Cleveland Public Library has been serving the needs of visually impaired people through its Library for the Blind and Physically Disabled (OLBPD) for many years. It had previously served as one of only two locations in the entire state to provide these materials.

That changed on June 30, 2009, when the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County transferred the Library for the Blind to Cleveland as a result of budget cuts. Cleveland Public Library is now the only source in Ohio to provide such necessary items as talking books, Braille materials, described videos, adaptive technology for magnification, and large-print books. Virtually overnight, the library went from serving approximately 11,000 active readers to serving nearly 16,000.

Without the budget to increase staff or capacity, the OLBPD in Cleveland now handles nearly 4,000 items per day, resulting in an annual circulation of more than 700,000 items.

“We know our library is a life line for many people,” said Will Reed, who was named branch manager in November. Reed replaced Barbara Mates, who had served in that role for more than 20 years. “We worked hard to make the transition of service as seamless as possible for our patrons. They are simply receiving their materials from a different location.”

In addition to taking on statewide responsibility for materials and services for the blind, Cleveland Public Library implemented a significant technology change in 2009. Thousands of cassettes were transitioned to a digital format. As part of the technology upgrade, the Library started in September sending out new players that were compatible with the new format.

“This was a huge change for our patrons,” said Reed. “The format for these materials has not changed for more than 30 years, so this was a big deal.”

Also new in 2009 was the investment in technology that allows the downloading of digital material through the Library’s website.