



## Technology Corner: Caribu Interactive App



Caribu was named one of the top 100 Best Inventions by TIME Magazine and our Lekotek leaders agree. The app is available for phones and iPads. One family member or friend invites another to play. Activities include tic tac toe, word search, puzzles, drawing, coloring and more. Children can also select from thousands of book titles, choosing to read the story or have the story read to them. The app is interactive and promotes turn taking, early learning, literacy and fine motor skills.

Last month during a virtual session, I called Brandon (through Caribu) with the intent of reading one of many Thomas The Engine books to him. To my surprise, he chose Beatrice and the Butterfly and read the entire 15 page book to me. We both enjoyed Beatrice overcoming her fear of the first day of first grade. This play/learning session is just one of many that demonstrate the power of play and the power of Lekotek.

During the COVID 19 pandemic, all play sessions, sibshops and family activities have been suspended. But staff members have successfully conducted play sessions, sibshops and even computer club through Zoom and apps like Caribu. With the benefit of technology, we are continuing to provide Lekotek services and resources to our families and during these challenging times, our families need Lekotek more than ever.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Family Picnic - September 12th  
Golf Tournament - September 14th  
Pumpkin Patch - October 3rd,  
Family Fun Day at Rock Ranch - October 10th  
Halloween Party – October 24th  
Happy Tails, Music and Sibshops – November 7th  
Holiday Party – December 12th

## *Using his Gift of Blindness*

*By Nancy Badertscher*

Marietta business executive, Chad E. Foster says he's successful and happy – not despite being blind but because of it. "Most people spend their entire lives trying to figure out how to be happy, something I learned early," said the now 44 year-old married father of two. "Happiness is not a feeling or emotion. Happiness is a decision each of us makes everyday when we wake up."

Foster was 3 when he started to have trouble seeing. He was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa, a genetic and degenerative disease. In his teens he had to accept he would never drive again, see another sunset or his family. After several near death injuries, he went to Michigan to train for a month with a Seeing Eye dog. There, he met people who were not only visually impaired but also dealing with mental impairments, kidney failure and deafness. The experience changed the trajectory of his life. "Being exposed to these courageous people taught me life's most valuable lesson. Life without obstacles removes opportunities for growth. We have to choose to deliberately frame our perception or we allow the circumstances to determine our happiness." With that knowledge, he said he "stopped playing the victim."

He changed his major at the University of Tennessee from medicine to business administration. Having to relearn how to learn without the benefit of eyesight, he sailed through with straight A's. A job offer from a Fortune 500 company was waiting for him. He's been climbing the corporate ladder ever since, securing more than \$45 billion in technology contracts for current and former employers. He's also written computer code that's helping make the tech world more user-friendly for individuals who are blind.

He is currently a finance executive at Red Hat, the world's largest open-source software company. In 2015, his company sent him to Harvard Business School's leadership program, where he earned the distinction of being the program's first graduate who is blind. He was chosen by his classmates as a graduation speaker and received a standing ovation with a poignant and humor filled address. "If you are looking at going blind, trust me, now is the time – with all the technology, GPS and smartphones," he said as the audience roared.

The experience turned into another life-changer. Foster's speech was so well received that it encouraged him to be more intentional about "using his gift of blindness" to give motivational speeches to leadership and sales teams. He is also writing a book about his life, due out next year. "If you were to offer me the ability to see – with the caveat that I couldn't help other people - I don't think I'd take it."

*Edited with permission from the Atlanta Journal Constitution, March 2020*



**Girl Scouts Earn Philanthropy Badge**

Troop 18411 from Drew Charter School completed their Philanthropy Badge at Lekotek. The girls collected tips at their cookie sale booths and visited Lekotek to present a check for three hundred dollars. While at Lekotek the troop experienced hands – on technology like the eye gaze system that allows a child to move the cursor, just by looking.

At Lekotek, Executive Director, Helene Prokesch, shared Lekotek’s mission of inclusion. Inclusion was very important to the founder of the Girl Scouts of America, Juliette Gordon Low, who had a hearing impairment. She welcomed and encouraged all girls to be scouts.

The girls concluded their visit by volunteering to stuff more than 200 eggs for Lekotek’s Annual Easter Egg Hunt. Lekotek thanks the troop for volunteering and raising money for our kids.



Girl Scouts Presenting Check

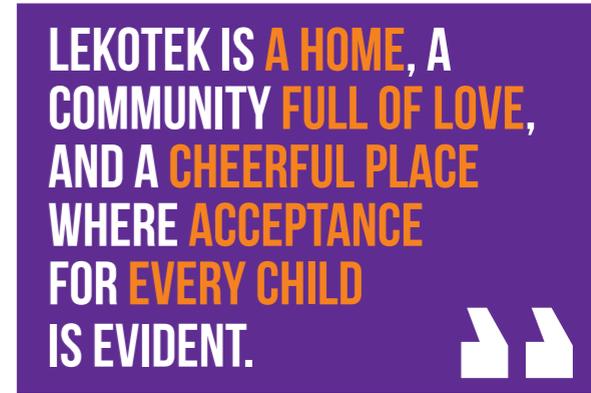


Staff at ATIA Conference

**Lekotek Staff Members Attend ATIA Technology Conference**

In January, Lekotek leaders attended the Assistive Technology Industry Association conference in Orlando. Assistive technology is defined as any product used to increase, maintain and/or improve functional abilities. These range from low tech picture communication boards to high tech solutions that include adapted keyboards, screen readers, eye gaze systems and electric wheelchairs.

Presenters and vendors shared new “state of the art” technology and best practices for diverse populations. Exhibiting at ATIA was the founder of BJ Live, a company in Spain that creates sensory rooms. Plans are underway for Atlanta’s main Lekotek to showcase their first sensory room in the US. Several companies – Ablenet, Smartbox and Accessible –Tech discounted and donated products to Lekotek. Energized, we returned to our sites with new skills and tools to share with our families.



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