

The Miami Herald

B R Y O G F

ONE DOLLAR
105TH YEAR, NO. 184 ©2008

MiamiHerald.com 

SUNDAY, MARCH 16, 2008
FINAL EDITION

SPEAKUP

THE FORUM FOR YOUR IDEAS, EXPERIENCES AND OBSERVATIONS

MIAMI LIGHTHOUSE

New tech helps the blind

As David A. Paterson is poised to become New York's 55th governor — and the first visually impaired governor in the nation — one might ask, “How can this be?” Blind people might ask, “Why did it take so long?”

Seventy-five percent of legally blind people are unemployed, the largest percentage of all disability categories. Expectations for blind children and adults are very low. Blindness seems to become a badge of weakness, inspiring pity, and once a person has felt pity toward you it is difficult to get them to feel confidence in your abilities. Blind people, despite dramatic increases in their capabilities because of new



PATERSON

technology, have abilities we never dreamed of. No one knows better than I what it is like literally to lose sight of the world around you, to have to learn new ways to do practically everything. But new ways can be learned. I typed this letter using Microsoft Word and screen-reading software that I can access when I want to read a word or a line on the monitor.

No, I cannot see to “point and click,” but I use memorized keystrokes to manipulate any Microsoft application, including Excel, Access and Outlook.

This is only one example of how technology helps the visually impaired gain competitive skills for employment. For example, at the Miami Lighthouse for the Blind & Visually Impaired we are training some clients for jobs with Marriott Hotels as call-center operators. There are blind musicians — there always have been. But now there are blind sound engineers, producers and promoters. There are blind lawyers, social workers, inventors, CEOs and more. Miami Lighthouse soon will establish an Assistive Technology Center as part of our new initiative to create a Center of Excellence in Low Vision and Rehabilitation. The Technology Center will be a testing ground, with new devices and aids that are constantly being developed. With proper training in assistive devices, blind people can do just about anything.

In his new role as governor of New York, Paterson will prove that a blind person can do almost anything a sighted person can do.

- VIRGINIA A. JACKO, president and CEO, Miami Lighthouse for the Blind & Visually Impaired, Inc., Miami