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### Foundation for the Junior Blind honors volunteers

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The foundation educates students in Braille reading and writing, computer literacy and independent living skills.

By Heidi Manteuffel/Special to The Malibu Times

The Foundation for the Junior Blind recognized its volunteers May 12 at a luncheon at the foundation's headquarters in Culver City. The foundation serves more than 6,000 children and adults with its six programs, which include Malibu's Camp Bloomfield, Infant-Family Program and Davidson's Program for Independence. Since 1953, FJB staff and volunteers have educated students in Braille reading and writing, computer literacy and independent living skills.



Tom Ashby (right) receives an award for his service with the Foundation for the Junior Blind. Ashby has been associated with the organization since he attended Camp Bloomfield as a child. Photos by Heidi Manteuffel/TMT

The Annual Volunteer Recognition Luncheon featured several FJB volunteers, many of whom have been with the foundation since childhood. Award recipient and past Bloomfield camper Tom Ashby said at the ceremony that FJB teaches children and adults to never let blindness impair their goals. As an example of this, Ashby said his blindness had not prevented him from farming, motorcycle racing and Minnesota bobsledding.

Ashby's involvement with FJB began in 1985 when he came to Camp Bloomfield as a camper. At a young age, he was also a part of Visions: Adventure in Learning programs. Now out of college, Ashby spends his summers in Malibu as the camp assistant, and gives guided tours to students and visitors of the camp.

"I've never even thought I was disabled," Ashby said. "I always tried to go for what I could. And if they said I couldn't do it, I would try that much harder."

Rachel Ng, a student speaker at the luncheon, is one of the many campers who has benefited greatly from FJB. From the encouragement and self-confidence gained from being a part of FJB, Ng ran in 2003 for student body president at her school, and successfully won the election. She said she is involved in gymnastics, and has mastered everything up to level one in ice-skating.

"I really like the foundation because it has taught me so many important things, one of which is to have no one but me define who I am," Ng said.

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FJB draws a great pool of supportive staff and loyal volunteers. Sally Young has volunteered for 10 years with the adult program, Davidson Program for Independence. Twenty hours a week, Young helps individuals 18 and older in the computer room and with various other needs connected with this program. She said, "Many times I read for them what's on the screen and will just be their eyes for them." Several of the older FJB members have diabetes, so at lunchtime Young has trained herself to scan the lunchroom to check if any individuals need medical assistance.

While little is known by the general public about blindness, Debbie Laskey, vice president of marketing at FJB, said blindness affects a significant number of people. She said it is estimated that one person every 11 minutes becomes blind, making 47,000 new cases each year. The leading causes of blindness are said to be glaucoma, macular degeneration and cataracts, although many cases are due to accidents and other related trauma.

For more information about the Foundation for the Junior Blind, visit its Web site at [www.FJB.org](#).

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