dissatisfied with his monotonous life? Up before dawn each day, off to work at a workshop for the disabled, home to walk our cocker spaniel, return to eat his favorite macaroni-and-cheese for dinner, and later to bed. The only variation in the entire scheme is laundry, when he hovers excitedly over the washing machine like a mother with her newborn child.

He does not seem dissatisfied. He lopes out to the bus every morning at 7:05, eager for a day of simple work. He wrings his hands excitedly while the water boils on the stove before dinner, and he stays up late twice a week to gather our dirty laundry for his next day's laundry chores.

And Saturdays—oh, the bliss of Saturdays! That's the day my Dad takes Kevin to the airport to have a soft drink,

watch the planes land, and speculate loudly on the destination of each passenger inside. "That one's goin' to Chiccar-go!" Kevin shouts as he claps his hands. His anticipation is so great he can hardly sleep on Friday nights.

And so goes his world of daily rituals and weekend field trips. He doesn't know what it means to be discontent. His life is simple. He will never know the entanglements of wealth of power, and he does not care what brand of clothing he wears or what kind of food he eats. His needs have always been met, and he never worries that one day they may not be.

His hands are diligent. Kevin is never so happy as when he is working. When he unloads the dishwasher or vacuums the carpet, his heart is completely in it. He does not shrink from a job when it is begun, and he does not leave a job until it is finished. But when his tasks are done, Kevin knows how to relax. He is not obsessed with his work or the work of others.

His heart is pure. He still believes everyone tells the truth, promises must be kept, and when you are wrong, you apologize instead of argue. Free from pride and unconcerned with appearances, Kevin is not afraid to cry

when he is hurt, angry, or sorry. He is always transparent, always sincere.

And he trusts God. Not confined by intellectual reasoning, when he comes to Christ, he comes as a child. Kevin seems to know God—to really be friends with Him in a way that is difficult for an "educated" person to grasp. God seems like his closest companion.

In my moments of doubt and frustrations with my Christianity I envy the security Kevin has in his simple faith. It is then that I am most willing to admit that he has some divine knowledge that rises above my mortal questions. It is then I realize that perhaps he is not the one with the handicap; I am. My obligations, my fear, my pride, my circumstances—they all become disabilities when I do not trust them to God's care.

Who knows if Kevin comprehends things I can never learn? After all, he has spent his whole life in that kind of innocence, praying after dark and soaking up the goodness and love of God. And one day, when the mysteries of heaven are opened, and we are all amazed at how close God really is to our hearts, I'll realize that God heard the simple prayers of a boy who believed that God lived under his bed.

Kevin won't be surprised at all!

**From the National Organization
on Disability's Religion and
Disability Program: Copyright
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Dear God,

I am so afraid to open my clenched fists!

Who will I be when I have nothing left to hold on to?

Who will I be when I stand before you with empty hands?

Please help me to gradually open my hands

**and to discover that I am not what I own,
but what you want to give me.**

**And what you want to give me is love,
unconditional, everlasting love.**

Amen.

— Henri J. M. Nouwen

From *The Only Necessary Thing: Living A Prayerful Life*



IS YOUR CHURCH WEBSITE ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL?

By Matt Carlisle

My daughter recently turned five. To her father's delight, she started to appreciate computers and the Internet this past year. Kid favorites like Disney and PBS make it easy for parents by offering highly interactive, easy-to-access websites. Corporate giants like Disney understand the importance of web accessibility. The television shows direct kids to the web sites where they then learn about Disney World where, if not careful, parents will soon be shelling out big bucks for a vacation....

United Methodists have made strides in making church buildings accessible to those living with disabilities. However, as the Internet and other new technologies continue to evolve, United Methodists find ourselves excluding many others through church websites.

A Georgia Tech survey found that 15 to 30 percent of people have functional limitations that can affect their ability to use technology products (50 million in United States, 750 million worldwide).

Web accessibility is becoming front page fodder. While blindness and deaf-

ness are the most obvious barriers, it's critical to consider the online needs of those with colorblindness, cataracts, long sightedness, limited fine motor control and dyslexia, to name a few. As the average age of United Methodist members nears 60, the issue of website accessibility will only increase.

When designing or redesigning a church website, make accessibility a foremost consideration. Here are some items to consider when evaluating the accessibility of your website:

- ◆ Use alternative or "alt" text to describe all non-text attributes like graphics and photos. "Alt" text describes the graphic or photo for those who aren't able to see it on the page or who rely on a screen reader.

- ◆ Site visitors using screen readers rely on your description of a text link. Avoid using text links like "click here" or "more." When read out of context, they make no sense to the user.

- ◆ If you offer video or audio files, include text transcripts. Captioning is a great alternative, but it can be expensive.

- ◆ The use of color on your website can often create problems for the visually impaired and colorblind visitor. When you use color alone to convey information, the same message may not be understood by all.

- ◆ Using Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) allows the site visitor to separate the content of your site from its design, creating greater flexibility.

To learn more about making a website accessible, visit the Web Accessibility Initiative website at www.w3.org/WAI...

**Adapted and abridged from
Interpreter Magazine website,
www.interpretermagazine.org;
originally published in
Sept.-Oct. 2007 issue.**

**Carlisle, who lives in Franklin,
Tenn., is former director of Web
Ministry at United Methodist
Communications and recently
launched BigHeartDesign.com.**



OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR WEBSITE ACCESSIBILITY

Tim Vermande, webmaster of the websites for the United Methodist Task Force On Disability Ministries and the United Methodist Association Of Ministers With Disabilities, has a few other suggestions for designing or redesigning a church website to make it more disability accessible:

- ◆ Avoid designing menus that pop up when you move your mouse over them (JavaScript pop-ups). According to Vermande, they are a "royal pain" for people like himself who have limited hand motion as they are always getting a menu when they don't want it or not able to get a menu when they do want it.

- ◆ Avoid hard-coding text sizes, among other things, as this can interfere with the capability that browsers offer for changing font sizes—a capability that some people with vision impairments need. Vermande himself designs websites using relative sizes, e.g., +1, instead.

- ◆ The most important requirement, says Vermande, is to try out the newly designed or redesigned website for accessibility before putting it online. He suggests trying it out yourself or having a trusted person do it. You can check out the site's accessibility to screen readers with a free trial of the screen-reader offered by GW Micro's Window-Eyes. The time limit is 30 minutes per session, and when they were told that the screen reader would be used to check accessibility design, they didn't object (Vermande did include a link to their site afterwards). There's also an extension for Firefox that can turn off photos so that tags can be checked. (This can also be helpful for people who can only afford "dial-up" and often turn off graphics because they take so long to download.)

Vermande's website can be accessed at www.vermande.us.



ONE VOICE LED TO ANOTHER: A SINGER'S TRANSITION TO WRITING

By Holly Weiss

Perhaps you have heard the saying, “Barn burned down—now I can see the moon.” I hated it when I first read it. Why? Because I was immersed in a barn-burning in my own life.

Post-polio syndrome, a condition that effects people infected with polio virus as children, often returns when polio survivors reach the age of fifty. I had been a successful professional singer for three decades. When unrelenting back pain presented itself after every concert, I had to retire. In addition, to conserve what little energy the post-polio syndrome left me with, I was forced to cut in half other activities in my life. I grieved for years. My charred barn had a constant visitor who picked up handfuls of ashes and smeared them on her face while rivulets of tears ran through them. *God, you gave me this voice to serve you. What now?*

Bing! On a lark my husband and I stayed overnight at the Crestmont Inn overlooking a beautiful mountain lake in Eagles Mere, Pennsylvania. Our room was a luxury suite that had been converted from a staff dormitory built in 1926. While there, I envisioned what life must have been like for young people working a summer job at a bustling inn. Then I recalled this quote from a book by Dag Hammarskjöld, the first UN Secretary-General:

*Another opportunity is given you
as a favor—and as a burden.*

The question is not:

Why did it happen this way? or

Where is it going to lead you? or

What is the price you will have to pay?

It is simply:

How are you going to make use of it?

We can be so entrenched in our idea of what God wants for us in our journey that we ignore his guidance when

we have to turn corners. He had to hit me over the head with a two-by-four to show me to leave my singing behind, write a book about this inn, and make use of what life handed me.

One voice led to another, and a wonderful experience in writing opened before me. My music inspired me to imbue my main character, the young hotel maid, Gracie Antes, with the desire to sing. Researching the history of the Crestmont, including the Native American legends surrounding the creation of the lake, enriched me.

One Native American legend said that the Great Spirit flooded Eagles Mere Lake out of anger. I begin my novel with this legend, but I give it a different twist, wanting to set the tone of grace around which *Crestmont* is built. In my novel, the Great Spirit cries tears of forgiveness. The eagle joins his tears with the Great Spirit's, both mingling together to gently fill the lake called Eagles Tears or Eagles Mere.

For me, writing was a natural progression from singing. Every song requires a different persona—a unique character the singer develops to make the song real. Inventing characters for *Crestmont* was an adventure I was well-prepared for after 30 years of creating them in song. Violinist Itzhak Perlman, who wears leg braces due to childhood polio, said, “Sometimes it is the artist's task to find out how much music you can still make with what you have left.”

God has blessed me with a loving, supportive husband, family, and friends. I am grateful for the years of ministry I've had through song. People used to tell me, “We can see your faith on your face as you sing.” I pray they can see a reflection of Christ in my writing. My life, although filled with physical challenges, has become a re-composition full of unique harmonies. God has faithfully and creatively led me from the voice of a singer to that of an author. And now, I can see the moon.

Weiss is the author of *Crestmont*, a historical-fiction novel set in the 1920s. A member of the First United Methodist church in New Hartford, NY, she is an advocate for the Global Polio Eradication Initiative and Compassion International. Visit her website at www.hollyweiss.com.

GRIEVING AND CREATIVITY

By Susan W. Ruach

Once the heavy weight of grief
lifts a little,
When the tears no longer
surface quickly or easily,
When depression and anger
ease minutely,
Poke around under the leaden
leaves of grief
For barely perceptible
sprouts of hope.

Although it takes a long time for
sad, dull eyes to brighten,
The creative force of life is
still astir
Under, around, in, and
through the grief.
Grieving protects, then clears
the way for creativity
to bloom again.

From *Alive Now* (May/June 2009).

Ruach, an ordained United Methodist minister, is currently employed at the UMC General Board of Discipleship in Nashville, Tenn.

UMC DISTRICT GRANT AWARDED TO WINGS EDITOR FOR COMPUTER

A grant from the San Diego District United Methodist Union has been awarded to long-time Fallbrook (Calif.) United Methodist Church member, Jo D'Archangelis. Jo, the editor of *Wings* ("A Faithletter For United Methodists With Disabilities And Those Who Care About Them"), is using the grant to help pay for a new computer system essential for putting the newsletter together. "My old computer system all of a sudden completely and permanently crashed," Jo said. "Although we had on hand some \$600 in funding for a new computer system through donations from generous *Wings* readers, it was less than half of what was needed. So I applied to the District Union for a grant." Some months later, the District Union came through with a grant of nearly \$800, for which Jo was extremely grateful. "When I received the award letter in the mail from Kathee Christensen, the Union President, I nearly danced in my wheelchair," she said. "Prayers were indeed answered." The grant makes it possible for Jo to continue to make *Wings* available in both paper-and-print and electronic versions to over 830 readers. Jo pointed out that this is in fact the second grant that the San Diego District has awarded to her and *Wings*; the District also provided funding for a new computer system in 1999.

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Wings Honor Roll Of Appreciation

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Charlotte Tarr	Lila Lanham

Note To Reader:

If you are a computer user who receives the paper-and-print version of *Wings*, please consider switching to *E-Wings*, either in the PDF version or— for use with a screen reader—in the Word Document version. Just e-mail me at jdarhangelis@roadrunner.com.

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