White Cane Safety Day in the United States

Quick Facts

White Cane Safety Day is a United States observance annually held on October 15 to celebrate blind and visually impaired people's achievements and the importance of the white cane.

White Cane Safety Day 2014

Wednesday, October 15, 2014

White Cane Safety Day celebrates blind and visually impaired people's achievements in the United States on October 15 every year. It also reminds people about the how the white cane is an important tool in helping the blind and the visually impaired live with greater independence.



White Cane Safety Day recognizes blind and visually impaired people's achievements and the importance of the white cane.

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What do people do?

The United States President may issue each year a proclamation calling on people in the United States to observe White Cane Safety Day with appropriate ceremonies and activities. It is a time when communities across the nation re-affirm their commitment to improve access to basic services for blind and visually impaired people.

Organizations, such as Lions Clubs International and the National Federation of the Blind, organize promotional activities involving the public as part of a goal to help to increase awareness of the use of the white cane and the laws that govern its use.  Activities such as visual displays, walks, meetings, public service announcements, and the distribution of t-shirts reminding people about the day are all part of the day’s activities. White Cane Safety Day also reminds people that motor vehicles and pedestrians should yield the right of way to blind or visually impaired people using canes.

Public Life

Although White Cane Safety Day is a national observance in the United States, it is not a federal public holiday.

Background

Many blind and visually impaired people, including famous musicians and writers, have made major positive contributions in the United States. Many have also used a white cane to help them succeed at educational institutions, work environments and their homes. The first of the state laws regarding the right of blind people to travel independently with the white cane was passed in 1930. It granted blind pedestrians protection and the right-of-way while carrying a white cane.

In 1963 the National Federation of the Blind called upon the governors from every state to proclaim October 15 of each year as White Cane Safety Day. At the time, only a few people achieved enough independence to travel alone on busy highways. The United States Congress, by joint resolution approved on October 6, 1964, designated October 15 of each year as White Cane Safety Day. By 1978 the number of visually impaired people who achieved a lot of independence through the white cane had greatly increased. Promotions on the benefits of the white cane proved to be successful and they are still continuing.

Symbols

The white cane can be perceived by many as a symbol of blindness or visual impairment. White canes are recognized for providing the visually impaired with greater mobility, allowing them to participate more within their communities. Blind and visually impaired people have used canes as mobility tools for centuries but it was not until after World War I that the white cane was properly introduced. In modern times there are different varieties of this tool, each serving slightly varied needs.