

TEACHER: Degenerative condition led to blindness

Continued from page 17

Zenger has worked at the IMESD, Superintendent Mark Mulvihill has become a fan.

"When we hired her, we were really excited to have such a highly qualified person who can relate to kids in such a unique way," Mulvihill said. "She is a huge gift to the ESD."

Zenger's arsenal includes everything from white canes to the latest in technology.

"The goal is to make them as independent as possible," Zenger said.

On a recent day, she worked with Ellen Paulsen, a freshman at Pendleton High School. The teenager has uveitis, an inflammation of the middle layer of the eye, and experiences disconcerting fluctuations in vision.

The two met up by the front office after Paulsen retrieved a white cane from her locker. They headed to the school's front walk where the teenager practiced sweeping with the cane to detect objects and drop-offs. They walked side by side, Jude guiding Zenger and Paulsen practicing with her cane, knowing the exercise could help her in the future.

"Potentially, I could go blind," Paulsen said.

Paulsen said this matter-of-factly, as if she was talking about a minor inconvenience. Zenger smiled.

"The kids who do the best, they have confidence and an attitude of 'It's just not going to stop me,'" she said.

As the teen approaches a flight of steps, Zenger asked, "Do you remember how to do stairs?"

"Yes," Paulsen said, with a smile. "I got this."

She dangled the cane out front, letting the tip hit each step as she climbed.

The cane is one of the most low-tech tools in Paulsen's arsenal of resources. Under Zenger's tutelage, she is mastering hardware and software designed for people who are visually impaired. Tools include closed-captioned television, magnifiers, cameras and a myriad programs to scan text and read aloud, enlarge type and change mouse, background and type on computer screens to eye-friendly colors and contrasts. There's Braille, of course, but now there is something called "refreshable Braille," a device that converts text to Braille characters using round-tipped pins that can be raised or lowered into various letter combinations. Zenger also has a library of traditional paper Braille books in her office: "Charlotte's Web,"

"Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," "Little House on the Prairie" and dozens of others.

Students can use cameras and CCTVs to magnify a dissecting tray or a white board across the room. A multitude of applications designed for iPads and smartphones round out an ever-increasing list of options that didn't exist when Zenger was a girl preparing for blindness.

Paulsen rolls a cart from class to class, stocked with camera, computer, CCTV, iPad and textbooks.

As the teenager goes to her next class, Zenger and Jude head for the parking lot.

The two are a team. They rarely stray from one another. Zenger's cell phone message says, "You've reached Sharon and Jude."

In the parking lot, Tod waits for Sharon in a silver 2015 GMC Terrain. While he waits, he spends his time sleeping and thinking, running errands or going to the car wash as Sharon meets with students. Back on the road, the retired electrician drives while his daughter makes calls.

"She's mostly on the phone, taking care of business," Tod said. "This is a rolling work area."

They travel miles and miles together — the odometer reads 90,000 miles — in an easy camaraderie. Except for the fact that she can't drive, there are few reminders that she can't see.

"I forget most of the time," he said.

He remembers the early days. Sharon got diagnosed at age three after her parents noticed she stumbled in dim light and sometimes wouldn't reach for objects. They helped her prepare for worsening vision, but encouraged her to do what she could, even driving. He remembers when she made the decision to turn in her license.

"One day, she came home and handed me her license," he recalled. "I said, 'What's this?' She said, 'I just don't feel comfortable anymore.'"

While she doesn't drive, it's obvious Zenger feels comfortable in life. Part of the credit goes to Jude. The dog takes his job as Zenger's eyes seriously. He walks a brisk 3.5 miles-per-hour, she said, a perfect pace, and likes to be on the go, just like her. Occasionally, he disobeys her in order to shield her from dangers such as the oncoming driver who tried to beat her through a crosswalk and misjudged their pace. Jude swung her around and led her back to the curb.

The dog doesn't pay much attention to anyone other than Zenger.

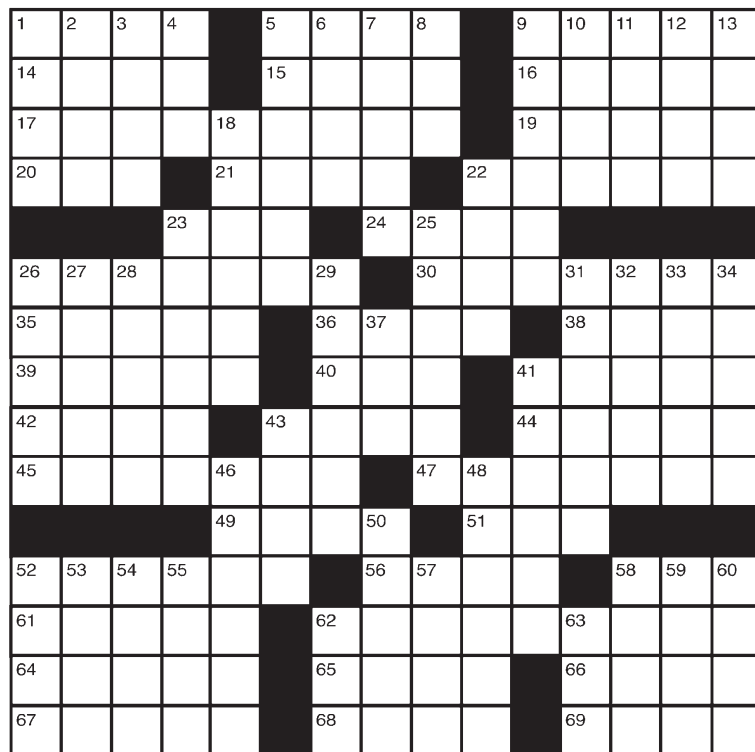
"He knows who he's working for," Zenger said, with a smile, "and that's me."

The Nugget Newspaper Crossword

By Jacqueline E. Mathews, Tribune News Service

- ACROSS**
- "Hell ___ no fury like a woman scorned"
 - Auctioneer's cry
 - Feeling of anxiety
 - Villain
 - Landing place
 - More put out
 - Pay back
 - No longer fresh
 - Needless fuss
 - Where the sun rises
 - Weak
 - Taxi
 - Shaker contents
 - Deadlock
 - Italian dish
 - Rump ___; cut of beef
 - Polio vaccine developer
 - Slob
 - Ethiopia's ___ Ababa
 - Neckwear
 - Darkness
 - Gull's cousin
 - Actor Sinise
 - Awaken
 - Classy
 - Moved over a bit
 - Sword fight
 - Ho-___; boring
 - Snapshots
 - Highest cards
 - Fore and ___
 - Of the moon
 - Pleasant
 - Dad's brother
 - Seep out
 - Singer Campbell
 - Take the helm
 - Military force
 - Mixer speed

- DOWN**
- Circle dance
 - Middle-___; neither old nor young
 - Threesome
 - Skirt's edge
 - Baby pigeons
 - "___ is not to reason why..."
 - Endures
 - Prepare Easter eggs
 - Items listed in a will
 - Short letter
 - Snatch
 - ___ down the river; betray
 - Ash or maple
 - Animals
 - Criticism; opposition
 - Sausage skin
 - Narrow streets
 - Furious
 - Fashion show participant
 - Chaplain's title
 - Real ___; Century 21's business
 - Flowering
 - ___ with; date
 - Lasso loop



Created by Jacqueline E. Mathews 9/13/17

— Last Week's Puzzle Solved —



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- | | |
|-------------------|------------------------------|
| 34 Carrying a gun | 54 In the past |
| 37 Lung contents | 55 Saga |
| 41 Game bird | 57 Stuff full |
| 43 Wildebeests | 58 Qualified |
| 46 Worshipper | 59 Hopping bug |
| 48 Saucy; pert | 60 Portable shelter |
| 50 Beer | 62 Montgomery's state: abbr. |
| 52 2 ___ 2 is 4 | 63 Bell's initials |
| 53 Quest; search | |

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