

Real Life Renos Podcast **Diane Bergeron**

00;00;09;06 - 00;00;26;07

Karen Brown

Welcome to Real Life Renos. Diane Bergeron and I met through a mutual colleague, Ron Wickman, an accessibility architect with whom Diane consults now and then. Diane has a Master of Arts in leadership and has put that to good use, working in government administration at the municipal and provincial levels

00;00;26;07 - 00;00;45;25

Karen Brown

before accepting her current position as president, CNIB Guide Dogs and VP International Affairs, also for the CNIB. Her role involves national and international advocacy, a responsibility she has undertaken on behalf of other organizations as well. Diane's appetite for adventures that few of us would undertake is what caught my eye.

00;00;46;02 - 00;01;02;01

Karen Brown

To say that she is a daredevil is something of an understatement. Diane has repelled down the side of a 29 story building. Yes, you heard that right. 29 stories. Skydived and driven a race car. You can see video of her skydiving on her website, which we will link in the show notes.

00;01;02;11 - 00;01;18;05

Karen Brown

She is passionate about exercise and in 2017 completed the Iron Man Mont Tremblant It will not shock our listeners to hear that Diane is the recipient of numerous awards for advocacy, excellence and leadership, and not surprisingly, that she is a motivational speaker.

00;01;18;17 - 00;01;32;25

Karen Brown

What may come as a surprise is that Diane is blind, a process that began when she was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa at the

age of five. By the age of ten, she was legally blind and in her thirties she lost all sight. To tie this back to her work with Ron

00;01;33;04 - 00;01;48;17

Karen Brown

designing buildings for accessibility often focuses on wheelchair access, however, Diane's advocacy for the blind has proven useful in Ron's work by allowing him to integrate design that meets the needs of those with diminished or no sight. And that is the subject of our conversation today.

00;01;48;29 - 00;01;52;04

Karen Brown

Welcome, Diane. You're down in Florida.

00;01;52;04 - 00;01;53;21

Diane Bergeron

I am in Florida.

00;01;53;21 - 00;02;02;10

Karen Brown

Perfect. Now you went down there to train for a race which sadly has been cancelled because of COVID. But talk to us a little bit about other races that you've been in.

00;02;02;10 - 00;02;13;01

Karen Brown

I mentioned the Ironman and you did something called a death race, and maybe you could talk a little bit about how a blind person trains for a race.

00;02;13;01 - 00;02;27;06

Diane Bergeron

Sure. Obviously, as a person who's blind an Iron Man or any kind of running, cycling, swimming type activity, especially open water swimming, you need to have a guide.

00;02;27;07 - 00;02;48;12

Diane Bergeron

So one of the things that is very important as a person who's blind is for me to find a training partner racing partner who has the same skill sets as me has the same speed and and fitness level, but has to be just that little bit better because they're going to be my eyes during the whole, the

00;02;48;12 - 00;03;13;10

Diane Bergeron

whole activity. So I've been really lucky to have friends that have also been into triathlon and running and swimming and so on. And so I've had several guides. I currently work primarily with a guide for triathlon. His name is Corey, but I got into all of this with my friend Cheryl in Edmonton, who actually after seeing me

00;03;13;11 - 00;03;24;26

Diane Bergeron

skydiving and race car driving and rappelling and so on, said, I think you should do a triathlon and I was a couch potato at the time so I was like, I don't, I don't exercise. What are you talking about?

00;03;25;10 - 00;03;46;06

Diane Bergeron

And she said, Well, it's a challenge and I'm challenging you. So we, you know, not being one to pass up a challenge. I said, all right. And six months later, we did our first Olympic distance triathlon, which is the Olympic distance is a 1500 meters swim, 40 km bike and then a ten K run.

00;03;46;27 - 00;04;00;19

Diane Bergeron

And and that was my first one. And then the next thing I know, she had me doing half Iron Man, and then eventually I trained for my for my full Ironman in 2017, which which was which was awesome.

00;04;01;07 - 00;04;25;06

Diane Bergeron

And really, it's all about finding that person to guide you and make sure that they're taking care of you in the water. We have a, we each wear a belt with them one meter rope between us so that I

don't wander off into nowhere, and she uses that rope to make sure that she keeps me going straight.

00;04;26;08 - 00;04;37;00

Diane Bergeron

.There's rules are not allowed to pull or anything like that. It's you have to swim side by side, and she gives tugs on the rope to let me know that it's time to turn or things like that in the bike.

00;04;37;00 - 00;04;50;14

Diane Bergeron

We use a tandem, so obviously I'm on the back and she's doing the steering and then in the run, I literally just hand over, can we just hold hands and we run beside each other and, and she guides me.

00;04;50;14 - 00;05;07;23

Diane Bergeron

So it's a lot of time together. It's a lot of communication and and a lot of fun, it really, you know, to do this. In fact, when I completed the Ironman in 2017, my guide cried when we crossed the finish line, and she said that was the most

00;05;08;09 - 00;05;17;10

Diane Bergeron

the most rewarding ironman she'd ever done was to to actually cross the finish line with a partner she thought was amazing. So, you know, can be fun for both.

00;05;17;10 - 00;05;35;10

Karen Brown

Aw, that's remarkable. Good for you. I don't see myself doing that, so I am really very respectful of the fact that you've taken that on any other races coming up. I mean, COVID, of course, is going to impact things. But are you training for something in the future?

00;05;35;10 - 00;05;46;27

Diane Bergeron

Well, as you said earlier, I'm in Florida, we were going to be doing the Disney runs. I was doing the ten K on the seventh of January and on the ninth we were going to do the full marathon,

00;05;48;01 - 00;05;57;27

Diane Bergeron

but due to COVID and some of the challenges, you know, we decided that we wouldn't do the run. It's just too dangerous to at this time.

00;05;57;27 - 00;05;58;04

Karen Brown

Right.

00;05;58;04 - 00;06;08;21

Diane Bergeron

So right now, it's just going to be a matter of trying to keep my fitness level up so that when COVID is hopefully not as big an issue, I expect that

00;06;08;21 - 00;06;25;06

Diane Bergeron

I'll be back down here either next year or in the, you know, later this year to do a Disney run. And I love, you know, the the Ironman is like a two year commitment of nothing else in your life.

00;06;25;06 - 00;06;36;12

Diane Bergeron

But training, you know, you do your work during the day you train in the morning, you train after work, you train all weekend. You really don't have a life other than work and and training for the Ironman.

00;06;36;12 - 00;06;36;22

Karen Brown

Mm-Hmm.

00;06;37;00 - 00;06;50;22

Diane Bergeron

In fact, I remember when we did Ironman 2017, Corey saw on the on the run, there was somebody held up a sign that said If you're still married, you haven't trained hard enough because it's really all consuming to do a full Ironman.

00;06;51;28 - 00;07;09;19

Diane Bergeron

Because I mean, for people who don't know, the full Ironman is is a four kilometer swim, 180 kilometer bike and a full 42 kilometer marathon, and you have to complete the whole thing in 17 hours. And if you're a second over 17 hours, you're you get a do not finish.

00;07;09;19 - 00;07;24;04

Diane Bergeron

There's no extra time for a person with a disability. You have to complete it in the exact same time as everybody else. So it's a daunting thing and it takes a lot of effort. But a half Ironman is really my that's my favorite.

00;07;24;04 - 00;07;39;27

Diane Bergeron

When it's, you know, it's half of all of those distances, it's hard enough that you have to train, but it's not. It's not all consuming in your life, so I see me doing lots of half half distance Iron Man's in the future and a few more marathons.

00;07;40;19 - 00;07;59;18

Karen Brown

Fantastic. And of course, you're busy with your work, which is the subject of our conversation today. Accessibility design is often thought of as benefiting people with mobility challenges, but there are a whole range of challenges vision hearing all kinds of them.

00;07;59;27 - 00;08;15;10

Karen Brown

And I think the thing that people are most concerned about is that it's going to make their home look like some sort of an institution if they bring too many of these modifications in. Can you talk to us a little bit about modifications that meet vision accessibility needs?

00;08;17;06 - 00;08;37;19

Diane Bergeron

Sure. Really, when it comes to sight loss, you're looking at two different types of of accessibility accommodation. There's different things that are color or light focused for people with sight loss who are not totally blind or extremely restricted in their sight

00;08;37;29 - 00;08;56;02

Diane Bergeron

and then there's the tactile and sound for people who and scent, I would say, for people who are totally blind or very limited, and sometimes you can combine those for someone who maybe has some sight loss that is deteriorating.

00;08;56;11 - 00;09;19;28

Diane Bergeron

And so you want to prepare them for every, every circumstance. So when I think about those two, when you're looking at the people with sight loss and general color contrast, and really it doesn't matter what color you use, it just needs to have a high enough contrast so that you can that you can see the difference between,

00;09;19;28 - 00;09;40;11

Diane Bergeron

for example, you can have a dark, darker colored floor with lighter colored walls, or you can have a darker floor with a darker wall, with a lighter baseboard or something that clearly delineates the difference between the floor and the wall.

00;09;41;11 - 00;09;59;25

Diane Bergeron

Or you use darker furniture in a room with lighter flooring so that you can really see where things are. So it's it's really only making sure that your colors are contrasting enough that there's a there's a clear difference for people who do have that ability to see contrast.

00;09;59;25 - 00;10;20;05

Diane Bergeron

Even if they can't see the item, they can see the change in color. Lighting is important. If you, if you're looking at, for example, where the windows are positioned to make sure that you can take advantage of the light or if they don't have good outside light putting lights in strategic places so that people can use the

00;10;20;05 - 00;10;35;10

Diane Bergeron

light if that's all they can see is the light, they can use that light to go from one room to another. So that's really important for people with sight loss stairs, of course, thinking about making sure that people know where the stairs are.

00;10;35;11 - 00;10;56;26

Diane Bergeron

So you could be really strategic if it's tiled or even if you're going to have wood or carpet, you can make the edging a different color contrast. And again, you can be creative and put some real interesting colors together to make it so that it's visible to someone with sight loss and and protect them from from, you

00;10;56;26 - 00;11;12;12

Diane Bergeron

know, going over to get help down the stairs. So things like that. And so it certainly doesn't have to be this black and white or black and yellow, you know, something like that. It can be really, really interesting colors.

00;11;12;12 - 00;11;35;27

Diane Bergeron

And just as long as there are different, a different contrast for people who are totally blind like myself, I use tactile indicators. So we have, for example, we have tile in the kitchen and hardwoods everywhere else. So I know when I'm going into my kitchen because the change underfoot goes from this smooth, the smooth hardwood onto

00;11;35;27 - 00;11;55;00

Diane Bergeron

tile. There's a little bit of an edge between the two, so that gives me a little bit of indication there. You can use sound. I have heard of people that that have a radio that they put somewhere in a room at the entrance and they just have it playing low all the time so that when somebody is

00;11;55;00 - 00;12;04;07

Diane Bergeron

walking into that room, they hear the radio or the noise they can easily find their way through the tile.

00;12;04;07 - 00;12;07;04

Karen Brown

Yeah, that's very clever. It's just low tech.

00;12;07;04 - 00;12;14;03

Diane Bergeron

Yeah, it's I mean, it's easy, right? A Bluetooth ... the new smart homes, right?

00;12;14;16 - 00;12;34;08

Diane Bergeron

Using Amazon or Apple or Google or whatever one of these HomePods, and you can strategically placed them around your home and have them make a sound so that you can find your way through different rooms and get an idea of where you know where things are at.

00;12;34;29 - 00;12;35;08

Karen Brown

Very clever.

00;12;35;08 - 00;12;55;19

Diane Bergeron

You can use different tactile paint. You know, you can have paint or wallpaper in one room and paint in another room to to help you indicate where different things are. And of course, there's also scent, which a lot of people don't think about.

00;12;55;28 - 00;13;11;23

Diane Bergeron

But I have used in my home in certain times when I'm thinking I'd like to figure out one room, you know, when I'm getting used to something, you can put an air freshener in one room that smells like oranges or something like that, some tangerine or citrus fruit.

00;13;12;02 - 00;13;20;09

Diane Bergeron

And you can put a floral scented one in a different room so you can use different. Scents to help you identify different rooms as well.

00;13;20;09 - 00;13;31;17

Karen Brown

Again, very clever and products that are out there on the market, oftentimes people will find that when they go to a home health care store, for instance, some place that sells products specifically

00;13;31;17 - 00;13;41;13

Karen Brown

aimed at people with disabilities, the prices are really astronomical. So if you can find these simple, low cost solutions that are abundantly available, it's much more helpful.

00;13;41;13 - 00;13;53;03

Diane Bergeron

Yeah, exactly. But if you and you know the key thing, whether you're designing for someone with sight loss or someone with hearing loss or someone that that uses a mobility aid, the

00;13;53;03 - 00;14;11;08

Diane Bergeron

key piece is thinking about it from start the start of the project. When in the design phase, if you design it right from the beginning to make it so that everyone with various disability can use, then anybody can use it.

00;14;11;08 - 00;14;31;29

Diane Bergeron

A mother using a baby carriage can go up a ramp makes it easier for seniors. There's so many things that you can do to make a place beautiful, make it accessible, and then it's ready for anybody that goes into it.

00;14;31;29 - 00;14;44;09

Diane Bergeron

If you have to retrofit, that's when you end up having problems, because that's when you have to start pulling things apart to make sure that it can be accessible right now in a commercial space.

00;14;44;09 - 00;14;51;04

Karen Brown

You were very involved in Ron's design of the Premier's Council of the Status of Persons with Disabilities Office Space.

00;14;51;10 - 00;15;06;03

Karen Brown

In fact, your input was so innovative. There were flooring pieces and railing pieces. Tell us about that because I think these are things that can be employed in a residential environment as well.

00;15;06;03 - 00;15;09;00

Diane Bergeron

Yeah. So the Premier's Council space was amazing.

00;15;09;00 - 00;15;28;29

Diane Bergeron

It was designed literally from, you know, it was a big open space. And so it was it was a blank canvas. And Ron got to use his creative and innovative ways to create this wonderfully accessible space and of course, Ron's original background is looking at accessibility because of his

00;15;28;29 - 00;15;47;20

Diane Bergeron

his father used a wheelchair and his, so he looks at that and has that sort of background and experience. And so understanding that when you're looking at creating a space for someone who uses a wheelchair, that round walls is fantastic because then the

person doesn't have to try and get around a corner and a three point turn

00;15;47;20 - 00;16;04;04

Diane Bergeron

to get around it, that there is a visibility piece to it. If the wall is round, you don't have as many blind spots for when you're going around the corner in the washroom. The washroom was round, which was fantastic for, you know, a wheelchair to turn.

00;16;04;13 - 00;16;18;10

Diane Bergeron

Of course, it made it very difficult for someone who was blind to find their way around because we use straight lines. Straight lines are essential for someone with sight loss. Anything curved around it makes it difficult for us to keep our orientation.

00;16;18;23 - 00;16;35;01

Diane Bergeron

And so Ron and I spent a lot of time together trying to make sure that we could have these rounded walls and and everything accessible. But how do we then incorporate into it a way for someone who's blind or partially sighted to be able to navigate the space?

00;16;35;02 - 00;16;56;22

Diane Bergeron

So the first thing that we did was we put the floor was carpeted and Ron created these. I think they're called, they're like a linoleum. I think it's card called marmoleum or something like that. And so they're square, and I'm going to say they're about 22 foot square, two feet by two feet, I think, or two and

00;16;56;22 - 00;17;18;23

Diane Bergeron

a half by two and a half something like that, and they were color contrasted to the carpet. They were embedded into the carpet and it was just a square. And so the marmoleum was a color contrast. But he also put designs in it just to make it pretty and then edged it with sort of a carpet edging,

00;17;19;13 - 00;17;33;20

Diane Bergeron

and so they were placed within the flooring at every we called them decision making points. So you walk through the front door and you go straight until you hit the square and you know that that's a decision making point.

00;17;33;21 - 00;17;51;01

Diane Bergeron

So you either have to you turn right and you walk straight till you get to the next square. That will take you directly in front of the reception desk and that's where you make a decision are you're going to go right or left. You go left, you hit another square and that takes you to the office space

00;17;51;01 - 00;18;06;02

Diane Bergeron

where the cubicles are. If you go right, you hit more squares to get to around to the meeting rooms and so on. So squares were strategically placed so that a person with sight loss could walk straight and not have to worry about the rounded wall at all.

00;18;06;02 - 00;18;17;13

Diane Bergeron

We just followed the squares on the floor and it was color contrasted, so people with sight loss could see it and it was also tactile for someone who was blind and I was pretty. It was. They were interesting.

00;18;17;18 - 00;18;18;10

Karen Brown

Mm hmm.

00;18;18;10 - 00;18;36;29

Diane Bergeron

The other the other problem that we had was trying to find specific office space, so when you came around a round wall, it's great to know that you just walked straight but how do you find the entrance into each of these cubicles or offices or or boardrooms?

00;18;37;13 - 00;19;00;29

Diane Bergeron

So what we did was we had, Ron had said he was putting a wooden kind of railing for stability for people who needed to the stability on the walls so we just decided, I said, well, if that's the case, why don't you just put some kind of etching or carved design into the railing that would coincide directly

00;19;00;29 - 00;19;20;29

Diane Bergeron

across from a door or off or cubicles so that if someone was blind was looking for someone for cubicles down, you just tell them to follow the railing and when they hit the fourth, the fourth notch in or design in the in the wood, they knew they were directly across from that cubicle door.

00;19;21;09 - 00;19;23;16

Karen Brown

So clever.

00;19;23;16 - 00;19;38;06

Diane Bergeron

Yeah, it was it was just a lot of creative thinking and trying to figure it out, and once it was designed, it was pretty spectacular. We we had we had a lot of people come in and check it out, and I was really proud of the work that Ron did in that space.

00;19;39;19 - 00;19;49;14

Karen Brown

Very, very good ideas, and as I said in the beginning of this little segment, those are ideas that can be translated to a residential space as well.

00;19;49;14 - 00;20;04;09

Diane Bergeron

Oh, absolutely, absolutely. Even when you think about when you think about putting things into a space in a in a home, again, if you've got if you've got something tactile like

00;20;04;09 - 00;20;24;01

Diane Bergeron

that, you know, going down a hallway, having a railing, I mean railings don't, that's not very costly. You just put a nice decorative railing on the wall. It helps for seniors coming in who are people who might need the stability, and you can put really decorative things there to help show where different things are across from from

00;20;24;02 - 00;20;44;01

Diane Bergeron

those spaces. Another thing that I have seen in commercial spaces using those railings is braille, and they are strategically placed underneath the railing where your fingers would touch as you were walking down the hallway, your fingers would suddenly, you know, when you were holding the railing.

00;20;44;01 - 00;21;02;17

Diane Bergeron

Just a natural way of holding the railing as you were walking along your fingers would suddenly touch braille that you could read. I noticed this was very prominent in Japan in their train stations. It gave you the number of the platform you were on as you were going down the stairs or up the stairs.

00;21;02;17 - 00;21;07;19

Diane Bergeron

Your hand, or my hand would automatically hit the braille and I could tell which platform I was on.

00;21;07;19 - 00;21;16;18

Karen Brown

Remarkable. That is really something that anybody I mean, I don't know where you'd find somebody to do that kind of work that sounds very specialized.

00;21;18;05 - 00;21;38;25

Diane Bergeron

I think that, you know, you can usually find people nowadays, I mean, braille is actually a font. You can get a lot of like plaques

and different things done with braille on it. But it's it's, you know, it's it's something that can be done and it's it's invisible to someone who is who was sighted because it's it's

00;21;38;25 - 00;21;52;02

Diane Bergeron

underneath, it's on the other side. So it's not even shown. So people don't even know it's there unless you're a blind person and you're you feel it knew right away you feel the dots. I mean, we recognize braille instantly, right?

00;21;52;02 - 00;22;11;01

Diane Bergeron

The minute we touch it, other people just like, Oh, there's some dots for some reason, and, but we notice it right away, and it is so refreshing to be able to, you know, feel the the the braille and know that that this so much thought and consideration went into it.

00;22;11;01 - 00;22;44;18

Karen Brown

Right. The tactile options are so important. We've talked about the flooring and the furniture and and the railings. There's something else that you had talked about and that is echolocation, and I think, as I said to you, I think many people think of echolocation, they think of bats, but we do it as humans, too. So can you tell us what that is to a human and how you as a blind person use it, how that gets incorporated into design?

00;22;44;18 - 00;22;53;25

Diane Bergeron

Yeah. You know, I think that everybody, whether you can see or you can't see in some way, your brain is processing echolocation, even if you don't recognize it as such.

00;22;54;00 - 00;23;06;01

Diane Bergeron

Your brain is processing it. And that's my personal opinion. I've often said, you know, there's this myth that if you're blind that you can, you know, you've got better hearing and in fact, you don't you're hearing is exactly the same.

00;23;06;16 - 00;23;27;16

Diane Bergeron

It's how your brain processes the information that you're hearing that is different. So as an example, if if you and I had exactly the same physical ability to hear and we were standing on a street corner, I would hear a car coming before you would we actually would physically hear it at exactly the same time.

00;23;27;16 - 00;23;46;12

Diane Bergeron

But your brain is so busy processing looking for the car and my brain is busy trying to process the sound of the car, so I would identify it from sound before you would, right? But we actually physically hear it at the same time as our brain is processing it differently when it comes to echolocation.

00;23;46;21 - 00;24;12;02

Diane Bergeron

Really, what echolocation is is just the difference in sound on on the basis of your surroundings. Sounds bounce off of solid objects in different ways. And so someone who is blind and who trains very hard in echolocation, and there's a number of people who who have done that, they will often make a sound.

00;24;12;02 - 00;24;17;20

Diane Bergeron

Sometimes you'll hear someone that will make a sound like a clicking noise with their mouth. They'll kind of go <clicking sounds>

00;24;17;20 - 00;24;19;07

Karen Brown

Yes, I've heard that.

00;24;19;07 - 00;24;32;28

Diane Bergeron

Yeah, so that noise bounces off of different objects, and someone who is really good at echolocation can often find objects using that echolocation.

00;24;34;18 - 00;24;44;14

Diane Bergeron

But there's other things you know you don't want to be walking down the street making that noise all the time. People around you are going to look at you wondering what's going on. I use sound in a different way.

00;24;44;15 - 00;24;57;09

Diane Bergeron

So I remember Ron and I, we went on a walk, and it was when we first started talking about echolocation and we were walking down a sidewalk and I said, we've just passed the end of the building. And he stopped.

00;24;57;10 - 00;25;12;25

Diane Bergeron

He said, How did you know that? And I said, because I was wearing shoes that made a sound. They had a harder sole on them, so they made a sound as soon as you passed the end of the building.

00;25;13;06 - 00;25;27;11

Diane Bergeron

The sound of the echo kind of coming back at you from the building stopped and it sounded completely different. The other thing is, is my dog, I have a guide dog and I have her chains, like her tags and they jingle.

00;25;27;11 - 00;25;47;07

Diane Bergeron

I have a little bell on her collar and it jingles, and as soon as she passes that chain sound is different. So you can identify a change in in a space you can identify if you're in a in, say, a shopping mall and you go inside, sometimes they have the mezzanine as soon as you pass from underneath

00;25;47;07 - 00;26;10;19

Diane Bergeron

that into an open space everything echoes differently and you can identify where you are based on that, that echo and that sound. So

you know, it's not always the clicking. Sometimes, if I'm trying to figure something out, I'll just snap my fingers a couple of times to kind of identify where things are, where in, where we are

00;26;10;19 - 00;26;27;02

Diane Bergeron

right now, actually, it's pretty interesting. I was thinking about this this morning as I was thinking about this particular podcast and I took the dog out to the washroom. When I come back, I have to go through just an archway that's that's covered in vines.

00;26;27;11 - 00;26;40;15

Diane Bergeron

As soon as I go through that archway, I know where I am because the sound changes immediately, the wind changes everything that's around me, and it's not, I can't stand there and go, well, the sound has changed this way or that way.

00;26;40;15 - 00;26;48;12

Diane Bergeron

It's just an internal way of noticing I'm in this space right now, and then I know exactly where I am to count my steps to my door.

00;26;48;12 - 00;26;55;20

Karen Brown

Right, and these techniques can be employed in design as well through the use of certain kinds of furniture and baffling.

00;26;56;17 - 00;27;13;27

Diane Bergeron

Absolutely everything from, like I said, that archway. You put an archway somewhere and it's beautiful, it's a gorgeous archway. It's got vines all over it. And so it's really pretty, but it automatically creates a barrier, a change in sound.

00;27;14;19 - 00;27;36;24

Diane Bergeron

When you're inside a building, you can do it by just changing the height of the ceiling. Changing the texture of the walls. Changing

just, just, by, by changing the angle of of the walls. If you have a ceiling that that angles, that'll change the sound as well.

00;27;36;25 - 00;27;58;10

Diane Bergeron

So just making any kind of structural change or, like you said, changing where the furniture is and and how it's placed is going to change the sound in a room so you can help. You can help figure out how to navigate a space just by by making sure that things are creatively placed to help someone use that echolocation.

00;27;58;10 - 00;28;14;26

Karen Brown

Sound and how our brains process, it brings to mind electric cars. That has to be something that is a discussion for people who are challenged by vision loss because they are so quiet.

00;28;14;26 - 00;28;24;07

Diane Bergeron

Yeah, it's actually a huge issue the World Blind Union, which is an international, a global organization advocacy organization, has been working with the

00;28;24;07 - 00;28;43;14

Diane Bergeron

regulatory bodies for cars to say there needs to be a sound. It doesn't have to be a loud sound. It just has to make sense that it sounds like a vehicle that's coming towards you because once that car stops, the engine goes off and there's absolutely no sound.

00;28;43;14 - 00;28;43;26

Karen Brown

Right.

00;28;44;04 - 00;28;56;16

Diane Bergeron

You can't hear the wheels turn. You can't hear, you know, if it's if it's a quiet car and it's coming towards you, often you can hear the tires on the ground. But if it stops or it goes slowly, you can't hear that.

00;28;56;16 - 00;29;10;12

Diane Bergeron

And so you're going to cross the road because contrary to popular opinion, our dogs don't see red and green. We have to decide when it's safe to cross the street. We have to give the dog a command to go forward if we're using a guide dog.

00;29;10;26 - 00;29;26;07

Diane Bergeron

It's the dogs, the dog needs to determine when it's safe and they're looking at the car to trying to figure that out and if I'm giving the dog a command and that car sitting still the dog's going to determine that it's safe.

00;29;26;16 - 00;29;41;23

Diane Bergeron

We start to move the light changes, the car starts to move and we're hit. Now the big argument that was said to us is that a a a car that is sitting still and not moving, you know, doesn't kill anybody.

00;29;42;17 - 00;30;01;08

Diane Bergeron

And although that is true, the driver could easily touch, you know, step on the on the pedal and off they go and I have no idea that they're coming. I can't jump out of the way. I can't, I wouldn't make the decision to cross the street without, you know, if I could hear something coming.

00;30;02;12 - 00;30;19;24

Diane Bergeron

The other thing is, is that we, when we stand at a street corner and make a decision, the decision we're making is based on what we call the surge. So the you stand, you wait and you hear the surge of either parallel or perpendicular to you, you hear the surge of the engines, you know that the light's

00;30;19;24 - 00;30;38;21

Diane Bergeron

just changed or that somebody has just moved. You don't have that with a silent vehicle. So it makes it very difficult for a blind person to determine when it is safe to to cross the road. And, you know, people have said it's up to the driver to stop and to not hit someone.

00;30;39;04 - 00;30;51;01

Diane Bergeron

And my answer to that one of my good friends who was working on this particular file said, well, I don't need my tombstone to say he had the right away so right now, we don't want to have to prove that theory.

00;30;51;17 - 00;30;54;21

Karen Brown

Are they making any progress on this?

00;30;54;21 - 00;31;05;12

Diane Bergeron

There are some regulatory changes that have occurred, but of course there's a lot of vehicles that are already out there that don't have the sound incorporated. And you know, this is a safety feature.

00;31;05;19 - 00;31;29;25

Diane Bergeron

It is a definite safety feature. And you know, some of the some of the car companies are getting pushback from environmental groups about, you know, sound pollution and trying to keep the sound down. And, you know, I completely agree with not wanting to have too much sound out there, but there needs to be enough sound to keep people safe on the roads.

00;31;29;25 - 00;31;43;25

Karen Brown

Absolutely. And the issue is magnified when we start hearing them talking about driverless cars or the ability for cars to drive on their own. How does a car sense that there is a blind person who is making a choice?

00;31;44;11 - 00;31;53;12

Karen Brown

I mean, it just gets the issue compounds exponentially when you start talking about all of these technologies incorporated into cars.

00;31;53;12 - 00;32;00;19

Diane Bergeron

Yeah. Now, once they have self-driving vehicles that I can that I can be in, then you're not going to have to worry about me stepping in front of you.

00;32;00;19 - 00;32;04;16

Diane Bergeron

You're going to have to worry about me driving the car.

00;32;04;16 - 00;32;13;05

Karen Brown

Well, there's that. There's that. Hey, listen, I don't want to let you go before we have a chance to talk about the CNIB because they do such wonderful work.

00;32;13;05 - 00;32;26;29

Karen Brown

We've just talked a little bit about some of the advocacy, but there is more and it's actually on such an international scale. There is a store. There are all kinds of things. Can you tell us about the CNIB and their work?

00;32;27;23 - 00;32;49;26

Diane Bergeron

Oh, absolutely. So CNIB was established in 1918. It was established in response to war vets coming home from the first World War who were blinded in battle and also from the Halifax explosion. A lot of people were blinded, and so they started CNIB. We're more than 100 years old, which is it's a really long time

00;32;49;26 - 00;33;11;12

Diane Bergeron

for a charity and really over the over that hundred years, the organization has changed significantly and how that it it helps

people with sight loss. You know that there used to be residential residences and schools and, of course, all of those have closed now and we do community work.

00:33;12;13 - 00:33;29;08

Diane Bergeron

We also work with our our partner organization, Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada, who does the rehabilitation pieces, teaching people how to use canes and live independently in their homes. And then CNIB is the other side of that coin, which is really the other pieces, right?

00:33;29;08 - 00:33;49;21

Diane Bergeron

It's beyond just learning how to function. It's it's the the technology, it's the sport and recreation and leisure. It's advocacy and employment programs, and there's all sorts of other pieces that we do. We have a Lake Joe, which is our camp.

00:33;49;21 - 00:34;06;19

Diane Bergeron

We have a camp for people with sight loss, which is I've often said that Disney says they're the happiest place on Earth, but I call Lake Joe the happiest place on Earth because it's so accessible and it's fun and and it's really designed for people with sight loss to go and have fun.

00:34;06;19 - 00:34;29;06

Diane Bergeron

They have a climbing wall, they have all sorts of water activities and in the process they're also helping people to do some get experience walking around and learning some of their independence skills. We have we produce alternate format materials, so we have recording studios and braille production.

00:34;29;25 - 00:34;52;06

Diane Bergeron

And and then of course, my favorite is because I work in it is our guide dog program, which we only started in 2017. And of course, the pandemic caused a bit of problems with the border closures.

People who would have normally gone to the United States to get their dogs ended up trying to get dogs in Canada

00;34;52;06 - 00;35;19;13

Diane Bergeron

so our demand for guide dogs went up significantly over 300% within 2020 and 2021. So we, although we had planned to grow slowly as a program over the years, we decided to step up to that particular challenge and we now have as of today, we have 48 working guide dogs across the country, so we're very proud of

00;35;19;13 - 00;35;33;06

Diane Bergeron

what we've done. It's, it's, we've got some property that we're building up to make sure we can bring in more dogs and we're hoping to start our breeding program in 2022 and start breeding our own dogs for our program.

00;35;33;06 - 00;35;59;07

Diane Bergeron

And yeah, it's a very exciting program. We do also have what we call buddy dogs. So not all dogs that come in the program are suitable as guide dogs for various reasons either temperament or medical or potentially anxiety or body sensitivities and so on, and so we analyze and determine which which career choice is best for

00;35;59;09 - 00;36;15;22

Diane Bergeron

guide dogs is the one that we that we have that is our key program. And then we have buddy dogs, which are dogs that, you know, wouldn't be great guide dogs, but they can be really, really good companions to a child who is blind or partially sighted or youth

00;36;16;01 - 00;36;34;27

Diane Bergeron

and we partner them up, and it helps the child learn responsibility and they have to continue with the obedience training and training with the dog. They have to feed and water the dog and take the

dog out, pick up after the dog walk, the dog, groom the dog, so they get all the stuff that they need to

00;36;34;27 - 00;36;51;13

Diane Bergeron

know to take care of a wonderful dog so that maybe in the future they may get their own guide dog. But the key piece we found in this and we're starting to realize is we started it, you know, giving these dogs as lovely pets to these young kids.

00;36;51;26 - 00;37;06;27

Diane Bergeron

What we realized is that it's helping the child with their orientation and mobility because they have to use their cane and take that dog for a walk. And it also helps them with socialization because a lot of kids on the block don't want to approach the blind kid with the cane

00;37;06;27 - 00;37;22;00

Diane Bergeron

but I'll tell you, when they have a dog with them, it's attracting, and it's helping the child with their socialization. Helping them to gain friendships, it's helping them within their family sibling connections. The family comes together around this dog.

00;37;22;00 - 00;37;38;09

Diane Bergeron

It's been an absolutely phenomenal experience and we're learning how these dogs can help. We have one child who has a buddy dog whose parents said that when the child lost his sight, it was due to cancer when the child lost his sight.

00;37;38;12 - 00;37;54;16

Diane Bergeron

Ever since, he can't sleep alone and so they were taking turns every night sleeping with this child because he was so afraid to sleep and ever since he got his buddy dog, the dog now sleeps with him and keeps him calm at night so that they don't have to sleep with them anymore.

00;37;55;01 - 00;38;04;00

Diane Bergeron

And that may be a small thing to some people, but I bet you to that couple, they finally have the opportunity to not have to stay in a room with their child.

00;38;04;00 - 00;38;05;25

Karen Brown

That's absolutely huge.

00;38;05;25 - 00;38;09;02

Diane Bergeron

Yeah. And it gives the child some feeling of independence, right?

00;38;09;02 - 00;38;12;10

Diane Bergeron

They don't have to have their parents with them, you know, they've got their dog.

00;38;12;10 - 00;38;29;02

Karen Brown

That's right. That's right. Well, we're going to make sure that we post a link to the CNIB on the show notes for this podcast, and you'll be able to access information about the Guide Dogs and the CNIB store, their advocacy work,

00;38;29;02 - 00;38;41;27

Karen Brown

all of that. We're also going to post a list or sorry, a link to Diane's website called Blind Iron Vision. Thank you so much for being with us today, Diane. I have learned so much.

00;38;41;27 - 00;38;48;07

Diane Bergeron

I think I'll also maybe just before we sign off, I'll also make sure that you have a link to one thing that we

00;38;48;07 - 00;39;01;26

Diane Bergeron

do on our website called Clearing Our Path. It's clearingourpath.ca and it is a link to all of the things that we spoke about today around tactile indicators, how to make things accessible. And so it's it's the standard

00:39:01;26 - 00:39:12;24

Diane Bergeron

and then it goes beyond the standards to say, here's some ideas. So it's just called clearingourpath.ca, and it's a great resource for anybody who wants to look at this particular way of building and designing.

00:39:12;24 - 00:39:15;02

Karen Brown

I have written that down and will absolutely include it.

00:39:15;04 - 00:39:25;25

Karen Brown

Thanks again, Diane. Thank you. And thanks again to our listeners. Please tune in again for another edition of Real Life Renos. the podcast.

00:39:25;25 - 00:39:30;19

Karen Brown

Real Life Renos, the podcast is a production of Reno Studios. Executive produced by Karen Brown.

00:39:31;01 - 00:39:41;05

Karen Brown

This is Real Life Renos theme music and lyrics by Jane Carmichael, recorded at Swamp Songs Recording Studio in Lucan, Ontario. Engineered by Matt Weston. Thank you for tuning in.