



## **WHITE CANE**

### ***History***

In 1921, James Biggs, a photographer from Bristol, England, became blind following an accident. Because he was feeling uncomfortable with the amount of traffic around his home, he painted his walking stick white to be more easily visible.

In 1930, the late George A. Bonham, President of the Peoria Lions Club (Illinois) introduced the idea of using the white cane with a red band as a means of assisting the blind in independent mobility. The Peoria Lions approved the idea, white canes were made and distributed, and the Peoria City Council adopted an ordinance giving the bearers the right-of-way to cross the street. News of the club's activity spread quickly to other Lions clubs throughout the United States, and their visually handicapped friends experimented with the white canes. Overwhelming acceptance of the white cane idea by the blind and sighted alike quickly gave cane users a unique method of identifying their special need for travel consideration among their sighted counterparts.

Also in 1931, in France, Guilly d'Herbemont recognized the danger to blind people in traffic and launched a national "white stick movement" for blind people. She donated 5,000 white canes to people in Paris.

Today white cane laws are on the books of every state in the US and many other countries, providing blind persons a legal status in traffic. The white cane now universally acknowledges that the bearer is blind. For specific information contact your local government office for motor vehicles.

### ***White Cane Safety Days***

To make the American people more fully aware of the meaning of the white cane and of the need for motorists to exercise special care for the blind person who carries it, on October 6, 1964, the U.S. Congress approved a resolution authorizing the President of the US to annually issue a proclamation **designating October 15<sup>th</sup> as "National White Cane Safety Day."** \*

The National Federation of the Blind (NFB), a leading organization for the blind, has established the **third week in May as "White Cane Week."** \* During this week, a special concentration of efforts to educate the public concerning the hopes and aspirations of the blind is emphasized.

In keeping with the Lions' established tradition of assisting the blind, your Lions club can do much to promote community awareness of the white cane law by seeing that all driver education manuals prominently include the law. Request that local radio, TV and newspaper media periodically feature news of the law's existence and its wording in detail. Contact offices of local government officials to request a proclamation.

*\* The above referenced dates are suggested dates. Lions clubs are free to hold awareness and fund raising events according to the schedule of the club and the community it serves.*

## ***White Cane Resources***

**Promotional:** [www.lionsclubs.org](http://www.lionsclubs.org) (in search field, enter “club supplies”)

- Club Public Relations Chairperson Guide (PR710)
- Sample news releases

**Informational:**

- National Federation of the Blind (NFB)  
Web: [www.nfb.org](http://www.nfb.org)
  - “model White Cane law”
  - history
- Schools for the blind; blindness and low vision experts and organizations

**Fundraising information and supplies:**

- Lions Clubs International Club Supplies Catalog carries the collection can and white cane sticker tags.  
E-mail: [clubsupplies@lionsclubs.org](mailto:clubsupplies@lionsclubs.org)  
Phone: 630-571-5466, ext 6921
- White Cane Days, Inc., P.O. Box 1, Monterey Park, CA 91754, USA Phone: 626-307-9569; fax: 626-307-1611

**Health & Children’s Services Department**

**630-468-6728**

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