

AT RANDOM: GRANTS AND GIVING

Group that records books for the blind closing Dec. 31

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Educational Tape Recording for the Blind, an organization founded here some 40 years ago by the late Vivette Rifkin, is to close shop at year's end, a victim of technological change.

Its passing would come not long after Rifkin's. The resident of Chicago's West Beverly neighborhood died Aug. 10 at age 96.

She founded the non-profit in the mid-1960s to help high school and college students, much as she had assisted her legally blind daughter Jerelyn. Rifkin and the volunteers she recruited would record their readings of textbooks and make the cassette tapes available to students as soon as possible. Later, they also served people with other disabilities.

But the non-profit didn't have the resources to convert to digital recording, said manager Nancy Leonard. It found itself becoming obsolete as textbooks became readily available on CDs, downloadable to MP3 players and accessible via software that converts text to speech.

The new media, Leonard said, are "a good thing for the students, not for us."

Leonard, who has worked for the organization for 14 years, said it now serves about 50 students down from more than 500 at its peak. As demand declined, revenues shrank and deficits ballooned. In fiscal 2006, it had operating revenues of \$45,903 and a deficit of \$88,748.

Leonard said the non-profit plans to shut Dec. 31.

Dovie Horvitz, another of Rifkin's children, said her mother had accepted the decision to close.

Leonard said the non-profit has contributed \$20,000 so far to endow a scholarship in Rifkin's name at Illinois State University, which has a program to educate future teachers of the blind. After the non-profit winds down, any money remaining is to go toward that endowment, she said. The non-profit also is looking to donate its master tapes to schools.

Campaign: Erikson Institute, the Chicago-based graduate school in child development, has launched the public phase of a \$30 million, five-year fundraising campaign to support its planned move next year to a new River North building.

Erikson said the Irving Harris Foundation gave \$4 million. Members of Erikson's board reportedly donated or pledged another \$12.1 million, putting Erikson halfway toward its goal. Virginia and Norman Bobins chair the campaign.

Grants: Having committed \$47 million since 2002 to revitalize low-income Chicago communities, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation is pledging \$4 million more to expand its New Communities Program to Milwaukee, Indianapolis, Detroit and seven other U.S. cities.

The Renaissance Schools Fund is contributing \$3.9 million to support 23 new schools in underserved Chicago communities. The fund said it has raised \$41 million from private sources since 2005 to help open 38 public schools.

The federal Institute of Museum and Library Services made matching grants of: \$485,241 to the Shedd Aquarium for an effort to give communities some say on Shedd programs; \$436,122 to the Lincoln Park Zoo for a database of ethograms, which catalog animal behavior patterns; and \$30,000 to Glenview's Kohl Children's Museum for research on "free-choice learning."

The Aurora-based Dunham Fund gave \$142,500 to Fox Valley Habitat for Humanity to build a home in Montgomery.

The Elton John AIDS Foundation gave AIDS Foundation of Chicago \$10,000 to help it advocate for development of rectal microbicides.

Kudos: Chicago Women in Philanthropy is to honor Anne Roosevelt at its annual luncheon Wednesday. She is vice president for global corporate citizenship at Boeing Co.

Condolences: The death of Chicagoan Nailah Franklin, 28, whose body was found last week after an intense search, also has touched the non-profit community here. Her sister Lehia Franklin Acox until recently was communications manager for the Chicago Community Trust.

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