

## PRINCETON AREA: Volunteer!: Giving voice and vision to others

By Pat Ellard Special to The Packet

**Posted:** Thursday, January 14, 2010 7:10 PM EST

Victory Chase stepped into one of the 12 identical soundproof booths. It was hi-tech, climate-controlled and comfortable, with a large window into the room where we stood. It looked like a booth from a quiz show: Victory could see out, and people could see her. But we could not hear each other without using headphones.

Victory consulted a chart to find the page and paragraph where she should begin reading. Her director was doing the same thing. She would read, and the director would follow along to make sure that nothing was skipped, nothing added. At Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic in Plainsboro, Victory is a valued volunteer. Her dad was in the service when she was young, and because they lived abroad, Victory can read German and Italian easily. That comes in handy for recording some books.

Michelle Iosevich, production director, said that the books have to be carefully recorded and monitored. "Each reader has a director (they used to be called monitors) following the text in a second book. The recording has to be exact; the student must be able to rely on it. The readers are not allowed to interpret the material or convey their opinion of what they are reading. That job is up to the student who needs the book."

"Isn't that hard when you get caught up in the text?" I asked. "It can be," Michelle said.

"How do you pick what to record?" I asked, intrigued by the possibilities.

"We don't pick it ourselves," Michelle said. "We get requests from individuals, schools, colleges, or universities. If we have already recorded the book, we make a copy from the master we have on file. National Headquarters keeps the library of master recordings. It is huge – many books are already done. We don't have to record novels anymore – they are all done except for the latest releases. Schools are not likely to request those."

"Wow," I said, "how long have you been doing this? Not you personally, I mean Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic."

"Well," Michelle said, "I'm a relative



Victory Chase at the Plainsboro studios of Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic: 'For me, reading is like breathing, and I want to help others enjoy books as much as I do. It's so much fun that you forget you're actually performing a service.'

Staff photo by Mark Orlikowski

newcomer, but RFB&D, that's short for

Start photo by Mark Czajkowski

Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic, began in 1949 as a way to enable wounded veterans to take advantage of the GI Bill of Rights. RFB&D actually began in New York City, but it soon moved to the Princeton area. It has grown like an idea whose time had come: We now have 20 recording studios in 18 states, and we send material to 237,298 members."

The next question was a natural. "How much does it cost to get a recording?"

"Individuals don't have to pay for them," Michelle said. "But they are available only for people with handicaps. Schools, colleges and universities do pay. Most of our funding comes through donations. Many publishers donate two copies of their books for recording. Of course, we have to be very careful about copyrights. That's why the student needs special equipment to play our recordings."

"What kinds of books do you record?" I asked, noticing that Victory was recording a book on advertising. "Usually textbooks," Michelle answered. "We have 400 volunteers who read for us, but we are always happy to get more, particularly to read science and math. We even have some doctors and nurses who read medical books."

I looked at the director's copy of the book that Victory was reading. It had been written in. Michelle laughed. "The book markers do that. They write in the books in pencil to let readers know what to read and the order to read it in. They read the text first, then charts or descriptions under pictures. Notice where it says RTT? That means Return To Text."

Victory was updating the chart for her book. "She is letting the next reader know where she stopped," Michelle said. As she stepped out of the booth, Victory told me that she won't be the only reader for this book. She is part of a team, a team that includes the book markers, the readers themselves, the directors, and the checkers. Checkers are the volunteers who give the recording its final check before it goes into the RFB&D library of recorded books.

To get recordings done in a timely fashion, several readers are often assigned to one book. There might be a single reader on a book if it is very short, but even books in foreign languages have multiple readers. "We record in French, German, Spanish, and Russian, as well as English," Michelle said.

I could feel my eyes getting wider and wider at the scope of the work, the number of volunteers, recording sites, and people requesting the books.

Victory, who lives near Griggstown, has been volunteering at RFB&D for over 20 years. When I asked her why she volunteers there, she said, "For me, reading is like breathing, and I want to help others enjoy books as much as I do. It's so much fun that you forget you're actually performing a service."

Michelle said, "The most astonishing thing is that these volunteers read week after week without ever seeing the people they are helping. But look at their faces."

The volunteers looked serious but serene, sequestered from the noise of the outside world, and happy. Definitely happy. For more information on RFB&D, including volunteer opportunities and donation information, visit [www.rfbd.org](http://www.rfbd.org) or call 609-750-1830.

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