



A quarterly letter to friends of the Breaking New Ground Outreach Program

Breaking New Ground celebrates 25 years of service

It has been 25 years since an Indiana farmer with a disability called Purdue looking for assistance in regaining access to his tractor. That call, which was routed to Dr. Bill Field, sparked the beginning of Breaking New Ground



(BNG). Though that particular farmer has now retired from farming, BNG continues to serve many others like him, not only in Indiana but also across North America. As the program passes the quarter-century milestone, we invite our readers to reflect with us on some of the significant accomplishments and events in the program's history.

Early years

At the time of BNG's inception, few other programs had attempted to address the challenges of farming with a disability. There was no federal funding structure for such projects, so during the 1980s BNG operated through a variety of grants and donations, includ-



ing start-up funding from Deere & Company and several years of funding from the U.S. Department of Education's NIDRR program. Then in 1990, Congress passed the farm bill that authorized the National AgrAbility Program for farmers with disabilities. The BNG Outreach Program, which provides

technical assistance to Indiana farmers, served as a prime model for this program. The BNG Resource Center—established to develop technical resources, conduct research on rural disability issues, and respond to information needs outside Indiana—functioned as the National Project leader from 1991-2000, along with National Easter Seals.

Direct services

Through the years, BNG programs have provided no-cost, on-site assessments to thousands of farmers and ranchers in Indiana and other states. In many cases, these visits have been piv-



otal in the future of the particular farm and farm family. In addition to direct technical assistance to individuals, program staff members have also provided direct services to hundreds of rural businesses, churches, county fairgrounds, and Extension offices.

In 1996, the BNG Resource Center established a nationwide, toll-free helpline, thereby providing another important avenue of service to consumers and professionals. More than 16,000 calls have been received on the helpline from nearly every state and several foreign countries. In addition to the helpline, BNG has received thousands of letters, emails, and visits from farmers, ranchers, and agricultural workers seeking to increase their independence.

Resource development

The BNG Resource Center has produced more than 50 print, audiovisual, and electronic resources covering a wide range of topics related to disability in agriculture and rural life. The



Breaking New Ground newsletter, published between 1982 and 2000, included 28 technical reports that targeted specific disability-related issues, such as farming with a spinal cord injury. The four editions of *Agricultural Tools, Equipment, Machinery, and Buildings for Farmers and Ranchers with Disabilities (The Toolbox)*, including a CD version released in 2004, have been some of the program's most highly acclaimed resources. The award-winning *To Everything There is a Season* kit for rural caregivers has spawned numerous caregiving workshops in several states. The *Perfect Fit* and *Bridging Horizons* educational resources were designed and introduced to en-



courage full inclusion of rural youth with disabilities in traditional 4-H and FFA programs.

Since the early 1980s, BNG has also invested significant time and energy in conducting conferences and workshops related to disability in agriculture,

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Look for BNG at:

Fort Wayne Farm Show
January 18-20

Louisville National Farm
Machinery Show
February 16-19

BNG Project Leader: Bill Field

Program Manager: Paul Jones

Rural Rehab Specialist: Steve Swain

Swain certified as Assistive Technology Practitioner

The Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America (RESNA), recently announced that Steve Swain, the Rural Rehabilitation Specialist for the Breaking New Ground Outreach Program, has fulfilled all eligibility requirements and passed the credentialing exam necessary to become a certified Assistive Technology Practitioner (ATP). These

requirements include a combination of relevant education and experience, as well as adherence to a code of ethics and rules as outlined in the RESNA Standards



of Practice. RESNA has developed this voluntary credentialing process in order to ensure consumer safeguards and increase consumer satisfaction with the service delivery process.

Steve has been with BNG since 2000. He is available to conduct accessibility assessments of homes, farms, rural businesses, and other facilities, and he also assists VR clients in formulating business plans for self-employment.

BNG receives PUCESA award

The Breaking New Ground Outreach Program received a Team Award from the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Specialists Association (PUCESA) at the annual Extension Conference. The award was given for the 2004 Caregiving in the Heartland initiative that included a train-the-trainer workshop and the development of the www.ruralcare.info website.

Also present in receiving the award was Bob Sunman of the Indiana Office of Rural Health, a major financial sponsor of Caregiving in the Heartland. The 2004 initiative was accomplished in collaboration with several other organizations, including BNG's nonprofit partners The Arthritis Foundation-Indiana Chapter, SICIL, and The Independent Center of Richmond.



Bob Sunman, Paul Jones, Bill Field, and Steve Swain accept the PUCESA award

25 years (continued from front)

including 10 National AgrAbility Training Workshops, two assistive technology conferences, 14 Caregiving in the Heartland workshops, and over 30 consumer workshops in more than 20 states and four Canadian provinces. In addition, BNG staff members have given hundreds of presentations at numerous state, national, and international conferences.

The quality of BNG's services has been validated by national awards from a variety of organizations, including the National Safety Council's 2001 First Place Award for the Improvement in the Quality of Life for

People with Disabilities and the 2002 RESNA Leadership Award. BNG has also received more than 10 Blue Ribbon Awards from the American Society of Agricultural Engineers for papers, Extension methods, and Extension publications.

As the needs of rural and farm families impacted by disability have changed, BNG has responded by adapting some of its services. What has not changed, however, is the mission of the program to cultivate greater independence for all people with disabilities, especially those involved in the production of our food and fiber.

Assistive technology items for sale

Several items which belonged to a former BNG consumer are available for purchase. These include two commercially manufactured platform lifts, two homemade platform lifts, a 2000 Dodge Dakota pickup with lift gate (which can be purchased separately from the truck), and a custom-built



scooter carrier for motor vehicles. For more information on these items, contact Vicky Thompson at 317-849-5211.

Also available is a display model Ventrac 300 heavy-duty off-road mobility unit for \$2900. Contact BNG at 800-825-4264 for information on this special offer.

