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National Federation
of the Blind

BUCKEYE BULLETIN

A publication of the
National Federation of the Blind of Ohio

Barbara Pierce, Editor
237 Oak Street Oberlin, OH 44074
bbpierce@pobox.com
www.nfbohio.org
(440) 775-2216

Sylvia Cooley, Production Editor

Dr. J. Webster Smith, President
(800) 396-6326; (NFBO Office)
jwsmithnfb@verizon.net
P.O. Box 458
Athens, OH 45701-0458

(Voice of the Nation's Blind

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 thirteen local chapters, one for at-large members, and special divisions for diabetics, merchants, students, seniors, parents of blind children, and those interested in Braille. This quarterly newsletter is produced in large print and on CDs. 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) 775-2216 or email bbpierce@pobox.com. NFB-NEWSLINE local phone numbers: 330-247-1241 (Akron), 330-409-1900 (Canton), 513-297-1521 (Cincinnati), 216-453-2090 (Cleveland), and 614-448-1673 (Columbus).

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From the President's Desk by J. Webster Smith

I attended my first NFB convention in 1992, and it was a life-changing event. It was held in Charlotte, North Carolina, and it was unique because the meeting was held in a convention center with the housing spread among four hotels. It was memorable for me for a number of reasons, and in this column I want to try to convey some of those reasons to you in an attempt to persuade you to consider attending this year's NFB convention in Detroit, Michigan, from July 3 through 8.

Even though I had been a member of the National Federation of the Blind since 1990, I had no idea what to expect when I arrived in Charlotte. The first thing that struck me was the way conventioners were responding to the fact that we had to take shuttles to and from the convention center and the hosting hotels. For the vast majority it was no big deal and in fact often seemed quite enjoyable. The next thing that amazed me was the number of choices the con-

vention offered. I remember feeling, "There is no way I could ever attend everything I want to unless I could divide myself into three or four people." It seemed to me that from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. something was always going on. Now to most people that could be overwhelming, but for me it was exhilarating.

I was a young professor at Indiana University South Bend, and I had an active lifestyle that included travel, recreation, and many academic pursuits. So for me this convention suited my personality and life.

I dropped in and out of many gatherings that first year, from the blind educators meeting to parts of the parents' meeting. I even wandered into a very interesting reception of businesspeople that I later found out were merchants. I remember returning to my room one day and looking at the agenda and saying to myself, "I can't imagine that they have left anything out!"

There were social choices as well, featuring great music, dancing, fellowship and food, and even a Monte Carlo night. I must admit that, when I had to call time out from exhaustion, it nearly killed me because I did not want to miss anything. I was like a starving man that year, and this convention was the ultimate smorgasbord of all things related to blindness and visual impairment. If you are busy and active and like to have options and choices, this is the event for you. I can guarantee that you will find something that interests you.

I never will forget the phone call that led to my attending that first convention. It came about two in the afternoon, and I remember a female voice saying, "Please hold for Dr. Jernigan." My mouth fell open because I had heard his voice on many recordings, but I had never dreamed that I would hear it on my phone. When he came on the line, it was instantaneous recognition. He extended the invitation that changed my life forever. As I walked into the convention

center in Charlotte, I heard all those voices that I had only read about and heard others talk about. It was fascinating to me finally to put voices with some of those names. I remember riding on one of the shuttle buses and overhearing a conversation between Allen Harris, then Peggy Pender, and Fred Schroeder. I thought to myself, "I'm on the bus with these guys, and the front of the bus at that." What a thrill." It really didn't matter to me what they were talking about; just hearing them was a powerful experience for me.

Hearing those voices compelled me to add my own enthusiastically, so I remember voting with the resolutions committee at the meeting, as if I were a member. A longtime member tapped me on the shoulder and said, "You don't have to do that." I attended the public board meeting and sat with amazement as those voices kept talking about issues that really mattered. I left that meeting with the realization that I had finally met a group of competent and confident blind people who were about the business of living their lives and making life better for other blind people. As I think back on it now, I was in search of blind people who just got it and had it. To that point I considered that I had a very productive life, complete with a great job and family and many friends and colleagues. But I wasn't really sure that there were other blind people with similar experience. Maybe I had been reading my press clippings too much and sort of thought I was one of those super-blind people--few and far between. At this meeting I met people who were doing things I considered extraordinary, whether they were blind or not. I also found blind people I could learn from and who could contribute to my growth in every respect. I must admit that some of the people I met did not sound anything like I thought they would when reading their articles and other writings.

I was like a newborn child at that first meeting, naive, innocent, and very vulnerable, but

right at home. If you are a blind person who gets it, wants to meet others who get it as well, and, more important, want to help others get it, you should consider attending this year's national convention.

This year's convention is in Michigan. I know as Buckeyes we have had a longtime competition with those guys from the state up north, but let's look at it this way--it's so close! Having such a wonderful event in our backyard should compel us to attend it. For some of you reading this, the convention will be practically a hop, skip, and a jump away, and who knows when it will ever be this close again? Just think about it. No long airplane flight or bus trip or trip by automobile. At the most, the meeting will be no more than six hours from the farthest point in our state. With this in mind we should try to have a large delegation of Buckeyes to show those from that state up north that we can compete with them even off the football field.

This is my first year as NFB-O president, and this is a golden opportunity for us to get as many people to the convention as we can, short of hosting the event ourselves. If you've always wanted to attend this meeting but thought that it was too far, this is your opportunity.

In these tight economic times our hotel rates are still fantastic, and I am committed to helping as many blind Ohioans attend this meeting as possible. I know what that first convention did for me, and I want to do whatever I can to give other people that kind of opportunity. You see, I have not missed a convention since 1992, and I have no plans to do so in the future. I know many of you reading this will follow the convention on the Internet, still others of you will wait for the audio version of the convention to be released, but wouldn't it be exciting to be there and actually meet those voices you hear? This could be the experience that changes your life so significantly that like me you will never

ever forget it. As blind people we are often told that our lives have no imagination or creativity and that we must feel bad when we consider all that we are missing. To this I say, just come to Detroit and see if that is true of the majority of people you will meet there. The energy and

excitement are electrifying, and I can only hope that, if you choose to join us, your experience will be half as positive and exhilarating as mine was in 1992. By the way, I'd like to meet you as well and put a voice with your name.



Thirty-five years ago this spring I wrote a letter to then NFB president Kenneth Jernigan. I had read my first Federation literature only the preceding January. The man who gave me the recordings of Dr. Jernigan's speeches had by then left the area, instructing a handful of us to do what we could to keep the newly reorganized At-Large Chapter of the NFB of Ohio afloat. I wanted to be a good soldier, but it seemed to me that we in Lorain County needed to band together in a chapter in order to encourage each other and to be able to work more effectively to improve life for the county's blind citizens. So I wrote

with my problem to that far-away, inspiring person, the president of the National Federation of the Blind. I explained my conflicting desires to follow the instructions I had been given and to organize a chapter and asked his advice.

Having now been a state president for almost a quarter century, I can imagine the joyful impact of such a letter on Dr. Jernigan and, when he received a copy of my letter, on my own state president, Bob Eschbach. Very rarely indeed do people contact an NFB president eager to establish a local chapter. I cannot now reconstruct what I expected the response to my letter to be. Now it seems only reasonable to me that the national president would have responded to my letter. After all, I was asking for advice; what should I have expected? I only know that I was thrilled beyond words to get the letter that I received. I am sorry that in the intervening years I have lost it. He gave me wise and practical counsel and alerted me that I would be hearing from Bob Eschbach. Bob's call was almost immediate, and out of that conversation and his subsequent visit arose the Lorain County chapter.

But the beginning of my chapter is not what I have been thinking about this spring. By far, as I remember it, the larger part of Dr. Jernigan's letter was spent urging me to attend the national convention in Chicago that summer. This was probably no more than an auto-

matic invitation at the close of the letter, but to me it was the most important part of it.

I don't suppose I seriously considered attending the convention that year. Our children were almost six, three, and eleven months. The baby was still nursing, and I certainly would not have considered that I could travel independently with her to a convention and attend sessions while caring for her. I told myself that I was needed at home and that we certainly did not have the disposable income to allow me to go off on such a jaunt, even if my long-suffering husband were willing to take on the preschoolers by himself. I know now that I should have dared to go to that convention. It was one of the great ones. But I sat down to write Dr. Jernigan to explain why I could not attend the convention and to assure him that I would be among the first to reserve a room for the 1975 convention. Making that promise to attend the convention the following year was an important step for me.

By then I had attended my first state convention and was president of my local chapter. I understood how important to my own development as an independent blind woman NFB conventions could be. Besides, Bob had promised to go with me to the convention, and we spent the intervening year scrimping to save the funds for the convention and the sitter for the kids. This was long before NFB Camp for Federation children. I was still very far from having the courage to set out for a national convention alone. I hope I would have had the nerve to do it if Bob had insisted on staying home to save money by minding the children while I went alone, but I am not certain how it would have come out. I will always be grateful to him for being willing to go. His willingness has made all the difference.

I don't have the words to describe the impact of that 1975 convention on me. I

arrived carrying a fifty-four-inch folding cane, using it only when I had no reliable arm to cling to. As soon as the exhibit hall opened, I bought a fifty-seven-inch straight fiberglass cane. The minute I tried it, I told Bob that it was as if I had been playing a piano with mittens on and now I had taken them off. When we went to dinner with two other couples in which one spouse was sighted and one was blind, I noticed that the other blind people were walking with their spouses but using their canes. I was the only one without a cane. That was just about the last time I ever walked anywhere outside my home, except to the altar in church, without using a cane.

I was not a rapid Braille reader, but I was given a Braille convention agenda that allowed me to decode my choices for meetings to attend. Bob was not much of a meeting attender, so he would go off to the art museum or other place of interest, leaving me to dip into convention activities on my own. I had never been in the Palmer House before, and I had no idea where anything was, but the place was filled with blind people figuring out where they wanted to go, and I decided that I would not look or feel out of place asking my way around the hotel. I discovered that I was pretty good at getting where I wanted to go, and the liberation I experienced was intoxicating.

I have never missed another convention, though for many years I went on my own because Bob had to stay home with the brood. I can only imagine the impact that this year's convention will have on first-time attendees. The program is vastly more complex and compelling than it was back then. For families with blind children, nothing can compare with the impact of a week of intensive parent programming and contact with competent, well-adjusted blind adults to shape parents' and

blind kids' conceptions of what blind people can become. We now have many vocational and avocational divisions bringing people together with similar interests and needs. Access technology vendors and organizations assisting blind people in various ways are represented in the exhibit hall. NFB committees and departments at our headquarters at the National Center for the Blind schedule workshops and seminars to jump-start affiliate and local chapter activities. Above all, because thousands of blind people now attend our conventions, the opportunities to network with others who face the same challenges we do in our daily lives are much greater than they used to be. And I have to say that the networking I did at my first convention led me to deep friendships that continue to nurture and encourage me all these years later.

If you are considering attending this year's convention July 3 through 8 in Detroit, I urge you to make up your mind in favor of doing so. Ohio has a bus traveling from Cincinnati, through Dayton and Toledo to Detroit. It costs \$20 to reserve a seat, but that money is returned when you actually climb on the bus. So the price is right for getting to and from the convention. To reserve your seat on the bus, contact Crystal McClain, (937) 935-6188; email <mcmclain@charter.net>. You can make a room reservation by calling (800) 266-9432. Room rates are \$62 a night for doubles, \$66 for triples, and \$68 for quads. The Detroit Marriott is an elegant hotel, so these rates are spectacularly good. Before

June 1 you can register for the convention online or by using the form that appears at the end of this newsletter. Doing so will save you \$5 for the registration and another \$5 for the banquet, which you do not want to miss. But if you decide to attend the convention after May 31, you will have to wait to register till you arrive at convention, and it will cost \$10 more.

The Ohio affiliate is warm and friendly, and its members are happy to show new-comers the ropes. If you are a parent of a blind child, contact Cindy Conley, president of the parents division. Her email address is <cconley@fuse.net>. She can connect you with other parents. If you are a student, you will want to contact the National Association of Blind Students when you arrive. Robby Spangler is president of the Ohio division, which is still struggling to get off the ground. Robby will be glad to hear from you. His email address is <spangler.robert@gmail.com>. If you are a senior, Barbara Fohl is your Ohio contact. She is president of our Ohio Organization of Blind Seniors. Her phone number is (440) 964-7824; her email is <barbfohl@pobox.com>.

I could list lots of other people whom you could contact, and I will be happy to mention names and contact information if you get in touch with me. But I suggest that you make plans to come to the convention this summer, where you can meet people yourself. The experience will change your life.



**The NFB of Ohio has been a member of the
Better Business Bureau since 2000.**

Crisis in Ohio Rehabilitation Again by Barbara Pierce



As long as I have been active in the Federation, the Rehabilitation Services Commission (RSC) and its constituent bureaus, including the Bureau of

Visually Impaired (BSVI), have periodically found themselves in one sort of political hot water or another. Sometimes it was with consumers such as the battles when the agency ditched the word “blind” in the bureau’s name, or when it embraced the not-very-bright idea of adding the National Accreditation Council (NAC) to the list of acceptable accrediting bodies for agencies doing business with RSC, despite NAC’s abysmal record of approving bad agencies and making enemies of blind consumers. Other times the problems have been with the governor, the legislature, or the Rehabilitation Services Administration in Washington.

We have often pointed out that, if RSC and BSVI know what is good for them, they will maintain good relations with the consumer organizations, particularly the NFB. After all, we are the blind consumers who have the energy and know-how to advocate for the rehab services we need when those services are effective and responsive. After all, we have intervened successfully in budget fights for RSC more than once.

The current mess the RSC finds itself in is a doozy, and it is impossible to predict where it will end and how badly blind Ohioans and others with disabilities will be hurt. As these

situations almost always are, the current mess is complicated. The budget cuts and the worsening economic picture for state government generally have ratcheted up the pressure on the agency. But the original disagreement between the legislature and governor on the one hand and the RSC administrator, John Connelly, on the other goes back to the previous budget. Some federal funds intended for rehabilitation and therefore, in Connelly’s view, appropriately allocated by RSC were instead earmarked by the legislature for the use of private rehab agencies. The Cleveland Sight Center, for example, got a million dollars to establish and run a call center training program. Perhaps this was a good use of federal funds, but the RSC administrator believed that the state agency should make that decision, not the legislature, which admittedly knows very little about rehabilitation.

Even more disturbing from our point of view, the Ohio Association of Rehabilitation Facilities (OARF) received funds to establish a body to accredit and perhaps to certify individual service providers. Theirs is the usual argument that responsible professionals must officially demonstrate the quality of the services being provided, and an accrediting or certifying body is the best, maybe the only, way of guaranteeing quality. This argument sounds sensible on its face, but consider these things. Where a community is large enough to have agencies, certification of individual employees may be possible. The agency can absorb the cost of doing the certifying. But what happens to professionals out in the sticks, trying to make a precarious living serving consumers over a large geographic area in which they are the only purveyor of those services? They usually make very little money and do not have the discretionary

funds to cover the cost of certification. What happens to consumers who no longer have access to services they need when the professional has to stop coming to their homes? The agencies are in favor of mandatory certification or accreditation of individual service providers because they can safely assume that they will get increased business, at least from consumers with the option of traveling to a large city for services. But the consumers who can't or won't leave home will just have to do without services.

John Connelly tried standing up to the legislature, arguing that rehab decisions should be made by the RSC and that the state agency should be allocating funds for rehab services, not the legislature. This position did not make him popular in the legislature or the governor's office. In our view his position was correct, but morale at RSC was at perhaps an all-time low, and distrust among consumers was high. After all, signs were popping up everywhere that RSC might be subsumed under a cabinet-level agency, smothering BSVI even further under a load of bureaucracy, and no one could be sure how serious Mr. Connelly was in resisting this movement.

The result was what in hindsight one might have expected. No consumer cavalry rode in to help by speaking up in favor of the agency. The legislature and governor saw an opportunity to get rid of a roadblock to their plans. An unpopular and somewhat inept bureaucrat lost his job. And, worst of all from our standpoint, blind consumers and those with all sorts of other disabilities are likely to suffer even scantier and more wrong-headed services. The tale of how this story has unfolded is told by the *Columbus Dispatch*, which carried it in three articles in March and April. Here are the stories:

Amendment May Put State Rehab Director's Job in Jeopardy

by James Nash

March 31, 2009

As key state officials grow more frustrated with his performance, John M. Connelly's days as executive director of the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission could be numbered. A joint conference committee last night inserted an out-of-nowhere amendment into the state transportation budget that would essentially make Connelly an appointee of Gov. Ted Strickland, instead of an appointee of the commission's board. The amendment was drafted by Sen. John A. Carey Jr., R-Wellston, to give Strickland more control over the position. Rep. Michael J. Skindell, D-Lakewood, said he was working on a similar amendment.

Skindell said concern about management of the Rehabilitation Services Commission has stretched back into the Taft administration. The "straw that broke the camel's back," he said, was when the commission refused to release a \$250,000 earmark that he, with support from Carey, inserted into the last two-year budget. "The frustration has existed with the legislature dealing with RSC during the budget times, and the executive branch dealing with RSC," Skindell said. He cited examples of using uncertified providers and the commission "hoarding" federally purchased computers, rather than putting them to good use.

The \$250,000 earmark was designated for the Ohio Association of Rehabilitation Facilities to create an accreditation program. Skindell said he was concerned that the commission was using uncertified service providers. So far \$50,000 of that money has been spent.

“For some reason the director and the commission has resisted releasing those funds,” Carey said. “We’ve been pretty frustrated with the lack of responsiveness to our legislative directives. And there’s been some management issues and concerns about the efficiency of the commission, and it doesn’t seem the administration or the legislature have been able to put their hands around it.” Carey added: “It’s too bad, because at one time RSC had a really good relationship with the legislature and the administration. Unfortunately that has not continued under the current leadership.”

Connelly, fifty-four, joined the commission in 1980 and has served as executive director for nearly eight years. He said he was blindsided by the amendment. “I have no idea what you’re talking about,” he said when called at his home last night. Connelly defended his record, noting that a recent programmatic audit by the state auditor’s office “found no management problems,” and the agency each year has helped an increasing number of disabled Ohioans find work or obtain disability benefits.

Connelly said there were a series of problems with the earmark. “Our general counsel indicated it was illegal because it was earmarking federal money,” he said. “Then there have been some issues with the recipients in terms of what their status is. The staff and I have been following direction we’ve received from the commissioners.”

Skindell said Connelly did raise some issues. “That’s fine. But they felt they could undo what 132 members of the General Assembly instructed them to do,” he said. “I’m concerned there has been a long history of issues with RSC, and I’ve been battling on

this one earmark.”

The 1,300-employee commission helps people with various disabilities find work, live independently, and qualify for Social Security disability payments. Though some say Connelly is a national leader in helping people with disabilities find jobs, he also has faced heavy fire for his management style, which some say has crushed morale at the agency and led to lawsuits.

Two licensed vendors and the two advocacy groups for blind Ohioans sued the commission, contending that it suppressed public records about its vendor-selection process. Meanwhile, a recent office survey showed that employee morale is in tatters, and both unions representing employees said a few

months ago that things were not getting better. “Morale at the agency is at an all-time low,” Jennifer Farmer, then spokeswoman for Service Employees

International Union District 1199, which represents more than 300 vocational-rehabilitation counselors, said in November. “Staff members are encouraged to snitch on each other.”

The House and Senate are expected to give final approval to the transportation budget today (Tuesday), and Strickland is expected to sign it by midnight. “This was a legislative proposal that the governor did not object to,” said Strickland spokeswoman Amanda Wurst said of the amendment. She repeatedly declined to elaborate.

Skindell said the idea of changing Connelly’s status was first raised more than two years ago by Strickland’s transition team, which helped him review state government operations and recommend changes. Former Rep. Barbara Sykes, wife of current House

“Morale...at an all-time low.”

Finance Chairman Rep. Vernon Sykes, D-Akron, headed up the health and human services portion of that team. Vernon Sykes was one of six members of the conference committee that approved the amendment.

“I don’t know what’s in store for him,” Skindell said of Connelly. “I have the utmost confidence that the governor has already done some outstanding appointments within RSC, and I think he’ll do really well with this particular appointment.”

Transportation Bill Waved on
House, Senate OK Wide-Ranging Plans
by James Nash
April 2, 2009

After weeks of debating trains, speed cameras, and vehicle fees, lawmakers approved Ohio’s biggest-ever transportation budget yesterday by overwhelming margins. The two-year, \$9.6 billion budget advances the idea of passenger trains across Ohio, builds and improves hundreds of miles of roads, and channels nearly \$800 million in federal stimulus money to roadways, bridges, and ports. It will not put cameras in construction zones to catch speeders, nor will it allow police to cite drivers only for not wearing their seat belts.

Although some lawmakers called the budget a sweeping piece of legislation that will affect how Ohioans get around the state, a few of its provisions have nothing to do with transportation. The bill extends the period in which unemployed Ohioans are eligible for public assistance. It provides three additional months of subsidized health insurance to small-business workers who lost their jobs. It also changes the relationship between Gov. Ted Strickland and

the state agency that provides job placement and other services to disabled Ohioans.

That agency, the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission, has come under fire from lawmakers, its employee unions, and groups representing disabled Ohioans for dragging its feet on spending a \$250,000 earmark, for poor employee relations, and for allegedly mismanaging a program in which blind people provide vending services on state property. Lawmakers slipped a provision into the transportation budget that would make the commission’s executive director, currently John M. Connelly, answerable to Strickland instead of the seven-member commission.

Although Connelly has been blamed for many of the complaints around the 1,300-employee agency, the commission itself supports him. In its most recent review of his performance, dated February 23, the panel praised his “steadfast public service.”

Strickland spokeswoman Amanda Wurst said the governor did not ask to have Connelly report to him. Under the new arrangement, however, Strickland will carefully review Connelly’s job performance, Wurst said. “The governor is generally aware of the concerns that some have raised,” she said.

Joyce C. Young, chairwoman of the commission, expressed dismay that the change was tucked into the transportation budget without warning. “We would have preferred that a discussion of this magnitude had allowed more input from the disability community rather than be introduced in the transportation bill,” she said.

The entire bill passed the House seventy to twenty-nine and the Senate thirty-one to two. The lopsided support masked intense

partisan disagreement over parts of the bill, such as placing speed cameras in construction zones, leasing Ohio Turnpike land for renewable-energy projects, and raising the vehicle title fee by \$5.75.

Disabled-Agency Chief on Way Out
Strickland Wants New Leadership
by James Nash
April 9, 2009

John M. Connelly is to be replaced as leader of the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission. Just days after lawmakers gave Gov. Ted Strickland control over the state agency that provides job services to disabled Ohioans, Strickland announced plans to replace the agency's longtime administrator. John M. Connelly, a career employee of the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission who has run the 1,300-employee agency since 2001, will not survive the transition to control by the governor this summer.

Connelly and his predecessors had answered to the seven-member, part-time commission. The commission has given Connelly generally high marks, but employees have

complained of poor morale, and groups representing disabled Ohioans have expressed concern about Connelly's leadership.

On March 30 lawmakers slipped a provision into the state's multibillion-dollar transportation budget that put Strickland in charge of the commission. Three days later lawmakers approved that budget with no discussion about Connelly or the commission. Strickland signed the bill. The entire budget takes effect July 1. The commission's chairwoman, Joyce C. Young, complained that lawmakers acted without consulting groups that represent disabled Ohioans.

Strickland wasted no time in announcing that he's asking Connelly to leave. "The governor intends to appoint a new administrator," spokeswoman Amanda Wurst said yesterday. "He's asked several people to lead a search in order to ensure a smooth transition." Wurst did not say what specifically led Strickland to call for Connelly's replacement, but she said the governor wants the commission to work more closely with other state agencies. A spokeswoman for the commission, Eileen Corson, said Connelly has not announced his plans.

Making Change with a Dollar

Editor's Note: Across the state of Ohio NFB chapters and individuals are planning and conducting activities to mark the two-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Louis Braille. On January 4 groups of Federationists in Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Dayton celebrated Louis's birthday at bookstores, passing out bookmarks with information about Braille, Braille alphabet cards, and cookies. Members wrote names in Braille and demonstrated the flexibility and usefulness of the code to anyone who stopped by the tables to watch and talk about the code. Other events are planned

for later in the year.

The single most exciting event of the year to date, however, has been the March 26 roll-out of the Louis Braille Bicentennial Silver Dollar at the National Center for the Blind in Baltimore. The director of the U.S. Mint was there to present a special plaque to President Maurer, and a number of dignitaries spoke to the crowd. Many of those present purchased coins, and nearly a hundred thousand other people have done so since that date. The mint recently sent out a mailing of a million pieces to those who might be interested in buying the

coin. Until April 27 the cost will be \$32 for the uncirculated and \$38 for the proof edition. After that date the price will be a few dollars higher. These coins have the letters "BRL," which is the Braille abbreviation for the word "Braille" on one side. This is the first U.S. coin to carry Braille lettering.

The other commemorative coin that was minted in 2009 was a silver dollar in honor of the two-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln. That coin sold out in six weeks. We are hoping that the 400,000 Braille coins will also sell out. If they do, the NFB will have access to \$4 million as matching funds to use to increase Braille literacy and the public acceptance of Braille. We have set goals to be achieved over the next few years. These include:

- The number of school-age children reading Braille will double by 2015.
- All fifty states will enact legislation requiring special education teachers of blind children to obtain and maintain the National Certification in Literary Braille by 2015.
- Braille resources will be made more available through online sharing of materials, enhanced production methods, and improved distribution.
- Courses in Braille instruction will be added to the curricula in high schools and colleges and offered to all students to ensure that this reading medium becomes an established, recognized method of achieving literacy in our nation.
- The American public will learn that blind people have a right to Braille literacy so they can compete and assume a productive role in society.

To read more about the Braille crisis in America, read the comprehensive report prepared by the NFB and presented to a repre-

sentative from the White House on March 26. The full text of the report appears in the May 2009 issue of the *Braille Monitor*, which can be found under publications at <www.nfb.org>.

Meantime it is up to all of us to do everything we can to raise the profile of Braille in the public mind. Spread the word about the commemorative coin and encourage your friends and the coin collectors you know to purchase it. The NFB of Ohio has bought several coins to present to people when appropriate. My children and grandchildren will all receive coins as gifts later this year, and I bought both coins myself. Be creative in dreaming up ways to publicize Braille. NFB of Ohio Board member Crystal McClain wrote a guest editorial for her local newspaper, the *Bellefontaine Examiner*, which was published March 20. You could do something similar. You could even use Crystal's article as a model. We will conclude by reprinting her editorial:

January 4, 2009, was the 200th birthday of Louis Braille, the inventor of Braille, a system of six dots that allows blind people to read. As a parent of a daughter, Macy, who is blind, I can assure you that Louis Braille has greatly affected our family. Without Braille Macy would not be literate. Let me say that again-- Macy would not be literate without Braille. Can you imagine your child, intelligent enough to read, not being able to do so? Macy is a voracious reader. She has been caught reading Braille under the covers in bed after bedtime with the lights out. We only knew she was staying up to read because she giggled at something she had read. She reads text books in Braille, cookbooks, hymnals, the Bible, Harry Potter books and the latest James Patterson adventures. She also subscribes to

Seventeen magazine (delivered in Braille). We recently learned she can download *Rolling Stone* magazine to her BrailleNote, an electronic notetaker that allows Macy to write notes in Braille using six keys; she is able to



read what she has written with the Braille dots popping up on a refreshable Braille display. She can do her homework, download books from the Internet, and much more with this device. None of this would be possible without Louis Braille and his invention.

Louis Braille was just fifteen years old when he first developed the reading system of six dots for the blind. There have been some changes to the original system, but the concept remains the same. Today with unemployment rates at record highs, the unemployment rate among the blind population is a staggering 70%. The good news in that number is that, of the employed blind people, 90 percent are Braille readers. Braille is essential for blind people to get a job. Because blindness is a low-incidence disability, a lot of sighted people have many misconceptions about blindness because they have never known a blind person. Blindness can be reduced to a mere nuisance with proper training, technology, equal opportunity, and a healthy attitude.

There are lawyers, teachers, inventors, writers, editors, and even a mountain climber who has climbed Mount Everest who are all blind. Blind people are just people who happen to be blind. Some are intelligent, some are idiots, some are articulate, some are annoying, and some are among my best friends.

Hopefully you've learned a little about Braille, its inventor, and blind people from this writing. Now you can help make sure Braille is taught to all blind people by investing in a Louis Braille Bicentennial Silver Dollar. This is a commemorative coin that has been struck by the U.S. Mint in honor of Louis Braille. March 26th is the kickoff of the Braille Coin. For each coin sold the National Federation of the Blind will receive money to help launch a Braille initiative to increase the



number of blind kids, adults, and senior citizens who are taught Braille. Join me in spreading the gift of literacy to blind people. For more information contact <www.braille.org> or <www.nfb.org>.

Literacy Empowerment: Answering Reading Needs (LEARN) by Debbie Baker

Editor's note: Debbie Baker is a member of the NFB of Ohio board of directors and an experienced teacher of blind children. In recent months she has been part of a group of professionals working both to improve the identification of students who should be taught Braille and improve the instruction they receive. Here is her interim report:

During two weekends, one in early October 2008 and the other in mid January 2009, eighteen educators of blind children and staff of the NFB Jernigan Institute spent time together to create what has become LEARN—Literacy Evaluation: Answering Reading Needs. LEARN is an effort by the NFB to address the critical need to increase Braille literacy among blind children. The format of the assessment we are developing assumes a decision rule. That is, the examiner must answer each question with a yes or no, and, when the exercise is complete, the teacher will have a definitive answer whether or not the child needs Braille. The developers hope that determining if a student needs Braille can be decided by whether the majority of answers to an established set of questions is yes or no. They have yet to determine the final percentage of negative answers to clearly define Braille as the literacy medium of choice. But test questions are worded so that, if a student cannot use print and maintain upright posture and visual comfort at a six-

**“...to increase
Braille literacy
among blind
children...”**

teen- to eighteen-inch working distance from printed material (each criterion being commensurate with those of grade-level peers), he or she should learn Braille. In the case of degenerative visual disorders, Braille should be the automatic choice.

Our team of educators and staff now exchange email and conduct conference calls to hone our work. If all deadlines are met for

the various accompanying sections of the assessment, the staff have said that they plan to complete a pilot in California in March.

Individual Braille teachers who participated in the symposium have also piloted the assessment tool and have

informed the team about bugs to be addressed and have reported their own pilot results.

Jessica Bachicha, coordinator of the symposium through the NFB Department of Affiliate Action, said that the results of the first pilot will be reported after April 20, 2009. Then we will begin the second stage of the pilot. In addition to the actual assessment tool, National Assessment of Literacy Skills (NALS), we have developed an introduction; a section of guiding principles; interview questions for parents, classroom teachers, and older students; suggested indicators of a need for Braille; teaching tips to motivate reluctant students; and a glossary of terms to define various visual disorders. The title of the entire project is LEARN—Literacy Empowerment: Answering Reading Needs.

My Trip to Washington by Lauren Adams

Editor's note: Almost twenty Ohioans made their way to Washington, D.C., the second week of February to talk with members of Congress about the NFB's 2009 legislative agenda. The April issue of the Braille Monitor includes the full text of the fact sheets we discussed with members of Congress and their aides. It also contains a description of the complete Washington seminar. One of the students who attended from Ohio was Lauren Adams, a freshman at Wright State University. She clearly enjoyed the experience and understood what it was all about. Here is her report:

On Saturday, February 7, I went to Washington, D.C., with my mentor and friend Deborah Kendrick, who is a member of the National Federation of the Blind, and we are involved in a two-year mentoring program together. She and I rode to the airport in a car with another blind man named Paul Dressell, who was super nice. Don't worry, he wasn't driving. Our driver's name was David, and he was awesome. Every year members of the NFB travel to Washington to talk to senators and representatives about passing laws that will benefit people who are blind or have visual impairments. A few students from around the state are invited to go along, and I was one of the lucky ones chosen to participate in this great opportunity. Deborah and I arrived in Washington early Saturday morning, and she asked me what color my jacket was in case we were separated and she needed to find me. I've never been that good about knowing what color I'm wearing, so I got kind of embarrassed when I had to tell her that I didn't know. I definitely learned about some

great technology that day.

When we got to the hotel, Deborah showed me this really cool gadget of hers called a color identifier (the Colorino from APH). If you want to know the color of a certain item, all you have to do is put the color identifier on the surface of the item and press a button, and it will tell you what color it is. It works on clothes, shoes, bedspreads, and other things like that, and it's small enough to fit in your pocket. Also, if you can't remember whether or not you turned a light on, you can wave the color identifier around the room holding the button down, and it will make a high sound if there is light in the room and a low sound if the room is dark. I was so excited when Deborah showed me. That night I was getting ready to take a shower, and I didn't know if I was holding a bottle of shampoo or cream rinse. That's when Deborah showed me another really cool piece of technology called the knfbReader Mobile. It's a cell phone that reads anything from bottles and jars to magazines and money. It turned out that the bottle I had was a mix of shampoo and cream rinse.

On Sunday I hung out with Hannah Furney, a really nice girl I met in the mentoring program that Deborah and I are involved in. I also met a really sweet girl named Leslie Penko, who was a lot of fun. We attended the winter conference sponsored by the National Association of Blind Students and listened to speakers who told us about some excellent resources like BookShare.org, a Website that has thousands of books you can download for free if you're a student. I had heard of Bookshare before, but I thought you still had to be in high school if you wanted a free

membership. After the speakers were done, there were five different breakout sessions, and everyone could go to two of them. Hannah and I went to a session called "Blind Dating" and a session where we heard about the three NFB training centers that are in Louisiana, Minnesota, and Colorado.

I thought it would be interesting to see what the blind dating session was about since blind dating can be interpreted in a couple different ways. It could be a blind person dating a blind person, two people (blind or sighted) who are meeting for the first time on a date, or what we talked about in the session (a blind person dating a sighted person). I learned that it's a good idea to look at some reviews of a restaurant online before you recommend it, because if you're blind, you won't know what the atmosphere is like unless someone tells you. At the session about the NFB training centers we got to hear from the director of each center. The training is the same at each center; you practice cane travel, living skills, working at a job, and how to handle certain situations in public places. For example, you might be at the movies and you want to be able to go to the bathroom and then come back and find your seat. The program is about six to nine months long, depending on the speed of your progress. I thought the session was very informative, and I got a CD that has more information about the centers.

After the sessions finished, Deborah, Hannah, and I walked to McDonalds for lunch. We had a great time talking and hanging out, and the weather was beautiful. That evening we heard from more speakers at the great gathering in, including Marc Maurer, the president of the NFB. Then all of us from Ohio went to dinner, and I got to sit right across the table from J.W. Smith, the presi-

dent of the NFB of Ohio; it was so cool. It took forever to get our dinner, but we had good conversation to pass the time. On Monday and Tuesday we were divided into teams, and we talked with different senators and representatives about three major issues.

One issue we discussed was silent cars and the fact that they need to have something on them that will make sound so people can hear them even if they don't see them coming. The next issue we discussed was Social Security Disability Income and how people who collect SSDI are allowed to make \$1,640 a month, and if they earn even one dollar over that, they lose all their benefits. People on SSDI are afraid to work hard enough to be promoted because they don't want to get raises, or they don't dare find a job for fear of losing benefits and Medicare. We proposed a bill that says that, for every \$3 someone earns over substantial gainful activity, \$1 of their SSDI stipend should be taken away. This would be an improvement over the current system, in which people lose all their benefits when they earn even a dollar over the amount they're allowed to. The final issue we discussed was technology and how some electronics and appliances are absolutely not accessible for blind people because you have to use a touch screen, and the only way to tell whether or not something has been turned on is to see if it lights up. The manufacturers could easily put chips in their products so that they would talk to us or at least beep when we turn them off and on.

I was really excited that Deborah was the leader of the team I was on. Our team had only one appointment on Monday; it was with Senator Sherrod Brown. The team that Hannah was on actually had the same appointment, so we all went together. We didn't get to meet the senator, but we talked to

his aide, and we got his business card in Braille, which I thought was really cool. Deborah and I had lunch at the deli in the hotel that afternoon, and a generous woman named Rhonda helped us get our food. Then she had lunch with us; she was a lot of fun. On Tuesday our team had four appointments, one right after the other. We were supposed to meet with John Boccieri, Jean Schmidt, John Boehner, and Steve Driehaus. We talked with John Boccieri's aide, Adria, who couldn't wait for us to leave. She couldn't have cared less about what we had to say. Congressman Boccieri stopped by to say hello at the end, so that made me happy.

We spent a lot of time talking with Congresswoman Schmidt because part of the conversation was social, and she was really interested in the issues. Congressman Driehaus was awesome because he actually tried to come up with solutions to the problems. We

didn't meet Representative Boehner, but we talked with his assistants, Maura and Natasha, and they were really nice girls. Then Deborah and I got something to eat from the cafeteria with Cindy and Paul from our team. After lunch we went to the gift shop, and I bought a T-shirt for my mom, a book for my dad, and a stress ball and charms for myself.

We went back to the hotel and got our stuff together. I met a really sweet woman at the airport named Susan, and I felt bad because she had been at the seminar the whole time, and I didn't get to meet her until the end. I arrived home from Washington late that night, and I was really excited that David was our driver again. He walked me to the door that led to my dorm and stayed for a minute to make sure I got in okay. I thought, "What a gentleman." My trip to Washington was a fantastic experience that I will never forget.

Saying Hello to the Real World, a Reflection on Future Quest 2009

by Annie Donnellon

Editor's note: the NFB of Ohio is in the second year of a two-year pilot mentoring program for young adults. They have been paired with blind adults, who befriend, advise, and hang out with them in an effort to provide sound role models for them as they approach adulthood and independence. Four state affiliates are involved in this experiment. The first weekend in March Ohio and Texas mentors and mentees traveled to Baltimore for a weekend of programming and fun together. Annie Donnellon was one of the Ohio students who went to the National Center for the Blind. Here is her report on what happened:

Like many of you, I have been asked what I might call cliché questions throughout my

life. "How old are you? Are you getting a guide dog?" You get the idea. Like many other college students, blind and sighted, I have been asked one question, my answer to which changes constantly: "What do you want to do when you graduate?"

Looking back at the transition from my senior year of high school to my freshman year of college, I had a definite plan: I would major in vocal performance, graduate after four years, then go on to pursue a singing career, probably with the Metropolitan Opera Company. I knew I had a gift and could not picture myself in any other field. As my high school voice teacher so eloquently told me, "You'll have fun in college because you're there to do nothing but sing." Boy did I like

that idea! To use some old 1970's lingo, that sounded far out. Over the years I have actually come to find that teacher's assessment of college a bit far fetched. How much can one do with a performance degree? I knew for sure I didn't want to teach.

I am the first to admit I have been given many pieces of advice over the years that I have questioned, one of these being, "When you get to college, you will be on your own. No one is going to be there to help you." For several years, not only have I managed to brush that off and say, "Yah, I know," I've also managed to find several ways to avoid it. For example, I used a personal assistant in the cafeteria and escorts to class (at least during my freshman year). As I have become more actively involved with the National Federation of the Blind, however, I am gradually discovering that such luxuries aren't necessary, let alone available everywhere else I go. My greatest wake-up call was last month at the National Center for the Blind in Baltimore, Maryland.

I have always heard that, when the student is ready, the teacher will appear. As part of the Ohio mentoring program I had the pleasure of attending Future Quest 2009, a career fair held at the National Center. My experience can best be described as almost a religious epiphany: every workshop encouraged me to examine the beliefs I had given lip service to for years but not dared to practice. The journey began with a tour of the National Center as well as the opportunity to interact with mentors and other mentees from Ohio and Texas. The meat of the program began on Saturday, March 7. That morning JoAnne Wilson, the executive director of the Department of Affiliate Action, gave an informative and engaging presentation reinforcing the importance of self-advocacy and

collective action, frequently with the state vocational rehabilitation agency (the Bureau of Services for the Visually Impaired). She told a story about the mouse who sounded an alarm about a mousetrap in the farmhouse that the rest of the animals blew off. When the trap caught a snake who then bit the farmer's wife, he killed the chicken to make soup for her, then the pig to feed the people who came to her funeral, and finally the cow to pay for her burial. In other words, when one blind person is suffering discrimination or is not getting appropriate and necessary services, it is the business of all of us to advocate and fight for justice for that person. The NFB is there to help each of us in just such situations. I have experienced the challenges of convincing BSVI that I am right, and now I know that I have the ability and responsibility to advocate for myself and that the NFB is ready to help.

Another highlight was the mock interview session that took place Saturday afternoon. After hearing a presentation on résumé-building and professionalism during an interview given by Hannah Jones of Black and Decker, I came away thinking, "This interview will be a piece of cake. I'm friendly, I know how to conduct myself, and I've already been through several interviews. I'm ready to go." Boy was I ever wrong! Needless to say, I was not as ready as I had predicted. When I was asked to tell about myself, the first thing that came to mind was factual information: I am a college senior; I am a vocal performance major and Spanish minor, etc. The question was actually trying to elicit personal characteristics: vibrant, personable, hardworking, etc. Overall I came to realize that the interview process is not as easy as one might think. One must have confidence, be brief and concise in responding to questions, and above

all be sincere in interactions with employers. Despite my lack of readiness, I concluded that this exercise was the ideal preparation for the work force and the real world.

Most rewarding of all was the discovery that I can do anything for myself that I put my mind to—from things as simple as carrying my own dishes at meals to going places without hanging on to the arm of a sighted person. My problem is not that I can't do these things, but for too long I haven't wanted to do them. As a result of this incredible Future Quest

experience, I can safely say my desire to increase my independence is greater than ever. When I become a Spanish teacher or whatever I decide to do, I will do my best to educate my students as well as other teachers that I am one of them. I can do the same work and live up to the same expectations. I truly believe God planned this Future Quest at the most opportune time of my life—my upcoming transition from college to the workforce. As a result of this inspiring weekend, I do indeed say hello to the real world.

Ohio Mentoring Goes to Baltimore by Deborah Kendrick



Editor's note: Deborah Kendrick, NFB of Ohio secretary, coordinates the Ohio Mentoring Project that you are reading about in this issue. Here is her perspective on FutureQuest, the weekend conference that had such an impact on participant Annie

Donnellon—see her story elsewhere in these pages. Deborah provides a broader view of what happened:

As you've read elsewhere in this issue, FutureQuest 2009 was a wonderful weekend program, hosted by the National Center on Mentoring Excellence at NFB's National Center for the Blind in Baltimore. The mentoring programs from two states came together for a whirlwind schedule of activities, benefiting mentors and mentees alike. Ohio's

weekend was March 6 to 8, and our FutureQuest experience was shared with the Texas program. Approximately twenty-five participants from each state were in attendance, rounded out by ten or so NFB staff, speakers, and guests.

Throughout the weekend there were sessions just for mentors and others just for mentees. There were career panels—featuring many of our Ohio mentors as presenters. Mentors Jan Danner and Jerry Purcell spoke about their careers in human services (she's a counselor and he the director of three senior facilities); Kevin Dobens about his job as an assistive technology trainer; and David Perry about his work in the Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired Industries program. I served on a panel discussing careers in journalism and media relations. Mentors had other duties throughout the weekend too. Some conducted mock interviews with the mentees, some prepared mentees for interviews, some led philosophy discussions, and others led informal conversations about table etiquette at our Saturday evening banquet.

Following the banquet, we had a wonderful talent show—showcasing vocalists, comedy

acts, violinists, flautists, pianists, and more from both Texas and Ohio. A cameo appearance by a lesser known act called Deborah and the Braillettes had the audience singing, a Texas musician jamming on the piano, and the American Idol-style judges wanting to dance. The show-stopping song was new lyrics to the rock classic "Louie Louie." Our version, written by Wayne Seligo, music director at the California School for the Blind, heralds the praises of Louis Braille, in celebration of his 200th birthday. Even shy mentors and

mentees joined in the fun, and not so shy gifted soloists Macy McClain and Annie Donnellon made our debut sparkle!

There was never a dull moment during FutureQuest-and rarely a quiet one. The conversations during and evaluation following the weekend underscored the value of mentoring for the mentors as well as the mentees. Bonds were strengthened. New friendships were formed. And new claims on independence were made.

Making the Affiliate Work

Editor's note: As many of us know, the Convention is the ultimate authority in the affiliate, and the board of directors bears the responsibility of making sure that things keep moving between conventions. The president has the day-to-day responsibility for making decisions and keeping us all on track. But how does all the work get done? The NFB of Ohio has a number of committees, each of which has a specific charge or area of responsibility. At the winter board meeting the NFBO president appoints committees with the advice and consultation of the board. These committees serve for that calendar year. Here is the list of committees for this year and their charges. Read these names carefully. You could find yourself on a committee. Here is the list:

DEAF-BLIND COORDINATORS: Bernie Dressell and Lisa Hall

Charge: To provide assistance and 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.

AD HOC COMMITTEE: Bruce Peters (chair), Annie Donnellon, Crystal McClain, Richard Payne, and William Turner

Charge: To evaluate and assess many aspects of our organization and to report their findings at the spring board meeting.

AWARDS COMMITTEE: Barb Fohl (chair), Debbie Baker, Paul Dressell, Eric Duffy, and Cathy Withman

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

CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE: Deborah Kendrick (chair), Annette Anderson, Annie Donnellon, and Paul Dressell

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

CONVENTION PLANNING AND ARRANGEMENTS COMMITTEE: Mary Pool and Bruce Peters (co-chairs), Carol Akers, Cindy Conley, Deborah Kendrick, Crystal McClain, Wanda Sloan, and Jeanette Wade

Charge: To assist in the planning and functioning of our state and national conventions and to provide additional assistance in the selection process of state convention sites.

FINANCING THE MOVEMENT COMMITTEE: Sherry Ruth (chair), Annette Anderson (SUN coordinator), Everett Gavel (Imagination Fund coordinator), Mary Pool (Jernigan Fund coordinator), and Ron Williamitis (PAC coordinator)

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

FUNDRAISING COMMITTEE: Sherri Albers (chair), Carol Akers, Cindy Conley, Susan Day, Macy McClain, Bruce Peters, William Turner, and Brian White

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

GUIDE DOG COMMITTEE: Debbie Baker (chair), Annette Anderson, and Diane Johnson

Charge: To serve as a vehicle for disbursing information and opportunity for interested guide dog users.

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE: Eric Duffy (chair), Debbie Baker, Cindy Conley, Susan Day, Marilyn Donehey, and Robert

Spangler

Charge: To increase the visibility and viability of the organization in the state legislature.

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE: Richard Payne (chair), Rebekah Booth, Susan Day, Cheryl Fischer, Hannah Furney, Crystal McClain, David Perry, Barbara Pierce, and William Turner

Charge: To implement effective strategies to recruit, retain, and reinvigorate the members of the NFB of Ohio.

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE: J.W. Smith (chair), Eric Duffy, Barb Fohl, Deborah Kendrick, Crystal McClain, Barbara Pierce, and Sherry Ruth

Charge: To oversee and manage the personnel matters of the organization, especially with respect to the director of field services position.

PROMOTION AND PUBLICITY: Susan Day (chair), Sheri Albers, Vincent Fugate, Mary Anne Joseph, Crystal McClain, Macy McClain, and Barbara Pierce

Charge: To promote and publicize appropriate programs and events, and to acquire as much positive publicity as possible for such activities.

RESOLUTIONS COMMITTEE: Paul Dressell (chair), Eric Duffy, Mary Anne Joseph, and Jason Perry

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

SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE: Barbara Pierce (chair), Deborah Kendrick, Leslie

Penko, Bob Pierce, and William Turner

Charge: To conduct the affiliate scholarship program and to develop and implement effective strategies to increase the visibility of the program and increase participation.

WEBSITE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE: Eric Duffy (Chair), Kyle Conley, Vince Fugate, Everett Gavel, Crystal McClain, and Macy McClain

Charge: To facilitate the development and maintenance of our Website and other related technological outlets.

Toledo Back in the Fold

Since 2007, when we admitted that the NFB of Toledo was really not a going concern, all of us have wanted to reenergize and reorganize a chapter in the northwest corner of the state. Richard Payne and the membership committee have been working with Colleen Roth, the one faithful member we retained in the area, to see what could be done. When Robby Spangler at the University of Toledo and Hannah Furney at Bowling Green became active in the student division, it began to look as if the time was right for calling a group together. Here is an article that appeared in the March 11 edition of the Toledo Blade:

Effort Is Underway to Restart Local Unit
by Julie M. McKinnon

Social workers can teach blind children and adults how to do tasks such as cooking—but only other blind people can be role models, provide peer support, and be first-hand advocates. That is why Colleen Roth and other blind Toledo area residents are working to reorganize a local chapter of the National Federation of the Blind.

"We want to give people a positive attitude," said Ms. Roth of Northwood. "When you talk to a blind person, it takes on a whole different meaning." Residents of Lucas, Ottawa, and Wood Counties are being sought to organize a local chapter. The Toledo area

had a Federation chapter from the late 1940s to 2007, when it disbanded because many members had died or moved from the area, said Ms. Roth, a member since 1972 who now belongs to an at-large state chapter.

The Federation has about a dozen chapters in Ohio with 300 to 400 members, said J.W. Smith, president of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio. There are a number of blind students at Bowling Green State University and the University of Toledo who, along with local residents, would benefit from having a local chapter, Mr. Smith said. The organization keeps up to date with technology, is involved with legislation, and addresses other areas concerning blind people, he said. "Exposure to that can only be helpful," Mr. Smith said.

An organizing meeting for the Toledo area chapter will be held from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. March 21 at the Ability Center of Greater Toledo, 5605 Monroe Street. Registration is required by calling Ms. Roth at (419) 661-9171 or emailing her at <n8tnv@att.net>.

Federation members go to schools to talk with children, have informational booths at health fairs, and do other activities to help educate people about being blind, Ms. Roth said. Helping families of blind people, including children, is another focus of the Federation, she said. "There is a lot of need," Ms. Roth said. "You have a lot of people who lose their eyesight and don't know what to

do." She added: "It's OK to be blind. It's not a shame, and it's not a tragedy."

That's what the *Blade* had to say, and the meeting on March 21 was excellent. Between Angie Heiser of the Ability Center and Colleen Roth and her friends, attendees enjoyed a delicious lunch and were able to collect lots of information. We got to know each other a bit, and folks learned something about the NFB and its work.

By the time President Smith and the membership committee returned on April 18, a whole group of enthusiastic people were ready to go. The officers of the new chapter

are president, Eric Burghardt; vice president, Colleen Roth; secretary, Ann Pacelli; treasurer, Marilee Medlen; and board member, Hannah Furney. Eric is a young guy who has not been blind long. He learned about the NFB and was eager to get involved. He has certainly achieved that goal. Those who are attending the convention this summer should plan to get to know Eric. We are all delighted to have Toledo back as a chapter of the Federation. If you want to contact them, just drop a message on ohiotalk, our listserv. Eric, Colleen, and Hannah are already active members of that group.

The Motor City March: Have You Gotten Your Tune-Up Yet?

by Sheri Albers

It's time to get your tune-up for the Motor City March. What is the Motor City March? It is the 3rd annual 5K walk-a-thon of the National Federation of the Blind, the March for Independence. This year's march will take place on Monday, July 6, 2009, on the streets of downtown Detroit, Michigan.

The purpose is to raise money to support the NFB's Imagination Fund, which promotes outreach programs on both the state and local levels to benefit blind children and adults, as well as support the programs and initiatives of the Jernigan Institute at NFB's national headquarters in Baltimore, Maryland. The main focus, of course, is the promotion of Braille literacy.

At last year's march in Dallas, Texas, over 1,000 people were in attendance with canes and guide dogs in hand. Halfway through the march, we listened to motivating speeches by Dr. Marc Maurer and Congressman Pete



Sessions, met winners of the Braille Readers Are Leaders contest, and got our first look at the Louis Braille Bicentennial Silver Dollar that was just released March 26th of this year. We even got a spot on *Good Morning, America*. It was truly an unforgettable experience.

So how do you get started with your tune-up for the Motor City March? Before you do anything, you need to make an appointment. In other words, get registered. Even if you were registered last year, you still need to register again. Simply go to <www.marchforindependence.org>, click on the Register Now button and follow the instructions. There is a link for Online Training, which will help you through the process of setting up your participant page and getting you on your way. Next you begin your tune-up. First thing is the oil change. This means eating healthy foods and drinking lots of water. Next, change the air filter. This

will occur as you get out and start walking to build your stamina and oxygen intake. You begin with a little at first and then add more and more each day. Don't forget new tires and alignment. Making sure you have the proper shoes and socks is very important. Please do not go out to buy brand new shoes the night before the march. You will need time to break them in to prevent blisters. You may want to stick a Band-Aid in your pocket in case you feel one coming on. Make sure your spark plugs are good. These are all the e-mail addresses that you use to send out your ask letters and all follow-up correspondence. Finally, you need a full tank of gas. Without this your march will not be complete. The entire event depends on this to be a success. The gas, of course, is the donations that you

raise from your family, friends, and colleagues. Be sure to visit the Website and click on the link to Get Fundraising Tips for ideas on different ways to get donations.

If you have any questions or have trouble getting registered on the Website, be sure to give me a call at (513) 886-8697 or email me at <salbers1@cinci.rr.com>. One tip I have found is that using the email system for donation-asking is the quickest and easiest way to reach a large number of people. Also, if you are a little squeamish as I am about asking for money, you don't have to do it face to face. Remember, the donation you are asking for is not for you. It is for the effort of the National Federation of the Blind to support and promote Braille Literacy in this country. That should make all the difference. Now get tuned up, and I will see you in Detroit.

AFB Senior Site® Turns Two

We recently received the following notice that may be of interest to our older readers:

The American Foundation for the Blind staff is happy to announce that AFB Senior Site <<http://www.afb.org/seniorsite>>, the agency's Website for seniors with vision loss and their families, turned two in April. Launched to help the twenty million Americans living with vision loss, the site has served hundreds of thousands of visitors since its inception, offering visitors the resources, help, and support needed to continue living a healthy, independent life with vision problems.

AFB Senior Site is the most beneficial and information-rich Web community for seniors with vision loss, and AFB works hard to keep its content relevant and updated often, which is why we're making more sections available in Spanish. New features added over the past

year include:

- A guide to diabetes and vision loss <<http://www.afb.org/seniorsite.asp?SectionID=63&TopicID=291&SubTopicID=126&DocumentID=4228>> to give help and support to the 3.2 million Americans living with both conditions.
- Senior Site Agency of the Month <<http://www.afb.org/seniorsite.asp?SectionID=64&TopicID=376>> .
- New video content demonstrating adaptive techniques and devices <<http://www.afb.org/seniorsite.asp?SectionID=63&TopicID=388&SubTopicID=154>> to help older adults who experience both vision and hearing loss maintain their independence, communicate effectively, and remain safe in their homes and communities.
- Esther's Insights <<http://www.afb.org/seniorsite.asp?SectionID=66&TopicID=363>>.

Buckeye Briefs

- ◆ Bruce Peters reports that the Greater Summit County chapter held its biannual election on Saturday, December 13, 2008. The results are as follows: president, Bruce Peters; vice president, Mary Weldon; treasurer, Anne Peters; secretary, Everett Gavel; and board member, Marilyn Donehey.
- ◆ We are sorry to report the following news from Paul Dressell: Don Pruitt, a dedicated Federationist, died January 31, 2009. He had ties in West Virginia, Kentucky, and Ohio. During the 1970s and 1980s, he faithfully attended meetings of the Northern Kentucky and Cincinnati chapters. Don was always ready to speak on behalf of Federation goals and philosophy; he will truly be missed. He is survived by his wife Dorothy.
- ◆ Bruce Peters reports that the NFB of Greater Summit County is conducting its annual bowl-a-thon on Saturday, May 2, from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. at Stonehedge Lanes. Three lines of bowling, including shoes, will cost just \$8 a person. There will be door prizes, a 50/50 raffle, and lots of fun. This event is sponsored by Blizzard Trophy Shop. Stonehedge is located at 580 East Cuyahoga Falls Avenue, Akron, OH 44310. Call Bruce Peters for details (330) 865-8477.
- ◆ The Miami Valley chapter participated in a Braille literacy event in early March, partnering with the United Way and Read Across America. This event was held in conjunction with Dr. Seuss's birthday. Five of us went to Meadowdale Elementary School and read stories in Braille to the children. We also had a dog guide with us that belonged to Linda Pelfrey. The children really responded to the stories and asked a lot of good questions. We are hoping to reach more schools in the future.
- ◆ The chapter also raised nearly \$600 with a spaghetti dinner on March 14. They are planning a bowl-a-thon in July. President Richard Payne and member Susan Day attended the membership seminar at the National Center in January. They report that it was very instructive, and they are planning to use what they learned to build the affiliate.
- ◆ The parents division still has blankets for sale. The cost is \$20 for Whozit and NFB embroidered in print and Braille. Alternatively you can have your name in print or Braille. The charge is \$10 for plain blankets with nothing embroidered on them. They come in many colors and are great to take on trips (like the bus to Detroit) and to the park or sporting events. To order, contact Cindy Conley, (513) 887-2583 or <cconley@fuse.net>.
- ◆ We have just learned that on June 24 Marilyn Donehey will be singing the national anthem at the opening of the Arrows game in Akron. She will be singing a capella, a prospect that would be enough to leave most of us unable to sing a note.
- ◆ Youth Slam News: Sheri Albers announces the five Ohio students who were accepted to attend the 2009 Youth Slam. This is the four-day intensive science and math program for high school students sponsored by the National Federation of the Blind. Here are

their names, grades, and schools. We congratulate them and wish them an awesome week at the University of Maryland in July.

Abigail Bolling, 9th, Finneytown
 Brent Bowling, 12th, Aiken University
 High School

Tamas Geczy, 11th, Orange High School

Chris Harrington, 12th, OSSB

Emily Pennington, 9th, Turpin High
 School

<i>ACTIVITIES CALENDAR</i>	
May 15-22	White Cane Recognition Week
July 3-8	NFB National Convention
July 27-31	NFB Youth Slam, Baltimore
Sept. 19	NFBO board meeting, Columbus
October	Meet the Blind Month
October 15	White Cane Safety Day
October 30-	
November 1	NFB of Ohio Convention, Columbus

If you or a friend would like to remember the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio in your will, you can do so by employing the following language:

“I give, devise, and bequeath unto the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio, P.O. Box 458, Athens, OH 45701-0458, an Ohio nonprofit corporation, the sum of \$_____ (or “_____ percent of my net estate” or “The following stocks and bonds: _____) to be used for its worthy purposes on behalf of blind persons.”

2009 National Convention Preregistration Form

Please register online at <www.nfb.org> or print legibly on this form or provide all the requested information and mail to the address below.

Registrant Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

I will pick up my registration packet at convention.

The following person will pick up my registration packet:

Pickup Name _____

Please register only one person per registration form.

One check or money order may cover multiple registrations.

Check or money order (sorry, no credit cards) must be enclosed with registration form(s).

Number of preregistrations x \$15 = _____

Prepurchased banquet tickets x \$35 = _____

Total _____

All preconvention registration and banquet sales are final (no refunds).

Mail to: National Federation of the Blind

Attn: Convention Registration

1800 Johnson Street

Baltimore, MD 21230

Registrations must be postmarked by May 31, 2009.



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Of Ohio

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