

MG Car Club Washington, D.C. Centre Celebrates Its 53rd Annual Braille Rallye!

By Todd Wells

On July 25th, the MG Car Club Washington, D.C. Centre's Braille Rallye continued a tradition started in 1963 when our club and the Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind joined forces. Originally, it was established as an incentive for blind children to learn to read Braille. Since that time, it has become a great reason for some of our sight-impaired friends, young and not so young, to get out of the city and enjoy the Virginia countryside. It is also a great excuse for our members to get their MG out for a beautiful drive while enjoying the company of their navigators and fellow club members. Fifty-three years of conducting this uplifting event is something of which we can be proud.

Simply owning an MG can be lots of fun, but sharing that experience with other MG enthusiasts adds a whole new dimension to enjoying your car. The MG has earned a reputation for being honest, straightforward, and forgiving, and the same is often said about MG owners: we tend to be unusually enthusiastic about our cars and naturally enjoy sharing our enthusiasm with other MG owners. MG people have been doing this through clubs all over the world since the first MG Car Club meeting in 1930.

The MG Car Club, Washington, D.C. Centre held its first meeting in October of 1951 and now has nearly 200 members. Originally founded as a sub-centre of the Eastern United States Centre (now the MGCC Long Island Centre), in 1954 the sub-centre became a Centre in its own right, and, over the years, has sponsored numerous activities and received its share of awards.

Rallye

The 2015 MGCCWDCC Braille Rallye began at a picnic shelter in Burke Lake Park in Burke, Virginia, and proceeded through about 35 miles of the surrounding, rolling countryside. Prior to the rallye, I determined the *optimal* time by driving the course at the posted speed limit several times. Participants had no prior knowledge of the course route. Naturally, they were not aware of the optimal time for completing the course until the rallye was completed. Each participating car was manned by a driver and a navigator. At the starting line, each navigator was provided a set of instructions pointing out keys to the route. Often the keys are not street names but directions linked to landmarks, e.g., "turn right at the white picket fence." This makes for an interesting and somewhat challenging rallye.

What makes it even more interesting for the Braille Rallye participants is that the navigators are sight impaired and the instructions are prepared either in large print for navigators with some sight, or in Braille for navigators who are sightless. Therefore, the driver must rely upon the navigator to read and communicate the directions correctly and the navigator is dependent upon the driver to locate each of the landmarks while driving the course. Upon completion of the rallye, the drivers, navigators and their families and the staff of the Lighthouse participate in a picnic during which awards for several different classifications are presented to the winning drivers and navigators. For those who did not want to formally participate in the rallye, they could participate in an untimed Fun Run.

Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind

Since 1900, Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind (CLB) has been dedicated to helping the blind or visually impaired population of the greater Washington D.C. region overcome the challenges of vision loss. Their work enables people of all ages who are blind or visually impaired to remain independent, active and productive in society. Their programs and services include training and consultation in assistive technology, employment marketing skills training, career placement services, comprehensive low vision care, and a wide range of counseling and rehabilitation services.

CLB provides programs and services to people of all ages who are blind or visually impaired, regardless of their ability to pay. Programs and services include adaptive technology, professional and career services training, low vision services, rehabilitation, counseling, children's services, independent living and older adult programs. CLB provides services to the more than 20,000 blind and low vision individuals in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

Thanks for the Support

For many years, the Burke Lions Club of Burke, Virginia, has generously supported the Rallye and we sincerely appreciate their assistance. Additionally, JR's Stockyard Inn has provided some of the best BBQ for our awards luncheon to be found anywhere! We can't thank them enough for their generosity.

If you have participated in a Braille Rallye, you know how rewarding and fun the day is. If you haven't, try to find one, or run one through your club. It does not have to be a big production to allow everyone involved to have a great day enjoying our MGs. The members of the MG Car Club Washington, D.C. Centre consider the Braille Rallye to be one of the club's most worthwhile events and it is thoroughly enjoyed by the car owners and sight impaired individuals who participate.

Finally, if you find yourself in the mid-Atlantic area for the Columbus Day weekend, join us for our club's annual Hunt Country Classic, in Middleburg, Virginia, on October 11. Since the first show in 1996, this event has proven to be one of the most popular British Car Shows in the area. We hope to see you there!