

JAMES R. GASHEL

Occupation: retired

Previous Employment: Vice President of Business Development and Product Evangelist, KNFB Reader, LLC.

James Gashel joined the KNFB Reader leadership team in 2007 after serving the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in several key leadership positions for more than thirty-three years. While serving as Executive Director for Strategic Initiatives at the NFB, Gashel led the public introduction and launch of the world's first, truly portable text-to-speech reading device for the blind, called the Kurzweil-National Federation of the Blind Reader. As part of this effort he raised and administered the funds necessary to support pre-release beta testing, product announcement, and public promotional efforts needed to bring the reader to market in 2006.

After first meeting Ray Kurzweil in April 1975, Gashel also organized and raised funds necessary to test and launch the original Kurzweil Reading Machine, released in 1977 as the world's first text-to-speech reading system for the blind.

James Gashel started his career teaching speech and English in Pipestone, Minnesota, later accepting a position as Assistant Director at the Iowa State Commission for the Blind in Des Moines. He earned his teaching degree and graduated from the University of Northern Iowa, and has work toward a masters degree in public administration from the University of Iowa.

At the National Federation of the Blind, where he joined the staff in 1974, James Gashel became one of the best known advocates for the blind of the United States. His work has led to significant changes in virtually every law directly affecting blind Americans: the Social Security Act, the Rehabilitation Act, the Randolph-Sheppard Act for blind entrepreneurs, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Copyright Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the Help America Vote Act.

During his service at the NFB, Gashel received the Commissioner's Award for Outstanding Leadership in Rehabilitation Services to the Disabled, the highest honor presented by the Commissioner of the United States Rehabilitation Services Administration. He is also a recipient of the Secretary of Labor's Outstanding American Award; an "honorary JD degree" from the National Association of Blind Lawyers; and the Jacobus tenBroek Award, the highest award given by the National Federation of the Blind to recognize outstanding leadership and service to the blind.

Now retired and living with his wife, Susan, in Honolulu, Hawaii, Gashel serves as president of the NFB of Hawaii's Honolulu Chapter and statewide legislative chairman.