



Melissa Sephton smiling down at her new toy.

Smiles all around

Five-year-old Melissa Sephton gets a giggle out of her new, customized Eeyore which flaps his ears and sings a song when activated by an infrared remote.

The Victoria youngster has cerebral palsy with very limited control of her movements. UVATT was asked to design a device that would enable Melissa to learn how particular actions will elicit a response. Since she can't point or use a hand switch, the team—in consultation with Special Education Technology BC—opted for a device she can operate with her head.

Two people were assigned to the project—Eric Auer, a UVic engineering grad and now full-time UVATT employee, and Lana Olague,

a third-year mechanical engineering student who is doing a co-op work term with UVATT.

After several trips to the toy store, Lana selected this Eeyore, which is normally activated when a switch on one of his paws is squeezed. Eric and Lana modified the toy to include the infrared detector (the box between the paws). Melissa wears a headband with the infrared remote, along with a laser pointer to help her find her “target.”

The cloth wrapping over the detector box and Melissa's headband were made by Norma Haskett, a volunteer sewer in the community

continued on p.3 ▶



University of Victoria

in this issue

What is UVATT?	2
Inspired devices	3
The UVATT experience	4
Amusing steps	4
Feature graduate student	4
Feature volunteer	5
An educational experience	5
Keyboard angles	6
Music therapy	6

A Dynamic Onscreen Keyboard

Imagine not being able to use a conventional keyboard and having to “type” by using a single switch, by moving your head or even by moving your eyes. For many people, this is a reality.

UVATT researcher Dave Marotto is developing an innovative computer program that generates an onscreen keyboard. Designed specifically for people with limited dexterity but who want to browse the web, send emails or just type documents or letters. Among its many features, the keyboard uses statistics and word prediction to aid users in faster and more accurate typing.

The keyboard will be highly configurable allowing it to be tailored to individual preferences and requirements. So, for example, input to the keyboard could be via a foot switch or even an eye-tracking device. Users will be able to select the size, colour and arrangement of letters. In partnership with SET-BC, UVATT is also working on using programmable keypads as input devices.

“The software is at a preliminary stage. A variety of users are helping us evaluate the range of options that should be included in the final program” says Dave.



Dr. Livingston with his youngest daughter, Hannah.

A note from the director

Over the past few months I have been able to take advantage of the good weather and walk into the university. During my walks I often reflect on how lucky I am to be involved with UVATT. In fact, I can hardly wait to get into work.

There are a number of reasons why working with UVATT is so rewarding and exciting; there are the intellectual and technical challenges offered by the projects themselves; there is, of course, the immense satisfaction of doing something that will have a direct impact on the quality of life of the users of our devices and technology; and there is the wonderful and stimulating experience of working with a team of extraordinarily talented and energetic students, community volunteers and university faculty and staff.

UVATT has grown by leaps and bounds over the past few years. We started with a single project back in 1999 and now we have over 70 projects underway or completed—every one in response to a request from the community. This clearly demonstrates that there is a real need for a multi-disciplinary organization such as ours that makes custom devices for those with special needs.

I hope you enjoy and are informed by this newsletter (and by subsequent issues) and, of course, any feedback would be greatly appreciated. Our intent is to share all our good news and our vision with our many supporters and, most of all, to say a heartfelt thank you to the many people who have contributed to UVATT's success. —Nigel Livingston

What is UVATT?

UVATT's underlying goal is to develop technology and devices that will improve the lives of those with special needs.

When we embarked on our very first project, we were aware that there was a need for a group or team that could develop customized devices tailored to the individual user. These are devices that are not commercially available, either because the market is too small or because of seemingly insurmountable technological barriers. Now, almost 6 years and 70 projects later our expectations have been fully confirmed—there is indeed a huge need and the requests keep coming in!

What makes UVATT so unique is the extensive involvement of students, faculty and staff, and the access to state-of-the-art facilities, laboratories and equipment across campus. We are also highly inter-disciplinary. Members of our team have come from computer science, engineering, physical education, music, nursing, mathematics, linguistics, psychology, biology...to name a few!

Another critical component of UVATT's success has been the involvement of community volunteers. These include retired engineers, sewers and machinists. You will read about some of these wonderful people in this newsletter.

Finally, we have received tremendous sup-

port from individuals and businesses that have donated money or materials to UVATT. This has enabled us to give all of our devices to users at no charge. We are, and always will be a not-for-profit organization.

As well as producing innovative and customized devices, we have another key "product". We provide students with a unique and deeply rewarding experience at the university. Many of the (almost 700!) students who have been involved in UVATT projects had not been exposed to special needs issues before joining our team. We are proud of the role that UVATT has played in raising student awareness of these issues.

UVATT is determined to become a self-sustaining and significant community resource that will be recognized as a world leader in the development of assistive technology. Although we still have a long way to go to realize our vision, it has, so far, been an exciting and very rewarding journey.

If you would like to find out more about our projects and/or the people involved with UVATT, why not visit our website? Just go to www.uvic.ca/uvatt



Some team members relax after the UVic Board of Governors had visited the UVATT labs.

Inspired Devices

Walk into the UVATT labs and you will find a number of projects under way that will assist not only those who made the original request, but many other individuals with a wide variety of special needs. How will these devices be distributed to those who could benefit from the technologies, but are not in direct contact with UVATT?

Inspired Devices Incorporated was created to address this need.

Inspired Devices Inc. (IDI) is a newly formed University of Victoria (UVic) spin-off company that is dedicated to working with UVATT to deliver innovative solutions to people with special needs. IDI's mandate is to be the distribution vehicle for UVATT on a local, national, and international level.

Since its inception in March 2005, IDI has been led by its General Manager, Stephen Anderson-Macdonald. His management experience in the technology sector and educational background (UVic BCom 2001, Queen's MBA 2005) provide the knowledge and skills necessary to build a strong foundation for growth and successfully lead IDI and UVATT towards realizing their goals.

IDI searches for commercial potential in each developed UVATT technology, while ensuring the appropriate delivery of products to end-users. Devices that have wider applications inside or outside the field of assistive technology will be commercialized to generate revenues to support future projects, moving UVATT closer to self-sustainability.

In addition, IDI is currently working in partnership with the University of Victoria Innovation and Development Corporation (IDC)—

UVic's technology transfer office—along with other organizations, to set up the appropriate structures, processes and networks. "IDC has been wonderful in terms of its support. This has been critical to our growth and success", notes Dr. Nigel Livingston.

Inspired Devices Inc. was formed and is wholly owned by IDC. Dr. Doug Tolson, Vice-President of IDC says "IDI will help UVATT achieve its goals. We're excited about being able to support this unique initiative at the university, which will help transfer technologies to the community".

Stephen adds, "Ultimately, IDI's goal is to allow UVATT to reach its full potential as a key player in the assistive technologies arena and to become a valued community resource. In doing so, elevate UVic's leadership in university-community relations."



Stephen Anderson-Macdonald

Smiles all around continued from p.1 ▲

who has contributed her time and skills to a number of UVATT projects.

Within minutes, Melissa gleefully learned how to activate Eeyore. UVATT plans to implement this system with a range of other devices such as remote-activated lamps and fans. For another little girl in Vancouver, Lana is design-

ing a laser pointer-activated system that will change the volume and track on an iPod. The laser pointers are carefully selected to make sure they won't damage eyes.

"Just seeing Melissa's smile is heartwarming, but this project also sums up what makes UVATT so special," says Dr. Nigel Livingston.



Inspired Devices Inc. FAQ

How will revenues made by IDI help UVATT? Revenues made by IDI will be re-invested into UVATT to fund future projects, hire more students and employees, and move UVATT toward self-sustainability.

How does IDI determine the commercial potential of UVATT products?

Through close partnership with Innovation and Development Corporation, IDI conducts detailed evaluations of UVATT projects as the ideas and requests are first received from the community. IDI then continues to work with UVATT throughout the R&D process to ensure intellectual property is adequately protected and protocols followed so that technologies with potential market value can eventually be licensed or sold commercially.

Does IDI produce any of the assistive technologies and devices? No. All assistive technologies and devices are created in UVATT's labs and research facilities.

What do you approach IDI for? IDI is dedicated to providing technology transfer services solely to UVATT. All research activities and community requests for assistive technologies or customized devices should go directly through UVATT. However, if you're interested in purchasing a product, licensing a technology or partnering with either organization, then get in touch with IDI.

Get In Touch with IDI

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Canada

Amusing Footsteps



The UVATT Experience

By Elaine Baird, UVATT Volunteer

I first learned about UVATT at their website when I was looking for a project for my Computer Engineering 499 design course. The 499 course gives students an opportunity to carry out a significant engineering design project working in a team of 2-5 people. Many 499 projects involve designing systems of software and hardware for remote devices that can control external machinery.

There was a large selection of projects to choose from, but I was immediately drawn to the projects offered by UVATT. These projects all involved improving conditions for those who have a strong need for electronic systems to aid their abilities.

I stayed involved with UVATT after my course ended and I am currently volunteering to improve a system of communication via computer for a person who has multiple sclerosis. The system detects electric signals produced by the movement of the forehead muscles. These signals are subsequently used to trigger an electronic switch, which in turn activates a call bell at the nursing station. The specialized nature of each UVATT technology user's requirements does not necessarily translate to designs that will be commercially successful. However, the enhancement of life for those who have limited abilities is very emotionally rewarding to the project designer!

I enjoy working with UVATT because it provides me with an opportunity to make a difference in someone's life and to meet people from diverse backgrounds working towards a common goal.



Whether we remember it or not, we all needed incentives when it came to learning how to walk.

Local physiotherapist Joan Glover approached UVATT last fall and requested a motivational device to help her clients at the Queen Alexandra Centre for Children's Health (QAC) learn how to take proper footsteps. These specific clients were younger children with various developmental disabilities—mostly under 10 years old—who were having difficulty learning how to take the correct footsteps.

The project was taken on by Eric Auer, a full-time researcher at UVATT and UVic engineering graduate.

After exploring devices on the market, Eric and Joan decided to design something new that would better meet the needs of the clients at QAC. This meant designing a device that is sensitive enough to detect the weight of a small child and can

be individually placed according to the stride length of each child.

Eric designed a foot-shaped device to be placed on the ground where Joan sets up a stepping path for the children. The device plays pre-recorded sounds—such as music or amusing noises—when it detects pressure from the child's foot.

At the QAC, Joan's young client, Keegan, was eager to use the device when he discovered it played a different sound each time his foot landed on target. Another young boy was delighted to hear a soundtrack from Star Wars as he stepped on the device. One of the features that Joan finds the most valuable is that the play list on the device can easily be changed and tailored to the interests of individual children. "Because therapy can sometimes be a little boring, the footstep device makes the process more fun for my clients," says Joan.



At the Queen Alexandra Centre for Children's Health, Keegan—client of physiotherapist, Joan Glover—is trying out the therapeutic footstep device created by UVATT.

At the Broadmead Lodge, Elaine Baird works with Janice Gunn to use the electronic muscle movement detector as a communication system.

Feature Graduate Student — Phil Zeman

When graduate student Philip Zeman is not out cycling, swimming or sailing, he is busy pursuing his interests in neurophysiology. Phil graduated with a Bachelors in Engineering and is now an interdisciplinary graduate student at UVic. Phil joined the UVATT team because he felt that his values were well suited to the organization.

"It is important for me to challenge myself and at the same time do something I see as meaningful," he says. "I feel there are a lot of

problems in the world. I'd like to contribute in a positive way." Phil is focused and determined about his goals and has constructed his own professional mission statement to express his future aspirations. "To design and construct accessible, reliable neural analysis equipment to aid neuroscience research and clinical neural diagnostics."

Being a part of UVATT has helped Phil come closer to achieving these goals. He is currently one of the lead researchers in UVATT's brain-

Feature Volunteer Bill Hook

When we asked Bill Hook why he decided to volunteer for UVATT he said, "It's because I enjoy figuring out solutions to complex technical problems and I enjoy working with smart young students."

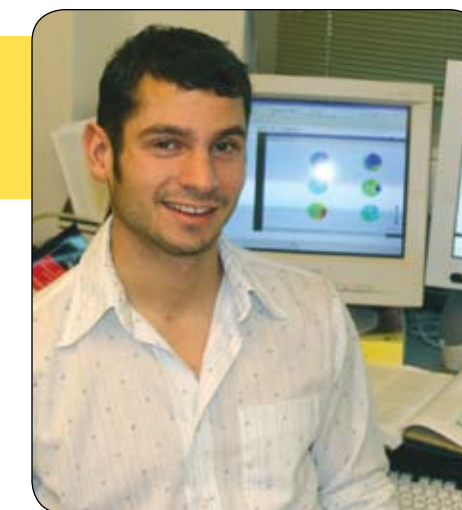
Bill Hook is one of UVATT's many invaluable volunteers who dedicates their spare time to the organization. Bill is a retired communications engineer who graduated from UCLA with a Bachelor of Science. Bill holds an impressive background, having spent three years in the US air force as a flight line officer where he supervised operation of electronic equipment for 75 jet fighter bombers. In addition, Bill worked for TRW Inc. for 32 years as an engineer and research scientist. At TRW, he worked on a variety of projects ranging from satellite communication systems, to signal processing to lasers.

Bill's varied experience has been a huge asset to UVATT. His accomplishments at UVATT so far include advances with brainwave communication research, numerous developments in the eye-tracking system and successes with detecting a person's facial muscle movement as a means of communication.



UVATT volunteer, Bill Hook conducts tests on the Cyberlink system to ensure that the unit is reliably detecting electronic muscular signals.

Bill has enjoyed being able to help people while working on projects that relate to his research interests. He recently directed a project that enabled a talented painter, who has multiple sclerosis, to use the movement of her head and the electrical signals from her jaw muscles to start painting pictures on a computer. "After drawing two multi-color paintings and a tree, she looked up at me and the other volunteer and said 'You people are wonderful,'" Bill recalls.



Phil Zeman conducting research on the brainwave communication system.

A Unique Educational Experience for Students

It's a win-win situation: UVATT thrives on recruiting bright, innovative and energetic students, and co-op students like Lana Olague work for UVATT because of the diverse nature of the projects—which provide not only practical, hands-on experience, but also a very rewarding experience. "I was excited at the opportunity to work on a project that would benefit others," says Lana, third-year mechanical engineering student and current co-op at UVATT. "I knew that working for UVATT would be an excellent opportunity to gain new skills and apply them to a variety of interesting applications," she says.

Student involvement with UVATT, however, goes beyond co-op placements. Students can earn class credit by taking on UVATT projects that have been approved by their professors or they can become volunteers. Either way, students—whether from a technical or non-technical background—have the opportunity to participate in researching and developing assistive technologies, testing and evaluating the devices, and training users with special needs.

"Being a mechanical engineering student, I haven't had the opportunity to learn about electronics. Working in the machine shop and designing circuits has provided me with invaluable hands-on experience," says Lana. Another unique aspect of UVATT is that students emerge from the program with a heightened awareness and sensitivity to disability issues. Lana especially enjoys working alongside children with special needs. "The first time a child used a device that I created was incredibly rewarding—her smile was priceless."



UVATT co-op student, Lana Olague, introduces a modified toy to Melissa Sephton for the first time.

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Keyboard angles

Imagine not being able to use your hands to type on a keyboard. What would you use instead? For Dan Spelt, that is a reality and his solution, his upper lip.

16-year-old Dan is a student at Pacific Christian School and has cerebral palsy. Dan bends over the keyboard typing one letter at a time. Dan also manoeuvres the cursor and uses applications such as Microsoft PowerPoint by using only his lips to control the keyboard. One can imagine that this method is tiresome, as you would have to raise your head every few seconds to see the screen. Dan's grandfather, John Nieboer, recognized this problem and contacted UVATT to request an assistive device.

With the help of Darcy Lane, Dan now has an easier, more efficient method of using his laptop. Fourth year engineering student and UVATT team member, Darcy created a device to aid Dan. An angled stand was built so that Dan can type while still looking at the screen. Darcy built the key-



A new music therapy tool

When we think of music, math, computers, and therapy, it is not immediately obvious what can be created from this combination.

However, with two sticks and a thin rectangular circuit board, Dr. Andrew Schloss is able to play a rhythm with drum beats and piano trills that are beyond human capacity in both tempo and complexity—all due to music, math and a computer. This device, called the radio drum, was developed in the Bell labs in the 1980s. Dr. Schloss, UVic professor in both the computer science department and school of music, has performed with the radio drum in countless concerts and festivals, both solo and ensemble.

Now teaming up with music therapists from the Victoria Conservatory of Music, UVATT team members including Dr. Schloss



Darcy Lane delivers the newly built keyboard stand to Dan Spelt, at his school.

board stand so that it can be tilted, adjusted and lowered to any desired position allowing Dan to type more quickly and efficiently. "Thank you for the keyboard stand, it is working out well for me and I like it very much," says Dan, in an e-mail to UVATT.

"The most rewarding aspect about this project was seeing the look on Dan's face when I was done and then seeing him use the device and realizing that it was actually going to help him in his everyday life," says Darcy.

and other UVic faculty and staff are working together to create a new music therapy tool, based on the radio drum technology.

Music therapists Johanne Brodeur and Allan Slade have requested two prototype radio drum applications for their clients. One application is for a 15-year-old boy with autistic spectrum disorder and the other application is for a boy who has difficulty moving his left arm.

A critical feature of the new radio drum system is that it will be robust, portable and easily set up by a user with a non-technical background. "The radio drum technology is simple, but developing the software to transform the device's output into a viable music therapy tool will be both interesting and technically challenging," says Dr. Nigel Livingston.



This article is modified from "Revolutionary music therapy tool on the horizon" by Mark Vardy, Vancouver Island News Group, Weekend Edition, July 15, 2005.

Join the team!

UVATT needs your help. Do you have some spare time and would like to contribute to your community? UVATT is always looking for volunteers who are interested in donating their spare time to improve the lives of people with special needs. There are a range of activities that volunteers can undertake; from conducting research, to developing or testing devices, to working one-on-one with users of UVATT technology, or even fundraising.

Our volunteers come from various backgrounds ranging from students and health-care professionals to seamstresses and retired engineers. No matter what your experience or background is, UVATT appreciates and values your contribution.



Volunteer John Horton

If you are interested in joining the UVATT team, please contact:

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 UVATT Operations Manager
 Ph: (250) 213-2442
 Fax: (250) 721-6622
 E-mail: mcho@uvic.ca



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*If you would like to support a particular project or assistive technology area (i.e. mobility or communication) or sponsor a co-op or graduate student, then please contact UVATT directly at 250-213-2442 or uvatt@uvic.ca

UVATT General Research Fund UVATT Equipment Fund UVATT—area of greatest need

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Thank you for your support. Your gift will assist innovative projects developed at UVic which enhance the lives of people with special needs in our community. Your gift will also help support co-op and graduate students who work full-time on our program.

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 Vancouver Island Health Authority
 Victoria Conservatory of Music
 Victoria General Hospital

We'd love to hear from you!

Do you have any questions, comments or suggestions regarding this newsletter? If you do, please contact:

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E-mail: mcho@uvic.ca

SOCCER FOR ALL

The Just for Kicks Soccer program provides an opportunity for children with special needs to play team soccer.

1:00PM every Sunday, September–March
McKinnon Gym at UVic

If you want to volunteer as a “soccer buddy” or enroll your child, please get in touch.

Info: Dr. Nigel Livingston, coach
721-7121, njl@uvic.ca



inspired



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Current UVATT Projects

What has UVATT been working on lately? We receive numerous requests for help from as far afield as Scotland and New York. We never know what new device or aspect of technology we will be working on next. One thing is for certain, by the time we publish our next newsletter there will be all sorts of new projects to describe.

Our activities are divided between longer-term research programs and project-based

tasks. Our research falls into three main areas: mobility, communication and human-computer interfaces.

A few of our current projects, other than those described in this newsletter, are listed below. If you want to learn more, please visit our website. And, of course, if you have some suggestions for a device or would like to make a request for one, don't hesitate to get in touch.

Eye-tracking based Communication and Control System

Glucose Meter for People Who Are Visually Impaired

Classroom Noise Meter

Cyberlink—Muscle Electromyograph (EMG) Detector

Harness for Communication Device

Laser Pointer Activation System

Mechanical Legs

Morse Mouse Communication System

Tongue Switch Communication System

Wheelchair Windscreen

Adjustable Umbrella Holder for Wheelchairs and Walkers

Tricycle for a Child with Arthrogryposis



In the News

UVATT has teamed up with the Garth Homer Society to develop distance education courses and packages specifically tailored to youth and adults with special needs. The Ministry of Children and Family Development has provided \$150,000 for a pilot project. Kelvin Wong has been hired as the project manager.

- In April, Dr. Nigel Livingston, was awarded the Academic of the Year award by the Confederation of University Faculty Associations of B.C. This award was established to recognize faculty members at B.C. universities who have distinguished themselves through their academic research or scholarly activity.
- In June, Dr. Nigel Livingston was awarded the Community Involvement Award at the 2005 ViaTec Technology Awards Ceremony. This award recognized Dr. Livingston for his outstanding leadership and accomplishments with UVATT.
- UVATT will work with the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario to develop a wireless device that will accurately monitor the limb movement of children with spinal muscular atrophy. This will be critical in assessing the outcomes of specific therapies and treatments. A full-time electrical engineering co-op student will be hired to work on this project under the supervision of our Technology Director, Bernie Till.
- The Satin Moon Quilt Shop will provide materials, up to a total value of \$500 for any UVATT projects that require custom sewing. Thank you Satin Moon!

