Winter 2021 Buckeye Bulletin

A publication of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio

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The National Federation of the Blind knows that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you or your future. Every day we raise expectations, because low expectations create obstacles between blind people and our dreams. You can live the live you want; Blindness is not what holds you back.

The National Federation of the Blind of Ohio is a 501(c)3 consumer organization comprised of blind and sighted people committed to changing what it means to be blind. Though blindness is still all too often a tragedy to those who face it, we know from our personal experience that with training and opportunity it can be reduced to the level of a physical nuisance. We work to see that blind people receive the services and training to which they are entitled and that parents of blind children receive the advice and support they need to help their youngsters grow up to be happy, productive adults. We believe that first-class citizenship means that people have both rights and responsibilities, and we are determined to see that blind people become first-class citizens of these United States, enjoying their rights and fulfilling their responsibilities. The most serious problems we face have less to do with our lack of vision than with discrimination based on the public’s ignorance and misinformation about blindness. Join us in educating Ohioans about the abilities and aspirations of Ohio’s blind citizens. We are changing what it means to be blind.

The NFB of Ohio has eight local chapters, one for at-large members, and special divisions for diabetics, merchants, students, seniors, guide dog users, members of communities of faith, and those interested in Braille. This newsletter appears three times a year and is circulated by email, posted on NFB-NEWSLINE®, our digitized newspaper-reading service by phone, and can be read or downloaded from our website, www.nfbohio.org. For information about the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio or to make address changes or be added to the mailing list, call (440) 774-8077 or email barbara.pierce9366@gmail.com. For information about NFB-NEWSLINE, our free digitized newspaper-reading service, call (866) 504-7300. Local NEWSLINE numbers are: 330-247-1241 (Akron), 330-409-1900 (Canton), 513-297-1521 (Cincinnati), 216-453-2090 (Cleveland), 614-448-1673 (Columbus), 937-963-1000 (Dayton), 567-242-5112 (Lima), 567-333-9990 (Mansfield), 740-370-6828 (Portsmouth), 937-717-3900 (Springfield), 419-806-1100 (Toledo), and 330-259-9570 (Youngstown).

Dream Makers Circle

You can help build a future of opportunity for the blind by becoming a member of our Dream Makers Circle. Your legacy gift To the National Federation of the Blind or the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio can be made in the form of a will or living trust or an income-generating gift or by naming us as the beneficiary of a retirement plan, IRA, pension, or a life insurance policy. You can designate a specific amount, a percentage, or list NFB as one of several beneficiaries. For additional information contact Patti Chang at (410) 659-9314, extension 2422 or at pchang@nfb.org.

The National Federation of the Blind uses car donations to improve the education of blind children, distribute free white canes, help veterans, and much more. We have partnered with Vehicles for Charity to process donated vehicles. Please call toll-free (855) 659-9314, and a representative can make arrangements, or you can donate online by visiting [www.nfb.org/vehicledonations](http://www.nfb.org/vehicledonations).

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# **Editorialby Barbara Pierce**

I trust that we will look back on the first fifth of the twenty-first century as the time when racial, gender, and sexual orientation justice truly came into their own. The Black Lives Matter demonstrations, the Me Too movement, the various LGTB Trans demands, and the Nothing about Us without Us efforts all demonstrate that oppressed people will no longer be quiet and submissive. This is undoubtedly a great improvement in our society.

The impact and repercussions of all these movements are being felt at every level of our culture. We should not be surprised that the NFB and our three training centers have been implicated in some of the accusations. You may have read some of these on social media. The leadership of the NFB, the National Blindness Professional Certification Board, and the NFB training centers have quickly stepped up to apologize and set in motion procedures to respond to the accusations that have been articulated. You will find careful and heart-felt apologies and statements on the websites of all five of these organizations.

I feel certain that the Ohio affiliate is guilty of these problems and regrettable behavior as well. We have embraced the code of conduct developed by The NFB, and that is an important step. But it is equally important to assure everyone that, if you have been a victim of any discrimination, aggression, or oppression at the hands of NFB-O leaders or members, we need to know about the problem so that we can address it. You need to choose someone in the leadership of the affiliate to whom you feel you can speak honestly and be heard, no matter who the perpetrator has been. I want to urge you not to pass along third-hand reports. One of the mistakes often made is to listen and speak to third parties and not the alleged perpetrator and victim.

This editorial is this administration’s way to articulate our apology and determination to demand better of ourselves and each other. We want nothing to do with injustice or discrimination. We believe in the equality of all people and the right of all blind people to equal treatment and a fair chance. We know that we have not always lived up to this standard. The agenda items during the past two national conventions demonstrate this fact. But we demand of ourselves and each other to do better and to respect every blind person.

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# **Convention Wrap-Upby Eric Duffy**

Editor’s note: Eric Duffy is secretary of the Ohio affiliate. Here is his post-convention article:

I have attended state conventions of the National Federation of the Blind since the mid 1980’s. Most of those conventions have been in the state of Ohio, but I have attended conventions in several states as well. The 2020 convention of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio was different from any other I have ever attended. The convention was virtual and conducted on the Zoom platform. No matter which affiliate convention of the National Federation of the Blind we participate in, there are a few things we can count on. We know there will be a representative from the national organization. We also know that the convention will be addressing issues of concern to the blind of the state.

This year we had to make decisions about how the convention would operate in the virtual world and then get our members comfortable in the new environment. President Payne put together a team to do strategic planning on how to accomplish both. This team began meeting weeks before the convention took place. I commend President Payne for his leadership, as well as those who stepped up to make the convention the success that it was. There are too many people to name here, so I won’t even try. You know who you are, and so do we.

We have done more training on the Zoom platform this year than we have ever done before. The days leading up to the convention offered Zoom training sessions. I don’t know exactly how many people took advantage of this training, but I do know that some of us should be able to get hired as Zoom trainers should we wish to do so.

The Board of Directors recommended to the convention a special voting policy to be used in the virtual environment in which we were operating. This policy protected the democratic way in which our convention has always operated. We tested a new electronic voting system a few weeks prior to the convention and then again during the Rookie Roundup.

The Rookie Roundup gave us the opportunity to preview the convention and to hear from informative and inspiring speakers. There were door prizes and funny moments, as we have come to expect at Federation conventions. Everything was designed to prepare us for the days ahead.

We also had the opportunity to learn from those selling access technology. That was a fast-paced two-hour session, with several vendors presenting and audience members asking questions. Suzanne Turner provided a list of the presenters and their contact on Ohio-Talk. If you need that list, please search the Ohio-Talk archives or contact Suzanne directly.

Cheryl Fields and the Community Service Committee conducted a lively happy hour Thursday evening before the convention officially began on Friday morning. There were music, door prizes, and good fun all the way around. Cheryl Fields and the Community Service Committee have done a great job of keeping everyone connected during the pandemic, and they took us into the convention on a high note.

Friday morning began with Zoom hospitality. This was a great time to renew old acquaintances and to make new ones. We could not be together in person, but we were determined to stay connected, and that’s exactly what we did.

The meeting of the Board of Directors was the first official meeting of the convention. We approved the constitution for the new Communities of Faith Division for the Ohio affiliate. This was a fast-paced meeting, and it was a great way to begin the convention officially.

President Payne called the afternoon session to order promptly at 2:00 PM, and there was a flurry of activity. Bob Pierce delivered an invocation. Annette Lutz drew someone’s name for a door prize, but the only thing I can tell you about that was that she didn’t draw my name. The mayor of Dayton, the Hon. Nan Whaley, then welcomed the convention to Dayton. Of course, had we been able to meet in person, the convention would have been held in downtown Dayton.

Thirteen-year-old Makenzie Love performed the national anthem beautifully. Makenzie has been in all of the Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning (BELL) Programs that the Ohio Affiliate has put together. Her family has been a real support to the affiliate, and we are always grateful when MaKenzie shares her talents with us.

Our national representative, Scott LaBarre, presented a report from the national office. In spite of Covid-19, we have been active at all levels of the organization. The national organization has assisted several state affiliates to improve the accessibility of voting. We are continuing to work to see that blind students have accessible education opportunities at all levels even online. We have continued to pursue our legislative initiatives, and we now know that the 2021 Washington Seminar will be conducted virtually.

“Never Fear; the NFB is Here: a Mom’s Perspective: Growing with the NFB and the BELL Program” was the next presentation, by Anne Casey. The Casey family has been a real blessing to this affiliate. Their blind daughter Rosemary is a real firecracker, and she has a bright future ahead of her. She does, because she has a loving and supportive family, and her family has made the critical decision to be actively involved in the National Federation of the Blind. Anne made it clear how much they rely on and appreciate the support of the National Federation of the Blind.

We heard from the Ohio Department of Education and also Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. Both of these agencies are important to the blind in different stages of life. We need to continue to nurture our relationships with both of these agencies.

The National Federation of the Blind is truly a family. We have new members joining the family almost every day. This convention President Payne asked some of our family members to tell their personal stories or things that have recently happened in their lives. Suzanne Turner was the first to do this, and others followed on Saturday. Suzanne talked about “Finding a New Job in the Storm with Patients in the Time of a Pandemic.” Later in the convention Maggie Stringer and Todd Elzey talked about living with blindness and hearing loss.

The convention, although virtual, still offered an opportunity for various committee and division meetings. The Ohio Association of Blind Merchants met to discuss issues of importance to operators in the Ohio Business Enterprise Program as well as concerns of those not in the program but who are business owners or interested in becoming business owners. The Community Service Committee conducted a special seminar, and the At-Large chapter also met during the dinner hour on Friday. The Ohio Association of Blind Students met later that evening to talk about their college majors and life experiences and goals. I cannot report on all of the meetings and activities that took place during the convention, but I want to give new readers and those who have not been to a convention in a while the idea of just what happens at a Federation convention. There are chapters and divisions that meet to offer information and support on a wide variety of topics. New friendships are made, and old friendships renewed. To learn more about our chapters and divisions, please visit our Website at www.nfbohio.org.

Saturday morning we heard from a panel on “Diversity, Inclusion, and Mutual Respect.” This was a very moving presentation given by Delcenia Brown, Jim Weiss, and Wilbert Turner. I am truly sorry for anyone who missed this panel. We then heard from Kerstin Sjoberg, the Director of Disability Rights Ohio. This nonprofit agency offers advocacy assistance and, when appropriate, legal assistance to Ohioans with disabilities.

Thomas Robinson then presented on creating meaningful career opportunities for the blind at Wright Patterson Air Force Base. This opportunity has now been made available to at least half a dozen blind people, of which I am one. Mr. Robinson said he wanted to do something to reduce the abysmally high rate of unemployment for the blind, and he created new opportunities for the blind while Director of Life Cycle Management for Wright Patterson. So that readers are not confused by terminology, let’s call these buyer positions. The position offers a good salary and benefits for those who qualify. We want to bring new people into this program continuously.

I must talk about the seminar on “Innovation in STEM Access for Blind Students and Science Lovers” organized and moderated by our own Caroline Carbowski. For me this was the real highlight of the convention. I say that not because I am a scientific genius, and not because I understood very much about what was discussed at all. I say this because we were having this presentation at all. For years blind students have been kept out of the STEM fields. The National Federation of the Blind began to change this many years ago, and Caroline and many others have now joined our work. Here is just a small sample of the topics that were discussed and an idea of who the presenters were, in order that readers can appreciate the professionalism and commitment that went into this seminar and the opportunities now available to blind students:

“SciAccess: Making Space for Everyone,” Anna Voelker, Accessible Astronomy Specialist, Coordinator of Outreach, Ohio State University Department of Astronomy; Co-presenters, Michaela Deming and Caitlin O'Brien, SciAccess Program Assistants and Astronomy and Astrophysics students at OSU;

“Accessibility Options for Informal STEAM Education,” Adrienne Provenzano, NASA/JPL-CalTech Solar System Ambassador and CASIS Space Station Explorers Ambassador;

“STEM Education and Students with Sight Loss in a Post-COVID World,” Dr. Mahadeo A. Sukhai, Head of Research and Chief Accessibility Officer, CNIB, and co-principal, IDEA-STEM;

“Hand-Catching Science: Tactile Graphics and Models Bring STEM Concepts to Life in Museums and at Home,” Lindsay Yazzolino, Tactile Design Specialist, TouchGraphics, Inc., tactile technology consultant and nonvisual designer, former cognitive neuroscience researcher.

More topics were discussed, but I will conclude this topic by saying that the future for blind students interested in the STEM fields is brighter than it has ever been. Thank you Caroline for your work.

The late afternoon general session was spent conducting the business of the organization. Several resolutions were adopted by the organization. These resolutions are now policy statements of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio. Please read all of these resolutions elsewhere in this newsletter. They are also on our website.

Elections were also conducted. This year all officers and one board member at-large were up for election. Each officer was returned to his or her office with the exception of Sherry Ruth, who decided to step down as affiliate treasurer after twenty-four years of volunteer service. There was a time during Sherry’s tenure that we were sending out more checks than any other state affiliate in the country. Sherry did her job with skill and integrity. Tom was always there to give her support when she needed it. So Tom very much deserves our gratitude as well. Tom and Sherry, the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio thanks you for your service. We love you.

Todd Elzey was elected as our new treasurer. Todd is originally from Ohio, but we had to steal him from the New York affiliate, because he was treasurer there. Todd has a long history with the National Federation of the Blind. He is bright and honest. He will make a fine treasurer for this affiliate. He and I have known each other since first grade, and many of you are beginning to know him as well. Please see his article elsewhere in this newsletter.

Scott LaBarre delivered the high-quality banquet speech we have become accustomed to in the Federation. If you missed it, ask Scott about Airport Guy the next time you talk to him. We had the presentation of both scholarships and awards during the banquet. See the articles printed elsewhere in this newsletter. But we do want to take the opportunity here to thank the Norwalk Lions Club for its generosity in supporting our scholarship program. Our members were also generous during our annual Money for the Movement collection. Thank you all as well.

The 2020 convention of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio was vintage Federation. President Payne and the Board of Directors take our responsibility to the organization and to each member very seriously. We knew we had to conduct this convention virtually, but we are looking forward to the 2021 convention already. We do not yet know where it will be held, but we are looking forward to seeing you then.

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# **NFB of Ohio Resolutions for 2020**

Editor’s Note: Here are the texts of the resolutions passed at this year’s convention:

**RESOLUTION 2020-01**

**REGARDING STATE CONTRACTING OPPORTUNITIES FOR BLIND OR LOW-VISION BUSINESS OWNERS**

WHEREAS, the Ohio Office of Budget and Management indicates that the State of Ohio spends nearly $1 billion annually on goods and services purchased from private businesses; and

WHEREAS, Ohio local and county governments also offer $100 million in contracting opportunities; and

WHEREAS, the State of Ohio provides contract preferences through the MWBE program to minority- and women-owned businesses because of the economic disadvantages these businesses face; and

WHEREAS, the State of Ohio encourages state agencies only through the Encouraging Diversity, Growth, and Equity (EDGE) program to contract with businesses owned by blind individuals; and

WHEREAS, the State of Ohio does not offer any contract preferences or set-asides for individual blind business owners, despite the fact that blind people face economic disadvantages because of the 70% unemployment rate among the blind and because approximately 30% of them live below the poverty level; and

WHEREAS, business ownership offers opportunities in many different fields, offers the blind the opportunity to earn significant income and offers them the opportunity to reduce their unemployment rate significantly; and

WHEREAS, access to state government, school district, and county and local government agency contracting opportunities can significantly increase the chance for a blind business owner to succeed: Now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio in convention assembled this 7th day of November, 2020, that this organization call upon the State of Ohio either to expand the Ohio Encouraging Diversity, Growth, and Equity (EDGE) Program to require a mandatory permanent contract set-aside for individual blind business owners or to open the MWBE program to blind business owners.

**RESOLUTION 2020-02**

**REGARDING PROMOTING SELF-EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE BLIND AND THOSE WITH LOW VISION**

WHEREAS, Despite the overall national unemployment rate being below 8%, the National Federation of the Blind, the nation’s largest organization of the blind, currently estimates that the unemployment rate of the blind is at approximately 70%; and

WHEREAS, it is estimated that approximately 30% of the blind live below the poverty line; and

WHEREAS, the unemployment rate for the blind and the percentage of the blind living below the poverty line has not been substantially lowered in decades; and

WHEREAS, despite technological advances, significant societal barriers remain that prevent many blind people from achieving full-time employment, particularly in rural areas; and

WHEREAS, even when full-time employment is achieved by a blind person, underemployment in the traditional employment market remains a significant problem; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. economy has been shifting from traditional employment to increased freelance and small business opportunities, and the United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that the number of Americans working as freelancers and small business owners will continue to increase to a point where by 2027 freelancers and small business owners will outnumber American workers in the traditional workforce; and

WHEREAS, the State of Ohio and Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities currently provide only limited support for blind people seeking self-employment, and do not provide any activities to educate blind individuals on the advantages of self-employment; and

WHEREAS, with the proper resources and training, self-employment offers many opportunities in many different fields for the blind to earn significant income, and offers the opportunity to reduce the unemployment rate significantly among the blind: Now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio in convention assembled this 7th day of November, 2020, that this organization call upon the State of Ohio and specifically Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities to recognize and support self-employment as a viable opportunity for the blind; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio call upon the State of Ohio and Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities to develop and implement a training program designed to train blind and low vision individuals to pursue self-employment opportunities--at a minimum the program should include elements that assist the trainees to

1. Assess their skills and interests to determine their best path towards self-employment;

2. Develop the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to plan their self-employment ventures properly;

3. Develop the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary for managing their self-employment ventures once started;

4. Develop the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to market their products or services; and

5. Access any resources necessary for any continuing education necessary to maintain or improve their skills in their chosen fields in order to offer the best opportunity for self-employment success; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio call upon the State of Ohio and Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities to assist those who have completed the self-employment training program to obtain the financing, equipment, and other resources necessary to begin their self-employment ventures; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio call upon the State of Ohio and Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities to train their vocational rehabilitation counselors in ways to assist clients who wish to pursue self-employment opportunities and to find and obtain resources for furthering their self-employment ventures; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio call upon the state of Ohio and Ohioans with Disabilities to take all steps necessary, including developing appropriate funding sources, to implement the program called for in this resolution.

**RESOLUTION 2020-03**

**Adjustment in Business Enterprise Staffing and Operation**

WHEREAS, Ohio’s Business Enterprise Program provides business opportunities for approximately ninety blind licensees in this state; and

WHEREAS, this program is funded by the service charge paid by these blind licensees through their business profits and the federal match money that these funds draw down; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on these small businesses, greatly reducing the amount of profits and service charge collected and drastically reducing the budget for the operation of the program; and

WHEREAS, the Bureau of Services for the Visually Impaired is the State Licensing Agency for this program, and the funds collected are used in part to pay the staff that work for this agency to manage the program; and

WHEREAS, these funds are also needed to provide daily operation of the program to keep the businesses running, and, if these funds are used to pay the staff, not enough money will be left to meet the needs of the program’s businesses such as maintenance and repair of equipment and growth of the program; and

WHEREAS, the intent of this program is to provide employment opportunities for blind businesspeople, not primarily to cover the payroll of mostly sighted state employees; and

WHEREAS, the number of employees has remained unchanged over the years even though the number of Business Enterprise facilities has decreased, thus creating an oppressive burden on the program to pay superfluous staff: Now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio in Convention assembled this 7th day of November, 2020, that this organization urge the Bureau of Services for the Visually Impaired to work with the Ohio Vendors Representative Committee to reduce the number of staff working for this agency as a part of the Business Enterprise Program through attrition and other means, thus reducing the burden of staff payroll on the program, allowing for more funds to be available for the current and future needs of the blind businesspeople to run their businesses more effectively and to expand the program to provide more opportunity for the blind; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this organization demand that the Bureau of Services for the Visually Impaired also work conscientiously with the Ohio Vendors Representative Committee to ensure that all funds collected be used efficiently and effectively to assist the blind licensees and to strengthen the program during this pandemic.

**RESOLUTION 2020-04**

**Improvement of the Business Enterprise Program on Ohio’s Post-secondary Institution Campuses**

WHEREAS, the Business Enterprise Program in Ohio provides business opportunities for over ninety blind licensees in Ohio; and

WHEREAS, several of these facilities are located on Ohio’s public college and university campuses; and

WHEREAS, the Ohio mini-Randolph-Shepard Act establishes the priority for these blind licensees to operate suitable vending facilities at these public universities; and

WHEREAS, the contracts for these vending facilities do not often include the cold beverage sales because of other pouring rights agreements between the university and beverage companies, denying the blind licensees the opportunity to increase their sales and profit with the sale of cold beverages, to the detriment of the business; and

WHEREAS, the Bureau of Services for the Visually Impaired acts as the State Licensing Agency for this program and thus has the obligation to establish suitable vending facilities where the priority exists; and

WHEREAS, the agency has failed to pursue the cold beverage sales at several universities, allowing profits that should belong to the blind licensee to go elsewhere: Now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio in Convention assembled this 7th day of November, 2020, that this organization demand that the Bureau of Services for the Visually Impaired, with the active participation of the Ohio Vendors Representative Committee, aggressively pursue agreements with Ohio’s public universities where there is currently no Business Enterprise facility, to establish suitable sites for blind licensees to operate; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that BSVI commit to working to ensure that all such agreements include the sale of cold beverages by the blind licensee; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we insist that, at universities where a current contract exists with no cold beverage sales agreement, the Bureau of Services for the Visually Impaired aggressively work to amend the agreements with the university to add the cold beverage sales agreement.

**Resolution 2020-05**

**Regarding Improvements to the Vote-By-Mail Ballot-Marking System in Ohio**

WHEREAS, since 2018 registered blind or visually impaired voters in Ohio have. been able to use the access technology with which they are familiar to mark the printed absentee ballot privately and independently using a computer, smartphone, or tablet; an Internet connection; and a printer; and

WHEREAS, under the current system blind or visually impaired voters must request the electronic absentee ballot ahead of time and then wait for days or even weeks to receive an email with a link to their ballot; and

WHEREAS, Ohio voters who requested an accessible absentee ballot and who did not receive the ballot in a timely manner have sometimes had to contact their county Board of Elections before receiving their ballot; and

WHEREAS, the ubiquitous nature of the Internet, combined with a wide variety of electronic content-delivery systems, has reduced the use of printers in our society—so much that printers are often not found in today's homes; and

WHEREAS, unless they own or have convenient access to a printer, blind or visually impaired voters are unable to take advantage of Ohio’s electronic accessible ballot-marking system; and

WHEREAS, in other states technology exists and is being used today in actual elections to enable registered voters to receive their electronic ballots immediately upon request and to deliver their ballots without having to print them; and

WHEREAS, voters who serve in the military or citizens who live overseas (so-called UOCAVA voters) already have the opportunity to submit their voted ballots using fax, email, or a secure web portal; and

WHEREAS, as much as Ohio’s accessible ballot-marking system represents a significant improvement for blind or visually impaired voters who want to mark the printed absentee ballot in complete privacy, it possesses three significant deficiencies:

1. Blind or visually impaired voters who do not have a printer or convenient access to a printer cannot use the accessible ballot-marking system,
2. Blind or visually impaired voters who submit online requests for their accessible ballots must wait before they can vote for an email, which may not be sent,
3. Blind and visually impaired voters in many cases must request sighted assistance to prepare the ballot to be mailed: Now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio in Convention assembled this 7th day of November, 2020, that this organization call upon the Governor, the Ohio State Legislature, and the Secretary of State to work with the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio and other interested parties to

1. Design or procure a system whereby blind or visually impaired voters can request an accessible ballot to be made available to them electronically as soon as early voting starts and have that ballot displayed on their screens immediately after they have been verified.
2. Design or procure a secure system through which voted ballots can be submitted electronically, thus eliminating the need for blind or visually impaired voters to own or find a printer, or to request sighted assistance before returning vote-by-mail ballots.

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# **The National Federation of the Blind of Ohio Honors Excellence at the Conventionby Annette Lutz**

Editor’s note: Annette Lutz is the NFB of Ohio Awards Committee Chairperson. Here is her report of the awards presented at this year’s convention banquet:

One thing that all of us can agree on is that 2020 has not been a typical year. Our chapters, divisions, and dedicated individuals had to spend most of their time at home holding meetings over Zoom and serving the Federation in new and creative ways. The question arose whether or not we should conduct our typical awards ceremony at the banquet or consider skipping the process this year because we feared that not as much had been done for the Federation. I called President Richard Payne and asked him about this, telling him that I had heard from several members who were questioning whether we should give out the awards during this year of decreased opportunity. Richard thought about it for a minute, and then made what turned out to be the absolutely right decision that the awards should go on. I have to admit that I was a little skeptical. I wondered if our membership could have accomplished enough over this period of being shut down to complete the Gavel questionnaires.

Well, I am happy to say that I was wrong. Our membership rose to the challenge, changed course, and conducted the work of the Federation in ways never before considered. I should never have had any doubts. I am therefore very proud to present to you the winners of the awards presented at the 2020 State Convention of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio.

The Division Gavel Award was given to the Seniors Division for the third year in a row. This division comprised primarily of our most experienced members have stepped it up during this year of the pandemic by keeping their membership active in Federation matters and by supporting each other and those less comfortable with aspects of their blindness through monthly sharing solutions phone calls in which those who have developed skills in various areas of life shared with those who are still learning. Once again, this division has proven that their experience is so vital to our organization.

The Chapter Gavel Award was presented to the National Federation of the Blind of Cleveland for a third year in a row as well. I could never list all that this chapter has accomplished in the constraints of a short article, but please be assured that this chapter is as vital and active as ever. When I presented this award, I joked that, when reading the gavel questionnaire that Cleveland submitted, I had to get comfortable because of its length in listing the accomplishments of their membership, but this is absolutely true. The chapter continued to conduct the business of the Federation and demonstrated the abilities of the blind throughout the year, not missing a beat due to the pandemic. The dedication and hard work of this chapter is a source of pride to this affiliate and should be an inspiration to us all.

This year we were proud to recognize two deserving individuals for service awards for their outstanding service to the Federation.

The Ruth Garwood Award was presented to Caroline Karbowski. This award goes to a sighted person who serves the affiliate throughout the state, and Caroline definitely qualifies. A member of the Capital Chapter, she has dedicated herself to learning blindness skills such as how to read Braille tactilely and how to travel using a white cane while blindfolded. She advocates for blind people in everyday tasks such as requesting Braille menus when she goes out to a restaurant and telling the restaurant how to get one if one isn’t available. Caroline has created a company that provides tactile models for blind people made using a 3D printer to understand what various items look like. She has volunteered at the BELL Academy and organized and conducted a workshop with an international cast of presenters at the convention. They explained their ground-breaking work in STEM fields using 3D printing technology. Caroline is a sighted person who completely understands what blindness is, and is very deserving of this award.

Last, but certainly not least, the Alphonso Smith Award was presented to our own affiliate vice president Suzanne Turner. You have already read about the achievements of the Cleveland chapter, but a large part of their success can be attributed to Suzanne as their chapter president. Under her leadership this chapter has grown and become the role model of what all chapters should strive to be. But her work does not end at the chapter level, not by a long shot. Suzanne has taken on the challenge of being at the forefront of moving this affiliate forward. She has been a vital part of assisting President Payne in all aspects of the affiliate’s work and accomplishments, from organizing the convention to working to increase membership, to fundraising, to mentoring the student division. Suzanne has a talent for thinking outside the box and coming up with solutions to any problem that she is asked to solve. On top of all of the work that she does for the Federation, she also makes herself available to help anyone in need, with everyday tasks such as assisting those who are unable to use computers to order groceries and researching ways to solve the problems of those she comes into contact with. Suzanne’s heart and dedication to both the NFB and to the blind community are an asset to our affiliate and a source of inspiration to all of us who know her and worked with her.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the awards committee who shared the responsibility of recognizing the greatness of these winners: Ali Benmerzouga, Shelley Duffy, and Jerry Purcell.

Congratulations to all of the winners. Let’s use them as an inspiration during 2021. Let’s go build the Federation!

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# **Meet the 2020 Scholarship Recipientsby Cassandra Jones**

Editor’s note: Cassandra Jones chaired the Scholarship Committee this year. Here is her report on the winners of this year’s awards:

It was my privilege to serve as the chairperson for the NFB of Ohio 2020 scholarship program with fellow committee members Jordy Stringer and Suzanne Turner. We had a very strong and deserving pool of candidates, which made the decision to select three recipients quite difficult. The candidates who were not awarded a scholarship were sent an email encouraging them to apply next year and providing information on connecting with the student division.

Traditionally the Scholarship Committee meets with the finalists over breakfast on the Saturday morning of the convention. Due to the pandemic, the state convention was held virtually, but this did not prevent the committee from meeting with the finalists. Over Zoom on the Sunday before the start of the convention, the finalists had an opportunity to introduce themselves to one another and ask questions concerning the NFB locally and nationally. They were told that they would be expected to speak upon receiving their scholarship at the banquet. We also encouraged them to attend the various sessions such as Rookie Roundup and the Student Division meeting.

The Scholarship Class of 2020:

The $1,000 Barbara E. Fohl Memorial Scholarship was awarded to Hannah G. Abel. Hannah is a sophomore social work student at Cedarville University. She served as the secretary for her high school National Honor Society and received the Cedarville University Chancellor’s Excellence Academic Scholarship Award. In her essay Hannah says that "Stargardts gave me life as I know it; it made me the person I am today. It may always be my descriptor, but it will never be my definition."

The $1,000 Robert Eschbach Scholarship was awarded to Jonathan Thomas from Fairfield, Ohio. Jonathan is completing his second year of graduate school at Wright State University, where he is studying English rhetoric and writing. JT has been voted Quest for Excellence Award winner five consecutive times. JT has not always felt ok about his blindness. However, he became involved with the National Federation of the Blind, and with this and other influences he writes, "My future isn’t limited because I’m blind."

The $1,500 Jennica Ferguson Memorial Scholarship was awarded to Kinshuk Tella. He is a sophomore at Miami University, where he is studying geology and has co-majors of environmental science and energy. In addition to science, he has interests in the performing arts and is a member of the marching band at Miami. He exhibits many characteristics of a future leader. Under the mentorship of Suzanne Turner, he was instrumental in reviving the Ohio student division and currently serves as the president. Kinshuk is ambitious and determined to reach his future goals and commented that “Not being limited by my physical abilities, but only my mental creativity, I have always striven to be a part of something greater than myself, from my heavy involvement in the performing arts and the blind and visually impaired community to my pursuit of involvement within the research and progression towards a more secure future.”

As members of the National Federation of the Blind, we know that blindness is not the characteristic that defines us or our futures. At the 2020 virtual state convention, three scholarships were awarded to three very deserving blind students who are paving their way to future success, not letting their blindness hold them back.

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# **National Federation of the Blind of Ohio Committee Appointments for 2021by Richard Payne**

Every year the Ohio Affiliate president appoints willing members to serve on various committees to help to guide the organization. So it is my honor and privilege to announce the Ohio Committees for 2021. Thank you all for serving.

AWARDS COMMITTEE

Charge: To oversee the awards process, to provide information and feedback when necessary, and to make reasonable decisions about NFBO awards.

Annette Lutz, Chair; Jerry Purcell; Ali Benmerzouga; and Emily Kiehl

BELL COORDINATOR

Charge: To communicate and help with planning the inhouse BELL Program and to organize the BELL Academy and plan efficient ways to promote and execute this important program.

Eric Duffy, Coordinator

COMMUNITY SERVICE COMMITTEE

Charge: To educate the Ohio affiliate about the professional and personal benefits of community service; to encourage chapters, divisions, and individuals to participate in projects in their communities; to encourage members to identify or develop and implement their own service projects; and to educate the public about NFB philosophy and the skills and abilities blind people bring to community service.

Cheryl Fields, Chair; Pat McPherson; Maggie Stringer; Candice Armstrong; Shelley Duffy; Gary Williams; Gloria Robinson; and Joann Williams

CONSTITUTION and RESOLUTIONS COMMITTEE

Charge: To make sure that all NFBO constitutions follow the state and national constitutions, both philosophically and rhetorically, and to oversee the submission process and to write and distribute clearly articulated and philosophically sound resolutions.

Barbara Pierce, Chair; Jim Weiss; Eric Duffy; Debbie Baker; Todd Elzey; Jessica Stover; Andra Stover; and Candice Armstrong

DEAF-BLIND COORDINATORs

Charge: To aid and provide information to those who are in this community and to serve as a vehicle to foster a positive relationship between the deaf-blind community and other members of the NFB.

William Turner and Suzanne Turner, Co-chairs

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Charge: To advise the president about policies, legislation, strategies, and initiatives in which NFBO should be engaged to improve educational opportunities for blind youth throughout the state.

Suzanne Turner, Chair; Ali Benmerzouga; Chris Sabine; Debbi Baker; Wilbert Turner; Caroline Karbowski; Marianne Denning; Anne Casey; and Sadie McFarland

FINANCING THE MOVEMENT COMMITTEE including SUN coordinator, Jernigan Fund coordinator, and PAC coordinator

Charge: To make members aware of these specific organizational fundraising opportunities and to implement strategies to increase participation.

Sherry Ruth and Colleen Roth, Co-chairs

FUNDRAISING COMMITTEE

Charge: To investigate additional opportunities to increase NFB-O resources and to implement effective fundraising strategies and programming.

Jim Weiss, Chair; Maggie Stringer; Todd Elzey; Colleen Miller; and Marion Parker

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

Charge: To increase the organization’s visibility and effectiveness in the state legislature and to continue to support our efforts in Washington throughout the year.

Eric Duffy, Chair; Todd Elzey; Chris Sabine; Jordy Stringer; Andra Stover; and William Turner

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

Charge: To implement effective strategies to recruit and retain members and to reinvigorate the chapters and divisions of NFB-O.

Carolyn Peters, Chair; Sheila Hardy-Wilson; Maggie Stringer; William Turner; Jim Weiss; Haley Thurston; Asia Quinones-Evans; Susan Day; and Gloria Robinson

PROMOTION AND PUBLICITY, WEBSITE, AND NEWSLINE COMMITTEE

Charge: To assist with updating the webpage content and the NEWSLINE service, as well as promoting and advertising NEWSLINE. Members on this committee should be proficient computer users.

To develop content and suggest creative ways to promote NFBO branding. Responsibilities include researching audience preferences and discovering current trends, creating engaging text, image, and video content, designing posts to sustain readers’ curiosity and creating buzz around new issues, staying up to date with changes in all social platforms, ensuring maximum effectiveness, training leaders how to use social media in a cohesive and beneficial way, developing an optimal posting schedule considering web traffic and engagement, and overseeing social media accounts.

Todd Elzey, Chair; Cheryl Fisher; Chris Sabine; Jim Weiss; Maggie Stringer; and Candice Armstrong

SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE

Charge: To conduct the affiliate scholarship program and to develop and implement effective strategies to increase the visibility of the program and increase participation in both the Ohio and national programs.

Jordy Stringer, Chair; Cassandra Jones; and Suzanne Turner

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# **From the President’s Deskby Richard Payne**

We have responsibilities and rights. I want to remind you that at the state convention I told you a story about one of my friends who is still working in a workshop for the blind. Like this individual my first job was packing plastic forks and knives in boxes. However, this job afforded me the life experiences and a chance to learn how to become sociable and yet to advocate for equal rights. My friend had more than one disability, so the company thought that he was unable to work on the very jobs that had been modified for people with disabilities. One day at lunch time he told me about a staff member who said to him that he did not have the ability to learn other job duties. Consequently, the NFB’S one-minute message resonates even stronger with me as I think of him. He went on to say that he felt that he did not matter and was not taken seriously. However, I was able to get my supervisor to allow me to work with him on our breaks. To everyone’s surprise, my dear friend was able to adapt and come up to speed in another position.

Therefore, we should never allow anyone to limit or deny us the opportunity to develop ourselves. I bring this to your attention because his case is not an isolated situation. Many blind people face discrimination every day, and some of them may have the ability to fight, but others need us to do it for them. When I decided to leave the workshop for the blind which did not allow an opportunity for upward mobility, the CEO told me that I would be back because the only employment opportunities were in the workshop, and no other job in Mississippi was hiring blind people. Well, that was not true, but it was extremely hard to get a job outside of a sheltered shop. He was wrong, and I did find competitive employment.

The Federation has also allowed me to work with many leaders who helped me to develop my own style of leadership. Since becoming the Ohio president, I have received several emails and phone calls clearly discriminating against the blind. You have also seen the many posts describing how Amazon and other employers have openly denied blind people equal rights under the law, but this should not be opposed just because it is the law to do so, but it is the right thing to do.

The Federation also allows us the opportunity to learn about laws and to network with other blind people that have either met those challenges or can point others in the right direction for mediation. We have built the largest network of blind people in the world and have some of the most knowledgeable members that lead this great movement.

You may find yourself in a situation where you may face the same type of denials or discrimination. That is why it is especially important that you use the Federation to gain knowledge. Together we can fight for the changes and give the next generation a weapon that they can use to continue the battle. Why do I refer to this as a battle? Because it is.

The blind of the nation have the right to a first-class life, and, if blindness is not what holds us back, then let no other entity do so either. If you feel that you are a victim of discrimination, please reach out to me, and I will assist you in contacting our NFB legal team.

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# **Legislative Challenges Facing Blind Ohioans in 2021by Eric Duffy**

Editor’s note: Eric Duffy chairs the NFB of Ohio’s Legislative Committee. We have our work cut out for us in 2021 both nationally and statewide. What Eric says is important for all of us to pay heed to. This is what he says:

While millions of Americans will have received a vaccine against the COVID-19 virus by the time of the annual Washington Seminar, we have nevertheless determined that it is in the best interest of our members nationwide to conduct the 2021 Washington Seminar virtually. We have little information from the national organization about the issues and procedures at this point, but we will know much more by the time this article is published. Because this will be a virtual event, more people from around the state and country can participate than ever before.

We can be sure that we will have at least three issues to discuss with our Members of Congress. One is likely to be the Access Technology Affordability Act. This will be a carry-over from the current Congress. As is suggested by the title of the bill, when this legislation passes with its refundable tax credit of $2,000 usable over three years, access technology will be more affordable to blind people. We will discuss the specifics of the legislation during meetings to be held in January and early February. We are also likely to have legislation to make personal medical equipment more accessible.

What we know for sure is that the Great Gathering-in will take place at 5:00 PM on Monday, February 8, 2021. This is our opportunity to meet with President Riccobono and our national advocacy and policy team to learn more about the issues. This meeting will begin promptly at 5:00 PM Eastern Time and will be held by Zoom.

The Ohio affiliate will conduct several meetings before February 8 to prepare for our work in Washington. We will need you to participate in these meetings so that you are prepared to discuss the issues with your Member of the House and our two Senators. As you can see, although we are not traveling to Washington in 2021, there is still much time-consuming work to be done. However, the work is rewarding and life changing for the blind of the nation.

It is highly likely that our 2021 Columbus seminar will also be conducted virtually. Although that decision has not yet been made, that is what I am planning for. At this point we will provide additional information in early 2021. Right now we need chapters to invite members of the Ohio House and Senate to your meetings. Representative Crawley is going to reintroduce our parental rights legislation, and Representative Brown has agreed to reintroduce our accessible prescription labeling bill. We are planning to get both of these bills introduced very early in the next General Assembly. We are also working to have companion bills introduced in the Senate. It is up to each one of us to do our best to see that both of these bills are passed before the next General Assembly ends. The legislative committee will do our part, but we need you to do your part when we call you to action. The National Federation of the Blind is the strongest force in the blindness field today. Our strength comes from you, our individual members in local chapters and state divisions. I am certain that, by working together, we can accomplish great things in the Ohio General Assembly and the United States Congress, even during the challenging times ahead of us in 2021.

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# **Living with Vision and Hearing Lossby Todd Elzey**

Editor’s note: Todd Elzey is the new treasurer of the NFB of Ohio. He has recently moved to Ohio from New York, where he was also the state treasurer. Todd is a native Ohioan, and we are very happy to have him back home again. At our recent convention Todd was part of a panel discussion on dual disabilities. We were running out of time by late in the morning. The panel was an excellent one, and I thought that it would be useful and interesting for *Buckeye Bulletin* readers to read a couple of the speeches, and it would also be a good way of letting you get to know the speakers. Here is what Todd Elsey has to say:

I had the pleasure of speaking to the NFB of Ohio State Convention this year as part of a panel on living with blindness and other disabilities. I spoke to the convention regarding my experience living with a combined vision and hearing loss. Unfortunately, the panel discussion was cut short due to the fantastic presentations we had at the convention, so I would like to share with you here in this article more about my experiences in the hope that perhaps this information will help someone else down the road.

I once gave a speech on this topic that I entitled “Kindergarten Dropout to Law School Graduate.” But my story begins before kindergarten. I was born in January 1965, which was at the tail end of a measles outbreak in the United States. That outbreak would have a significant impact on my life.

Unbeknownst to my mother, she was exposed to German measles babysitting during the first trimester of her pregnancy with me. Unknown to anyone at the time, this exposure caused what is now known as congenital rubella syndrome in me. Congenital rubella syndrome is now known to have had a roughly 50% stillborn rate and, for those who were born, often carried many severe birth defects, including blindness and hearing loss.

I was first diagnosed with vision loss when I was about six months old. I am completely blind in my right eye and legally blind in my left eye. At the time professionals apparently did not test for hearing loss in young children, so my hearing loss remained undiagnosed for several years. In retrospect, since I apparently had hearing loss from birth, given the severity of my hearing loss, it is surprising that I somehow managed to learn to speak normally.

At any rate at five years old I entered kindergarten in the West Jefferson Ohio School District. This district had basically tagged me as mentally retarded. They sat me at the back of the classroom and gave me a coloring book and crayons to keep me busy. They did nothing to try to educate me, and they kept me completely isolated from the other kids in the class. In fact I was even made to sit next to the teacher on the playground during recess and not allowed to play with the other kids in the class. I often wonder where my life would have gone had I remained in the West Jefferson School District. I am sure it would not have been good, given that they were afraid to educate me even as a kindergartner.

Fortunately, my parents and grandparents were not willing to accept what West Jefferson had in mind for me. After Christmas break that year, I simply became a kindergarten dropout. Instead of completing kindergarten, beginning the following year, my mother and grandparents enrolled me at the Ohio State School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (OSSB) in Columbus.

I started at OSSB in the first grade, where I met our affiliate secretary Eric Duffy for the first time. I mention Eric specifically because it was Eric and others at OSSB who taught me what it was like to interact with other kids at school. In fact Eric made it pretty clear early on that I was just one of the other kids when he and another friend handcuffed (yes, they were real handcuffs) me to a post as a gag. But, while OSSB brought inclusion with other kids, something was still off. By the end of the year I had, despite the best efforts of my first-grade teacher Mary Butler, failed so badly that I would have to repeat first grade.

I did better the second go round, but I was still struggling. Finally, someone decided to have my hearing tested. That test revealed that I had been struggling with what is a moderate-severe hearing loss. As it turned out, I am completely deaf in my left ear and have only about 50 percent of normal hearing in my right ear with the most significant loss being in the high-frequency ranges. This meant that I had completed two years of first grade without the ability to hear conversations at normal volume and was piecing words together because I was not hearing some sounds like “s” at all.

In retrospect I wonder why it took so long for someone to suggest having my hearing tested. It was pretty clear that I wasn’t getting what was being taught in class. I can remember asking to sit with my right ear towards the teacher, and I can remember asking to sit right next to the teacher. Also my mother recently told me that she remembers wondering why even as a toddler I would not listen to things she asked me to do and seemed often to ignore her. We know today that all of these are indications of hearing loss. So one of the most important lessons I have taken from this experience is that, if there are any indications of hearing loss, you should get a hearing test to find out for sure because, as you will see, there is help.

By the end of my second first grade year I had begun the process of being fitted for my first hearing aid. My first aid was a big box that strapped to my chest with massive over-the-ear headphones. I had to use this contraption for a while before I could be fitted for a real aid. It was bulky and once again served to set me apart as different from the other kids I went to school with because no one else at OSSB was using a device like this. But, despite my rebellion against it, the hearing aid worked, and I was suddenly able to hear much better. Since that first bulky contraption of a hearing aid, I have worn just about every style of hearing aid imaginable. I have worn completely in-the-ear hearing aids, I have worn behind-the-ear hearing aids, and, if you can imagine this, as an active teenager I wore a hearing aid that was actually built into my glasses. I can say without a doubt that the hearing aid built into the glasses was the worst hearing aid idea ever because, when you sent one to repair, you sent both.

Undoubtedly I would never have made it through school without a hearing aid. However, despite being able to hear much better with a hearing aid, I still faced challenges. First, I had to take speech therapy classes for years after getting a hearing aid because I mispronounced some words since I simply did not hear the higher range sounds like “s”. Even today there are still words that I do not hear correctly. Rather, I will sometimes try to correct for not hearing a certain word via the context in which the word is used. This can often lead to some amusing results such as when my stepson once asked me if I had Q-Tips and I thought he said cheese nips. So, know that, if you have friends or family members who sometimes give you a funny response to an inquiry, likely it isn’t that they are not paying attention, but that they simply did not hear the actual word you said and misinterpreted it contextually.

Another issue I ran into was what others thought I could and could not do. At OSSB we had to earn a “mobility pass” that would allow us to go off campus independently. The school’s practice was typically to grant most students some level of mobility pass. In addition, typically the school would require many totally blind students to travel with students who had residual vision. We did not know better back then, but today I would vehemently fight that rule because we know that all blind people can travel independently. Regardless, the lead mobility instructor decided that, since I had both a combined vision and hearing loss, I would not be allowed to go off campus at all--not independently or with another student. Rather the lead mobility instructor had decided that, since I could not hear on one side, it was not safe for me to travel in the community. Had this decision been allowed to stand, I might still be afraid to travel independently. But fortunately, with the support of my grandparents and my language teacher, we were able to prove that I was capable of traveling independently anywhere I wanted to go.

I eventually earned the right to go off campus independently and even to take other students off campus who the school deemed incapable of traveling independently. The lesson I learned from this is one that we in the NFB also preach–do not let anyone, particularly professionals in the disability field, define what you can and cannot do. This applies regardless of what disabilities or combinations of disabilities you might have. It should be only you who decide what your abilities are.

Another issue that I ran into in school and afterwards as an adult was being able to hear in large auditoriums, on the telephone, or in group parties. These issues have been a problem all the way through much of adulthood. But in recent years access technology has aided in resolving some of these problems. For example, large area assistive listening systems now make it possible to hear clearly in many auditoriums and theaters. These devices can even be found in very large settings like sports stadiums.

Unfortunately, although they are required by the ADA, many venues are still not properly equipped with assistive listening devices, even though they are easy to install and relatively inexpensive. Because venues often do not advertise the availability of these devices and tend to put out only small signs that are often difficult for anyone to find, even when a venue does have an assistive listening device system, they can be difficult to gain access to. This is particularly problematic for those with combined vision and hearing loss because venues still do not distribute material such as programs in accessible formats like Braille and large print. Consequently, I have learned to be aggressive in asking venues about the availability of assistive listening devices and in pushing to get them installed in facilities I encounter without them. If you have difficulty hearing in large venues such as theaters, I encourage you to ask venues for an assistive listening device because these devices can greatly enhance what you hear in large spaces. When properly set up, these devices can assist both people who wear hearing aids and those who have more moderate hearing losses that do not yet require hearing aids.

I have also had trouble for years hearing well on the phone. As a kid I had to take my hearing aid out to talk on the phone because of the feedback caused in putting a telephone handset next to a hearing aid. Later aids, such as the one I used when I got my first job with the United States Department of Defense, sort of worked with hearing aids, but with limited volume and speech recognition. Even the advent of cell phones did not clear up the problem right away because most cell phones were not initially hearing aid compatible. However, with the advent of Bluetooth, telephones suddenly became much more accessible. I now use a Bluetooth-compatible-Resound hearing aid with an iPhone. The sound from the iPhone now streams directly into my hearing aid,. This has significantly increased my speech comprehension over the phone and made it much easier to communicate. Unfortunately, Bluetooth-compatible hearing aids are not cheap, and they do not yet work with every cell phone. But if you have a moderate to severe hearing loss, this is the best telephone sound quality you are going to find, and it is well worth the effort and money.

A funny thing happened on my journey to telephone accessibility with Bluetooth. I started streaming music on my phone: I had always loved music but often did not know the lyrics of a song because I could not hear the words clearly. When I started streaming music directly into my hearing aid, it was as if this whole world opened anew. I suddenly heard lyrics much more clearly, and I began to have a much better understanding of the meanings of songs. This started me wondering about television. So I also started watching television on my iPad, where I could stream the sound right into my hearing aid, and later bought a separate streamer that hooks into my television. After I started streaming television shows, I also discovered that I had been missing the nuances of conversations and relying far too heavily on what I could see visually.

The problem experienced with TV is not unique in overcompensating visually for what I cannot hear. This has been a problem all along. In high school at OSSB I was in the bell choir and had to learn to play the bells visually because I could not hear the notes like other members of the choir. Then later, while working for the NFB of California and testifying for legislative committees, I strained to see name plates of legislators during committee hearings because I could not quite tell with my hearing exactly who was speaking to me or from what direction the sound was coming. Of course, these workarounds were a challenge because I also could not see well enough to make them truly effective. In the end the tack I have taken is to use a combination of alternative techniques and access technology to compensate for both the blindness and hearing loss to get to the best place I can in participating in life.

In 2003 I completed a long journey from kindergarten dropout to law school graduate despite dual disabilities of blindness and hearing loss. Although neither disability affected my ability intellectually to complete this journey, having access technology available has undoubtedly made that journey and my successes since easier. Despite the advances, however, there remain challenges.

For example, despite hearing aids and assistive listening devices, interpersonal communications can still be difficult. I definitely do better one on one or in small groups. I still struggle to hear well in larger settings such as parties or conferences, particularly where there is a lot of background noise. Many with hearing loss learn to compensate in these situations with visual cues such as facial expressions, eye contact, or even reading lips. But given my vision loss, these techniques are not practical for me. In fact, I have been told that I can sometimes seem arrogant, aloof, or even anti-social. Some have even told me that they tried to make eye contact to strike up a conversation, but of course I cannot see another person’s eye movements, even when close up, let alone from halfway across a room.

Regardless, when we have the chance to meet at a convention, if I am not talking a lot in a large convention or you have spoken to me and I do not respond, know that I am not ignoring you, being anti-social, etc. Rather it is almost certain that I have not heard you. I positively want to meet and get to know all the members of the NFB of Ohio as we work together to change what it means to be blind. So, if I do not respond in a large group meeting, please get my attention in another way such as a tap on the shoulder, etc., because I do want to hear from everyone. Likewise, remember that, if you have family or friends who have hearing loss and sometimes seem distant or anti-social, it may be that they cannot hear well enough in the environment that you are in, to follow the whole group conversation. Consider reaching out in a slightly different way that will include them–you both may find that you have both been missing something meaningful.

The process of living with vision and hearing loss is rarely perfect, and it can often be tiring because it can take a lot of energy to concentrate to hear, but it is worth the effort to be a fully participating member of society. If you have any questions about hearing loss or access technology that might help those with hearing loss, do not hesitate to reach out, and I will be happy to try to help.

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# **Coming to Terms with Usher’s Syndrome Type 2by Maggie Stringer**

Editor’s note: Maggie Stringer was also part of the convention panel discussion about multiple disabilities. She is Jordy Stringer’s wife and is becoming an indispensable part of the Ohio affiliate. She is bright and articulate and is becoming active in many NFB programs. She did not have time to write out her presentation, but she found an old piece that captures her message. This is what she says:

I was a sophomore and having a blast playing volleyball for Catonsville high school in Maryland. The Comets were having an amazing season and were ready to take on the next team. One autumn afternoon we were bussed to our competitor’s gym for what I believed would be an easy game. Already dressed in our uniforms, we headed into the gym to do our warm-ups. I remember feeling disoriented because the gymnasium looked like a dreary storm cloud, and I immediately became nervous. I did not understand the anxiety at the time, but I no longer felt confident of this game.

I started in the right corner of the court, my spike position. The ball was served to our side of the court, our center bumped the ball to our setter, and then she began to set the ball for me to spike, a simple play and one of my favorites. I watched the ball go up, I tried to follow its path, but I lost it. It was not lost for long because what goes up must come down. And the ball did just that, came down on my head!

As a teenager I found that my peripheral vision was beginning to narrow, night blindness was setting in, and adjustments from dark to light and light to dark were quite time-consuming. My eyes did not want to cooperate with me and felt like they were becoming my enemy. My partial deafness had already brought endless teasing, ongoing bullying, and feeling like an outcast. I was determined that I was not going to let blindness further alienate me, so no one was allowed to know what was going on. I was willing to make sacrifices. I was going to do anything I could to protect this secret, not understanding its cost. I was going to need a whole lot of excuses, miss out on opportunities, and unintentionally hurt family and friends.

Losing my peripheral vision meant that oftentimes I might not see a person a few feet away waving to get my attention. To make it even more complicated, my eyes would make direct contact with people, yet I still did not see them. I could never defend against the gossip about my becoming a snob or simply being rude. I truly could not see them. I did not believe I could do anything to change that.

When I began experiencing night blindness, I became afraid of how I would act around others in the dark rather than what might be lurking in the night to hurt me. I made plenty of excuses about why I could not be out after dark, and, being a teenager living at home, I found it rather easy to do. There were times that I knew I had been caught not being able to see well in the dark. I was volunteering for a local food ministry, and we were going to be making a home delivery. The elderly lady lived off a gravel road deep in the woods, and she did not have any of her outside lights turned on. Needless to say, it does not matter how slowly you walk, you will trip onto the deck if you can’t see it. Thankfully, I did not hurt myself, anyone else, or the groceries.

One beautiful spring morning I walked to a community blood drive. It was not my first time donating blood, but it was my first time going to this building. Once I was inside, I needed time to allow my eyes to adjust from daylight to indoors. I was immediately nervous because I could feel the tension surrounding me as I stood in a church doorway. When I was able to make my way through the church, I was anxious because I was frightened of walking into a person or knocking over a table full of supplies. They summoned me to a booth for a quick interview and physical. My heart rate was a little high. Actually, it was really high, to the point that I was told that I was not allowed to donate blood on that day. I kept trying to tell myself to relax, but it was not working. I left that morning feeling sad and disappointed in myself. My little secret was interfering with my ability to help others.

I remember the moment that my retinitis pigmentosa could no longer be my little secret. It was late afternoon, and I was waiting for my ride to pick me up from work. They pulled into the parking lot, and I started to get into the passenger seat. However, it was not that simple.. I did not open the door to the correct car. The ladies in the car looked terrified. I still remember the look on the elderly lady’s face to this day. Owing to that experience, I realized I could not hide my retinitis pigmentosa or deny what was going on.

My mom had had enough. She scheduled an eye appointment for us to discuss what was wrong with my vision. She was unsuccessful in getting me to talk about it because it was still my little secret. No one else believed that there was something wrong with my vision. They thought I was too lazy to watch where I was going or that I had stopped caring about others even to the point of not acknowledging their waves. My first, second, third, fourth, and many other appointments with a local optometrist generally consisted of the same exams with the same results, and they did not yield any answers about what was wrong with my vision. Sometimes I felt as though there was no explanation what was happening to my vision. I prayed that I would meet a doctor who would believe me, even if he did not have the answers. I will never forget one appointment. Someone suggested that I should try going to see an eye doctor at the Katzen Eye Group. On the day of my appointment, I met with the nurse tech first. He explained to me that I was to push a button every time I saw one of the LED lights come on. It was a field test. The machine was large, and it reminded me of a bull’s eye with a ring of LED lights and one LED light in the center. I had to stare at the center LED light as the tech randomly turned on one of the other lights in the circle. I was supposed to push the button every time I saw the second light. It was strange because I kept my focus on that center LED light and never saw any of the surrounding LED lights. I felt as though I was doing something wrong. At the end of the test, the nurse tech came into the room and asked why I had never pushed the button. I explained that I had never seen any of the other LED lights come on. He checked the machine to see if it was malfunctioning. It seemed to be working properly, and then he said that I would need to take the test again. I took the test for a second time, and the end result was the same: I did not see any of the lights come on.

The nurse tech returned to the exam room and asked if I understood how to take the test and when to push the button. Even though I replied that I knew what I was supposed to do, he felt the need to explain the directions again. I took the field test a third time, with the same results as the two previous tests. I was moved out of the exam room and switched to a standard doctor’s office, where I waited to speak with the optometrist. After she came in, we discussed my reason for the eye appointment and all of the issues that I had been having for the past several years. We discussed the field test results, which were blank and did not make sense to her. How could I completely fail the exam three different times? She said that she had noticed that I was wearing two hearing aids and wanted to make sure that I understood how to take the test and when to push the button. Even though I had already explained that I did in fact understand, my word was apparently not sufficient. She insisted that I explain in my own words how I was to take the test. I did so, and she was still puzzled. Her questioning then took a different direction. It was not about my vision, but rather what family life was like at home or if I had ever felt depressed. At this point I stopped believing that she had come to work that morning with the intention of listening or helping her patients. It did not stop there, though. She kept dwelling on my hearing aids and continued to question whether or not I was capable of following directions. She asked me to complete a few simple tasks. I had to stand on my left leg while holding my right foot and vice versa. I also had to extend both arms to my sides and, when directed, touch my nose with my left index finger and vice versa. Okay, Doc. I am not depressed, and my family wants answers as much as I do, so quit talking to me as if I am stupid, pretending that you care, and tell me what is wrong! Unfortunately, she could not hear me yelling at her with my mind. I left her office with her recommendation for me to speak with a psychiatrist on a different floor of this building. All I wanted to do was leave and never look back. I purposely waited until my aunt and I had left the office before telling her the outcome of my appointment. If I had relayed the events with the doctor to my aunt before we left the office, I would be writing an entirely different ending to this experience.

I shared my previous experience with a dear co-worker of mine. She knew an optometrist who was very personable and thorough with all of his patients. I met with Dr. Benjamin Hedin and could have hugged the man. Finally I had found a doctor who not only took seriously what I had been experiencing, but also diagnosed my condition as retinitis pigmentosa. He gave me a referral to Wilmer Eye Institute at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore for my final diagnosis of Usher Syndrome type 2, leading me to my next series of adventures.

At Wilmer’s Eye Clinic at Johns Hopkins Hospital, I was diagnosed as legally blind and that Usher syndrome type II was the cause. I had spent several years keeping it a secret and then spent a year hunting down an answer. What was I to do next? A lady that worked for the county school district as a student advocate for the deaf and hearing impaired suggested that I seek training. That is exactly what I did. The Division of Rehabilitation Services—the state agency serving the blind in Maryland--found a program that would teach me how to travel with a white cane, learn to read braille, use adaptive technology, and live independently. All that I needed to do was to quit my job and commit the next nine months to a new way of living. And as a twenty-year-old, I was willing to take on the challenge and ready for an adventure.

The program that I enrolled in was part of Blind Industries and Services of Maryland. It was modeled on the NFB training centers. They believed in using sleep shades to help a legally blind person truly understand how to live as a totally blind individual. That meant wearing these shades five days a week for eight hours a day. My classmates and I all lived in a co-ed dormitory apartment and were all there for different reasons. Most were legally blind from a variety of causes, and a few were totally blind. Regardless of our background and what brought all of us together, we became a family and truly leaned on each other as we embraced this new journey.

My most challenging class was cane travel. It was not necessarily scary for me, but it was for my family and friends. They were a little uneasy about a young girl walking around a big city while wearing black sleep shades and using a white cane. I grew up in the county though not familiar with city life, but I was able to hold my own. It continues to amaze me to this day that the first people to offer me assistance were the ones that were considered lower class: the homeless, drug dealers, and street walkers. They never asked me for anything; they just wanted to help me get to my destination.

There were a lot of prayers for me while I was in training. I know this was so because I witnessed many miracles. One afternoon I was going out on a trip for my cane travel class. I came to a traffic light and waited for the light to turn red so that I could cross the two-lane road and then catch the bus. I would know it was time to cross the street by listening to the street traffic. The cars in front of me had all come to a stop. That meant it was safe for me to cross, or so I thought. When I reached the middle of the street, I heard two men yelling out “Stop! Stop!” I did as they said and stopped in the middle of the street. A second later I learned why they were yelling at me to stop. A tractor trailer came flying past me, and the draft from the truck pushed me back a few paces. Once the trailer disappeared, I quickly finished crossing the street. The two men that yelled for me to stop came over to check on me. I could not believe that I had misjudged the traffic pattern and nearly killed myself. The men reassured me that I had timed it correctly; the tractor trailer ran through the red light. I have not shared the best part of the story yet. Those two men were working on a six-month construction project. They always work the morning shift; however, on this day a machine was not working properly, and their schedule had been rearranged to work that afternoon. That was the first and only time that I saw those men.

For each of our classes we had to complete final projects to graduate. For instance, our independent living class wanted us to be able to prepare meals for a small gathering of four to six guests, as well as plan a party for a minimum of twenty-five guests. All the shopping, preparation, cooking, setup, and cleanup had to be done without any assistance. The Braille and computer classes had us take final exams to demonstrate what we had learned throughout the year. Our cane travel class dropped us off. Yes, they dropped us off as part of our final project. The instructors drove around in many circles to confuse our location and then dropped us off. We were then expected to find our way back to the school. There were two stipulations, though: we were allowed to ask only a yes or no question. Additionally, we were allowed to ask a total of only three people. The instructors were following us from a distance to ensure that we did not cheat. There were a total of three drop-off routes, and, if you did not make it back to the school within a reasonable time, then it did not count. The second aspect of the final project involved using three different forms of transportation to go to a new destination. For instance, I took the bus to the light rail, light rail to the airport, and then a plane to Miami.

The odd part of my training was that I had drastically lost my sight. As I mentioned earlier, we had to wear the sleep shades five days a week, for eight hours a day. I was not the only person that had this same experience. Many students prior to my class and after our graduating class experienced the same issues. All of us had a progressive disease, just not the same type of condition. I truly believe that it is the cause for my current state, which is total blindness at the age of thirty-nine. Regardless of the reasoning, I would not have been able to do the things that I do and live independently without the proper training that I received.

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# **Editor’s Musingsby Barbara Pierce**

Have you ever thought about the challenges facing the people who design and carry out the NFB’s fundraising program? It is pretty easy to generate solicitations featuring pathetic descriptions of bumbling, clumsy, depressed people living empty lives because they cannot see a smile or appreciate a sunset. If you are simply trying to make the public feel sorry enough for people to contribute some cash to cheer them up or pay professionals to entertain and take care of them, you can succeed, and that is what blindness agencies have historically done through the years. The NFB has always tried to be accurate and positive about what blindness is and what it is not, but such portrayals of blindness do not tug on people’s heartstrings enough to persuade them to contribute to an organization. That problem provided the motivation behind the creation of the Kernel Books during the 1990’s. Dr. Jernigan was determined to find a way to tell people entertaining stories about the lived experience of blind people. His hope was to show people that NFB members were pretty much like them. Goofy things could and did happen to us, but mostly we just wanted a chance to live satisfying lives, just like sighted people do. If you have not read the Kernel Books, you should take the time to do so. Many of them have been recorded by the National Library Service. All of them are downloadable from the NFB website.

But all good things must come to an end. Eventually we ran out of Kernel Book stories, and they lost their attractiveness as part of fundraising packages. So the question became, what do we do now?

The answer is being worked out by Patty Chang, NFB director of outreach, and her team. They are developing fundraising pieces that are accurate when describing the dreams and abilities of blind people, but that also capture the frustrations that blind people face while just trying to live their lives like everyone else. The story that Sheree Heppe told recently on Ohiotalk is a good example, the frustration of her trip to a resale shop when the staff refused to speak to her, a blind shopper who had the audacity to enter the store without a sighted companion.

Another, shorter example appears in Todd Elzey’s newsletter article. Todd mentions in passing that he was forced to sit beside the teacher on the playground. What kind of recess would that have been for any young child? I remember my frustration on Girl Scout overnights being forbidden to sleep on the top bunk. The scout leader was afraid that I would fall out of bed, and she had promised my mother that nothing would happen to me if she gave me permission to go. In vain did I point out that everyone closed their eyes when they slept, so I was no more likely than anyone else to fall out of bed, which I never did at home.

These are the kind of little vignettes that Patty and her team are looking for: what is it like to be blind? What frustrations or inequities do we face day in and day out because of public ignorance about blindness? What injustices do we live with every day? What and where are the small victories?

Here are two small examples from my life of what I am talking about. I never got used to the insult of being asked by passing motorists as I walked to or from my job at Oberlin College, “Where are you trying to go?” I was walking briskly and confidently; why would someone ask or even care about where I was going or, in their words, “Trying to go?” I finally learned without slowing down to answer, “I am going to work or going home,” depending on the time of day. But occasionally I would hear a car stop beside me, and I would gather myself for hearing the intrusive question about where I was trying to go, when instead I received a request for directions. I always knew, not only where I was, but what the names of the streets that the person needed to take to get where he or she was going. More than once I received thanks with the comment, “I have always been told to ask a blind person for directions if possible because blind people always know where to go and how to get there.”

You undoubtedly also have such experiences to draw from. Patty needs to hear from you. You do not need to write your story up in beautiful prose. She needs only the details of your experience. In fact, if you like, I will help you write your story out for Patty. This project is called Storybank. Everyone can help the effort. We are not looking for the sad tale of the injustices in your life. We want glimpses, anecdotes that illuminate what it is like to deal with blindness day in and day out.

Take a few minutes to think about this request. You have stories that will help the NFB shed light on blindness, what it is and what it is not. If you think of something that might help us, you can email Patty Chang with the story at story@nfb.org, or you can call or email me at 440-774-8077 or barbara.pierce9366@gmail.com. Mark your message “Storybank.” You can make Patty’s life much easier.

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# **Who is the Cleveland Chapter?by Suzanne Turner**

Editor’s note: Suzanne Turner is president of the Cleveland chapter. The chapter won the Gavel award this year for the third successive time. I thought it would be only fitting to give Suzanne some space to describe the activities of her chapter. This is what she says:

The Cleveland chapter of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio has become a force for the blind in Cleveland and the surrounding areas. It offers support, advocacy, and community linkage. One aspect of our strength is our diversity and inclusion. We represent those whom we serve. Thus we are a group of individuals that work together well, exercising emotional intelligence, yet not afraid to take initiatives to make a significant impact. Our members have grown in their leadership abilities, creating educational seminars to enhance the lives of the blind, assisting with sharing tips and techniques on living productively, and increasing the overall morale in our immediate circle. But what has made the chapter stronger is the family dynamic that has grown during the pandemic. The chapter has experienced difficulties and heartbreak through several Cleveland member families. Therefore empathy is key and is at the forefront. So, as we press forward toward the end of 2020, our family has become closer, firm and unquestioning. We are there for one another, be it ordering food, assisting with paperwork, or praying for a sick loved one. We take care of our own and those whom we do not know as well.

Cleveland’s motto is “reach one, teach one.” Hence, putting into practice the NFB’S philosophy, the NFB also provides encouragement and support to families with blind children and to people who are losing vision or have become blind later in life by bringing them into a network of tens of thousands of blind people who are living full lives and who can serve as mentors and role models. Together, with love, hope, and determination, the members of the National Federation of the Blind transform dreams into reality. We have added a number of new blind people to this network of thousands of NFB members providing inspiration, motivation, and whatever else they need to move forward as blind people. As a result we are absolutely stronger, and we are keeping the pledge “To participate actively in the efforts of the National Federation of the Blind” each and every day.

Moreover, Cleveland continues to circulate information on achievements, equality, and justice via our many outlets. Every month prior to our Chapter meetings we post on Facebook, send out information by text, email, voice box, Cleveland’s Listserv, and SimpleBlast, Cleveland’s new communication tool. SimpleBlast is a robocall system, in which short messages are sent out to the entire chapter by telephone, leaving information such as reminders of upcoming chapter meetings, chapter dues, and updates on members who are in bereavement and physically healing. The multiple communication methods are to ensure that everyone receives the same announcements, no matter what their skill level, literacy, or lack of technology.

Consequently, our creative means for providing the information of meeting dates, times, and Zoom call-in numbers for Cleveland’s chapter meetings, Ohio’s statewide events, and national programs on topics of interest that are readily available so that anyone who is concerned about blindness can attend and become informed. In addition mass emails are sent to the media, community partners, and others highlighting events such as Cleveland’s Forum on Pedestrian Safety Measures Regarding Electric Scooters and E- Bikes, Cleveland’s Informational seminar on blindness, and a round-table forum by community partners who provided information on their programs and services. The *Buckeye Bulletins* and the *Braille Monitor* are distributed to members in several formats as well.

Additionally, Cleveland has highlighted and celebrated several month awareness celebrations through emails, Facebook, ListServ, and Cleveland’s Voice Box, such as Louis Braille Day, White Cane Awareness Day, and Senior Day, highlighting successful blind leaders and activities in the Federation. There are no communication limits when it comes to promoting the NFB mission, goals, and philosophy in Cleveland. However, we do recognize the NFB Code of Conduct, and we uphold it completely when using social media.

Finally, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Cleveland created a variety of committees this year to assist and accommodate members, newly blind individuals and the community in order to keep them engaged and connected through innovative events. We encouraged productivity and offered knowledge about blindness, reasonable accommodations, accessible transportation, and technology. The virus did not halt our mission or purpose to distribute literature throughout the surrounding areas. Cleveland directly targeted seniors and parents of blind children in order to give answers to their concerns. Telephone calls were made and returned to the public, assisting them to overcome barriers.

Cleveland takes care not only of the community, but of our own members as well. Because of social distancing, Cleveland has gone into members’ and local seniors’ homes to provide one-on-one instructions on Aira, Be My Eyes, grocery delivery, and more, such as Instacart, Amazon Shopping, NEWSLINE, and DoorDash; all were downloaded and the people given directions on how to independently operate the services to aid this vulnerable population with tools that offer independence and safety. Also several members have used features on Zoom and conference lines to connect non-members and Cleveland members to NFB activities, such as Senior meetings, Ohio Board of Directors meetings, national Presidential Releases, and the national convention. All in all, we are a family, and Cleveland is thankful for members who continue to serve and thrive during this difficult time.

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# **Buckeye Briefs**

Here are the results of the Miami Valley chapter’s fall elections: president, Sheila Hardy-Wilson; vice president, Wanda Sloan; secretary, Kinshuk Tella; treasurer, Gary Ann Williams; at-large board member, Richard Payne. Congratulations to all officers.

The Greater Akron Chapter held its election for president and vice president on Saturday, November 21, 2020. Elected to two-year terms were president, David Bertsch, and vice president, Jessica Stover.

The NFB of Ohio Springfield chapter held elections at its December meeting. The following slate of officers was elected for two-year terms: president, Debbie Baker; vice president, Susan Day; treasurer, Crystal McClain; secretary, Todd Elzey; and at-large board member, Hans Wagner.

The At-Large Chapter conducted its election at the state convention. Those elected were president, Colleen Roth, and secretary/treasurer, Yvonne Soldan.

The Capital Chapter conducted its election in November. Elected were president, Annette Lutz; vice president, Jordy Stringer; secretary, Maggy Stringer; treasurer, Shelly Duffy; and at-large board member, Misty Hatcher.

The Ohio Association of Blind Merchants conducted its election at the convention with the following results: president, Annette Lutz; vice president, Steve Vincke; secretary, Shelbi Hindel; treasurer, Karen Whalen; and board members, Frank Bragassa, Todd Elzey, and Isaac McCallister.

The editor gets tired of correcting the names of Ohio chapters and divisions in the newsletter, agendas, and the like. I would be very grateful if readers would take note of the following names, which are taken from the first article of each constitution, and then make a point of using the correct title, or, if you wish to use an alternate title, do not capitalize the c of chapter. My chapter, for example, is the NFB of Lorain County or the Lorain County chapter. Here are the correct chapter and division names:

At-Large Chapter

Capital Chapter of the NFB of Ohio

NFB of Cincinnati

NFB of Cleveland

NFB of Cuyahoga County

NFB of Ohio—Greater Akron Chapter

NFB of Lorain County

NFB of Miami Valley

NFB of Springfield

Diabetic Action Network of Ohio

Ohio Association of Blind Merchants

Ohio Association of Blind Students

NFB of Ohio Communities of Faith

NFB of Ohio Senior Division

Paul Minuard Jordan

March 13, 1945--December 21, 2020

Paul Minuard Jordan, seventy-five, died peacefully on December 21 while at home with Paula, his wife of more than fifty-three years, by his side while she held his hand. Paul was born in Columbus, Ohio on March 13, 1945. He was born without sight but lived his life by overcoming any obstacle in his way. A talented musician and singer, Paul was a black belt in tae kwon do and at one point was one of only two blind black belts in the nation. A loving and devoted husband and friend, Paul was a deeply religious man and dedicated many years of his life to Westminster Presbyterian and St. John’s Westminster Union Churches. He loved his church family, serving in numerous ways across more than four decades including singing in the church choir, Sunday school teacher, and church board member. But more than anything else, Paul loved his family–twin sons, Aaron and David, daughter-in-law Leah, and four grandchildren, Gavan, Kerrigan, Logan, and Carly. Paul graduated from Kent State University in 1967 and worked for the Internal Revenue Service for more than 30 years before retiring. “The Punk,” as he was affectionately known by those closest to him, was a devoted fan of all things Cincinnati, but an especially dedicated fan of the Bearcats, Bengals, and Reds.

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# **Activities Calendar**

Every Thursday at 7, Community Service happy hour, Ohio Zoom room

January 18, Martin Luther King’s birthday celebration, 7:00 p.m., Ohio Zoom room

February 1, Presidential Release live

February 1, NFB of Ohio scholarship form available at nfbohio.org

February 6, Community Service Super Bowl party, Ohio Zoom room, time to be announced

February 8-10, Virtual Washington Seminar

March 1, Presidential Release live

March 24-26, The 2021 Jacobus tenBroek Disability Law Symposium, "Race, Diversity, and Inclusion and the Right to Live in the World”

March 31, Deadline for submitting NFB scholarship applications

April 1, Presidential Release live

May 2, Presidential Release live

June 1, Presidential Release live

July 5, deadline, NFB-O scholarship applications

July 6-11, NFB national convention, New Orleans, Louisiana