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The

# PROSPECT



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*Also:* **CRIS Keeps Community Connections In The Air**

# The Sound Of Hartford

CRIS Radio Offers Blind,  
Disabled A Lifeline  
To The World

BY DIANE WEAVER DUNNE

CRIS RADIO

The CRIS Radio  
building in  
Windsor, Conn.



CRIS Radio volunteer Diane Duhaime produces a live afternoon news program. Pictured with Duhaime is her guide dog, Iroc.



State Sen. Edith Prague, at left, joins Gov. M. Jodi Rell, Comptroller Nancy Wyman and Windsor Mayor Donald Trinks as they cut the ribbon to officially celebrate CRIS Radio's new broadcast center in Windsor on May 17.

Photos by Steven Laschever

When Carol Gillispie's radio went dead in her West Haven home in early summer, she immediately called CRIS Radio's broadcast center in Windsor.

"You're off the air," she blurted in a panic. The urgency in her voice about the need to immediately "fix" the transmission problem was a poignant moment, highlighting the critical importance of how CRIS Radio (Connecticut Radio Information System) creates a lifeline to the world for individuals like Gillispie and thousands of others who are unable to access newspapers because they are blind, learning disabled or physically handicapped.

As the only radio-reading service in Connecticut, CRIS volunteers read entire articles featured in several daily newspapers and about 30 magazines. The 30-year-old nonprofit broadcasts 24 hours a day, seven days a week with the help of nearly 400 volunteers.

For Gillispie, who has been blind nearly her entire life due to a rare form of cancer, CRIS Radio is not an ordinary radio station. It's much more than a news and information source.

CRIS Radio provides a connection to the community in ways most people take for granted. "If I hadn't listened to the obituaries read today on CRIS Radio, I would not have known about the deaths of two people I knew, or about their funeral arrangements," she explained, noting that without CRIS, she likely would have missed their services.

Gillispie says it's the in-depth and diverse information — from front page news to store circulars — broadcast on CRIS Radio that helps her stay informed.

Gov. M. Jodi Rell, when speaking at a recent ribbon-cutting ceremony officially cel-

ebrating the opening of CRIS Radio's new broadcast center in Windsor, praised the nonprofit for including information featured in store advertisements. She pointed out that knowing whether "pork chops are on sale this week" is something most of us don't give a second thought to, it is helpful to know when making up a grocery list.

Gillispie agrees. She listens to CRIS Radio's "Market Time" before doing her own grocery shopping.

### Media Access

While commercial radio and TV news programs often provide news summaries, Gillispie explains that CRIS Radio broadcasts much more.

"I used to hate sports," she said. "But on CRIS Radio, they read the entire articles. They give you a total picture. Not just the scores of who won and lost. I want to hear what the players do."

For some, including Rosie Morlene of Rocky Hill, the value of CRIS Radio is that it helps reduce feelings of isolation.

Morlene, who lost her sight while attending college as a young adult, wanted independence. "I had lost my vision and I didn't want to stay home with my parents," she recalls. "I toughed it out in an apartment — by myself — in New Britain. I needed something that would tell me what's going on out there."

The answer was CRIS Radio, introduced to Morlene by the state Board of Education and Services for the Blind in 1979, the year it began to broadcast.

"I said, 'This is great!' It was, 'Whoa! I'm going to stick with this.' It was amazing how much CRIS Radio cheered me up," she recalls. "It was the answer for me."

Today, Morlene is a CRIS volunteer producer, operating the control board each week for a one-hour live afternoon broadcast in which two volunteers read news featured in two regional newspapers, the *Journal Inquirer* and the *New Britain Herald*.

She also reads the weather forecast, prepared for her in Braille, during the broadcast. "I do it to help others and [volunteering] is rewarding for me. I love it. I know how it feels when you lose your vision. You look for things to help you."

Another CRIS volunteer, Diane Duhaime of Wethersfield, convinced Morlene to sign up for training at CRIS Radio to become an on-air producer, the same role Duhaime serves.

Duhaime, who was born legally blind and lost her remaining vision at 30, said complete vision loss for her was like suffering from a death in the family. She said that volunteering and learning new skills helped her emotionally recover.

Today, she works out of her home for commercial radio station WCCC, operates the control board to produce a live news broadcast and regularly volunteers at the Connecticut State Library for the Blind.

"I enjoy being a part of something," Duhaime said. "I feel [volunteering at CRIS] has helped me in a lot of ways. It helped me with my shyness, not be so sensitive. It gave me confidence."

Duhaime, like all CRIS listeners, received a specially tuned CRIS Radio at no cost.

This fall, CRIS Radio is launching a redesigned website that will offer on-demand, downloadable programs. CRIS programs also can be heard on most cable TVs, telephone, or online at CRIS Radio's website, [www.crisradio.org](http://www.crisradio.org).

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**Diane Weaver Dunne** is the executive director of the Connecticut Radio Information System (CRIS Radio) in Windsor.