Winter 2019 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, 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), Dayton: 937-963-1000 (Dayton), 567-242-5112 (Lima), 567-333-9990 (Mansfield), 740-370-6828 (Portsmouth), 937-717-3900 (Springfield), 56-806-1100 (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.

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# **Convention Wrap-Up by Eric Duffy**

Editor’s note: If you didn’t attend the 2019 NFB of Ohio convention, here is your chance to find out what happened. NFB-O Secretary Eric Duffy summarizes what happened and the decisions made. This is what he says:

“Hello and welcome to the DoubleTree. Would you like some of our warm chocolate chip cookies?” If you don’t know it by now, the 2019 convention of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio was held at the DoubleTree hotel Columbus/Worthington from November first to the third. I won’t even tell you how many times I went to the front desk to get more cookies, but almost every time I was there, I saw President Payne. He said he was taking care of this thing or that thing with the hotel, but I suspect the real story was that he wanted more cookies.

The cookies are always good, but they’re only a very small part of a Federation convention. The convention began with the meeting of the Board of Directors on Friday morning. Ever Lee Hairston was introduced as our national representative. We talked about convention arrangements for the rest of the weekend, the 2020 Washington Seminar, the 2019 BELL program, and much more. This session was also streamed.

From noon until 2:00 there was time to catch up with old friends and make new ones. There was also an opportunity for convention rookies to learn more about what to expect from the weekend.

The afternoon session began promptly at 2:00 pm. After welcoming ceremonies State Representative Erica Crawley was introduced. Representative Crawley is the lead sponsor of HB 188, which, when passed, will protect the rights of blind parents in Ohio. Representative Crawley thanked the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio for bringing the need for this legislation to her attention, and she is confident it will pass.

Kenia Flores, who was attending the convention all the way from North Carolina, then talked about her involvement in the National Federation of the Blind and in particular her work with the National Association of Blind Students. She was excited about the prospect of revitalizing the Ohio Association of Blind Students, and that is exactly what we did at the convention. Suzanne Turner deserves much of the credit for this work.

Ever Lee Hairston then brought us greetings from President Riccobono, Dr. Maurer, and our national office. She talked about the fact that, although we have local chapters, state affiliates, and a national organization, we are a united and cohesive organization. Our unity is what makes us strong. We are united in our goals, our policies, and our programs. This also means our fundraising programs. We should all do more to support the policies and programs of the Federation, and this includes raising money. We must all know and understand the NFB pledge and the one-minute message. The pledge and the message should be a part of our chapter meetings. We must play the presidential release during our chapter meetings.

Later that afternoon we heard from Kevin Miller, the Director of Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. The way in which OOD officials and the Federation engaged with each other during this discussion was much more pleasant and productive than it has been in some time. One OOD consumer expressed concern about her rehabilitation case on Friday afternoon, and OOD officials worked with her to find a resolution on Saturday afternoon. In no way is any of this meant to say that our relationship with OOD is where we want it to be. Many issues still need to be resolved; however, I am prepared to say that our working relationship has improved dramatically. OOD officials used to say, “Let’s just understand that there are always going to be points on which we disagree, so let’s just agree to disagree.” Now the message I am getting is, “Let’s move forward in the areas in which we agree and continue to work on the disagreements.” We must do our part in this relationship as well. We must keep our message positive. Our actions must be productive, and we must continue to build a strong partnership with the agency.

“Blindness from Cradle to Career” was the title of a presentation delivered by Carol Castellano. Anyone who knows Carol knows what a dynamic presenter she is. She is a well known author of articles and books related to the education of blind children. We were fortunate to have her with us for the weekend.

When the gavel fell at 5:00 PM Friday afternoon, those unfamiliar with our organization probably thought it was time to relax until the next morning. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Capital Chapter hosted hospitality. There was plenty of food for everyone. We want to thank everyone who contributed items to the hospitality room. A special thanks goes to Ruth Boggs for all the hard work she did to make this such a success.

Later that evening there were a self-defense workshop, meetings of the At-Large Chapter and the Ohio Association of Blind Merchants, and a number of committee meetings, including the Resolutions Committee meeting. You will read more about resolutions elsewhere in this newsletter.

Friday night the Not the Royal Shakespeare Company performed a radio episode of the *Thin Man*. In this performance all of the actors read their lines from Braille scripts. This was a fun production, and probably the best one we have ever done. It is always good to go out on a high note, and I say that because this in all likelihood was our last play. This is so for a number of reasons. Directing these plays has been a labor of love for Bob Pierce for all these many years. He believes in the abilities of blind people and understands the value of Braille. So directing a play in which lines are read from Braille scripts and raising money to support our OPUB division seemed to be a natural fit. Bob is a quiet person who works hard behind the scenes. He doesn’t get a lot of credit or a lot of thanks for what he does. Many people believe he is with us because of Barbara, but Bob is a true Federationist at heart. Of course it is Barbara who introduced him to our movement, but he is a strong part of it in his own right. So thank you, Bob. Thank you for all that you do, and thank you for being our brave director for many years.

Saturday morning was also a busy one. We heard about the Ohio Client Assistance Program, state library services for the blind, and the Bureau of Services for the Visually Impaired. There was also a report on our Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning (BELL) program. The convention got to hear from eight-year-old Rosemary about what BELL meant to her. We heard from Rosemary’s dad, as well as from many of the volunteers who helped make the program the tremendous success that it was.

The exhibit hall was busy in the afternoon, and those who were not in the exhibit hall were in meetings for blind seniors, parents of blind children, or various workshops that were taking place. It was an afternoon full of activities.

The high point of a Federation convention is always the banquet. This year’s banquet was second to none. President Payne and I both enjoy a good steak, so I thank you, Mr. President, for feeding us well. Ever Lee Hairston delivered a top notch banquet address, and I hope those who were not at the convention heard her presentation on our live stream. Scholarships and awards were also presented at the banquet. Full reports of both ceremonies appear elsewhere in this newsletter.

Money for the Movement has been a long tradition in this organization. As a part of the banquet, chapters, divisions, families, and individuals have an opportunity to contribute To the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio. Contributions can be made by check or in cash. We also accept pledges, which should be paid before the next convention. This year we raised $4,065. Thank you to everyone who contributed.

The bidding wars began as soon as Money for the Movement was concluded. Of course this meant that the auction was underway. There were books, baskets, a Victor Reader Stream, and a video magnifier to bid on. This year we raised $1,577 with the auction. We want to thank everyone who contributed. We especially want to thank HumanWare and Visparo, who donated technology.

If you did not stay for the after-banquet party, you missed a real treat. Ken and Roger Baccus provided the entertainment. They were easy on the ears. They can play and sing just about anything, and that’s exactly what they did.

Sunday morning began with a faith service. We have some talented singers in this organization, and Sunday morning many of them got to shine.

In the memorial service Paul Dressell, Chris Tolle, Martha Cawen, Bill Ines, and Betty Bowls were recognized as having died since last convention. All of these individuals were active and contributing members of our movement. They are missed.

Andra Stover then delivered a presentation titled “What Are the Odds?” She recapped her first-time experience attending the national convention. She talked about how making one choice or the other could have changed her whole week. For example, when her friend did not show up to take her to the airport, she could have decided to stay home, thus missing the entire convention. However, she got out of her comfort zone and got an Uber to the airport, and her adventure continued from there.

This was the morning for Akron presenters. Dave Bertsch, president of the Greater Akron chapter, then talked about the common attributes of leadership. Are you a leader? What leadership abilities do you possess? What can you do to be a better leader? Effective communications is an essential part of leadership. In order to lead, you must be someone others are willing to follow. This is some of the food for thought Dave left us with.

Then came the business of the organization. Elections were held, and the financial report was presented. Dave Bertsch was elected to the Board of Directors. President Payne thanked Deanna Lewis for her service on the Board.

This was a great convention. Spirits were high. All convention sessions and the play were streamed live. Jordy Stringer played an important role in our streaming and sound management throughout the weekend. Everyone has a part to play in creating a successful convention. But the only way you can do this is to be at the convention. I am already looking forward to the 2020 convention, and I hope you are too.

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# **Editor’s Musings**

# **by Barbara Pierce**

Since the convention I have been thinking about resolutions. I have served on the national Resolutions Committee since 1976, and I have chaired the Ohio Resolutions Committee now for two years. I knew nothing about resolutions when I was appointed To the National committee, but I have learned about this organizational art form during the past forty-three years.

Resolutions are the mechanism used to articulate, consider, debate, and adopt the policies of an organization. They are challenging to write because they are one sentence long. The first part is a series of whereas clauses setting forth the problem being addressed. The second part is one or a series of actions to be undertaken by the organization or suggested by the organization for other entities to undertake. They are called “the resolves.” Resolutions are tricky to write in this form, particularly because the author is required to set out in as few words as possible what the problem is and how to resolve it.

Weeks before the convention I begin reminding people that it is time to think about possible resolutions. I have a set of instructions that I can send to anyone interested in writing one. The committee is also willing to help with the formulation and writing of resolutions that it thinks worthy of consideration. We would not help someone who wanted to bring a resolution asking the Ohio Legislature to provide a computer to every blind person in the state every three years, for example. Such a resolution would be foolish and an exercise in futility.

A Resolutions Committee meeting is scheduled on the Friday evening of every convention. The committee meets to review the resolutions collected and votes to recommend do pass or do not pass on each resolution. Resolutions that the committee thinks unworthy of convention consideration are not brought to the convention floor unless three chapter presidents are prepared to bring it to the floor.

The national organization has another way to bring resolutions to the convention floor, but Ohio has never developed such a path. If a resolution is brought To the National board, the board can vote to bring it to the convention. The national organization has a rigid two-week deadline before the convention for getting the committee to consider a resolution. If something comes up after that deadline has passed, the board is the path to get it to the convention. Our deadline is one week before the convention, and we have never had the need to deal with a resolution that could not meet that deadline.

We had one resolution this year that created a lot of discussion. It took me by surprise because one of the opponents was a member of the committee who approved the resolution before the convention, though he did not attend the committee meeting on Friday to raise the reservations that he presented on the floor.

President Payne allowed some considerable discussion of the resolution, and, when the audience became restive, he quite properly asked if people were ready to vote. An overwhelming majority was ready to vote, and the resolution was approved with a few nays and a couple of abstentions.

I recognize that it is difficult to listen attentively to the reading of the resolutions late Sunday morning. It is perfectly proper to ask to have a resolution read again if necessary. This should be called for if people are unclear about the content or purpose of the resolution.

I have heard suggestions that the resolutions should be circulated before the convention. I am pessimistic about whether this is possible. We usually don’t finish writing them till a day or two before the convention. The committee meeting is open to the membership. Those who are interested in resolutions can ask to be appointed to the committee or can attend the meeting just to be sure that they know what is happening and what the arguments are in this year’s resolutions. The national process is not more open than this, and it seems sufficient to me. I am in no way trying to limit member participation in creating or passing resolutions. I do want everyone to understand what is going on and how to participate in the process. That is why I have devoted my column to this topic in this newsletter. The writing and passing of resolutions is certainly democracy in operation.

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# **2019 NFB of Ohio Resolutions by Barbara Pierce**

This year we adopted two resolutions at the state convention. Resolutions are the official policy of the NFB of Ohio. They are reviewed by the Resolutions Committee and considered and adopted or rejected by the organization in convention assembled. After adoption resolutions are then to be acted upon by the president and Board of Directors. Here are the texts of this year’s two resolutions:

**Resolution Commending the DeWine Administration: 2019-01**

WHEREAS, the blind of Ohio have suffered from chronic unemployment or under-employment for decades; and

WHEREAS, state officials have given mere lip service to the idea that state government should be a leading employer of the blind and others with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, Governor Mike DeWine had the conviction and courage to issue Executive Order 2019-03D, Establishing Ohio as a Disability-Inclusion State and Model Employer Of Individuals with Disabilities: Now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED by the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio in Convention assembled this third day of November, 2019, in the City of Columbus, Ohio, that this organization commend Governor DeWine for issuing this executive order; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this organization offer itself to Governor DeWine as a nationally recognized expert in the employment needs of the blind and that we urge his office and all other state Officials to consult with the organized blind as the state moves forward with the implementation of this executive order; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this consultation occur annually at a minimum.

**Resolution: Regarding the Proliferation of Dockless Electric Scooters and E-Bikes: 2019-02**

WHEREAS, dockless electric scooters and e-bikes are new forms of transportation that have become increasingly popular in the United States; and

WHEREAS, the appeal of these vehicles is that they may be retrieved from and left anywhere because they do not need to be parked at a docking station or rack; and

WHEREAS, as a result users are leaving these vehicles in locations that block curb cuts, obstruct sidewalks, block bus stops and stoops, and generally disrupt the flow of pedestrian traffic; and

WHEREAS, users further endanger pedestrian traffic by riding these vehicles on sidewalks and other pedestrian rights-of-way; and

WHEREAS, these vehicles are virtually silent when in use, making it impossible for those using nonvisual means of travel to detect them; and

WHEREAS, the public is encouraged to contact the various scooter and e-bike companies directly to report vehicle misuse, request that a vehicle be moved, or report an injury or other concern by calling the company, visiting the website, or making a report using the app; and

WHEREAS, the blind cannot identify the scooter and E-bike companies’ names, phone numbers, or websites because the information on the scooter or e-bike is available only in print; and

WHEREAS, blind people are further denied the opportunity to make reports or issue complaints since scooter and e-bike websites and apps are generally not accessible using access technology; and

WHEREAS, few laws in the United States regulate the use of these vehicles, and laws that do exist are inconsistent from city to city: Now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED by the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio in Convention assembled this third day of November, 2019, in the City of Columbus, Ohio, that this organization urge the Ohio Department of Transportation, the Ohio General Assembly, city councils, and regional and local governments to work with the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio to enact laws regulating scooter and e-bike use to control parking, prohibit riding on sidewalks, and generally avoid disrupting the flow of pedestrian traffic; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this organization call upon agencies with the power to create regulations governing the use of dockless electric scooters and e-bikes to consult with the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio about the safety and identification of dockless electric scooters and e-bikes; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this organization demand that all dockless electric scooter and e-bike companies place their company name, scooter or E-Bike identification number, and contact information on each vehicle in a format accessible and easily detectible by the blind and that these companies develop accessible websites and mobile applications so that blind pedestrians can easily make reports of misuse or injury; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this organization call upon the Ohio Congressional delegation to introduce federal legislation establishing a minimum sound standard for dockless electric scooters and e-bikes when moving.

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# **Report of the 2019 NFB of Ohio Awards by Barbara Pierce**

Heather Leiterman, chair of this year’s Awards Committee, was unavailable to prepare this report. Thank you to this year’s Awards Committee, who worked hard to make the decisions reported below. They are Heather Leiterman, Ali Benmerzouga, Emily Pennington, Jerry Purcell, and Annette Lutz. Their work honors individuals who have done outstanding work to build the affiliate and highlights the work of chapters and divisions that understand what the Federation stands for and are busy doing the work to which we are all called. By calling attention to their work, we hope to inspire all of the organizations in the affiliate to support the NFB at all levels and use their energy to carry out projects worthy of the Federation.

The committee presented two individual awards this year. The first was the Knall/Garwood Award presented to a Federationist who has given long and faithful service to the NFB of Ohio. It is named for John Knall and Ivan Garwood, who both served the organization faithfully for many years in varied capacities. The 2019 Knall/Garwood Award was presented to President Richard Payne. Here is the text of the plaque presented to him:

**The Knall/Garwood Award**

Presented by the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio

To Richard Payne

With deep affection and respect for your many years of devoted service to the NFB of Ohio

As chapter president, Board member, Vice President, and President.

You are an indefatigable volunteer wherever needed.

November 2, 2019

The Alfonso Smith Award is named for an outstanding president of the NFB of Ohio in the 1950's. It is awarded to a blind person who has performed outstanding service to the organization. The 2019 Alfonso Smith Award was presented to Mike Leiterman chiefly for his work with our recent legislative program. Mike and Heather Leiterman have now moved to Atlanta, where Mike is working for the Centers for Disease Control as an attorney. Here is the text of his award:

**The Alfonso Smith Award**

Presented by the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio

To Michael Leiterman

For imagining, organizing, and conducting our first statewide legislative seminars

For building relationships with legislators and for encouraging us to make our voices heard in Columbus

You are colleague and friend to the blind of Ohio.

November 2, 2019

The other three awards presented were part of our Gavel Award program. Chapters and divisions are asked to answer questions designed to explain what the group has worked on during the year and how energetically it has supported the wider Federation. The winner of the Chapter Gavel Award for the second year in a row was the NFB of Cleveland. If they win the award next year, they will be presented an actual gavel for their work. The certificate Cleveland received could not begin to enumerate the activities of this chapter under the leadership of President Suzanne Turner. The chapter is large and growing, which means that many hands are available for the projects they have undertaken. Here is the text of the Chapter Gavel Award certificate:

**The Chapter Gavel Award**

Presented by the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio

To the National Federation of the Blind of Cleveland

For your continuous effort to educate the community about blindness

To find and teach new members about the work of the NFB

And to participate in legislative efforts locally, across the state, and around the nation

We applaud your growing membership, your deepening commitment to the work of the NFB, and your unflagging efforts to build the affiliate.

November 2, 2019

The Division Gavel Award was presented to the NFB of Ohio Senior Division. The Seniors are trying to offer services and counsel to those losing vision, particularly seniors. They encourage local chapters to reach out to seniors and to provide inservices to organizations serving seniors who are uncertain about how to serve seniors losing vision. Here is the text of the certificate presented to the NFB of Ohio Senior Division:

**The Division Gavel Award**

Presented by the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio

To the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio Senior Division

For reaching out beyond your members to newly blind Ohioans

For training professionals serving seniors to learn ways to help blind seniors

And for counseling individual seniors facing vision loss

We salute you for inspiring us and showing us how to serve others as we age.

November 2, 2019

Several years ago we established the Chapter on the Move Award to be given to a chapter that had obviously caught fire and was doing great things, though perhaps not at the level of the Gavel Award winner. We do not present this award every year, only when it is deserved. We did present the award this year to the NFB of Greater Akron. Here is the text:

**Chapter on the Move Award**

Presented by the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio

To the National Federation of the Blind of Greater Akron

For your boundless enthusiasm for and growing understanding of the philosophy and effort of the NFB to provide hope and opportunity to the blind of Akron, the state, and the nation

For your participation in the activities of the state organization and the support of the work of other chapters

You inspire us and revitalize our spirit.

November 2, 2019

There you have the awards presented this year. It is important that every chapter and division participate in the Gavel Award process. Each chapter and division should appoint a committee to write its answers on the form in late summer. In this way more members will become invested in making healthy decisions about group activities and funding priorities.

Thank you to the Awards Committee for its hard work. Let’s see if we can have every chapter and division enter the Gavel Award competition next year.

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# **Meet the 2019 NFB of Ohio Scholarship Recipients by Cassandra Jones**

Editor’s note: Scholarship Committee chairwoman Cassandra Jones presented this year’s three scholarships at the banquet. Here is her report of this year’s scholarship program:

On November 2 at the 73rd convention banquet of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio, three scholarships were presented to three deserving students.

The Jennica Ferguson Memorial Scholarship in the amount of $1,500 was presented to Kinshuk Tella, a first-year student at Miami University studying environmental science and geology. In addition to taking a full course load, Kinshuk plays the baritone in the marching band and will be in the pep band next semester.

Kinshuk was recently introduced to the NFB of Ohio and is motivated and eager to learn more about the organization and contribute his talents. With the revival of the Student Division, Kinshuk was elected Vice President and is looking forward to building the Student Division.

Lucas Cassi was awarded the Robert Eschbach Memorial Scholarship in the amount of $1,000. He is a senior at Kent State University studying interpersonal communication with a minor in peace and conflict studies. Lucas is a certified yoga instructor and teaches yoga as part of the programming offered through campus recreation. Additionally, he is on the Board of Diversity, where he advocates for all students. Lucas has been connected to the NFB of Ohio for several years and wholeheartedly embraces the NFB philosophy. He is committed to contributing and building the Federation. As part of the reorganization of the Student Division, Lucas was elected the Treasurer and is looking forward to reviving the Student Division.

The third scholarship, the Barbara E. Fohl Memorial Scholarship in the amount of $1,000, was awarded to Nakita Griffin, a senior at Otterbein University studying psychology. Nakita is passionate about writing, and her genres of interest are poetry, fiction, and erotica. Between attending classes and completing homework, Nakita has written a book, *Blindly in Love*, which is available on Kindle. While a student at OSSB, Nakita was on the drumline and hopes to return to playing the drums. She would also like to introduce young blind children to drumline.

This was Nakita’s first convention, and she described it as energizing and educational. Nakita is new to the Federation and is looking forward to learning about the NFB and becoming involved in the Capital Chapter.

The scholarship program is one of the most important tools we have in shaping and inspiring young people. We are deeply grateful to the Norwalk Lions Club, who, at Jason Ewell’s encouragement, have generously underwritten a significant portion of this program. Their underwriting of the academic aspirations of blind students has been profoundly important to all blind Ohioans. The NFB of Ohio remains deeply committed to supporting the educational dreams of young blind people, but we could not begin to be as generous as we have been without the Norwalk Lions.

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# **Why Should You Join the PAC Plan? by Suzanne Turner**

Editor’s note: Suzanne Turner is the NFB of Ohio PAC Plan chairperson. Below she reminds us all why we should give steadily to the Pre-Authorized Contribution Plan. You can contact her at 216-990-6199. This is what she says:

The National Federation of the Blind relies on the generosity of supporters and members to promote our mission to help blind people live the lives we want. If you are not familiar with the work of the Federation, let me provide insight.

If it were not for people like you who support our programs, we would not have the ability to provide free white canes; advocate for the rights of blind children, students, working-age people, and seniors; fund scholarships; and evaluate access technology. For the last two years my 2018 and 2019 Cleveland first-time members received Kenneth Jernigan Scholarships to help them attend the national convention. So last year I ensured that Cleveland would give back a little of what we’ve received. We as a chapter as well as some individual members contribute to the monthly Pre-Authorized Contribution (PAC) Plan. I understand that several chapters have also been on the PAC Plan for years: NFB of Lorain County and the NFB of the Miami Valley are longtime supporters. The NFB of Cincinnati also just voted to join.

Congratulations and thank you for the contributions. It is the Financing the Movement Committee’s hope this year that all Ohio chapters, divisions, and individual members will participate by joining PAC. The good news is that anyone can contribute. You do not even have to be a member of the organization. You just have to possess a checking account, a credit card, or a debit card. You can designate as little as $5 a month to be deducted from your account every month on a day that you choose. You can increase, decrease, or stop your contribution whenever you wish. But we are counting on you.

Finally, for your convenience we will gladly take the information that will provide contributions to the funds of the National Federation of the Blind. I am happy to complete the PAC form for anyone who contacts me. Also I can assure you that your personal information will be secure and private when you enter the data online at the website pac@nfb.org. If you would like to complete the PAC form in the comfort of your own home, go to pac@nfb.org and complete the online form. Thank you for all that you do for the blind and for getting on the PAC Plan.

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# **From the President’s Desk by Richard Payne**

I was reminded leading up to the state convention and during it that our community is just like other nonprofits and civil rights groups. One of the things that we do every day is to combat the low expectations, misconceptions, and stereotypes that are the true barriers to achieving our dreams. The blind have organized for the same reasons other minorities have—to make positive social change through collective action. Federation philosophy provides an overall framework for thinking about blindness, what it means, and what it doesn't mean. However, it is not intended to be rigid or dogmatic. Mark Shield said, “There is always strength in numbers.” The Federation is constantly changing, and our talents grow and revolve from a tremendous pool. We have several dynamic people in our membership from diverse backgrounds. That also creates the change of educating the membership as to how the Federation family works together. This reminds me that we must always remember to think of ways to apply this to our life and work in the NFB; our work and any project that we are tackling now benefit the multitude of the world. The work that we do on the local and state level should reflect the movement.

I also would like to remind us of the excerpts from Dr. Mark Maurer’s 2015 Convention talk “The Nature of Blindness”:

[Loosely quoted] Lots of people who were born blind, including me, want to remain that way even if given the choice to become sighted. We still want to be blind even though society sends lots of messages that this attitude isn't ok. Why do we still want to be blind even knowing that we could fit into society so much better as sighted people? We want to remain blind because we know quite well how to manage our lives as blind people.

Maybe we are identifiably and interestingly different from people who are sighted. . . .

Dr. tenBroek said in 1940 blind people are normal, useful, and self-respecting. . . .

I do the things that I do without looking, and I regard this as natural. . . .

Independence for the blind demands a measure of rebellion, and rebellion cannot occur without mental effort. One of the elements of the rebellion involves the insistence that we who are blind have the right to participate fully in our society on equal terms with others. . . .

Invention, rebellion, creativity, planning: these are words that I associate with the successful blind people I know. . . . I believe that the world is a more interesting place with disabled people in it than it would be without us. Although we in the National Federation of the Blind have emphasized how similar blind people are to sighted people-- how our talents, aspirations, and capacity to function have not been diminished by our blindness--we are in certain ways different from sighted people, and the difference is sometimes a disadvantage and sometimes an advantage. As you know, I am not a broken sighted person; rather, I am a blind person. This expression indicates that I believe each of us has value, blind or sighted, and I believe that the value that each of us represents should be cherished.

When I read the above message, I was reminded of all those great leaders who have led this impressive movement. The National Federation of the Blind of Ohio belongs to all of us, and we should be proud of our leaders and stand behind them. They have a tremendous amount of work to do every day. When we look at them and hear words of encouragement, it allows us to understand the Federation even more. While I have been president, several decisions have been made. Some of them may not be the ones that some agreed with, but put yourself in the shoes of the president. It is important to give that person no matter whoever they may be the ability to do the job that you elected them for. One of my credits to myself is that by being in the Federation for so long it has allowed me the pleasure to get to know and work with so many strong leaders from across the nation. I stand on my actions and understand the full impact. Several of you have called or emailed after the convention for various reasons, and I wish you could tell everyone about your positive experiences. I watch the news but not so much now because good news does not sell. We must keep lifting the self-esteem of blind people, and I think you should know why. Why do I remain active in the Federation? Years ago I pledged to participate actively in the effort of the National Federation of the Blind to achieve equality, opportunity, and security for the blind; to support the policies and programs of the Federation; and to abide by its constitution. For me this pledge remains to be one of the building blocks and powerful commitments of my life. We continue working hard to build our visibility in the legislature and also to educate the public and other blind people. This is just part of the job of the Federation, but when you add building the Federation, everyone should be doing what you can to see that others can enjoy that great gift that you have been afforded.

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# **2020 NFB-O Committee Appointments**

Editor’s note: The following are the committee appointments that President Payne has made for 2020. Each listing begins with the committee description of charge followed by the name of the committee chair and then those appointed to that committee. Please read each committee listing to learn of your committee appointments.

**AWARDS COMMITTEE**

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

Chair: Annette Lutz

Members: Jerry Purcell, and Ali Benmerzouga

**BRAILLE ENRICHMENT FOR LITERACY AND LEARNING (BELL) ACADEMY COMMITTEE**

Charge: To organize the bELL Academy and plan efficient ways to promote and execute this very important program.

Coordinator: Eric Duffy

Members: Jolene Bennett, Marianne Denning, and Debbie Baker

**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

Chair: Cheryl Fields

Members: Marianne Denning, Sheila Hardy Wilson, William Turner, and Eric Duffy

**CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE**

Charge: To make sure that all NFBO constitutions are in compliance with the state and national constitutions, both philosophically and rhetorically.

Chair: Albert Elia

Members: Barbara Pierce, Shawn Martin, and Coleen Roth

**CONVENTION PLANNING COMMITTEE**

Charge: To assist and advise the president in the planning and logistics of our state convention and to provide additional assistance in planning and executing affiliate activities at national convention.

Chair: Lucas Cassi

Members: Garry Williams, Sheila Hardy Wilson, Kinshuk Tella, Annette Lutz, Jessica Stover, Jim Weiss, and Shawn Martin

**DEAF-BLIND COORDINATOR**

Charge: To aid and provide information to those who are in this unique community and to serve as a vehicle to foster a positive relationship for the deaf-blind community. In 2020 the coordinator will assist the affiliate in forming a Deaf-Blind Division and recruiting members.

Coordinator: Suzanne Turner

**EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

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

Chair: Marianne Denning

Members: Debbie Baker, Jordy Stringer, and Chris Sabine

**FINANCING THE MOVEMENT COMMITTEE,** including Shares Unlimited in NFB (SUN) coordinator, Jernigan Fund coordinator, and the Pre-Authorized Contribution (PAC) coordinator

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

Chairs: Sherry Ruth (Jernigan), Suzanne Turner (PAC), and Coleen Roth (SUN)

**FUNDRAISING COMMITTEE**

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

Chair: Suzanne Turner

Members: Gloria Robinson, Lucas Cassi, Deanna Lewis, Garry Williams, and Wilbert Turner

**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.

Chair: Eric Duffy

Members: Annette Lutz, Andra Stover, Marianne Denning, Albert Elia, and Jolene Bennett

**MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE**

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

Chair: Carolyn Peters

Members: Jim Weiss, Jolene Bennett, and William Turner

**PROMOTION AND PUBLICITY COMMITTEE**

Charge: To develop content and suggest creative ways to promote NFB-O branding. Responsibilities include research audience preferences and discover current trends; create engaging text, image, and video content; design posts to sustain readers’ curiosity and create buzz around new issues; stay up to date with changes in all social platforms ensuring maximum effectiveness; train leaders in ways to use social media in a cohesive and beneficial way; develop an optimal posting schedule considering web traffic and engagement; and oversee social media accounts.

Chair: Dave Bertsch

Members: Asia Quinones-Evans and Chris Sabine

**RESOLUTIONS COMMITTEE**

Charge: To oversee the submission process and to write and distribute clearly articulated and philosophically sound resolutions.

Chair: Barbara Pierce

Members: Debbie Baker and Andra Stover

**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.

Chair: Cassandra Jones

Members: Suzanne Turner, and Jordy Stringer

**VEHICLE DONATION COMMITTEE:**

Charge: To facilitate the process and promote the NFB Vehicle Donation Program throughout the state.

Chair: Lucas Cassi

Member: Brandon Khounesombat

**WEBSITE AND NEWSLINE COMMITTEE**

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

Chair: Robby Spangler

Members: Cheryl Fields, Jim Weiss

Thank you for serving in 2020.

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# **Making a Difference in Ohio and the Nation with Legislation that Matters by Eric Duffy**

Editor’s note: Eric Duffy is the coming year’s legislative director. In the following pages he brings you up to date with the 2020 legislative issues at both the state and federal levels and reviews for you the structure of the legislative bodies with which we will be working. This is what he says:

Those of you old enough to remember Saturday morning cartoons and the *Schoolhouse Rock* productions might remember the one called “I am just a Bill.” It taught us how a bill becomes a law. *Schoolhouse Rock* talked about the Federal legislative process, but here we will talk about both the state and federal processes from the perspective of the National Federation of the Blind.

The impetus for working to get legislation passed at the state or national level often begins with a resolution. A resolution adopted by the National Convention becomes the policy of the National Federation of the Blind. Of course national policies are binding on the organization at all levels. In the late 1980’s and early 90’s we as an organization decided that we must address the Braille literacy crisis in the country. Resolutions were adopted, and we began to work on federal legislation. Then affiliates began passing state legislation to address the crisis. After several states, including Ohio, passed legislation protecting the rights of blind children to be literate, those opposing federal legislation began to fall in line.

At both the federal and state levels, we organize around an issue that will, when changed, have a significant effect on as many blind people as possible, does away with antiquated laws or practices, or in some other way protects the civil rights of the blind. Then, depending on whether we want to pass federal or state legislation, we set about to find someone in the Congress or State House who supports our idea.

Particularly in the Ohio General Assembly, you may be in a position to help. If one of our initiatives is something you believe your state representative or state senator would sponsor, by all means let the president or the legislative director know.

We do our best to see that our legislation in Washington has sponsors and has been introduced before the annual Washington Seminar. That of course is not always possible, especially at the beginning of a new Congressional session. At this writing we do not yet know what the issues in 2020 will be. They will be decided at the December national Board of Directors meeting. The job of everyone attending the Washington Seminar is to build support for our legislation. President Riccobono and our legislative team, who are on Capitol Hill regularly, usually have specific members of the House and Senate in mind to sponsor our legislation. Our job is to ask our Congressional delegations to cosponsor a bill that is already introduced or to agree to cosponsor it once it is introduced. Finally, if we cannot get the Representative or Senator to cosponsor, we urge them to support the bill when it comes up for a vote in the committee or on the floor of the House or Senate.

As I write this article, President Payne has announced whom he has chosen to participate in the 2020 Washington Seminar. Many whom he has chosen are first-time participants. So here is what they can expect this year. Our national organization prepares fact sheets for each of the issues we will discuss with Congress. Each fact sheet explains the change we want to make and the need for change. We will have several conference calls to discuss this material before we go to Washington. We want our team to be well prepared so that we can deliver a professional presentation in each office. We will arrive in Washington on Monday, February 10, 2020. Everyone on our Ohio team should plan to be in the afternoon session in which the issues are discussed and role play often takes place, giving us a chance to be in groups to practice our presentations or at least to observe it being done effectively.

What we have come to call the Great Gathering In takes place at 5:00 PM that evening. Anyone from Ohio who could not be there earlier in the day for some reason must be in the audience for this meeting. President Riccobono will talk with us about the seminar and the work of the Federation. We will then hear from our legislative team, who will discuss the work ahead of us during the next few days and the remainder of the year.

On Tuesday morning the Ohio delegation will work in our pre-assigned teams and begin to take our message to the Congress. We do our best to meet with each of our two Senators as one delegation. We then begin to visit with the members of Congress assigned to our team. These appointments often have long breaks between them and are spread out throughout the Congressional office buildings. That means that there can be a lot of standing around and that there will definitely be a lot of walking. That is why we always emphasize that those who go to Washington with us must have real physical stamina.

Before the Ohio delegation leaves Washington, we will have met with each of our Senators and all of our Congressional representatives. But our work is not finished, and neither is yours. After we get home, our team leaders must send thank you notes to those with whom we met. You can then send a note to your Congressional representative and thank him or her, or the relevant staff member for meeting with us. In this same note you can remind them of our legislative efforts. Communication must take place throughout the remainder of the year. It is our responsibility to make sure that the Ohio Congressional Delegation is actively supporting our legislation.

In Ohio we are just beginning to plan our March on Columbus. We don’t have a date, but we know it will be sometime in the spring. By now you should know that our primary concerns in the Ohio General Assembly are HB 188, our bill protecting the rights of blind parents, and HB 214, our accessible prescription labeling bill. Both of these bills are in the Health Committee in the Ohio House. HB 188 has had three hearings, and we hope it will be voted out of committee soon. HB 214 has had two hearings and will be in committee a while longer. We are still working out the details of our service animal legislation, so it has not been introduced.

At times you will be asked to write letters, send emails, make phone calls, or testify in person in support of some of this legislation. Some times we will call upon you with very short notice. But when we call for action, we need your commitment.

I am going to conclude this article with some very basic information. In fact one might say that this should have been the very beginning of the article. No matter where it is placed, this is probably the most important part of the whole thing. It is what I want you to remember the most. We are working with two legislative bodies. This means that there are two chambers. The Federal body is the United States Congress. It is made up of the House and the Senate. Ohio currently has sixteen members of the House. This means that in Ohio we have sixteen Congressional districts. You live in one of those districts. Which one? Who represents you? Please look at the following list: district 1 . Steve Chabot, 2. Brad Wenstrup, 3. Joyce Beatty, 4. Jim Jordan, 5. Robert Latta, 6. Bill Johnson, 7. Bob Gibbs, 8. Warren Davidson, 9. Marcy Kaptur, 10. Michael Turner, 11. Marcia Fudge, 12. Troy Balderson, 13. Tim Ryan, 14. David Joyce, 15. Steve Stivers, 16. Anthony Gonzalez. One of these 16 men or women represents you in Congress. He or she is referred to as your Member of Congress or your Congressional Representative. As do all other states, Ohio has two Senators. Currently they are Sherrod Brown and Rob Portman. They both represent you in the United States Senate.

The State of Ohio also has a bicameral legislature. It is made up of the Ohio House and the Ohio Senate. The collective body is called the Ohio General Assembly. There are ninety-nine members of the Ohio House, and thirty-three members of the Ohio Senate. These individuals are referred to as your State Representative and your State Senator. Of course their offices are in Columbus. Please learn who your State Representative and State Senator are. Have their contact information at your disposal.

I now chair the legislative committee. I will do my best to keep you informed about what is happening with legislation at both the federal and state levels. I will do what I can to help you be involved in the process, but you must also do your part. Know who represents you. Be familiar with all of our issues, and be ready when called to action.

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# **Buckeye Briefs**

The NFB of Cleveland conducted elections in November. Those elected to two-year terms were president, Suzanne Turner; vice president, William Turner; recording secretary, Ali Benmerzouga; treasurer, Natassha Ricks; and board member, Shirley Patterson. There are two board positions up for election in 2020. These seats are currently held by Cecil Dukes and Robert Campbell.

NFB of Springfield will have a potluck celebration on Saturday, December 21, from 10:00 to 12:00 noon at Alexander and Associates, 1150 E. Home Road. Members are welcome to bring guests.

NAGDU, the Ohio Association of Guide Dog Users, hosted a dog Christmas gift exchange by phone on Sunday, December 8, at 7:00. Service dogs and pets were invited.

The NFB of the Miami Valley conducted elections in November. Elected were president, Carolyn Peters; vice president, Karen Warner; secretary, Robbie Spangler; treasurer, Tim Janning; and at-large board member, Sheila Hardy-Wilson. The holiday celebration will be held December 14, from 1 PM to 3 PM at Christ Episcopal Church, 20 W. 1st St., downtown Dayton. All are welcome.

The Capital Chapter reports the following election results: president, Annette Lutz; vice president, JW Smith; secretary, Eric Duffy; treasurer, Shelly Duffy; and at-large board member, Misty Hatcher. Anyone in the area is also invited to a Christmas luncheon at the Rusty Bucket on N. High Street in Columbus. It will be immediately following the regular December meeting on December 7.

Eric Duffy writes that the Capital Chapter has been a regular guest on the “Morning Exchange” show on Voicecorps for the last several months. The show is live weekday mornings from 11:00 AM to noon. We have now been offered a regular show, which we believe will be on the third Wednesday of the month. Not only is this show broadcast in the Columbus area, it can be accessed on the internet and from your favorite Amazon device. You can call in live and participate in the conversation about the National Federation of the Blind. In fact, we need your help. We need for you to join the conversation. Please watch Ohio-Talk for the announcement about our December show and the confirmation of our regular time slot. We will also include the call in number in that announcement.

Jackson Schwoebel is the president of the newly revitalized Ohio Association of Blind Students. With the help of Richard Payne, Suzanne Turner, Kenia Flores, and Trisha Kulkarni, the OABS is up and running once again. He reports that the group has a lot of great members on the student board. The election results are president, Jackson Schwoebel; vice president, Kinshuk Tella, one of this year’s scholarship winners; secretary, Emily Kaihl; treasurer, Lucas Cassi, another scholarship winner; and two At-Large Board members, Jimmy Parsons and Lyka Crebillo. The student board has talked about having meetings once a month by conference call, and they have already met once. During this meeting they discussed Washington Seminar, various fundraising ideas, and ways to get more blind students involved in the student division as well as the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio as a whole. Recently Jackson was approached by his disability adviser at Cuyahoga Community College, where he attends school, and was asked if he would speak to a committee board regarding accessibility. He accepted this opportunity and told them some things that they could do differently to make online learning more accessible for blind students, ranging from making Blackboard more accessible to ensuring that blind students receive all their course materials in accessible format. You can see that the student division is on the move. Stay tuned to learn what is next.

Sheri Albers has accepted a job with the San Francisco Lighthouse for the Blind. Her departure from Ohio leaves a big hole in affiliate leadership. Richard Payne has appointed Suzanne Turner as affiliate vice president, and the NFB of Cincinnati has elected Gloria Robinson to fill Sheri’s term as president. Congratulations to Sheri in her new job and to both Suzanne Turner and Gloria Robinson in their new positions.

Before our most recent convention, the Community Service Committee asked members of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio to bring new hats, gloves, mittens, or scarves to the convention. We will donate these items to the Ohio State School for the Blind. The school can then provide them to students in need for any reason. All too often the blind are perceived as being on the receiving end of the giving process. We know, however, that this does not need to be the case.

Disability Rights Ohio (DRO) Director Michael Kirkman has announced his decision to retire, effective early 2020. He was Legal Director for its predecessor, Ohio Legal Rights Service, for twenty years before assuming the leadership position.

"I consider guiding the transition from a state-run organization—OLRS--to a non-profit, private organization--DRO--as one of my greatest accomplishments as Executive Director," Kirkman said. "It took more than five years to move into the private sector, and since then I have watched the organization grow into a vibrant work environment dedicated to establishing and expanding the rights of Ohio residents with disabilities."

Spearheading that transition is only one of Kirkman's impressive successes. During his tenure Disability Rights Ohio brought and resolved several major court cases, milestones in the fight to ensure that the rights of those with disabilities are recognized and honored. These include:

\*A settlement in the class action lawsuit, filed by DRO, the law firm of Steptoe & Johnson, and the Bazelon Center against the State of Ohio, will shortly be submitted to the court for approval. The comprehensive settlement agreement focuses on improving outcomes for students with disabilities by identifying specific steps school districts must take to maximize student achievement, including integration into the regular classroom and emphasizing the use of assistive technology to boost learning. The ruling also includes strategies for improving the transition to post-secondary education for students with disabilities

\*Preliminary approval of a comprehensive settlement agreement in the class action Ball v. DeWine suit, granted after more than three years of litigation. DRO, the law firm of Sidley Austin LLP, the Center for Public Representation (CPR), and attorney Sam Bagenstos brought the suit on behalf of individuals with developmental disabilities and their families. As part of the settlement, the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) has agreed to continue and expand programs that will allow more people with developmental disabilities the option to live and work in their communities with the supports they need. DODD will expand options counseling and pre-admission counseling programs, maintain peer-to-peer and family-to-family programs, increase access to state-funded individual options waivers for people who choose a waiver, support and expand programs for integrated, affordable housing and integrated employment and day services, and continue follow-along visits for people after they have left their care facilities.

\*A nationally recognized federal court opinion that led to resolution of a dispute between DRO and the Buckeye Ranch that advances a strong working relationship between the organizations as they seek to ensure the safety and care of children with disabilities. The settlement outlines DRO's access authority and the means by which its advocates will conduct abuse and neglect investigations going forward, minimizing interference into residents' schooling.

The search to find Kirkman's successor will begin immediately. The Board has established a Search Committee that will identify potential candidates and make recommendations on which should be interviewed by the full Board. Applications from both internal and external applicants are currently being accepted and may be submitted to execsearch@disabilityrightsohio.org. Interested parties can go to https://www.disabilityrightsohio.org/execsearch.

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# **Activities Calendar**

December 1 to January 15, Braille Readers Are Leaders Contest

January 1, Opening hotel registration 2020 national convention

January 4, Louis Braille’s birthday and World Braille Day

January 4-10, Braille Literacy Week

February 10, Great Gathering-in, Washington Seminar

February 10-13, Washington Seminar

March 1, Opening convention registration 2020 convention

March 31, Deadline National Scholarship applications

April 15, Deadline Jernigan Fund applications

May 15, Deadline Ohio Scholarship applications

July 14 to 19, 2020 NFB convention, Hilton Americas-Houston hotel