



News of Books

Access To Books Helps Achieve Academic Dreams

(NAPSA)—Being totally blind since birth did not prevent Kristen Witucki from achieving her academic dreams.

The Pine Hill, New Jersey, native received the National Achievement Award program's 2004 Mary P. Oenslager Scholastic Achievement Award. The award is given annually by Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic to college seniors with visual impairments who have demonstrated exceptional scholarship, leadership, enterprise and service to others. Witucki has been an RFB&D member for many years and served as an advocate and a spokesperson.

RFB&D, a nonprofit organization based in Princeton, New Jersey, serves more than 137,000 members with a library of 100,000 recorded textbooks. Students with disabilities that make reading challenging or impossible rely on RFB&D to access the printed page and achieve educational success. All of the library's titles are recorded by volunteers.

At 13, Witucki was asked to join RFB&D's Consumer Advisory Council. This was her first exposure to professional adults who were blind or who had learning disabilities, but this early contact helped inspire her to make a difference in the lives of special-needs students.

According to RFB&D President & CEO John Kelly, "Kristen is a



Kristen Witucki has been honored for her exceptional scholarship, leadership and service to others.

role model for all students, regardless of disability."

After graduating as salutatorian of her high school class, Witucki went to Vassar College, where she majored in English and received a New York State Teaching Certification. In addition, Witucki taught high school English, mentored blind students and worked extensively with people with learning disabilities.

According to a study published in Learning Disabilities Quarterly, students with learning difficulties showed a 38 percent increase in reading comprehension after using RFB&D's audio textbooks on CD. The study was conducted by Johns Hopkins University to evaluate how effective these recorded textbooks were in

helping secondary students with learning problems.

In the Johns Hopkins research project, nearly 100 special education students participated in the eight-week study that focused on the accessibility of the district's ninth-grade American government textbook. Students were assessed by short-term and long-term comprehension tests. A pretest and a posttest, developed by the textbook test maker, helped determine how the course of the study affected students' comprehension.

"The findings are important because they demonstrate that students who need alternative ways to access high-content material can experience success," said Michael Rosenberg, professor, Department of Special Education, Johns Hopkins University, following the release of the study in 2003. "Also important is the kind of partnership between a national nonprofit organization and a team of university researchers, because it enables us to conduct applied research that directly impacts the lives of children."

Giving back to education is Witucki's goal as she pursues a master's degree in special education at Teacher's College, Columbia University.

"RFB&D will continue to be my main resource for achievement and inspiration," says Witucki. "I know my relationship with RFB&D will be lifelong."