
EFREN PAREDES, JR. EXPERIENCE WORKING AT MICHIGAN BRAILLE TRANSCRIBING FUND

Efren Paredes, Jr. commenced working at Michigan Braille Transcribing Fund ("MBTF") in 1996. He began working for the non-profit corporation when it was located at the State Prison of Southern Michigan (Central Complex). The company moved to the State Prison of Southern Michigan (JMF) in 1997 and moved one last time to the G. Robert Cotton Facility ("JCF") in 1998. Efren moved with MBTF every step of the way and remains employed with the company to this day.

MBTF employs over 30 braille transcribers who have each successfully completed a rigorous braille transcription course. They have each been certified to produce braille materials by the U.S. Library of Congress. The transcription includes, but is not limited to, transcribing printed material into its braille equivalent. The company is the largest braille production facility in the nation, and perhaps the entire world. MBTF produced nearly 4 million pages of braille in the year 2004 alone. It has transcribed braille textbooks for children in all fifty states in the U.S.A. and also in countries like Canada, Bermuda, Cuba, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, England, Guam, and Israel, among others.

In addition to transcribing print school K-12 textbooks into braille, MBTF also transcribes state high school proficiency exams, children's stories, restaurant menus, hospital information, the annual Jackson bus schedule, college and hospital brochures and other documents, unique braille calendars, business cards for state officials and, most recently, MBTF transcribed the 2004 presidential election ballots for the entire State of Michigan.

Efren was certified as a Literary Braille Transcriber by the U.S. Library of Congress in 1997. He completed his lessons in only four months and was the youngest person to ever be hired or certified by MBTF. Efren is proficient in the use of Literary Braille Code, Textbook Braille Code, Computer Braille Code, Foreign Language Braille Code, and is pursuing certification in Nemeth Braille Code—the code used for math and science braille transcription.

One of the most memorable moments Efren has had at MBTF is when he transcribed a series of five Little Golden Books into braille. This particular project was very unique because Efren was presented with a request unlike any other he had previously been presented with. In most instances MBTF receives requests for the company to transcribe a print textbook into braille. People send MBTF the book they would like transcribed and then MBTF transcribes their book and sends them the braille version of the book.

In the Little Golden Book braille transcription request a father who was blind asked MBTF if there was any way the company could put braille over the pages themselves in the books so he could read the book to his son who is sighted. This would allow the blind father to read the braille text to his sighted son while his son read the print on the pages and followed along.

Efren was determined to find a way to complete this assignment. After exchanging ideas with other braille transcribers and hearing their suggestions Efren devised a way to put the print text of each

individual page onto translucent braille plastic adhesive using the manual Perkins brailier. After transcribing the text of all the books onto the plastic adhesive pages Efren cut the plastic adhesive and applied it to the corresponding text pages.

This, among other projects he has completed while employed at MBTF, make Efren very proud to work for the company. He is able to provide the blind and visually impaired an education, and allow them to imagine a world that they have never seen or experienced. Efren's work gives the blind and visually impaired life experiences they otherwise would not receive without the work he and other braille transcribers do in the field of braille transcription.

Braille transcribers and braille graphic artists at MBTF regularly receive letters from teachers, students, and parents thanking them for the wonderful work they do for the blind and visually impaired. Transcribing print textbooks into braille allows blind and visually impaired children to sit in class with their sighted peers in a public school and read along with them, if they wish to do so. They would otherwise need to be placed in their own classroom, attend a school for the blind, or be home schooled. It is very heartening to the braille transcribers who receive the letters of appreciation because they are able to read about the tremendous impact they are having on the lives of children.

In addition to his duties as a braille transcriber for MBTF, Efren is the production clerk. As the production clerk he processes all purchase orders, invoices customers, records all production by braille transcribers, distributes brailled materials to blind proofreaders in society and makes a record of the work they do, and he is the graphic designer for the MBTF brochure, certificates, business cards, and letterhead. He has also produced banners and designed programs for the company to take to special events.

Efren is proficient in the use of all braille transcription software (e.g., MegaDots and Braille 2000). He is also adept in the use of other software such as Word Perfect, Microsoft Word, Microsoft Publisher, Adobe Acrobat, Microsoft Excel, and OmniPage 14 (the leading Optical Character Recognition ("OCR") software). Efren's excellent dexterity skills, and ability to accurately type over 100 words per minute, have helped him perform very well as a braille transcriber and clerk. He can be relied on to type things quickly and complete tasks many others are unable to accomplish in such a short period of time.

Additionally, Efren provides tours to outside groups who visit the MBTF production facility. He has given tours to State Senators and Representatives, members of the Michigan Parole Board, employees of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, college students, Lions Club International members, employees at the G. Robert Cotton Facility, and a host of others. Efren educates them about the history of MBTF since its inception in 1962, enlightens them about the various things MBTF does for the community besides braille transcription, provides them with a chronology of braille transcription, points out and explains all the departments inside MBTF, and answers any questions posed to him regarding MBTF and the subject of braille.

You can view photographs of MBTF, their employee roster, and publication catalog at www.mi-braille.com. ■