



David Kopp (right) studied civil engineering at Purdue so that he could work to improve the public transportation experience for people with special needs.



“My wife, Virginia, slowly lost her sight to Retinitis pigmentosa near the end of her 24 years working at Purdue,” Jacko said. “She is now the president and CEO of the Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired. This familial connection led me to become familiar with the needs of the blind and I earned a braille machine advanced repair technician certificate in 2023.

“I was in a unique position to help my student who did not have a braille conveniently available,” Jacko said. “So, I went online to eBay and purchased the old reliable, cast aluminum bodied machine, totally disassembled it, cleaned it, repaired it.”

This machine, Kopp said, is better than any other braille he has ever used.

“It’s true what they say about how ‘they don’t make them like they used to,’” Kopp said. “The braille is big but it’s incredibly well-made and more reliable than anything I’ve had before.”

In addition to being a great help with his studies, Kopp said it has also provided practical uses.

“Now that I am completely blind, I am more reliant than ever on labeling things, especially after I moved into a new apartment,” Kopp said. “The braille can make labels, which I use to help make the space more accessible as I get used to my surroundings.”

Jacko insisted Kopp keep the braille as a graduation gift, in hopes the machine will benefit Kopp as he begins his career as a civil engineer.

“When I signed up for the Perkins Braille Machine Repair Course, I would have never guessed it would be so critical in helping one of my civil engineering students toward graduation,” Jacko said. “One never knows where the path will take them.”

Kopp graduated in December 2024 with a bachelor’s degree in civil engineering, having used braille notes during his final oral senior design presentation.

# ENGINEERING ACCESSIBILITY

## Professor’s unlikely skill helps blind student achieve his dream

A professor’s unexpected crossing of career paths has led to a tremendous impact on the life of a blind student.

Lyles School of Civil and Construction Engineering undergraduate student David Kopp was born with a genetic eye disorder called aniridia that led to a gradual loss of eyesight. During surgery early in his junior year to correct a detached retina, he came out of the surgery totally blind. Undaunted, Kopp continued to pursue a degree and career in transportation engineering with a focus on accessibility.

“Accessibility is obviously really important to me, and I know just how vital it is for people with disabilities to get around,” Kopp said. “And Purdue — especially my school — has been very accommodating.”

One of the more remarkable accommodations came in his final semester. Robert Jacko, professor of civil and construction engineering and senior design instructor, just happens to be associated with the Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired.