

Media Release

Contact:

**Kandy Cayce, DHS Division of Services for the Blind
(501) 682-0332**

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Arkansas' First Lady and individuals who are blind and visually impaired observe "Independence Day"

You might say that for some people, Independence Day comes in October instead of July. That's what White Cane Safety Day represents to people who are blind or visually impaired. The white cane is a symbol of independence, because it increases mobility.



Blindness organizations partnered together to commemorate the day this year on October 17 at World Services for the Blind in Little Rock. The day has been observed every year since President Lyndon B. Johnson signed it into law in 1964. The day is part of Blindness Awareness Month.

Keynote speaker First Lady Ginger Beebe addressed more than 200 people about the history and importance of White Cane Safety Day. Broad

support was shown by organizations and individuals who traveled from around the state for the event.

The celebration concluded with the First Lady learning how to cross a street using a white cane.

Katy Morris, director of the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind, spoke to the guests and introduced Mrs. Beebe and the leaders of agencies and organizations involved in blindness issues, including **Bill Jacobson**, Department Chair and Coordinator of Orientation and Mobility, UALR Department of Counseling, Adult and Rehabilitation Education; **Anglyn Young**, State Coordinator, Educational Services for the Visually Impaired; **Larry Dickerson**, President and Chief Executive Officer, World Services for the Blind; **Tony Woodell**, Chief Operations Officer,

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World Services for the Blind; **Bill Johnson**, Chief Executive Officer, Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind; **Daniel Novielli**, Chief Operations Officer, Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind; **John J.D. Hall**, Library Manager, Arkansas Regional Library for the Blind; **Geoff Brown**, Executive Director, Arkansas Lions Eye Bank and Laboratory; **Terry Sheeler**, President, National Federation of the Blind of Arkansas; **Kara Aaron**, Visual Impairment Services Team Coordinator, Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System; **Jim Hill**, Superintendent, Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired; **Darline Wheelington**, Council Chair of Arkansas Lions; **Dewayne Hodges**, President, American Council of the Blind Arkansas Chapter; and **Lis Geoghegan**, President, Arkansas Chapter of the Association for Education and Rehabilitation for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

In addition to representing independence for those who use it, the white cane raises awareness for pedestrian safety. The first White Cane Ordinance was passed in 1930 in Peoria, Illinois and granted pedestrians carrying a white cane protections and the right-of-way. Other states soon adopted similar laws.

Photo caption:

Arkansas First Lady Ginger Beebe, right, gets a lesson from Alexis Tyson on how to use a white cane to cross a street safely. The demonstration was part of observances of White Cane Safety Day during Blindness Awareness Month.