

# THE EDGE NEWS JOURNAL

## Senior Idol contestants sing their hearts out

By Mark M. Miller

Based on the widely popular television show "American Idol," the Harman Senior Center held a "Senior Idol" competition on April 30.

Fourteen contestants over the age of 60 duked it out in front of a three-member panel of judges to see who would be the next "Senior Idol."

"The reason I started [the competition] is because [the seniors] have a lot of talent" said Eileen Pryor, assistant director of Harman Senior Center, adding that these people are active people...these are seniors that are on the move. "[This event shows] the youth that just because you get older doesn't mean you lose everything."

Pryor said the event, which finds contestants through anyone of 18 possible centers throughout the Salt Lake Valley draws an audience of about two hundred every year.

"Centers can send two representatives [to participate in a talent show]," Pryor said explaining how the final contestants are chosen for the final competition. "We have a talent show where the people here vote their representative in."

Those who make it into the finals, get a chance to bring their acts to the stage.

Cheers greeted the singers who performed as each took the stage.

Contestant, Laura Briggs, may live



Fourteen contestants put their natural ability to the test in this years senior idol.

with Rheumatoid Arthritis and been in a wheelchair for the last 9 years, but that didn't stop her from captivating the audience with her comic rendition.

Performing "Cry Me a River," Briggs endeared herself to the audience by getting laughs when she sobbed out loud during the song.

But Briggs said outside performing her biggest reward has come in her personal life through the touching letters written for her by her granddaughter.

"She's just writing to me and telling me things...it is the most beautiful thing. I've never known her to write like that. I didn't know she was a writer...and since we've become very close," Briggs said. "Everybody [in my family] seems to open up so much and they tell their

friends [about me] and their friends want to meet me. I'm a real celeb."

But it was Connie Teeter who captured the judges and the title with her rendition of "Summertime."

Teeter was once a night club singer but later suffered an injury from a car accident that happened 16 years ago. Teeter said that thanks to new medications, she is able to breathe well enough to sing again.

Other prize winners were Second place, Kelvin Hoover for his performance of "My Buddy" and Third place went to Roene Whitney for her rendition of "Climb Every Mountain."

"I have found that...the best thing for older people to do [is] to shock their kids every once in awhile and [help them to see] that the oldies really are...great people," Briggs said.



The Everyone Can program shares stories about people living with disabilities with Bunderson Elementary students.

## Disability Law Center shows how Everyone Can

By Haley Cavanagh

Utah's Disability Law Center wants to help change some attitudes about people living with a disability, diversity and community by intervening at an early age when children may be the most malleable and least resistant to change.

So the DLC established the Everyone Can program to educate children in elementary and middle school through interactive reading and discussion groups, peer education and art instruction.

The Everyone Can team uses literature with characters living with disabilities as the core of their curriculum. The books tell stories that supports a message "everyone has something to offer and there is greatness in everyone, but we need to look for that greatness and not be concerned about people's medical conditions and projecting ideas about what we think they can or can't do."

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Pictured is Cindi Vega, guide dog Romy and the teddy bear she received for all her volunteer work.

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~~ CINDI VEGA

## A light in the dark

By Mark Miller

It has been said that when you lose an arm or a leg, the other one becomes stronger to compensate. Cindi Vega is a woman who has become a stronger person as she lost her eyesight.

Born with Septo Optic Dysplasia, Vega's body doesn't produce enough hormones and as a result blindness has set in.

Despite this, she lives a very independent lifestyle, “I live alone with Romy [my guide dog]... she is a yellow Labrador... I've had [her] for six years,” Vega said. “I've modified some things [in my apartment] with brail like my stove, dishwasher and microwave but that's about all the modifications I've [needed].”

Her condition has at times left her wheelchair bound but it hasn't slowed her down, “Whether I use my cane, my dog or my wheelchair I still have places I need to go.”

Vega does lots of volunteer work for different nonprofits around the Salt Lake valley, “I serve as President of the Utah Council of the Blind, chairman of the Board for the Committee on Accessible Transportation (CAT) and Vice Chairman of the Board for the UCB Credit Union: For Utah's Visually Impaired,” Vega said.

The UCB recently gave Cindi a stuffed teddy bear equipped with several accessories that they felt best represented Vega including dark glasses, a cell phone, a backpack and a wheelchair.

“I'm always running somewhere so they put these running shoes on [the bear] and I'm always on my phone taking calls and I always have this stuffed backpack,” Vega said, adding that UCB members awarded her the bear because she [hops] onto things really quick and gets them done the best [she] can.

Vega also has a fulltime job as a teacher for the blind with The Division of Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

“I work with [clients] on how to use adaptive software for the computer and [I] help them make their transition from the mouse to the keyboard,” Vega said.

The DSBVI's mission is to assist individuals in achieving maximum levels of independence and, whenever possible, developing goals toward competitive employment.

Vega said that she's witnessed first hand the success of the training, “I love to see clients who come into our pro-

gram go from being testy [about their loss of sight] to learning that they can overcome any of their challenges.

Cindi's success at work has not gone unnoticed. She has received The Golden Key Award for her outstanding contributions in promoting employment opportunities for people with disabilities. About getting the award Cindi said, “I loved receiving [it] because [it reminds] me that I can overcome my disabilities and be independent by earning a living for myself.” She teaches her students that “even though you are blind you can still be successful.”

DSBVI is primarily funded through grants and when a client is accepted into the program there is no charge for the services provided. In Utah, the Division of Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired has four locations but its main office is in Salt Lake City. If you would like more information about the organization call: 323-4343 or toll free: (800) 284-1823.



## Disability savings accounts for Utahns

By Deborah De Vos

A new tool to help Utahns who care for family members with a disability is now available. Sen. Chris Dodd, D-CT, put up S.2741 on March 11, to give caretakers the ability to create disability savings accounts.

The purpose of the new accounts is to allow families to save private funds for disability-related expenses to supplement benefits provided by other sources,

including Medicaid and private insurance.

“This legislation encourages individuals with disabilities and their families to save personal funds for their unique disability-related needs,” Dodd said while presenting the bill in session. “The establishment of disability savings accounts will promote the investment of private funds in the long-term well-being of individuals with disabilities.

The savings accounts will provide disabled individuals with a tax-advantaged mechanism to save including funds expended from the DSA for specific services -- education, medical services, employment training, support and transportation

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“If we can get those attitudes and reshape those,” says Sheri Newton, outreach and education specialist. “It’s the best way to get people when they are young and forming those attitudes.”

The first part of Everyone Can is that ‘everyone can be great at something.’ The second part is ‘everyone can help others discover their own greatness.’ Teachers explain to children that you do that by being complimentary and watching people and seeing what’s wonderful about them, then telling them.

Newton said the stories engage learners on a deeper level into the topic for an extended amount of time because they’ve developed a multi-sensory program to convert ideas from short-term memory to long-term memory so that children will better retain the overall message.

Newton said the EC experience provides students with a perspective about “disability” that is fresh, realistic, fun and positive. The program emphasizes everyone’s unique abilities and that “disability” is natural by providing concrete information on how every person has a role in making his or her community inclusive and vibrant.

Since the pilot EC project began, Newton said they’ve trained 4,450 students, 220 classrooms; and expanded the program into five additional counties that include Cache, Box Elder, Washington and Iron counties.

“One of the more powerful parts of the program is that though we’re instructing the children, teachers can see that instruction and they can continue to do that with future classes,” Newton said.

The Disability Law Center’s website has provided a booklist of books that the specialists have approved as promoting the program’s overall message.

Newton also said that EC members are working to expand the program with plans to contribute more books about those living with disabilities to rural libraries whose funds are limited.

Founders of the EC program have advocated for 10 to 20 years before discussing how they could create change for people with disabilities and the attitudes of people that seem to present the greatest barriers to people with disabilities more than anything else.

“It has been a thrilling experience over the past few months to have children approach me at the grocery store, the park or public events and say, ‘I know you. You came to my school. You are the Everyone Can Lady,’” Newton said. “What an honor it is to share how we can strengthen our society by focusing on the abilities we each possess.”

For anyone interested in bringing the program to their school, Newton said to contact the Disability Law Center’s website, <http://www.disabilitylawcenter.org/everyonecan.html>, for more information.



Students at Bunderson Elementary listens to a children’s story about a person living with a disability.

“What an honor it is to share how we can strengthen our society by focusing on the abilities we each possess.”

~~Sheri Newton

**CORRECTION—APRIL ISSUE:**

The Columbus Community Center is the center that was started in 1968 by a group of parents. Columbus Secure Shredding started five years ago and is one of our business units that provides secure document shredding services for business while creating job opportunities for people with disabilities. They provide vocational training for Salt Lake City School District students but they also have a number of other services and programs for adults who range in age from 22 to retirement age.

**National Council on Disability has Utah nominees**

On March 20, President George W. Bush announced his intention to renominate five current National Council on Disability members and nominate six new members. Among the six new member nominations were a couple of Utah residents.

Marvin G Fifield, of Utah State University and Kristen Cox, the states executive director of the Department of Work force Services has both worked with the disabled communities in Utah.

Fifield is the principal investigator for the Indian Children’s Program at Utah State University’s Center for Persons with Disabilities that he helped to establish in 1991. He is also the former director of the Center for Persons with Disabilities at Utah State University and professor emeritus of psychology and special education and rehabilitation.

Cox, who is blind, was appointed as a special assistant to the commissioner of Rehabilitation Service Administration in the U.S. Department of Education by President Bush in 2001. Cox also established and led the Department of Disabilities for Maryland.

The NCD is an independent federal agency composed of 15 members appointed by the President and confirmed by the U.S. Senate that make recommendations to the President and Congress to enhance the quality of life for all Americans with disabilities and their families.

## DSA continued from page 2

Interest on accounts with a balance of \$250,000 or less is tax free, low income earners will receive a refundable matching tax credit of up to \$1000 for their contributions to the DSA, funds can be rolled into the DSA accounts from college savings plans and special needs trusts without penalty and the beneficiary's access to critical public supports will be protected.

"This important legislation is designed to help individuals with disabilities live full and productive lives for all their years," Dodd said. "It provides families with a tool to save the money they need for their unique needs and provide for their children long after they are gone."

Accounts are set up through a financial institution and can be held and managed by the beneficiary, their spouse, family member or legal guardian. Funds are expended directly from the account for services and will not be counted against eligibility for Medicaid and SSI or other federal support services.

## Be ready for anything

By Haley Cavanagh

The likelihood that you and your family will recover from an emergency tomorrow depends on the planning and preparation done today.

While each person's abilities and needs are unique, every individual can take steps to prepare for all kinds of emergencies from fires and floods to potential terrorist attacks. By evaluating your own personal needs and making an emergency plan that fits those needs, you and your loved ones can be better prepared.

On the government website, [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov), there are tips especially tailored toward people living with Disabilities.

Steps to be more prepared include create a support network to help in an emergency, tell these people where you keep your emergency supplies and give one member of your support network a key to your house or apartment.

Contact your city or county government's emergency information management office. Many local offices keep lists of people with disabilities so they can be located quickly in a sudden emergency.

Wear medical alert tags or bracelets to help identify your disability.

If you are dependent on dialysis or other life

sustaining treatment, know the location and availability of more than one facility.

Show others how to operate your wheelchair.

Know the size and weight of your wheelchair, and whether it is collapsible, in case it has to be transported.

Some additional supplies include prescription medicines, list of medications including dosage, list of any allergies; extra eyeglasses and hearing-aid batteries; extra wheelchair batteries, oxygen; keep a list of the style and serial number of medical devices; medical insurance and Medicare cards and a list of doctors, relatives or friends who should be notified if you are hurt.

Remember to always have at least a 3-Day supply of food and water per person, when no refrigeration or cooking is available. When stocking up on canned goods, invest in "pop-top" cans that do not require a can opener. Update your seventy-two-hour kits every six months (put a note in your calendar/planner), to make sure that all food, water and medications are fresh (not expired) and that all batteries are changed.

For more information, visit: <http://www.ready.gov/america/getakit/disabled.html>

## What Parents need to know and teach their children about law enforcement

Parents need to know what to expect if their child with autism has an interaction with law enforcement officers.

A free presentation will be held on May 14 at 7 p.m. to help parents, caregivers and families information on how.

The event will be held at the Sanderson Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, 2709 S. 1500 W., and is organized by the Utah Parent Center.

For more information about the event call 272-1051 or e-mail [upcinfo@utahparentcenter.org](mailto:upcinfo@utahparentcenter.org).

## Magna Health Fair



On Saturday, May 17, Magna Healthy Community and The Utah Housing Coalition are sponsoring "The 6th Annual Magna Healthy Community Fair" from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

The event will take place at the Magna Recreation Center, 8400 W. 3270 S.

This year 75 sponsors will attend the event to provide information about services that promote health, wellness and safety.

The Lion's Club is also sponsoring a "Fun Walk" which will begin at 8:30 a.m. on the morning of the event.

The walk will kick off at the Magna Chevron on the southwest corner of 8400 W. and ending at the Magna Fitness recreation center.

Letters to the Editor:

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Send letters to:

[docpress@gmail.com](mailto:docpress@gmail.com)

We want to hear from you!

Deborah De Vos

Editor

Edge News Journal

The Edge News Journal  
c/o Disability Outreach Committee  
2971 South 8400 West #6  
Magna, Utah 84044  
[www.doonthemove.org](http://www.doonthemove.org)



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