SIGHTS & SOUNDS

THE MAGAZINE OF ALABAMA INSTITUTE FOR DEAF & BLIND

SPRING 2026



Scout's Honor

PAGE 4: ASB's Dalton Harris earns rank of Eagle Scout

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SIGHTS & SOUNDS
THE MAGAZINE OF ALABAMA INSTITUTE FOR DEAF & BLIND

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ON THE COVER: ASB Eagle Scout Dalton Harris

INSIDE COVER: ASD Student Kaleb Griffin

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Sights & Sounds is published by the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind Office of Institutional Advancement, P.O. Box 698, Talladega, Alabama 35161.



From The President

Spring always brings a welcome sense of renewal across our campuses.

This time of year allows us to reflect on the progress made since the first day of school. In classrooms, on athletic fields, and in programs throughout Alabama, our students continue to grow in skill, confidence, and independence. As graduation approaches, that growth becomes especially meaningful.

Commencement is always one of the most important days of our year. Watching students cross the stage is a powerful reminder of why our work matters. Each graduate represents perseverance, strong family support, and the daily dedication of our faculty and staff. Seeing the pride on the faces of families is a moment we never take for granted.

Throughout this issue, you will see examples of what makes AIDB strong—enduring community partnerships, student achievement, and programs that extend our reach across the state. Our mission is carried forward through collaboration, generosity, and a shared belief in the potential of every student we serve.

Spring also reminds us that growth continues beyond a single milestone. For some students, a chapter is closing. For others, new opportunities are just beginning. In every case, we remain focused on preparing young people for lives of independence, purpose, and contribution.

Thank you for your continued support of Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind. Your encouragement and partnership make this work possible.

AIDB Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind
Deaf. Blind. Limitless.

Scout's Honor

ASB's Dalton Harris Earns the Rank of Eagle Scout

By Carolina Bennett
Coordinator, Marketing
& Community Relations





An ASB Family Tradition: Eagle Scout Dalton Harris with his father Donald Harris, Jr. (left) and his grandfather Donald Harris, Sr. (right)

In January 2026, family members, educators, fellow Scouts, and community leaders gathered on the campus of the Alabama School for the Blind to recognize a significant achievement. Dalton Harris, a sophomore at ASB, was formally honored as an Eagle Scout—the highest rank awarded by the Boy Scouts of America—during a Court of Honor ceremony held within his school community.

For Dalton, the moment marked the completion of a journey that began years earlier and required steady commitment, leadership, and perseverance. For the Harris family, it carried meaning far beyond a single ceremony. Dalton joins his father Donald Harris, Jr., and an uncle as an Eagle Scout. All of the Harrises follow in the footsteps of Donald Harris, Sr., continuing a Talladega Scouting legacy that spans decades.

Born with a visual impairment, Dalton has been a student at AIDB since early childhood. At ASB, expectations are not lowered; students are taught to meet high standards using the tools, instruction, and support available to them. That approach closely mirrors the values of Scouting, where progress is measured through sustained effort and responsibility over time.

Dalton grew up surrounded by those high expectations. Scouting was understood as a long-term commitment—one that required patience, consistency, and follow-through. When

"We are very proud of Dalton, and we are thankful for his involvement in Scouting. We are richer because of his participation and example."

David Self, Scouting America

Dalton joined the Scouts in second grade, he did so knowing the path ahead would take time.

"Hard work—and that it's worth doing," Dalton said when asked what Scouting taught him. "If you put your mind to it, anyone can do it. The only reason a lot of people don't earn Eagle is because they don't take the time to do it."

Long before Dalton began his Scouting journey, his grandfather had already spent more than four decades as a troop leader, mentoring generations of Scouts and shaping the program at the local level. For Donald Harris Sr., Scouting and parenting were about standards—meeting them fully and without exception.

"You can get alternate merit badges, but I never let Dalton have any alternates," Harris said. "I made him earn everything just like everybody else. I wanted it to mean something. That's what Scouting teaches—that you can do anything you want to do in life if you set your mind to it."

Earning the rank of Eagle Scout is Scouting's highest honor. Only a small percentage of Scouts nationwide complete the requirements, which include years of active participation and leadership roles within a troop.

According to Scouting America, earning the Eagle Scout Rank demands years of steady progress and personal growth. Candidates must earn a minimum of 21 merit badges—including required badges in areas such as citizenship, first aid, and personal management. One of the hallmark requirements is the Eagle Scout Service Project, in which the candidate plans, organizes, and leads a significant community service effort from start to finish.

Dalton met every one of those national standards, and led a community-wide service project that benefited the local Ronald McDonald House.

"The Eagle Scout Rank represents the highest achievement within Scouting America and stands as a symbol of



exceptional leadership, character, and perseverance. Since its introduction in 1912, fewer than 10 percent of all Scouts have earned this distinction, underscoring the level of dedication required. Eagle Scouts are recognized not only for their outdoor skills and Scouting knowledge, but also for their commitment to living by the principles of the Scout Oath and Law in everyday life," said David Self of Scouting America.

Dalton's achievement was formally recognized during the ceremony by several state and local leaders. State Representative Steve Hurst, on behalf of Governor Kay Ivey, presented Dalton with a proclamation and a preserved Alabama state flag. Talladega City Council President Hugh Sims also recognized Dalton on behalf of Mayor Ashton Hall. AIDB President Dr. Dennis Gilliam and ASB Principal Alan Nunn addressed the audience, acknowledging the discipline and responsibility required to reach the Eagle Scout rank.

Dr. Dennis Gilliam, President, Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind added, "Dalton's achievement reflects exactly what we strive for at AIDB—preparing students to lead full, ambitious lives through high expectations paired with meaningful support."

For Dalton's father, sharing the Eagle Scout rank across generations is both rare and deeply personal. The Harris family's connection to AIDB runs just as deep.

"I met my wife here," Donald Harris, Jr. said. "She went to school here. My sister-in-law and brother-in-law went to school here, and I had a Deaf sister who went to school here. This place is the world for our family. That's what it boils down to—the Deaf and Blind community being here."

Harris, Jr. has watched his son balance Scouting, academics, athletics, and student life with steady focus.

"He has worked hard," he said. "He stepped up when he needed to step up and took responsibility for getting things done. Just like we were taught here—if you don't work hard, you can't do what you want to do in life."

Dalton's journey to Eagle Scout unfolded gradually. Like many students, his early years at AIDB required adjustment. Over time, he developed confidence not only through Scouting, but through academic and personal growth. He has earned honor roll recognition, is a member of the track and wrestling teams, and is known among his fellow students as a leader.

"He started here when he was three years old," his grandfather said. "Now he's in tenth grade. He's learned respect. That's something we always teach in Scouts—and it's something he's carried with him."

Scouting leaders echoed that assessment, noting that Dalton met the same expectations required of every Eagle Scout candidate.

"Earning the Eagle Scout Rank demands years of steady progress and personal growth. We are inspired by those Scouts who earn the Eagle Scout Rank. Dalton is a remarkable young man whose perseverance and determination are truly inspiring. The Eagle Scout Rank is not easy to achieve–on average less than 4 out of 100 Scouts will earn the rank. For Dalton and other Scouts with disabilities who earn the Eagle rank, the achievement speaks volumes about the personal strength of their character and it quietly showcases the strength of their support system- their troop, their families, and their community. We are very proud of Dalton, and we are thankful for his involvement in Scouting– we are richer because of his participation and example," Self continued.

Harris is the first ASB student to earn an Eagle Scout honor in more than 30 years. For Dalton, the process reinforced the importance of service and responsibility.

"If you're ever put in a position where you can help people around you," he said, "you should take that opportunity and help them—no matter what."

That pride in earning his Eagle Scout is rooted less in the title itself and more in what it represents: years of effort, accountability, and growth. Supported by his family, his troop, and the AIDB community, Dalton completed a journey that few begin and fewer finish.

Now, multiple generations of the Harris family share another bond besides their mutual connection to AIDB–the lifelong rank of Eagle Scout.

We are strong



Helen Keller School Hosts *First Annual* Powerlifting Tournament

L-R: Paris Kennie, Conrad Chapman, Gabriel Locker, and Keimonta Carr

By Amy Shelly, HKS Principal

During the 2024–2025 school year, Helen Keller School proudly reinstated its powerlifting team, marking an important milestone in the expansion of athletic opportunities for students. The team successfully competed in two tournaments during the year and expressed strong enthusiasm for continuing and growing the program into the 2025–2026 school year.

During the summer months, the school was approached by former powerlifting coach Billy Keel, who proposed the idea of hosting a powerlifting tournament on the Helen Keller School campus. After thoughtful discussion and consideration, school leadership recognized the significant opportunity this would present for student engagement, community outreach, and program visibility. Planning for the event officially began shortly thereafter.



Gabriel Locker in the HKS weight room

On November 8, 2025, Helen Keller School hosted a Powerlifting America–sanctioned tournament on campus. The event featured multiple competitive divisions and welcomed a diverse group of lifters, including Special Olympics athletes, high school competitors, and collegiate athletes. Participants traveled from across Alabama, Tennessee, and Georgia to take part in the competition. In total, more than 40 lifters competed throughout the day, creating an energetic and exciting atmosphere on the Helen Keller School campus.

Due to the overwhelming response and number of registered athletes, the tournament was organized into two separate competitive sessions. The first session focused primarily on Special Olympics athletes and included 22 competitors representing Georgia, Tennessee, and Alabama. Helen Keller School proudly fielded four lifters, while E. H. Gentry contributed two athletes to the competition. Each athlete had the opportunity to compete in three events: bench press, deadlift, and squat. The AIDB athletes performed exceptionally well, with all participants earning medals in their respective divisions.

The second session featured athletes from across the state of Alabama, including competitors from the University of Alabama and Troy University. This session showcased impressive performances and high-level competition. Notably, Stevie Hendrix claimed first place in the Masters 3, 83-kilogram division and set a new Alabama state record in the bench press. The strength and skill on display were remarkable, with deadlift attempts reaching weights of up to 606 pounds.

Throughout the event, the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind's newly acquired food truck was on-site to serve athletes, spectators, and guests. This marked the first time the food truck was utilized at an athletic competition, and it was met with tremendous success and positive feedback from attendees. Overall, the tournament was a significant success for both Helen Keller School and the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind.

The event provided an excellent opportunity to showcase the campus, highlight student and athlete accomplishments, and engage with community members from across the state and surrounding regions. Attendees were able to connect with staff, meet athletes, and learn more about the educational and athletic opportunities offered through AIDB. Commenting on the event's success, AIDB President Dr. Gilliam emphasizes that it does more than highlight skills; it showcases AIDB as "a place of opportunity where all students can be a part of something bigger than themselves. Our students work daily to exceed expectations and defy limitations. Equipped with the right support, they can truly demonstrate their strength and pursue limitless opportunities."

With this vision of strength and support in mind, Helen Keller School anticipates its Second Annual Powerlifting Tournament in the fall of 2026 as it builds on the momentum of this year's inaugural success.



Keimonta Carr practices his deadlift

CHAMPIONSHIP LEGACY



Peter-Joseph 'Scooby' Brownlee drives to the bucket in an ASD victory over Coosa Valley Christian



ASD coach Paul Kulick addresses the team

On winter nights in Talladega, there's a special kind of electricity in the gym at the Alabama School for the Deaf (ASD). It isn't measured in decibels. It's measured in eye contact, hand signals, stomps on the hardwood, and the unmistakable momentum of a program that has spent generations proving something bigger than the scoreboard: that excellence speaks volumes, even in silence.

The action on the court unfolds without sound—but never without intensity.

Basketball has long been one of the most visible athletic programs on ASD's campus. For more than 100 years, the program has operated with a clear expectation: compete at a high level and compete to win. The Silent Warriors are defined by preparation, discipline, and consistency—qualities that have made ASD one of the most successful School for the Deaf basketball programs in the country.

Both the boys' and girls' teams compete in the Alabama High School Athletic Association while also facing Schools for the Deaf from across the region and nation. That dual role has shaped a program accustomed to different environments and varied levels of competition. ASD teams represent Alabama in public-school athletics while also serving as a benchmark within School for the Deaf basketball.

That commitment has produced sustained success. The ASD boys' basketball program has won national championships in 1966, 1986, 1992, 1994, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2008, 2009, 2011, and 2015, along with numerous Mason-Dixon titles. These championships span multiple decades and reflect long-term consistency rather than brief peaks.



Championship banners line the walls of the ASD gym. They mark the program's history and reinforce expectations that are still in place today. Players are taught early that success at ASD is built through daily habits, conditioning, and accountability.

For many years, that standard was shaped under the leadership of Coach Don Hackney, who led the ASD boys' program for 27 years. During his tenure, the Silent Warriors won six national championships and established a culture centered on preparation and collective responsibility. ASD's basketball gym was named in his honor in a ceremony on December 14, 2024.

Dr. Dennis Gilliam, President, Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind, remarked on the coach's legacy at ASB, saying "Coach Hackney helped build a program that emphasized responsibility and preparation. His impact is still evident today."



Hackney's influence continues to shape ASD basketball. Players learn the importance of visual communication, attention to detail, and consistent effort—principles that remain central to the program's identity.

Jason Roop, Principal, Alabama School for the Deaf added, "Coach Hackney believed winning was the result of preparation and discipline. That expectation is still part of how our sports programs operate."

ASD basketball is also defined by how the game is played. Communication on the court is visual and deliberate. Players read spacing, movement, and timing to stay connected. These methods are ingrained early and reinforced through practice. In a sport where communication is constant, ASD athletes adjust naturally. Plays are signaled. Defensive rotations are recognized. Tempo is managed through awareness rather than verbal cues.

That approach has translated across levels of competition. ASD teams travel throughout Alabama and beyond prepared to compete with structure and discipline. The program does not seek accommodation on the court; outcomes are determined by execution.

Assembling championship teams can present challenges, particularly because many student-athletes arrive at ASD without prior connections to teammates. Chemistry and trust are developed through practice and competition, helping the program remain competitive across different eras.

The current ASD teams continue to face demanding schedules that include public-school competition and regional matchups. Student-athletes balance academics, travel, and training as part of the program's expectations.

Juanita Burrow, mother of a current team member Peter-Joseph "Scooby" Brownlee, says that being a part of ASD's basketball team is an inspiration for others. "Scooby is the definition of grit and discipline. In a sport built on communication and split-second reactions, he has developed his own rhythm, leadership style, and competitive edge. He doesn't just overcome obstacles; he outworks them. His resilience, focus, and passion for basketball make him not only a standout player, but an inspiration to everyone watching." Brownlee's resilience is indicative of the work ethic instilled in all

LEFT: Lakendrick Agee sinks the free throw to give the Silent Warriors the lead against Coosa Valley Christian



Coach Don Hackney and his ASD team during one of his trips to the Final Four in Birmingham.

Another Banner Year

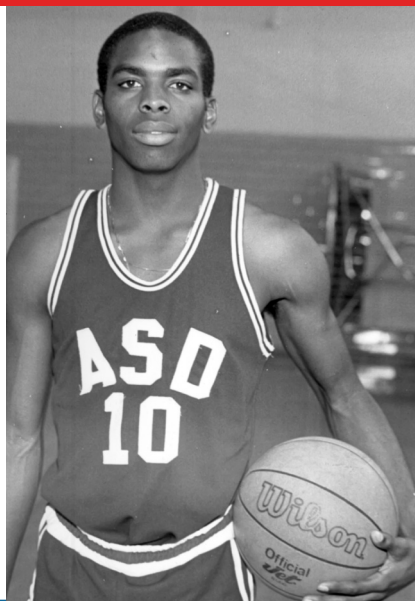
ASD Basketball has collected 11 National Championships

CHAMPIONS 1966 | CHAMPIONS 1986 | CHAMPIONS 1992 | CHAMPIONS 1994 | CHAMPIONS 1996 | CHAMPIONS 1997 | CHAMPIONS 1998 | CHAMPIONS 2008 | CHAMPIONS 2009 | CHAMPIONS 2011 | CHAMPIONS 2015

AIDB student-athletes over generations of competition.

One shining example of that legacy of success is former player Deon Harris, ASD's all-time leading scorer and one of only 15 players in state history to score over 3,000 points. He was a three-time All-American, two-time All-State selection and the Alabama 1A player of the year in 1987.

From current players to All-Americans from generations past, the shared traits of resilience, focus, and passion have led to a century of success for ASD's basketball team, constantly shining a light on AIDB's mission and helping others to see what 'limitless' truly means.



RIGHT: Deon Harris was a three-time All-American, two-time All-State selection and the Alabama 1A player of the year in 1987.

Limitless Leadership

By Jesse Kelley



When Will Burgess talks about leadership, he doesn't describe a single moment or title. He talks about habits—showing up prepared, staying involved, and following through. Many of those lessons, he says, took shape long before he represented Alabama 4-H at the state level. They began at the Alabama School for the Blind.

A junior at ASB and a native of Snead, Alabama, Burgess grew up in a family shaped by agriculture. Both of his parents were raised on family farms and participated in 4-H programs as children. That background made joining 4-H feel natural.

"When I first got involved, I would have been five," Burgess said. "I would have been a Cloverbud, which is the youngest a 4-H'er can be, and it just kind of snowballed from there. It's an organization that has more opportunities than you could possibly know."

But it was his experience at ASB that helped him understand how to make the most of those opportunities. On campus, students are expected to participate fully—in academics, athletics, and student life. Burgess embraced that expectation quickly.

"Without a doubt, Will is probably the top leader in the school," said ASB Principal, Alan Nunn. "Quite often, students come in and feel like they don't fit in somewhere, but Will is a part of everything. If it's going on at ASB, Will's going to be there, and he's going to be involved in it."

Burgess' path to ASB was shaped early by significant medical challenges. At the age of four, he was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Treatment required multiple surgeries and rounds of chemotherapy, leaving him Blind and forcing him to relearn basic motor skills. Recovery was long, but by the time he arrived at ASB, his focus had shifted toward participation and independence.

Will's teachers at ASB see him as a model student who leads by example and shows others that they can overcome any challenges. "When people see all of the things William has done and the obstacles he's had to overcome to get where he is now," ASB teacher Ashley Bridges said, "I think that in itself speaks volumes."

That growth became especially visible through 4-H, serving as a state ambassador and as campus president for ASB's 4-H Club. He has represented the school at statewide events and traveled to Atlanta, Georgia to attend 4-H Congress.

"He's involved in every aspect of 4-H," Nunn continued. "Everywhere he goes, whether it's in Alabama or traveling somewhere else, he takes ASB and AIDB with him."

For Burgess, the appeal of 4-H lies in its range of hands-on experiences.

"I like working with the chickens out in the Ag building," he said, "and preparing for projects like quiz bowls and speeches, and getting to do a lot of community service."

One of the most meaningful opportunities has come through Speak Up Alabama, a 4-H program focused on communication and public speaking. Burgess gravitated toward informative speeches, using them as a way to explain how he works and what he needs as a visually impaired student.

"It really helps to communicate my needs as a visually impaired person," said Will.

Educators have watched that confidence grow over time. Burgess' involvement extends well beyond 4-H. On campus, he manages for the ASB wrestling team and competes in track and field. His presence is consistent across activities.

"Everyone follows Will, regardless of what the activity is," Nunn said. "Everybody feels like Will is their best friend."

Looking ahead, Burgess plans to attend Auburn University and study agriculture, with the goal of turning his passion for 4-H into a career by becoming a 4-H county extension agent. For those who have worked with him, that path feels like a natural extension of what he has already learned.

"I'm very proud of Will," Nunn said. "How can you not be proud of someone who is willing to step out and not let their visual impairment affect what they want to do? Will is a perfect example of someone who can accomplish anything."

Will's 4-H Extension Agent Kim Good echoes what those at ASB have seen in Will, saying "I have known Will his whole

LEFT: ASB student and state 4H representative Will Burgess

life. I have watched him grow and mature and become involved in things, that I always knew he was capable of, but I'm not sure *he* did. I'm at the end of a 26-year career and working with the youth at AIDB is the most rewarding thing I've experienced in my career. I have learned as much from them as they have learned from me."

Will's leadership and service has not gone unnoticed at the state and national levels, Will represents the best of what 4-H can be. "Will's story shows what's possible for young people across the country. Through hands-on learning and strong mentorship, 4-H helps youth build confidence, leadership skills, and real-world experience that prepare them for work and life," said Heather Elliott, Senior Vice President and Chief Development & Marketing Officer at the National 4-H Council.

Casey Mull, Alabama Assistant Director for 4-H's Youth Curriculum & Teaching added, "It's inspiring to see young people like Will find their niche and pursue big goals through Alabama 4-H. Will's achievements, and the doors he's opened through 4-H, show how local programs help young people grow and prepare for what's ahead. I look forward to seeing the impact he will continue to make."

At ASB, leadership is more than just a concept. It is something practiced daily through involvement, responsibility, and consistency. Will Burgess has embodied the ideals taught at ASB and carried them with him throughout Alabama, serving as a living example of what it means to be truly limitless.



Will stands with one of his prize chickens at the Joe Tom Armbrester Agricultural Center

Reaching *Further*

How the RISE Autism Program Expands AIDB's Footprint Across Alabama



Penelope Hernandez RISE Together Preschool student

Perhaps no initiative better illustrates the reach of the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind than the RISE Together Preschool in Decatur, nearly 200 miles from AIDB's central campus in Talladega.

While grounded in the same expectations and instructional approach, RISE Autism expands AIDB's footprint, allowing the institution to serve children and families across North Alabama and strengthen its statewide mission through early intervention, specialized instruction, and sustained support.

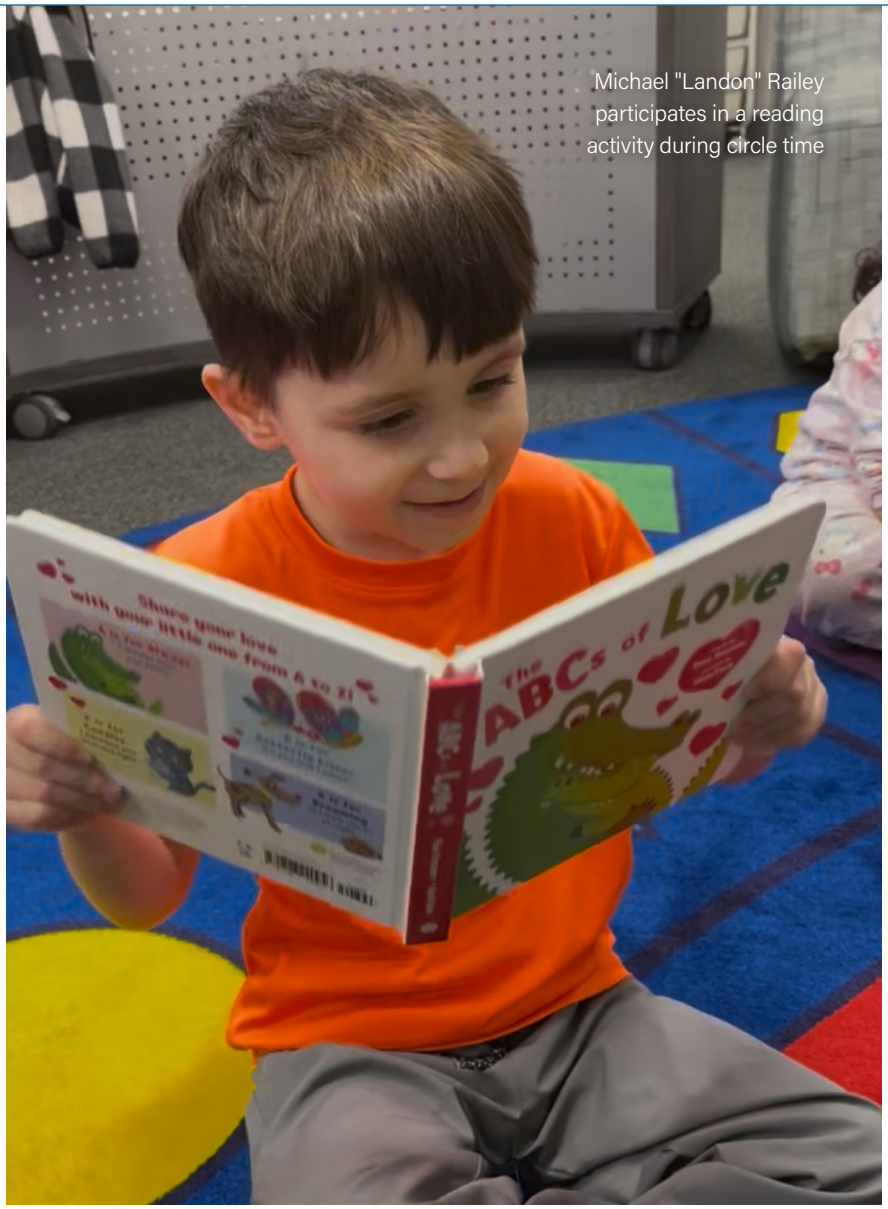
For families, the impact of the RISE Together Preschool is measured less in miles than in moments. First words spoken. New routines established.

Progress that once felt out of reach has become part of everyday life.

For many parents, enrolling in the RISE Together Preschool marks a turning point.

"Having a child that's autistic has been a challenge," said Cayla Rock, a parent who's child is enrolled in the RISE Together Preschool. "The goals he's been able to reach year over year since being here are amazing. About a year ago, I honestly wouldn't know where we would be."

The RISE Together Preschool serves young children with autism spectrum disorder and sensory impairments, providing intensive early intervention during some of the most critical developmental years. The preschool's focus extends beyond academic readiness. Equal emphasis is placed on communication, behavior, and independence, skills that influence every part of a child's life beyond the classroom.



Michael "Landon" Railey participates in a reading activity during circle time

Before entering the preschool, families often describe feeling overwhelmed by uncertainty. Communication may be limited. Progress can feel slow and difficult to measure. Daily routines may be challenging to establish. What the RISE Together Preschool provides is not a single solution, but a structured environment where growth is intentional, consistent, and supported over time.

"When we transferred here, he had maybe less than ten words," said Katelyn Clark, a parent and Alabama School for the Deaf alumna. "Now he's up to 25 words. He's speaking. He's singing. He can communicate his wants and his needs and answer questions that a year ago we couldn't even get out of him."

That progress reshapes daily life at home.

"I want to understand my son," Clark said. "Now I feel happy because I understand what he wants and what he needs."

Those changes are not accidental. The RISE Together Preschool is built on individualized learning plans, close collaboration with families, and consistent reinforcement of skills. Teachers, therapists, and staff work together to ensure continuity between the classroom and the home.

"We bring in occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, physical therapists," said Wendi Glass, Director of AIDB's RISE Autism program. "We want parents to have an understanding, too, so that as we grow here, that growth carries over into the family home."

That approach reflects the philosophy long practiced across AIDB campuses. Expectations remain high, and support is meaningful and individualized.

Although the RISE Together Preschool operates in Decatur, it remains closely connected to AIDB's broader mission and expertise. Staff collaborate across campuses, sharing knowledge and resources while responding to the specific needs of families in North Alabama. The program also supports other AIDB locations, reinforcing a unified standard of instruction and care across the state. For educators, the work is deeply relational.

"There's nothing like this that I've seen," said Josh Cornelius, a parent whose children attend the program. "It's family. They helped us grow, and that's going to carry on for my kids for the rest of their lives."

The impact of RISE Autism extends beyond individual households. Local leaders and educators have recognized the program's role in strengthening early childhood services across the region by meeting families where they are, both geographically and developmentally.

"AIDB is always open to opportunities like this preschool program," Glass said. "We carve out a unique pathway for kids here that they're not going to get everywhere else."

For AIDB, RISE Autism represents an important evolution. It demonstrates that the institution's expertise is not limited by location, but can be applied thoughtfully across Alabama while remaining rooted in the same standards and values. That adaptability is especially important in early childhood education, where timely intervention can shape long-term outcomes.

Skills developed through the RISE Together Preschool, including communication, self-regulation, and independence, form a foundation that supports future learning, whether students continue within AIDB programs, attend local schools, or transition to other educational settings.

Parents often describe a renewed sense of confidence returning to their homes.

"It's a treasure," Cornelius said. "I hope when we leave here, he has a teacher who's just as involved as the teachers he's had here."

For AIDB leadership, RISE Autism reinforces a simple truth.

"We're fulfilling the mission of AIDB," Glass said. "We're breaking barriers and impacting families the way the kids deserve. We're here to show them that this is what possibility looks like."

Nearly 200 miles from Talladega, the RISE Together Preschool carries forward the same principles that define AIDB's work statewide. Students are met where they are. Expectations remain high. Families are supported through moments that shape lives.

For the children and families it serves, the RISE Together Preschool is not an extension of AIDB in name only. It is a clear expression of the institution's expanded footprint and its commitment to serving students across Alabama.



Benjamin Chamberlain participating in a color sorting activity



THE STORY OF ASD'S

Eight-Time BACK-TO-BACK-TO-BACK-TO-BACK Champs

By Carolina Bennett



Student-Athletes (Left to Right): Zayla Cook, Blake Tucker, Chelsey Rhoades, Alonna Lydian, Ciara Motley, Micah Renfroe, Charles Williams, D'Jayla Allen, Elias Lopez, Pedro Garcia, Eli Lewis, Noah Garcia. **AIDB Representatives:** Jackie Smith, Member - AIDB Board of Trustees, Jim Fannin - Head Coach, Jason Roop - ASD Principal, Chip Dobbs, Member - AIDB Board of Trustees, Abel Deuel - ASD Youth Sports Athletic Director, and Dennis Gilliam, Ed.D., AIDB President

AIDB is committed to preparing students to become confident, involved members of their communities. Nearly all of our students participate in extracurricular activities—both academic and athletic—that support personal growth, skill development, and leadership. Many of these opportunities would not otherwise be accessible for our students outside of AIDB, making their participation especially meaningful.

One shining example of this is the ASD Soccer Program, which allows students to challenge themselves physically and be recognized for their athletic abilities. This year, the ASD 12U Recreational Soccer Team—composed of both boys and girls—completed an undefeated season and captured the League Championship title. This is the team's eighth straight championship victory, a testament to the dedication and perseverance of its student-athletes, many of whom have been contributors to multiple championship seasons. Head Coach Jim Fannin says that it is "always a great experience working with the 'Dream Team'... they always work to the best of their abilities by moving forward and learning to play as a team."

The team's success has been a source of pride not only for the players, but also for staff, families, and the broader community. On November 10, 2025, the Talladega City Council moved to formally recognize the ASD 12U Team for their hard work and outstanding season. During the recognition ceremony, the players proudly stood alongside city officials and AIDB representatives as they celebrated their athletic achievement and teamwork.

ASD Principal, Jason Roop, commented that what made this extraordinary season possible was that "for over two decades, Coach Fannin has poured his heart into the ASD youth soccer program and into our students. The past eight years of continued success, capped off by an undefeated season this year, are a testament not only to his coaching ability, but to the relationships, trust, and confidence he builds with our youth." There is no doubt that moments like these will make a lasting impact on every person involved with the program.

"Sports have always been a great outlet for our youth athletes," said Abel Deuel, ASD's Youth Athletic Coordinator. "Jim has done a wonderful job coaching the program to eight-straight championships, many all star appearances, and one state appearance. I hope the youth athletes continue their success and more importantly have fun. As Magic Johnson once said, 'All kids need is a little help, a little hope, and somebody who believes in them.'"

These victories are more than trophies. They serve as a living example of the 'limitless' spirit that defines life on campus at AIDB, reflecting the broader truth that our students are not defined by disability, but by their abilities, determination, and involvement. Through programs like these, students grow in confidence, develop resilience, and discover their true potential beyond any perceived limitations.

AIDB students continually shatter misconceptions about Deaf, Blind, DeafBlind, and multi-disabled individuals by redefining success. Each story, like that of ASD's undefeated "Dream Team", is a reminder that with access, guidance, and belief, our students are capable of extraordinary achievements, and their potential is truly limitless.

LEFT: Pedro Garcia-Ordonez, ASD Student-Athlete

Living Legacy

The Marianna Greene Henry's Special Equestrian Program's Lifelong Impact

By Rhiannon Harris, Administrative Assistant to the Health and Clinical Services Executive Director and Kate Storjohann, MGH Arena's Manager and Lead Program Instructor



Erin Paulson and her favorite horse, Roger

Erin Paulson, a recent graduate of the Alabama School for the Blind, has been a part of AIDB since she was just three years old. Erin was born with a rare eye condition known as bilateral coloboma, which affects her iris, retina, and optic nerve and results in significant visual impairment.

While reflecting on her years at AIDB, Erin recognizes that the Marianna Greene Henry (MGH) Arena, the facility for AIDB's special equestrian program, has been a constant presence throughout her life. Erin states that her earliest memories of the MGH Program include attending physical education and therapy classes at the MGH Arena during her early school years. What began as structured movement and learning soon grew into a lifelong passion for horses.

As Erin progressed through elementary school, her connection to the MGH Arena deepened. At the age of ten, she joined the Riders' Club Team, where she learned horsemanship, horse care, and riding skills. Erin went on to compete in multiple horse shows and the State Special Olympic Games, earning gold, silver, and bronze medals. One of her fondest memories includes participating in festive winter shows, where the horses were decorated with wreaths, lights, and even a little glitter.

In 2024, Erin lost all vision in her right eye and remains with limited vision in her left eye. While some activities, such as tacking a horse and trotting on horseback, became more challenging due to her low vision, Erin never allowed these obstacles to stop her or define her. With practice, perseverance, and support from instructors and teammates, she overcame each challenge. When speaking with Erin, she shared, "I've learned that caring for horses is a team effort." She added that it involves feeding, grooming, and maintaining a clean and safe environment for both the students and the horses. Through these experiences, she learned the power of teamwork, determination, and self-confidence.

Not only has Erin achieved significant equestrian accomplishments, but she has also thrived academically and socially at AIDB. Throughout her school years, Erin notes that being a part of AIDB changed her life by providing essential tools for success, such as braille instruction, assistive technology, and life guidance. Erin also explored a wide range of extracurricular interests, including agricultural science, where she competed in poultry shows that involved hatching, raising, and showing chickens. She went on to compete in numerous poultry shows at 4-H competitions held at both the state and national levels.

Following her sophomore and junior years of high school, Erin participated in the Summer Work Experience Program, spending six weeks each summer working at the MGH Arena. Through this opportunity, she gained hands-on experience caring for horses, maintaining the barn and arena, and supporting daily operations. This experience not only strengthened her skills but also confirmed her desire to build a life working with horses. MGH Arena Manager and Lead Program Instructor, Kate Storjohann mentioned some of their experiences together and said "Erin is passionate about sharing her love of horses with others. We are very proud of all that she has accomplished."

After graduating from ASB in May 2025, Erin was offered a part-time position as a Special Equestrian Assistant and Barn Aide at the MGH Arena. Without hesitation, Erin accepted the position and now works alongside staff and students, sharing her passion for horses and helping current students build confidence, independence, and meaningful connections. Storjohann added that they "are thankful to have her in the MGH family."

When speaking with Erin, she was eager to share about her job and added, "I love teaching students with disabilities about horses. Sharing my passion for horses and helping students connect with them is very rewarding." There is no doubt that her future is bright and she is looking ahead in hopes to become a full-time employee at the MGH Arena and pursue certification as a PATH Instructor. Her long-term goal is to one day become an instructor or barn manager.

Erin's journey is a powerful reflection of what AIDB strives to achieve every day—empowering students to see beyond limitations, build on their strengths, and realize that here, the possibilities are limitless.

The Long Game of Generosity

The Monday Morning Quarterback Club and AIDB are a team that has stood the test of time. By Heather Jeffcoat



HKS Golfer Tierece Wilson, Gold medal winner at the 25th Annual Special Olympics North America Gold Championship

For nearly four decades, the Birmingham Monday Morning Quarterback Club (MMQBC) has been one of the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind's most faithful and impactful partners.

Through its charitable arm, the Quarterbacking Children's Health Foundation, the Birmingham-based organization has contributed more than $500,000 to AIDB since the late 1980s. That support has strengthened programs, expanded opportunities, and helped ensure that students across Alabama have access to experiences that shape both confidence and character.

In 2025, MMQBC's generosity made possible a new chipping and putting green at the Helen Keller School of Alabama. The upgraded practice space provides student-athletes with a dedicated area to refine their skills, prepare for competition, and experience the discipline and joy that come from the game of golf. What may appear to be a simple facility improvement represents something far greater—access, opportunity, and belief in what AIDB students can accomplish.

For students at AIDB, athletics serve as an extension of the classroom, reinforcing life skills that translate well beyond competition. The new putting green offers daily opportunities to practice perseverance, manage setbacks, and celebrate progress.

"Golf teaches patience, focus, and confidence, and those are skills that reach far beyond the game," said John Smyth, 2026 MMQBC Captain. "We're proud to support AIDB's new chipping and putting green because it gives students at the Helen Keller School of Alabama a place to build those skills in a way that's hands-on, inclusive, and empowering."

Founded in 1939 by Zipp Newman, sports editor of The Birmingham News, the MMQBC has long united Alabama's love of athletics with a deeper commitment to children's well-being. For generations, the organization has gathered weekly during football season, building community around sport while channeling that shared passion into meaningful philanthropy. Today, with nearly 800 members, the MMQBC has raised more than $40 million to support children's health and educational initiatives throughout the state.



Left to Right: Tommy Sisson, 2025 MMQBC Captain, Mike Royer, AIDB Foundation Board President, Mark Bryant Tyson, President of the Quarterbacking Children's Health Foundation

Their partnership with AIDB reflects that enduring mission.

Year after year, their generosity equips students with the tools, facilities, and opportunities needed to grow — as athletes, as scholars, and as young men and women preparing for life beyond campus.

The impact of the MMQBC is measured in more than dollars. It is seen in strengthened programs, expanded access to competition, and students who are empowered to set higher goals. It is felt in moments of confidence gained, in skills sharpened through repetition, and in the pride that comes from representing AIDB on a larger stage.

Generational partnerships like this create stability. They allow AIDB to plan boldly, to invest wisely, and to ensure that students across Alabama continue to receive an education enriched by athletics, leadership opportunities, and character development.

AIDB is deeply grateful for a partnership that spans generations and continues to open doors for the students we are honored to serve. Because of the Birmingham Monday Morning Quarterback Club, students at the Helen Keller School of Alabama have a place to practice, to compete, and to grow — today and for years to come.

Christmas Comes Early

Raising Funds in Every Way for Students' Gifts on Christmas Day

By Carolina Bennett



ASB Student Finn Bayles with one of his Christmas gifts

It may seem strange to fundraise for Christmas in the heat of July. While most people are soaking up the sunshine, our team is diligently preparing for our annual Christmas in July fundraiser. This event is more than a summer get-together; it is the driving force behind the joy of Christmas at Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB). Because of this initiative, students from Alabama School for the Deaf (ASD), Alabama School for the Blind (ASB) and Helen Keller School (HKS) are guaranteed personalized gifts tailored to their specific wants and needs.

The Christmas gift opening is undoubtedly one of the highlights of the year for our students. These moments are made possible by the dedication of the Christmas in July committee as well as other volunteers, sponsors, donors, AIDB, and the AIDB Foundation. Your participation at the event ensures that every child receives gifts purchased just for them; a gesture that is especially vital for students who might not otherwise receive presents during the holidays.

"It is such a pleasure to work with the Christmas in July Committee each year. They truly love our students and are always passionate about helping this fundraiser succeed. I have never worked with a more caring, proactive, and dedicated group of volunteers," said Becky Watson, AIDB's Chief Institutional Advancement Officer and Executive Director of the AIDB Foundation.

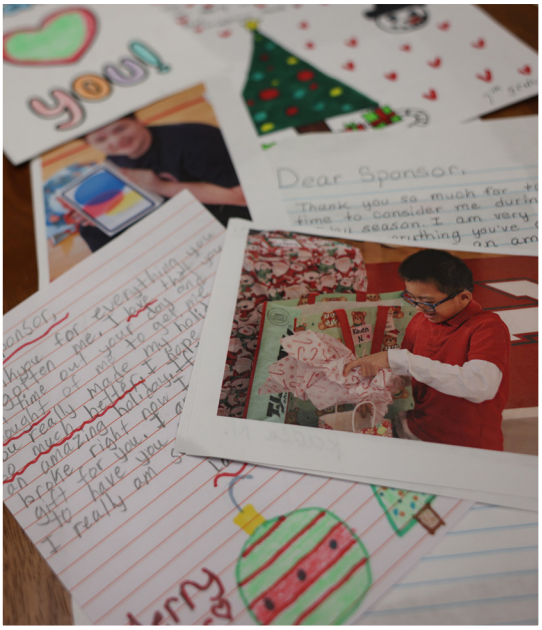
As this event grows each summer, so does its impact. Every dollar raised beyond our previous years allows us to do more for the children we serve. Finn, a longtime student at ASB, notes that these gifts provide an "extra helping hand," explaining that "for some, they may not have Christmas presents at home."

When students were asked what they would say to the supporters who make this possible, Finn shared that the greatest gift is "the gift of sponsorship... there are students who, without AIDB, would not receive anything." When you donate or volunteer, you are directly impacting students like CJ and Lauryn from HKS, who offered the most humble response about receiving Christmas presents: "I would tell them thank you."

That simple "thank you" is the heartbeat of our mission. Your proactive help and support shapes these students' lives, ensuring that every child we serve enjoys an unforgettable Christmas.









By joining forces, we can reach our goal this year of $175,000+ to make sure no student goes without that special toy or present they have been wishing for this Christmas.

Come and make a difference with us at our 17th Annual Christmas in July Fundraiser on July 11, 2026, at Pier 59 on beautiful Logan Martin Lake. Whether you choose to donate, volunteer, or attend, your presence helps students like Finn, CJ, and Lauryn know they are supported by a community that cares—see you there!

TOP LEFT: HKS Student Lauryn Silmon with a Christmas present
TOP RIGHT: A thank you note from ASD student Rihanna
BOTTOM LEFT: Students express their gratitude through dozens of thank you notes to the many generous donors
BOTTOM RIGHT: A room full of gifts for AIDB students

Challenge Aspen



ASB Seniors and Chaperones on the slopes in Aspen, Colorado

ASB Class of 2026 Seniors Travel to Colorado to take on the Ski Slopes

By Alan Nunn, ASB Principal

The senior class at the Alabama School For The Blind (ASB) found themselves on the receiving end of a special senior trip this year. Twelve seniors and six staff members traveled to Snowmass Village, Colorado, during the last week of February for five fun-filled days in a winter wonderland. Snowmass Village is located about 190 miles west of Denver in the Rocky Mountains. Preliminary planning for the trip began just over a year ago following a meeting with representatives from Challenge Aspen.

When the seniors were told about the trip, Thelonious Sylvester said, "I had to cover my mouth in shock! I couldn't believe I would get to ski in Colorado, much less for free!" Shymiriya Broadnax had a similar reaction. She said, "I am excited and thankful for this amazing opportunity, and I feel very lucky and privileged. Not only will this be a learning experience for me, but I get to make some unforgettable memories with some special people. This is the best senior trip in ASB history!"

According to their website, "Challenge Aspen is dedicated to impacting lives through year-round adaptive experiences for people with cognitive and/or physical disabilities." The trip was a joint venture between Challenge Aspen and the AIDB Foundation. It provided our students with an opportunity to do something that most of them would never have had the opportunity to do. Chief Education Programs Officer, Andy Keith shared with gratitude that "This is a monumental opportunity for our students. We are extremely grateful to AIDB and the AIDB Foundation for making opportunities like this a reality."

During the trip, the seniors spent three days and four nights in Snowmass Village. Two of those days were spent on the ski slopes and one day was reserved for shopping and seeing the sights of the surrounding area. It was the opportunity of a lifetime to make memories with their classmates that they will never forget.



North Meets South

Boston University Deaf Education Students Travel to ASD to Help Immerse Bilingual Grammar Curriculum in the Classroom

Written By: Lynn S. Dunn, ASD Master English Teacher and STEM Outreach Coordinator

Fun, Fun, and more Fun!!! That is what Alabama School For The Deaf's (ASD) Graves Hall West students experienced with the Bridges program from Boston University. The program is led by Dr. Todd Czubek, co-developer of the Bilingual Grammar Curriculum (BGC) and head of the Deaf Education program at Boston University, and Dr. Kristin DiPerri, co-developer of the Bilingual Grammar Curriculum and author of the Bedrock Literacy Curriculum. These three programs are internationally recognized as cutting edge programs for providing strategies to teachers of the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing (DHH) for developing English language and American Sign Language skills with DHH students. The Bedrock and the BGC are integral components of the English Language Arts (ELA) and American Sign Language (ASL) instruction at the Alabama School for the Deaf. The Bridges program provided all ELA teachers with five days of intense immersive training in both programs.

15 students from the Deaf Education program at Boston University came and taught classes in English Writing, English Reading, ASL Comprehension, ASL Composition, Math, and Science, for five days. Each class was taught by two students from Boston College, a co-teaching model which demonstrated instruction with small groups, one-on-one, and activities occurring simultaneously.

All classes were filled with hands-on and interactive activities such as role playing, games that developed critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills, and interactive instructional assessments.

Teachers' comments throughout the week were all extremely positive." The training taught me so much! I especially enjoy using the inferencing activities that I learned. They have really helped my students, "said ASD middle school/high school teacher, Kristen Stanley.

Stephanie Hood, ASD high school ELA teacher and parent of an ASD student said, "BGC is an enriching and foundational language of learning for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. We were grateful to have BU students come and teach BGC, ASL, and English. This was a wonderful opportunity for our elementary students to engage, interact, and enrich their language skills."

"I learned so much and got so many ideas about activities I could use in my classroom. I just loved the whole experience," said ASD elementary teacher, Katelyn Wilson.

The teachers had had previous trainings in the Bedrock and BGC programs, but they said this training really helped them solidify their understanding of the two programs and how they complement and support each other and aid in teaching from a bilingual perspective. It was an amazing experience for all.



ASD student Zury Martinez



Student teacher signs for ASD students



Renovated Taylor Hall Is New Pathway to Independent Living

ASD residential students move into their new home in Spring of 2026 By Jason Roop, ASD Principal

Taylor Hall has entered an exciting new chapter at the Alabama School for the Deaf. Recently renovated, the dorm now dedicates half of its space to independent living apartments designed to help students build the real-world skills they need for life beyond ASD. The transformation represents a major step forward in preparing students for independence, responsibility, and confidence.

The newly renovated apartments are fully equipped to mirror real-life living environments. Students residing in this section of Taylor Hall are responsible for managing daily tasks such as cooking, cleaning, budgeting, and time management, while still receiving guidance and support from residential staff. This balance allows students to practice independence in a safe, structured setting.

"This renovation is about more than just a building upgrade—it's about preparing our students for adulthood," said Jason Roop. "Taylor Hall gives students the opportunity to experience what independent living looks like while still having the safety net of campus support."

Students have already expressed excitement and pride in their new independent living spaces. Lakendrick Agee, a senior, shared, "I am really excited to be almost on my own. I wish I had more time, but I'm thankful for the opportunity to practice living







independently before I graduate. The first thing they told me about this dorm was that I would have to pay mock rent!" Experiences like these are building confidence, responsibility, and a stronger sense of ownership as students learn to manage their daily routines and prepare for life after ASD.

According to Marcus Washington, ASD Student Life Director the independent living model is a powerful learning tool. "This environment allows students to practice essential life skills every day," Washington said. "They're not just being taught independence—they're living it. That hands-on experience makes a lasting impact."

The renovation of Taylor Hall aligns with ASD's mission to educate and empower students in all areas of life, not just academics. By creating intentional spaces like these apartments, ASD continues to lead in innovative programming that supports student growth beyond the classroom.

TOP: TV room/lounge LEFT: Study Room
RIGHT: Individual Independent Boy's Room

"This project reflects our commitment to meeting students where they are and helping them grow into capable, confident adults," said Jason Roop. "Taylor Hall provides a bridge between school life and the responsibilities students will face after graduation."

As students settle into their new apartments, the impact of Taylor Hall's renovation is already evident. The independent living spaces are fostering responsibility, confidence, and pride—key ingredients for success after ASD. With projects like this, the Alabama School for the Deaf continues to create meaningful opportunities that prepare students for life, independence, and success.

A New Route to Independence

Critical Transportation Now Possible Statewide Thanks to C.A.R.S App

By Donte' Little, Assistant Director, AIDB Special Projects

Access to transportation is critical for individuals with disabilities, especially those who are non-drivers. Engaging in one's community and having access to healthcare, education, employment, and social activities is pivotal to independence, inclusion, and overall quality of life. Alabama is the most car-dependent state in the United States with approximately 5 million registered vehicles, and over 200,000 miles of roadway. However, although Alabama has a number of metropolitan areas, the state is still predominantly rural with limited or fragmented access to all areas of the state.

"Living in Alabama has its perks; I can go hiking or go to the beach within a couple of hours. However, as a non-driver, getting a ride from one place to another is not always easy," said Jonesti Steele-Averitte of Oxford, a University of Alabama Alumni and Intern and is a client served by.

To address the transportation needs of Alabamians with vision and hearing differences, the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) has taken the driver's seat to improve access to the entire state. Through its statewide network of Regional Centers, AIDB provides access to educational, employment, medical, social service, and community functions in all 67 counties in Alabama. With funding from a $100,000 American Honda Manufacturing Co., Inc., award, and a $1.7 million American Rescue Plan Act subaward through the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS), AIDB has expanded its current transportation services by adding close to three dozen accessible vehicles to its fleet, and developed a new transportation software named C.A.R.S. (Community Access and Ride Service).

The C.A.R.S. platform includes both web-based and mobile app interfaces for managing transportation services. Users can request, schedule, cancel and track the status of their rides. AIDB staff can also manage transportation services based on Regional Center locations across the state, creating access to more communities and resources.

"I am no stranger to having to ask for rides--it is a part of life for a person who is Blind. However, being able to schedule rides independently through technology or an app is a game changer for me, as well as my non driving clients," said Dena Dodd of Decatur, ADRS Field Supervisor for Blind and Deaf Services.

As of October 2025, AIDB has provided over 3,687 transportation services to more than 3,882 Alabamians and is expected to make an even larger impact by the end of 2026. With its 10 Regional Centers strategically placed throughout the state, AIDB is meeting the unique needs of each person where they need it the most-- in their home communities. Regardless of one's differ-ability or address, AIDB has C.A.R.S available for use. For more information about C.A.R.S. or to schedule transportation services, please reach out to any AIDB Regional Center by visiting www.aidb.org.



ABOVE: Nathan Wright uses the C.A.R.S. app to pick up prescriptions



Jonesti Steele-Averitte uses the C.A.R.S. Transportation software to go to her local Walgreens to pick up needed goods.

The Journey of Cole and Conner Howell

From AIDB to Impactful Careers

By Heather Jeffcoat

Twin brothers Cole Howell and Conner Howell share a remarkable story of growth, resilience, and purpose, rooted in their experiences at the Alabama School for the Blind (ASB) and the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB). Their paths diverged into unique careers, but their values and gratitude for AIDB unite them.

Both brothers, who are ASB Class of 2018, recall the transformative power of AIDB. Cole reflects, "AIDB personnel helped to provide accessible materials, helping to ensure that I received an education comparable to that of my peers." He credits extracurricular activities—track and field, Space camp, band, drama club—for building social skills and independence: "AIDB provided me with opportunities to build my social skills, and increase my independence, through extracurricular activities comparable to those performed by my sighted peers."

Conner echoes this sentiment: "AIDB taught me there are resources out there for Blind and visually impaired students to become successful in their desired professions. It also equipped me with assistive technology, as well as how to communicate effectively with peers, faculty, and staff which is an integral part of my work today."

Their journeys after graduation from Troy University led to meaningful careers. Cole became an Outreach Vocational Evaluator at E.H. Gentry, inspired by his experiences: "I realized that a career in rehabilitation would be a rewarding career whereby I could positively impact the lives of others with disabilities, helping them to maximize their employability and independence."

He continues to grow professionally, pursuing advanced degrees and certifications, and shares, "It is empowering to me to help turn student dreams into educational and vocational realities."

Conner found his calling in journalism: "Being in this position allows me to not only keep my communities informed but be a voice for the voiceless and help make a difference." He describes his work as a reporter to "set an example for those who are to come after me."

Both brothers emphasize the importance of self-advocacy, perseverance, and giving back. Cole states, "AIDB has taught me the importance of self-advocacy, independence, perseverance, and resilience. Hence, it is my mission to instill these qualities in the consumers whom I serve during the vocational evaluation process."

Conner adds, "AIDB also gave me freedom to know what it was like to no longer be an outsider or someone who was seen as different while in school. It leveled the playing field so that people were seen as who they are as people rather than be judged by barriers or limitations."

Their hopes for the future are rooted in advocacy and empowerment. Cole shares, "It is my mission to continue advocating for the independence of persons with disabilities. I strive to be a mentor and role model, helping to iterate that it is possible to live a fulfilling and meaningful life, positively contributing to the good of society, even if one happens to have a disability."

Conner wishes for AIDB to "continue to thrive and give students around the state opportunities for growth and success just like it did for me."

The Howell brothers' stories remind us that with the right support, determination, and belief in one's potential, barriers can be overcome and dreams realized. As Cole says, "It is my hope that all of us here at AIDB will continue to believe in the limitless potential of the consumers whom we serve."



Top Left: The Howell brothers graduating from ASB.
Bottom Left: With their mother at an ASB Track meet.
Right: On a recent vacation to Scotland



Campus Snapshot

Elijah Stinson plays at Helen Keller School.



ASD student Liam Green gets a check up from AIDB's Elizabeth Turner, RN

Supporting the Whole Student

By Rhiannon Harris, Administrative Assistant to the Executive Director of Health and Clinical Services

How HCS is Impacting Students in all Aspects of Life

At the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB), student success is built on more than academics alone. Behind every classroom achievement is a network of dedicated professionals working to support students' health, independence, and overall well-being. The Health and Clinical Services (HCS) department plays a vital role in ensuring students have the care, tools, and support necessary to thrive in their educational environment. Professionals within HCS are continuously seeking innovative tools, strategies, and techniques to help students achieve their goals. Extending beyond clinical care, the HCS team emphasizes collaboration, education, and advocacy for each student.

Services include coordinating evaluations, providing teacher consultations, participating in Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, managing prescribed medications, and securing adaptive equipment and supplies. Together, these efforts help create a strong foundation for every student's success.

COMPREHENSIVE CARE ON CAMPUS

AIDB is uniquely equipped to provide a wide range of medical and therapeutic services on campus. This approach allows students to receive care in a familiar, supportive environment without the need to travel off campus. All AIDB students have access to services ranging from low vision aids to a fully functioning nursing clinic that is staffed whenever school is in session.

The Health Center is supported by around-the-clock registered nurses and licensed practical nurses and is fully equipped to accommodate students who may require additional medical care. Traci Morrow, a board-certified Family and Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner, serves as the Executive Director of Health and Clinical Services. She oversees daily physical and psychiatric care, conducts regular rounds, and remains on call for emergencies. Additionally, the nursing staff maintains close communication with parents and guardians, providing timely health updates and collaborating on treatment decisions. The nursing team also administers medications prescribed by students' home physicians and assists with annual Medicaid physical examinations.

As part of AIDB's primary care services, residential students also receive dental care through the fully equipped on-campus dental clinic. Through a Collaboration with the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Dentistry and AIDB's on-staff dental hygienist, students attend dental clinics in a professional atmosphere. The clinic provides routine cleanings, X-rays, fillings, minor procedures, and emergency dental services, ensuring students' oral health needs are met quickly and efficiently.

Time spent at the clinic is never considered wasted; rather, it is an opportunity to provide the nurturing care that helps our students become the best versions of themselves.

SUPPORTING COMMUNICATION AND SENSORY ACCESS

HCS plays a critical role in supporting students' communication and sensory needs through specialized audiology, speech, and low vision services.

The Audiology Department, led by Dr. Kristen DeLauney, Au.D., provides comprehensive hearing services including evaluations, hearing aid fittings and repairs, and consultation with schools across the state. The team also recommends classroom sound systems and personal FM devices to ensure students have optimal access to sound in their learning environments.
The Speech Therapy Department is staffed by nationally certified Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) who serve students across all programs. Through individualized evaluations and therapy tailored to each student's needs, therapists deliver engaging and effective sessions using games and innovative strategies. In addition to direct services, speech therapists pursue advanced professional development and provide outreach services and consultations to public schools.

Dr. DeLauney comments on the importance of the program saying that "through audiology, speech-language pathology, and low vision services, our department addresses the hearing, vision, and communication needs of our students." She adds that this is extremely beneficial and provides "individualized support, assistive devices, technology, and programming. Our team helps ensure students have equitable access to learning and the opportunity to succeed."

The Low Vision Department partners with the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) School of Optometry to deliver high-quality vision care directly on campus. Students receive vision assessments, eyeglass prescriptions, and digital imaging for physician consultations. Regular on-campus clinics, including visits from an ophthalmologist specializing in unique conditions—ensure students benefit from expert care and state-of-the-art technology without ever leaving campus.

When there is a need to be met, AIDB ensures that every student is given access to tools needed to amplify their communication skills. This is evident through the work that the department provides day in and day out. Dr. DeLauney adds that she is "proud to lead a dedicated team whose passion for their work and commitment to AIDB's mission are evident every day." It is because of our dedicated staff that AIDB students are given what is needed to have conversations necessary to everyday life.

MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

The Psychology Department supports students' emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs through individual and group counseling services. Counselors and social workers collaborate closely with teachers, job coaches, vocational rehabilitation staff, and families to develop strategies that best support each student.

The department conducts psychological, behavioral, and emotional evaluations and provides ongoing support in areas such as conflict resolution, independent living skills, grief, coping strategies, and behavioral challenges. This collaborative, student-centered approach ensures emotional well-being remains a cornerstone of educational success at AIDB.

BRIDGING LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Access to information is essential for families, and HCS works to ensure language is never a barrier. Spanish interpreting services are available to support communication between school staff and families during meetings, phone conferences, referrals, and Early Intervention services.

In addition, translation services are provided for essential documents, including IEPs, newsletters, monthly bulletins, weekly communications, homework notices, event information, and family handbooks. These services help ensure Spanish-speaking families remain informed, engaged, and fully connected to their child's educational journey at AIDB.

BUILDING INDEPENDENCE THROUGH THERAPY AND ADMISSIONS SUPPORT

Within HCS, the Admissions Office, directed by Mandy Griffin, serves as the first point of contact for families interested in enrolling their child in one of AIDB's programs, including the RISE Together Preschool Program and the three K–12 programs: the Alabama School for the Blind, the Alabama School for the Deaf, and the Helen Keller School. The admissions team is dedicated to guiding families through the enrollment process and invites them to tour the campus to experience firsthand what makes AIDB a special place, and, to many, a home. Griffin comments on the work that is being done in the department and says "our goal in Admissions is to look beyond the application and truly understand the student so we can support the family with making the best educational decision for their child." For many families, the guiding hand of the admissions team is what helps them obtain access to necessary resources.

Once enrolled, students benefit from a range of therapeutic services designed to foster independence. Occupational Therapy focuses on daily living skills such as dressing, eating, and classroom participation, with hands-on training tailored to each student's abilities. Physical Therapy is integrated into students' daily routines, helping improve mobility, balance, coordination, and access to their environments. Together, these services enhance students' independence and overall quality of life.

Freedom Center For The Blind

Isaac Beavers, AFCB Executive Director and Anil Lewis, Executive Director of Blindness Initiatives for the National Federation of the Blind

Prioritizing Choice and Excellence in Blindness Training

The Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) is a recognized leader in providing comprehensive education, rehabilitation, and employment services for individuals who are Deaf, Blind, DeafBlind, and multidisabled. In 2025, AIDB served over 31,000 people across their lifespan, driven by a mission to provide superior quality programs that refuse to let adversity limit an individual's potential. One of these programs is the Alabama Freedom Center for the Blind (AFCB), located in Decatur, AL. AFCB serves as a residential training facility for adults who are Blind or Low Vision. It is an intense, nine month, full immersion program. Here, participants come to realize that their lack of eyesight does not take anything away from who they are as an individual or their capacity to reach their full potential.

Central to AFCB's adult rehabilitation is the understanding that different philosophical approaches—specifically Traditional Training and Structured Discovery—offer unique pathways to independence. At their core, both programs share similar objectives, but they each contain distinct practices to achieve the ultimate goals, proving that blindness is not a tragedy and helping impacted individuals attain maximum independence.

One similarity is that Traditional Training and Structured Discovery tools and techniques were developed from lived experiences of people who were Blind and Low Vision. Acceptance of blindness, confidence-building, and skills acquisition are key components of both models. Anil Lewis, National Federation of the Blind (NFB) Executive Director for Blindness Initiatives, emphasizes the value of having access to both models. While Traditional Training assisted his college graduation, he credits Structured Discovery at the Louisiana Center for the Blind for elevating his confidence and skills to a higher level.

The core training classes for both approaches are: Braille, Independent Travel, Assistive Technology, and Home Management. Job Readiness is also incorporated into the curriculum. Specific programs can train professionals in these skills through university settings and apprenticeships.

Techniques are where Traditional Training programs and Structured Discovery diverge. Traditional Training approaches often utilize an individual's remaining vision to help them obtain greater independence through the use of devices and modifications, such as magnifiers, large print, lighting, and contrasting colors. These programs also teach non-visual skills, but they do not require that students adhere strictly to these methods.

Structured Discovery emphasizes non-visual techniques through the mandatory use of learning shades (sleep shades), white canes, and cognitive problem-solving. It focuses on experiential learning, problem-solving, and confidence-building through manual skills mastery. The purpose is to free students from relying on their limited vision. Non-visual skills mastery promotes confidence and safety.

AIDB facilitates this "Informed Choice" by offering diverse programs in partnership with Vocational Rehabilitation. E. H. Gentry Facility (EHG) in Talladega, offers traditional rehabilitation and employment training to participants across Alabama and throughout the Southeast. Rindarius Pollard, current EHG student says, "I really like the Modern Manufacturing Program that Gentry offers."

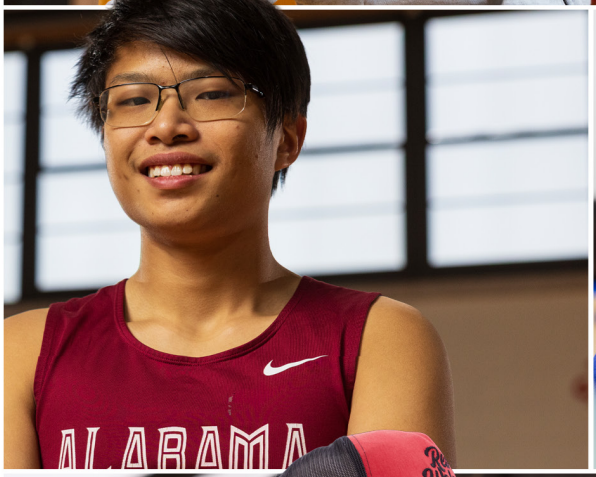
Alabama Freedom Center for the Blind (AFCB), Decatur, AL: Offers a unique training model that promotes a philosophy that utilizes non-visual instruction across Alabama and throughout the Southeast. "I felt like the Freedom Center would challenge me, and I was impressed by the facilities," says Kimberly Chichester, a graduate and AFCB employee.

By providing both traditional and discovery learning-based models, AIDB ensures individuals with visual impairments are not limited. Whether a student chooses the visual-assistive tools of Traditional Training, or the immersive non-visual mastery of Structured Discovery, AIDB prioritizes every person's right to choose the path that best fits their life goals.

Campus Snapshots













AIDB At A Glance

Upcoming Events Across AIDB



APRIL 17: SPRING CAR WASH

Join us on the lawn in front of Johnson Hall at ASD on Friday April 17th, for a fun day of shopping and suds! Our ASD Senior High students will be hosting a yard sale and a car wash. The proceeds from the yard sale benefits the class of 2027 and the car wash proceeds will benefit the class of 2028. Your support makes a huge difference for our students—and you'll leave with a sparkling car and some great finds!

APR 25-29: ASD ROBOTICS AND DRONE COMPETITION

The ASD Robotics and Drone team will travel to the Great Wolf Lodge in Colorado Springs, Colorado for their competition. The Drone Team will compete on April 25th - 26th and the High School Robotics team will compete on April 28th - 29th. Cheer on our teams from afar as they represent ASD on the national stage!





MAY 6: ASB SPRING CONCERT

You don't want to miss the delightful sounds of the ASB Concert Band at their Spring Recital. Join us in supporting our Band students and their hard work at The Oliver Hall Auditorium on ASB's Campus at 6 pm.

MAY 22: AIDB GRADUATIONS

Baccalaureate (all schools) - 10AM
HKS Graduation: Woods Hall Auditorium on the HKS Campus - 1PM
ASD Graduation: McFarlane Auditorium on the ASD Campus - 3PM
ASB Graduation: Oliver Hall Auditorium on the ASB campus - 6PM





MAY 31 - JUNE 5: SUMMER ENRICHMENT CAMPS

AIDB hosts eligible students for tuition-free, overnight Enrichment Camps at the Alabama School for the Blind (ASB) or the Alabama School for the Deaf (ASD). Each camp is designed to provide engaging experiences that combine recreation, academics, creative arts, and fun field trips in a supportive and inclusive environment. Rising 1st–12th grade students who are Deaf, Blind, hard of hearing or visually impaired and not currently attending ASB or ASD are eligible. To learn more, email admissions@aidb.org or call 1-800-532-4622.

JULY 11: CHRISTMAS IN JULY

Join us on July 11, at Pier 59 on Logan Martin Lake for AIDB's 17th Annual Christmas in July Fundraiser. This event makes Christmas extra special for AIDB students.



OPPOSITE PAGE TOP (L-R): Skyler Powell, Pedro Garcia-Ordonez, and Elian Brockman, ASD,
2nd Row: Santan Williams, HKS 3rd Row Left: Rafael Gapud, ASD, 3rd Down Right: Gunner Hartman, ASD
Bottom Left: Davis Brakefield, ASB student, Bottom Right: Avaeya Hawkins, ASD student

Momentum

Updates from the AIDB President's Staff



Jessica Edmiston

JESSICA EDMISTON

CHIEF ADULT PROGRAMS OFFICER

The Office of Field Services' statewide network of Regional Centers continues to connect Alabamians to the tools they need through the Alabama Telecommunications Access Program (ATAP). This program provides free, loaned telecommunications devices to eligible Alabamians who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Blind, Low Vision, DeafBlind, or have unique speech needs. This past year, ATAP served 577 consumers across 60 counties, distributing 583 devices throughout the state by helping individuals stay connected, independent, and engaged in their communities. Contact us for more information. https://www.aidb.org/adult-services/regional-centers



Amanda Fuller

AMANDA FULLER

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT

We have heard the phrase, “life goes on” all our lives and we know this to be true. Some days life is more difficult than others, but it moves on. So it is with Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB). No matter what happens today, life goes on and AIDB moves on with or without us. We have completed a few months of 2026. We have many exciting events to look forward to before the school year ends in May. Let’s make the most of every day in order to have wonderful memories.



Andy Keith

ANDY KEITH

CHIEF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS OFFICER

THE CHAMPIONSHIP GAME: Looking back at the first half of the game, a lot was accomplished, but as any good coach knows, the second half dictates the outcome of the game. As AIDB enters the second half of the game, a lot of excitement is generated and one of the key components to a win for AIDB is summer camps. As summer camp planning and preparation begins, the excitement increases. Summer camps provide opportunities for students across the state and potentially the region to come for one - three weeks and experience top quality instruction, STEM activities, fun trips, experience the AIDB Way and most importantly develop and foster new relationships. Summer camps are important events for AIDB and provide exciting times and experiences for students who attend.



Kelley Park

KELLEY PARK

CHIEF HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICER

AIDB Human Resources personnel conducted training for all managers and supervisors on January 8 and January 15, engaging more than 100 AIDB managers on relevant topics including onboarding, communication, job descriptions, Title VII and Title IX, the new Alabama Paid Parental Leave Act, corrective documentation, performance evaluations, background checks, on-boarding contractors, active listening, and FMLA and ADA. In addition, the Human Resource team partnered with The Center for Creative Leadership and provided two-day on site training for our newest cohort of High Potential Staff on leadership competencies.

JONATHAN SHERBERT

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ALABAMA INDUSTRIES FOR THE BLIND

Necktie production has long been a proud tradition at Alabama Industries for the Blind, and we are excited to continue building on that legacy. We are expanding our necktie operations with the addition of two LIBA machines, which will allow us to increase our production capacity. In addition, AIB is helping to design new equipment to make the tie pressing area more accessible for visually impaired staff—further enhancing safety and efficiency while advancing our mission.



Jonathan Sherbert



Becky Watson

BECKY WATSON

CHIEF INSTITUTIONAL ADVANCEMENT OFFICER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR AIDB FOUNDATION

The Office of Institutional Advancement and AIDB Foundation continue to raise funds, share the AIDB story, and support the mission of AIDB. The Foundation was blessed through the generosity of donors, partnerships of other Foundations and non-profits and Corporate sponsors to be able to contribute more than $1.3 million in funding opportunities directly to all of AIDB during 2024-25. What a wonderful impact we are making on the lives of those we serve together each and every day. Thank you for your selfless giving to allow us the opportunity to help our students, clients and families understand that they can achieve great things! Please join us for our Birmingham fundraiser on April 2 at The Club and our Christmas in July fundraiser on July 11 at Pier 59 on Logan Martin Lake. For more information, email me at Watson.becky@aidb.org.



Joey Hutto

JOEY HUTTO

CHIEF FACILITIES AND CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT OFFICER

The Physical Plant Department is rapidly making improvements to enhance our facilities for students and staff. AIDB-North Student Activity Center is in the final stages: work includes placing furniture, finishing landscaping, setting up kitchen equipment, and completing the maple wood gym floor. Taylor Hall at the ASD campus has been fully renovated and features an independent living wing for boys, a high school boys' wing, a new game room, study room, and rear porch to serve as a student hub. For enhanced safety, the installation of the fire alarm system at E. H. Gentry is being finalized. Upon completion, AIDB will achieve 100 percent fire alarm coverage across all student-occupied spaces. I want to close by expressing my utmost gratitude to the staff and students of AIDB, as I have made a career change this February. I have been blessed to have been placed at AIDB, to serve with a dynamic staff and be a part of helping our students. AIDB is family and, most of all, I will cherish the relationships that I have made at this incredible place.

MARK RICHENDERFER

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

2026 is off to a great start! Our team has hit the ground running as we prepare for the go-live of our new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system in April. We are also pleased to welcome two new members to our team: Jared Pointer, Controller, and Paul Shelly, who has transferred into the role of Co-Director of Purchasing and Warehouse. In addition, the State Auditors are currently on-site conducting our annual audit. Despite everything underway, we remain fully committed to supporting you. Please don't hesitate to let us know, "How can we help YOU?"



Mark Richenderfer



Kyle Gregg

KYLE GREGG

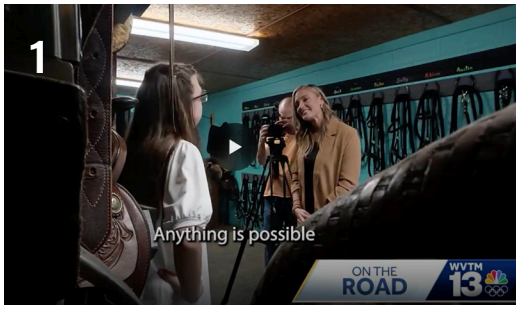
CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER

Our OIT team is steadily modernizing AIDB's infrastructure to better serve our remarkable community. These ongoing system upgrades are about more than just hardware; they are vital steps in enhancing accessibility and expanding independence for our students and consumers. By leveraging cutting-edge technology, we're ensuring that AIDB's mission remains at the forefront of innovation and excellence.

In The News

By Heather Jeffcoat

Just some of AIDB's Many Headline-Making Moments



NBC 13 - MGH Feature

NBC 13's Brittany Decker traveled to Talladega to do a feature on the Marianna Greene Special Equestrian Program. She interviewed ASB alumni Erin Paulson and spent time with Pat Greene, who founded MGH in honor of his daughter Marianna Greene.

Watch the Video



ALFA NEIGHBORS SERIES

Armbrester Center Plants Opportunity for AIDB Students

ALFA came to campus to learn more about the Joe Tom Armbrester Center and how it impacts children and adults with disabilities.

Read The Article



WBRC6 - Abilities At Work Feature

AIDB was featured as a part of WBRC's special on employment for adults with disabilities. Dr. Dennis Gilliam, Jason Roop, and Rod Skene were interviewed about training and employment for individuals with disabilities, and AIB employee and Blind Worker of the Year Jena Smith, shared about her experience working on AIDB's campus.

Watch the Video

More To Know

Learn more about some of this issue's articles with AIDB video features



Watch the Video

REACHING FURTHER

AIDB's Decatur's RISE Autism Program



Watch the Video

LIMITLESS LEADERSHIP

ASB's Will Burgess and 4-H Leadership

AIDB Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind
Deaf. Blind. Limitless.

P.O. Box 698
Talladega, AL 35161

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

GOOD CHEER AT THE PIER!

17th Annual

CHRISTMAS IN JULY

Fundraiser for Students

JULY 11, 2026 • PIER 59

Hosted by The Christmas in July Committee

Proceeds provide holiday gifts
FOR AIDB STUDENTS

