

**WASHINGTON**

**COUNCIL**

**OF THE BLIND**

Opportunity, Equality, Independence

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# WCB NEWSLINE

Winter 2023 Edition

“Audacity”

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Call us toll-free at 800-255-1147 or visit our website for more information at <http://www.WCBinfo.org>.

## Calling All Members

**We will publish the spring 2023 WCB Newsline in April**

**and are anxious to read your quality content.**

**Please send all submissions by February 28.**

**Digital cartridges should also be returned by this date.**

## **Publication Guidelines**

* All submissions will be edited for brevity and clarity.
* We reserve the right to publish or refuse submitted content, including author contact information, unless you explicitly tell us not to.
* All opinions expressed are those of the authors, not Washington Council of the Blind or WCB Newsline staff.
* We do not accept anonymous content or letters.
* Articles may be up to 1,000 words.
* Chapter updates may be up to 350 words.
* Please submit in Microsoft Word format when possible.
* **Send all submissions to:**

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## President’s Message by Julie Brannon

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As I re-read my Newsline “President’s Message” submission for fall 2022, it’s interesting to be sharing planned and probable Washington Council of the Blind convention events, and now, for all of us who attended in-person or virtually, to have lived through them!

I won’t spend much space outlining the convention for I am sure there will be many submissions regarding it, but do allow me to say that the amount of thought, focus, and work that went into our first ever hybrid WCB annual convention, allowing for its success, is beyond comprehension. Thank you WCB members who stepped up to the plate to make sure it happened.

WCB is looking ahead to some board changes. First, thank you to Heather Meares and Reg George for their dedicated service on our WCB board for the past four years. Their contributions in their roles have been invaluable. We welcome a new officer (not new to the WCB board, but new to the role of secretary), Danette Dixon, currently president of South King County chapter and chair of our First Timer Committee. We also welcome two brand new members to the board, Tim Breitenfeldt, currently spearheading our developing young adult affiliate, and Beth Greenberg, currently Convention Committee co-chair and Newsline committee member. All of these people will bring excitement and new ideas to WCB, so stay tuned.

At our convention business meeting, many amendments were discussed and passed. I recommend you become familiar with them. See Alco Canfield’s article “Business Meeting Extraordinaire” in the WCB Happenings section of this newsletter for more on this topic.

Two major endeavors for the beginning of 2023:

1. Development of the current membership list. Lisa George will be contacting membership contacts within chapters for that needed help. Please work with her so we can submit our data to ACB by the deadline.
2. Starting in January, I will be involved in committee chair assignments and gathering names of interested members who would like to work on our active committees. Hopefully, we’ll get many members not before involved in this all-important work of WCB that propels our organization forward to accomplish our mission and vision.

As we look ahead to 2023, the WCB board will be getting together to plan and develop our vision for the year. This will involve input from members, so be waiting for that.

## Letter From the Editors

Greetings and salutations,

We boldly welcome 2023 and all it holds for us all. Here are some words to help us live our most audacious life:

Dream, persevere, love, laugh, cry, fly, hope, focus, advocate, learn, grow, try, open, close, change, maintain, push, relax, dance, sleep, risk, exercise, energize, think, read, write, sing, play, travel, move, create, meditate, listen, respect, breathe.

As we move forward on our individual paths, we unite as one in support of each other.

Your Faithful Editors,

Heather Meares and Reginald George

## It’s Your Newsline … Just Say It! Compiled by Reginald George

This is the place to express your thoughts, voice your valued opinions of our articles, inspire us with your grandest ideas, and share your honest concerns as we continue to evolve our publication into the Newsline you can’t wait to read.

Welcome to another year, our 51st to be exact, of Newsline. Thanks to everyone who took the time to read our zine last year and vote in our third annual Readers' Choice contest. This was the best one yet, and the recording is up in podcast form for you to listen to any time. We have also posted Heather’s “Cheshire Cat interview” column with Naomi and Keiko Namekata from this issue, and the author panel from last fall’s state convention. You can listen to all episodes of WCB Newsline Unleashed at the following link:

https://wcb-newsline-unleashed.pinecast.co

Or, just ask your phone or smart speaker to play it.

The winner of the fall issue’s Readers’ Choice contest was Chris Coulter’s “Music of Trains.” And the winner for the year as chosen by you the readers was “I Choose Joy,” by Hayley Agers. Our Editor’s Choice pick was the story “Stress,” by Everett Elam that also appeared in our fall issue.

As editors, we ask very little from you, but it is nice to know we have readers. This award exists for you to have some creative input into our content. So, please keep telling us what you like and why. We need you to read, vote, and keep giving me that feedback and attention everyone seems to think I crave. The deadline to cast your vote for the best article from this issue is Tuesday, Feb. 28. Send all votes, submissions, and content to [TheWCBNewsline@Gmail.com](mailto:TheWCBNewsline@Gmail.com).

As always, we wish to recognize and thank our authors for the gift of your writing, and we are always looking for new writers on almost any topic. We couldn’t do this important work without you. Please share your copy of Newsline with a friend.

**Reader feedback on fall issue:**

Vaughn Brown: “I vote for Judy’s article on her experience working in the hospital during the pandemic. Her story gave me chills just thinking about the quietness and lack of noise.”

The Editors Respond: We also felt her essay was outstanding and worthy of special mention. Judy, you made that experience so real for a lot of us in your haunting portrayal of that first day working in a ghost hospital, “Sounds of Silence during the Pandemic.” Thank you for sharing some of your experiences with us on the front lines in that war. We look forward to much more of your future writings.

Sheri Richardson: “I love the one that Chris wrote about growing up and hearing the sound of trains. I grew up right next to a very busy railroad and woke up, went to sleep, ate, played, and did everything to the sound of trains. They are definitely in my blood.”

**Reader feedback on special edition:**

Allen Bentson: “I vote for Hayley Ager’s ‘I Choose Joy.’ Hayley’s article about how she enjoyed the show without being able to see it made me think of all the things I enjoy reading books about that I have no interest in doing.”

Carl Jarvis: “Well I'm a sucker for animal/human conversation. And Heather's ‘Hoot Owl’ certainly had a great deal to say. But Frank took me on an adventure in such a clear and detailed way that later on I actually thought I'd been there. So, my vote goes to Frank's article.”

From Holly Kaczmarski: “I also vote for Frank’s article on the awesome glass-blowing experience. I also liked Heather's article and I am also an animal lover and I talk to animals all the time but as an artist, I loved the article on glass blowing, so that article gets my vote.”

Sheri Richardson: “This is so very difficult. I love Frank's glass-blowing experience because it never even occurred to me to try that or even think I could. On the other hand, I can so relate to Hayley and Chris's stories. But I guess my vote goes to Heather for her creativity and, maybe I shouldn't admit this, but animals always talk to me in my dreams. Maybe I'll write a story someday about a talking hornet.”

Debby Phillips: “Chris and I share a common love of the sound of trains. It wasn't always so for me, but that's another story for another day. Craig and I used to have ‘cheap dates.’ We would go to the train depot in Vancouver and I'd listen to the trains and he'd watch them. After 9-11, we couldn't do that without arousing suspicion, so we had to stop our visits to the train depot. But I also loved Frank's article with its great explanations of glass blowing. And I have to give a shout out to my home state of Oregon where this took place. Lincoln City has always been one of my favorite Oregon Coast places to visit, and I loved his descriptions of all that he got to do and experience. But the one that showed the most creativity and imagination to me was Heather's ‘Cheshire Cat Interview.’ It made me smile and laugh, and I felt as if I were there with her. So, although I would like to vote for all three as Reader's Choice of the Year, but since I can't, I'm choosing Heather's article. Great story!”

Note: Opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors, and do not reflect those of Newsline staff or Washington Council of the Blind.

# FEATURES

## Cheshire Cat Interviews #18 Passing on the Fire Within by Heather Meares

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I love strong women. I admire and respect their fiery spirits, stubborn grit, and determination. I learn from their experiences in education, travel, love, and loss, and how life events mold you into the person you become. I am one.

Let me say that it is not easy to carry the weight of expectations that come with being this type of person. You take risks to accomplish your goals, and your decisions are questioned by others who think they know what’s best for you. Quite often, your opinions differ from the rest of the group, but they somehow just have to jump out and find their way into the discussion anyway. People sometimes assume that you really have your act together and know exactly what you are doing because you are bold and confident in the decisions you make, or resolute in what you think and say.

Although these factors may be true, most of the time I don’t have a clue about what I am doing or where it will lead, but I know why I am choosing it in that moment.

I come from a very long line of audacious women: both of my grandmothers, my aunties, my sister, and my mother. All of them made me who I am today, and I know my own daughter has also inherited this empowering gift. Most importantly, it was the influence of my mom, who engrained it into me from a very early age that I could accomplish anything my heart desired, no matter what obstacles may appear before me. I know this sounds a bit fairytale-ish, but I was raised on those, too. I believed her then and still do today. If only I could figure out what my heart really desires… but that’s a digression for another day. I write this on the one-year anniversary of her passing, and I still break down in tears, thinking of the loss of her physical presence. But I feel her with me and remember all she taught me. Occasionally, I even get to have funny, random chats with her in my dreams.

Recently, I was lucky enough to interview not only one of the women I have heard about since I moved to Washington six years ago and hoped I would get the opportunity to meet someday, but also was able to reconnect with another of the most highly respected women I have worked with since I’ve been here. They just so happen to be mother and daughter, and it‘s been a rare treasure to learn from them both. I think they even learned some things from each other during our conversation, and that, in itself, was worth it all. So, let’s hear what Keiko, a blind parent, and Naomi Namekata, her sighted daughter, have to say.

First, I asked them each to introduce themselves, and tell us about their careers. I didn’t realize this was such a loaded question.

Keiko: “My name is Keiko Namekata. After getting my degree in rehabilitation teaching from Western Michigan University, I first worked for the state of Illinois as a vocational rehabilitation teacher. I worked with people in their homes, teaching them blindness skills, and covered four counties around Chicago. Then we moved to Seattle, and I was employed by the Department of Services for the Blind as a field rehabilitation teacher. After a big layoff, I went to work for Vision Services, more popularly known as Community Services for the Blind and Partially Sighted, and later was Sight Connection before it finally closed. I worked for them for a couple of years as an itinerant, primarily in Seattle, but also covered the east side in Bellevue, Kirkland, and so forth. Then, an opportunity came up with DSB, working in the Orientation Training Center as a communications instructor. I taught Braille, typing (those were the days before the computer), the Echo and Apple 2E. Then I worked as a vocational rehabilitation counselor for about a year and a half, and then with the Independent Living Program from ‘91 to ‘94. I became the OTC program manager in ‘94 and retired in 2014. That’s my career, and now my second career is homemaker, housewife, grandparent, and a little bit of volunteering.”

Naomi: “My name is Naomi Namekata. I am an assistive technology specialist (ATS) for the Washington Assistive Technology Program, which is based out of the University of Washington. In this job, I manage the I Can Connect Program, which is the national deaf/blind equipment distribution program. We partner with Perkins School for the Blind to provide service to all Washington state residents who qualify for this program, and currently I have about seven part-time trainers around the state. I also do a lot of professional trainings. We have a contract with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to do trainings for them, and a project with King County to do some senior trainings in the senior center, so a wide range of presentations and trainings. I’ve been here since 2017. Prior to that, I worked for DSB in their VR program, starting in 2001 as a counselor aide, which is now a rehab technician, and they supported me in going back to school to get some computer-related class course work in training. I became an ATS with DSB in the VR program. For many years, I covered all parts of Washington state, except the most eastern parts. It was a great experience, and I gained a lot of skills and met a lot of really cool people over the years.”

Heather: “And you have children, as well?”

Naomi: “I do, yes, I have a son. His name is Ren, and he’s about to turn seven. He’s in first grade. He’s the best.”

Heather: “Keiko, what do you think is your most important accomplishment during your work in the industry?”

Keiko: “The OTC started as a place where people sent their clients to acquire skills, but a lot of times they were really not focused on the next steps, so creating value or meaning to the training center. I used to feel like a step-child at DSB. The most important part was the VR program and employment, and I firmly believe that good, solid alternative skills are the most important, critical first step in anyone’s success. If you don’t have the skills, you can’t survive as an individual, get to places, look good, and perform not only the job tasks, but all of the other skills that really make you a full person and be able to participate. I wanted to hone in on that importance of value at the training center, and for it to mean something to the administration and to the counselors. All of the programs we’ve added had to do with helping students develop themselves to their full potential, to be able to begin the journey towards future employment. And also, communicating with the counselors and really helping them address their information. So, I guess having made a difference, adding value to the OTC program and the VR system, to become more of an integral part, rather than a separate entity.”

Heather: “It sounds like a very holistic approach, not just this piece or that piece, but working with the whole person. This is a great concept. On the opposite end, being retired, do you see an area that could still be improved upon?”

Keiko: “Well, I try to not meddle, other than just checking in once in a while to see what’s going on. I did focus on working with the Sight Connection before it closed. Being retired, a lot of people lose vision later in life, an overwhelming number after they reach 65, and that population is so under-served. Just because you’re old, it doesn’t mean you don’t deserve to live a full life, as independently as possible. The beauty of Independent Living Services is that it’s not one time limited. With the older population, circumstances like the environment and physical conditions change, and vision changes. I love that people can re-apply if their circumstances change. So, I guess the place that needs more work, for people who are not working to have a place to get services, is that Independent Living Program.”

Heather: “Right, I don’t think you’re the only one that would express that sentiment. I’ve heard that multiple places, and I’m glad you are putting words to that thought. So, Naomi, what is the most important thing you learned from your mom?”

Naomi: “Wow. There are so many things, including playing the piano and how to cook lasagna, but she really helped me realize that having a disability, being blind, you can still live a full, rich, independent life, be successful, in your home life as a mother, a parent, a daughter, and also in your professional life in your career. She really inspired me to work in this field because I saw from her example that with the right skills and training, and attitude, you can achieve anything that anyone who is fully sighted is capable of, or more.”

Heather: “What’s the biggest thing you want to pass down to Ren?”

Naomi: “Hmm, the same thing – that you wouldn’t judge someone based on any difference in the way they do things. I remember growing up, and even still, going places with my mom, people stare. People are well meaning, and now way more educated about disabilities in general, but back in the day, going to the make-up counter with her, the women behind the counter would not address her directly. They would address me, and ask me what she wanted. I thought that was so rude!”

Heather: “And that still happens a lot.”

Naomi: “I’m sure. So for Ren, I want him to understand that having a disability is just a difference, and it doesn’t mean that you should treat anybody any differently.”

Heather: “Keiko, that is a huge career path you just gave us a dissertation on, wow! What was your inspiration for the beginning of all that? What made you say, ‘This is what I really want to do’?”

Keiko: “I’m glad you asked that. I had visual changes in early elementary school, I couldn’t read the text books, couldn’t see people at a distance, my eyes wouldn’t adjust to quick movement, and those kinds of things led to a lot of reluctance to participate in physical activities. By the time I couldn’t read the books in third grade, I honed in my memory skills, listened really well, and tried to fake it. We came to the United States when I was in the fifth grade and eventually they found out that I really didn’t see much of anything, so they got me an itinerant teacher who recommended that I learn some blindness skills. They got me to learn Braille, but unfortunately my English skills weren’t all that great so I was struggling not just with Braille, but with identifying words. I focused a lot on academics and trying to improve my English, and succeed in school. I attended a blindness skills training center in Chicago, where we learned cane skills under sleep shades, some sewing techniques, all that stuff you’re supposed to learn. My mother was a very strong person who had high expectations. Her thing was ‘I don’t want others to look at you and say you can’t do something because you’re blind’.”

Heather: “Good for her!”

Keiko: “By the time I entered the training center, I had no problem putting meals together for myself, cleaning, doing the family’s laundry, picking out my clothes, putting curls in my hair. Remember the rollers? I remember one girl who was crying because she couldn’t find the buttons to put on her dress, which was inside out. I thought this was really not good, that you should be able to take care of yourself by the time you are this age. That’s when I thought this is something I want to do, I want to be a teacher for the blind.”

Heather: “I really like the fact that you brought up the thought of not only learning to function as a blind person, but the whole language barrier, as well. That’s a lot to deal with in one fell swoop, that’s huge. Is there anything you want to do now, in retirement, on your bucket list?”

Keiko: “I get a lot of enjoyment listening to kids play music. One of my grandsons is learning to play piano. I download books on the Braille and Audio Reading Download service a lot, I like to cook, and we do a lot of walking for leisure. One of my goals is to travel to Europe. I’ve been to Japan; I’d like to experience European culture. I also started doing some volunteer work, teaching Braille at the library before COVID, and I’m hoping that we’ll be able to resume that. Now that they have the Zoomax NLS EReader for Braille, when it gets beyond the demo stage, hopefully people will be able to get dependable, reliable equipment that works.”

Heather: “I’m curious about Naomi’s thoughts on this technology.”

Naomi: “Well, I love technology. I’m a fan of products made based on universal design principles. We talk about it a lot for buildings with the ADA, but I think using those concepts and applying them to technology in general, that anyone can access is hopefully the path forward. Specialized technology, like Braille displays and notetakers, CCTV’s or video magnifiers have a place and are very important, but they’re so expensive. Having some mainstream technology that is accessible to lots of people makes access easier. On the flip side, I think more and more businesses, organizations, and government agencies understand how important it is for their digital content, whether it’s software, forms, PDF’s, websites, or social media, having it be accessible to begin with is how we close the gap in terms of accessibility.”

Heather: “A lot of progress has been made, but there’s still a long way to go with all of that.”

Naomi: “Things are moving forward. Up to 30 percent of social media users self-identify as having a disability, which is a huge population, right? These companies realize it’s a huge number of people we can sell our products to. Hopefully, we will see more over the next 10 or 20 years.”

Heather: “For both of you, what is the one thing you want to pass on to the world?”

Naomi: “Looking at the world with an inclusive view. We talk about that in terms of race and diversity, and disability too, being inclusive with how you interact with others, but also when you’re designing products and putting anything out there in the world. There’s a lot of division in our country and in the world right now, and I’d just like people to think about trying to be more inclusive in every aspect of their life.”

Keiko: “I’d like to impart to upcoming generations of younger people who are blind or have any kind of disability, that you have to really dream. Once you dream about something, and stay focused on it, things will begin to fall into place. I read somewhere that successful people start with a dream, you establish goals, actions come before you, and you’ll know which direction to follow. You might fail a few times, but through that you will know what you can achieve. The other thing I wanted to say about being a parent, is that it’s a lifelong experiment. You do the best you can at the time, learn from your mistakes, adapt and grow with your children, and be a good role model. Naomi was a very curious child, and as a blind parent it was challenging. She is a huge risk taker. We all survived and I appreciate the people my daughters have become.”

Heather: “Are you a risk taker, as well?”

Keiko: “I have been put in situations where I have to be, but it’s not something I look for. I’m a very steady, fairly calm person who looks at situations and plans steps to problem solve. Those are my strengths.”

Heather: “You have a very quiet boldness to you. You stick to it, keep steady, and you get things done. To me, that is what audacity is. It shows its form differently, whether steady planner or risk taker, but I see both of you as very audacious women, and I thank you for sharing your lives with us.”

Editor’s Note: This wonderful interview, like a rare, showy orchid, is way too dynamic and complex to be held by the mere printed page alone. There was way too much love and humor to cover it all. It begged to become a podcast, and so it has. You can find this, along with all of our other fine offerings, in our WCB Newsline unleashed main podcast feed on the ACB Media Network podcast page, and on our home page at Pinecast, located here: <https://wcb-newsline-unleashed.pinecast.com>

Chronicles of a Happy Warrior #13  
Are You Being a Bold Risk Taker or a Precocious Brat?  
by Mark Adreon, the Happy Warrior

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“You are not a team player and have the audaciousness to just plow ahead with your ideas.”

“This organization has such an audacious mission.”

“You are going to hurt yourself or others if you continue on your audacious plan.”

“It’s hard to get along with Sam, his audaciousness is always trying to be in the spotlight.”

“Mark is so audacious, always challenging the way we do things.”

“You are never going to succeed, as your audacious and reckless behavior is going to turn off people.”

“As an artist, she is so audacious with her sculpture, pottery, and wall art.”

“What an audacious outfit to wear to our annual meeting.”

“Toni’s obsession with rock climbing and not safety is going to have an audacious ending.”

OK, is being vain, acting, presenting, or living audaciously a good thing? Bad thing? Annoying? Rude? Dangerous? Daring? Creative? Reckless? Resolute? Foolhardy? Bold? Fearless? Extreme? YES.

Or is it indigent lack of respect?

Are organizations, governments, or businesses often praised for being audacious? YES.

When the adjective audacious is used to describe individuals, is it often negative? YES.

Some people are considered a “pain in the neck.” They seem to always be pushing for change or wanting to go another direction. They think they own their projects and seem to not want feedback from others. They even will tell you that your ideas won’t work. Are they audacious or are they just brats?!

Do you consider yourself audacious? If so, why? What makes you audacious? If not audacious, how would you describe your personality presentation?

Am I being audacious to even think I can write expertly about the pros and cons of audaciousness? Maybe. (Smiling.)

Let’s consider your relationship to audaciousness. You may be audacious and have a personal connection to all that means. (Are you an Aries?) You might experience audaciousness in people, perhaps friends, around you, social influencers, businesses, employers, or organizations you interact with or are a part of.

If we think about times when we have heard audacious used to describe a person, it seems to carry with it a negative connotation. (Consider some of the examples at the beginning of this article.)

Why do you think so many people consider audaciousness a negative characteristic? You know, “shade.” Could it be that these people seem arrogant, pushy, bold, self-serving, know-it-all, not interested in the norms, or just too much?

Interestingly enough, these same audacious characteristics are envied or praised when presented by social idols. Larger-than-life, successful people, people in your daily life, or those achievers will often carry a positive inference when called audacious. These people often represent the pro side of the adjective – meaning those that are successful risktakers, bold thinkers, or actors that show change or results. Let’s not forget the creative influencer changing cultures and lives.

Living an audacious life is not for everyone, and not everyone would want it. For some, audacious people or behavior is difficult to understand and fully appreciate. For people who are audacious, by their nature, it can be difficult to fit in with many groups or organizations, especially if they are driven by consensus-based leadership or focused on “what other people think.”

Audacious people often enjoy taking risks, challenging the status quo, creating untried pathways or ideas. They are bold in their thinking or actions. They do not shy away from a challenge, and will often “upset the apple cart.”

To be clear, people don’t need to be completely audacious about all aspects of their life. Even the quietest and unassuming person can be audacious about their issues of passion.

I consider myself audacious. I am also aware of it and work to ensure positive outcomes. Sometimes, I am not successful with this, and others misinterpret my behavior. When working at Department of Services for the Blind (DSB), my strength was in discussing cultural change with businesses and organizations. There were times when I needed to take bold steps and risks, like when I advocated for and produced a film that would show many of the day-to-day scenes that people who are blind encounter from the sighted world. The film took strong steps to have the blind person stay neutral and not react out loud to the situations. This is not a true-life depiction of how most blind folks would respond. The film focused the viewer to concentrate on the behavior of the sighted person, not the behavior of the blind person. And yes, I used humor about the situation and took care to make sure the humor was NOT about the blind person. The situations are all too familiar to folks who are blind.

Yes, I was audacious to think I could guide this project. This film was full of risk-taking with the public, blind communities, blind organizations, and cautious agency staff. The outcome was successful for the intended audience, employers, agencies, organizations interested in creating a blind friendly environment and culture. There were mixed results with some in the blind community. It was an audacious project and my supervisor, Lou Oma Durand, provided me the freedom to pursue it.

The definition of audacious is dependent on the situation or environment. When used in organizations, businesses, or government agencies, you will often find elements of audaciousness in their mission, vision, or value statements – for example, the value of risk-taking, bold action, thinking out of the box, creativity, challenging status quo, acting, and going beyond expectations, to mention a few. These statements have high value to these organizations, as they guide their culture and operations. However, often they are words that look good on paper and are not honored in real time with real people.

I’ve heard many businesses express how they want a “big, audacious mission” for creating and developing bold and aggressive marketing strategies, or expanding an organization’s cultural values. Marketing ideas will sometimes be where the business‘s audaciousness will be realized.

Speaking of business, when I started working with DSB, I was assigned to support the agency’s self-employment (SE) program. The program appeared to be a last-resort choice for participants. There were few approved business plans, counselors were unfamiliar with small-business options, what the agency policies were, and who would make a good candidate for self-employment.

I had the audacity to consider the program ineffectual and needing a major overhaul. In my mind, it needed to be a first choice for people who were not having success at finding a job in areas where few existed, and had audacious personalities and characteristics that would serve them well as a business owner. I supported self-employment policy changes, clarity on what makes a business plan, championing the SE committee to support success with modified approvals, and developing an exploration workshop series where any DSB participant could attend.

Even discussing this program, I feel audacious and realize it is one of the characteristics we would have encouraged for a budding entrepreneur.

In considering the topic of audacity, I must confess the definitions and examples seem to describe who I’ve been most of my life. I find that I am, generally, audacious about many things. As a result, it is difficult for me to feel part of organizations or groups. It has nothing to do with my appreciation of these groups or organizations.

I will admit that not all aspects of audaciousness apply to me. I don’t feel foolhardy, arrogant, grandiose, or reckless, and these are all synonyms for audacious.

My personal definition for audacious is: engaged, not restrained by someone else’s norms, bold thinker, strong presentation, conviction of well-thought decisions, not fearful of being different, takes calculated risks, willing to try bold and new ideas or expressions, developing strategies for cultural change, open to the awesome differences of others, interested in creating and not maintaining, and lives fully and as big as WE ALL ARE.

Cheers to all audacious people and those that love them, hate them, don’t understand them, and those that want to join them.

## Miss Audacious by Debby Phillips

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Audacity. I love words, like audacious, bodacious audacity. I also like ostentatious and mendacious, and loquacious, and loquacity. They come tumbling off my tongue like rocks rolling into the water. They are tumbled and jumbled in the water until one day they are smooth and beautiful. Of course, it takes them a long time to begin to be smooth and beautiful, and maybe they have to show audacity not to be crushed among the other rocks.

That reminds me of an event that happened when I was a wild and crazy girl. Well, not too wild and crazy, just a teenager who wanted to show her friends she wasn't afraid.

It was night, and we were in our room at the Oregon School for the Blind (OSB). The door to the adjoining room was open, so the other girls in the room were all there. We had been talking about – well, boys to be exact, or the dearth of boys. As the graduating class of 1970 from OSB, we only had two boy classmates. There was a boy that I had kind of a thing for since like sixth grade, but he acted like he didn't know I was alive. So, our last year in class, this girl (I'll call her Pearl to disguise her name) had returned to the school for this last year, much to my dismay. You see, I had been hoping that this boy (I'll call him Winston) might notice me this year. But that wasn't going to happen with Pearl around. So Pearl was one of my roommates. Pearl originally came from Texas, I think, and she was one of those females who drew males like butterflies to flowers, bees to honey, or mosquitoes to my tender young skin. Pearl and Winston were an item, and I was a miserable mess. I tried not to show it but, every once in a while, Pearl just got under my skin. So, she made some snooty comment about her and Winston. Now why I felt like I had to prove myself to Pearl I don't know. I was student body president, got straight A's, got to sing solos, and was popular with some sighted high school kids who worked on our campus that year. I was thin and beautiful (so my husband says after seeing some pictures of me). I had everything any girl almost ready to graduate from the Oregon State School for the Blind could want, except for Winston. And Winston was cute. He was tall, smart, did well on the wrestling team, had been student body president the year before, and he was strong and a bit mysterious. So, when Pearl made her snide comment, it pushed me right over the edge.

I said, "I bet I could climb out the bedroom window and get out."

She said, "I doubt it. You'd be afraid."

Well, she was right, I was afraid. But I did the most audacious thing I could do. I went over to the window, climbed up and stuck my foot out. On one side was a fence that kept people from falling down a set of outside steps to the basement. But next to that was a garbage can. That can had been there since I was five years old, and I remembered it well. So, I moved my foot further and found it. Yup, there was that garbage can right where I knew it would be. What I didn't know was whether it would hold me up or not. But I figured that the worst that could happen is that I'd tip the garbage can over (which would make a terrible noise) and maybe I'd fall. But, being young and feeling invincible, I figured I could just get up off the ground and walk back into the dorm.

I held onto the edge of the window, stepped out and onto the garbage can, and jumped down, safe and sound. With all the dignity I could muster, I walked back into the dorm, listened for sounds, and nobody seemed nearby. So, I hurried into my room and into bed.

I will end here by saying that my triumph was only short-lived. The next morning, I was greeted by the words, "You are in serious trouble." The loquacity of the dorm counselor was quite crushing. Her words tumbled around my ears, and I was crushed to silence. My audacious deed had gotten me "campused," or in the language of my teenage peers, I was grounded. For two whole weeks. And it didn't garner any attention from Winston, either. So, my only claim to fame is that I climbed out a window in Howard Hall, and I have used the story in a few conversations with people who think that blind folks can't do anything. It's gotten me some laughs, and so now I'll say it here. WINSTON, I did it for you! Wherever you are, I did it for you. Maybe someday, I'll hear from Winston at least with a laconic "nice going." And Pearl? Eat your heart out! You never climbed out a dorm window or did anything to get in trouble, Miss Prim and Proper. I still have a little note of triumph in my heart. I did something that none of my roommates dared to do, and that I was a little afraid to do. But I did it! So, you all can call me Miss Audacious now, or Mrs. (which my husband might prefer).

## Audacity, the Power of Words by Chris Coulter

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I was a late talker. I didn’t walk or talk until I was three. Once I got started talking, I learned words that must have been way beyond my childish understanding. When I started school at the age of six, I wasn’t content with one-syllable words. I loved the sound of big words and I was fascinated by the strange sounds that were called “foreign languages.” I loved my own language, but I wanted to know what those languages meant.

I also listened to Liberace play the piano. Not only did he play great, big, fat chords on the piano, he talked about the music, and his voice was wonderful to listen to.

As the years went by and I learned to have a healthy respect for good speakers who could raise up applause and even cheers, I knew that I just might end up speaking or singing with power.

In my early twenties, I heard Barack Obama begin to talk about history and hope and all the other things that held a family, a town, or a crowd of people in listening mode.

I had never heard of the word audacity before hearing about Barack Obama’s book, which is called “The Audacity of Hope.” By that time, I knew what audacity meant, but I believed that if I learned to be someone with audacity, I thought that meant I was a brat, or a really wild teenager, or someone who drove fast cars.

A few years later, I learned from Mr. Obama’s quieter books and speeches that he was trying to teach us to think, not just to shout. Over time, I have been thinking more and more about people coming together to learn, to get to know each other, and to appreciate each other.

I must say that I never thought about raucous politics or lots of arguing. I don’t think my future has ever held out to me a presidential candidacy, and I still believe that the power of words doesn’t necessarily come from thousands of cheering throats. Sometimes change starts like a whisper that begins to grow into a swelling crescendo that becomes a united choir that sings together. Will it last? I don’t know. I do know, though, that song and story and a dash of politics if a person likes it, can still unite people if others take the time to give the change a chance.

## Daring to Ask by Hayley Agers

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Have you ever been told “you’ll never know unless you ask?” Well, I have learned that this statement couldn’t be more true. I’m writing to share my experiences and to encourage you to be bold enough to do the same, for whatever the reason or question might be.

I had a dream of reaching out to those in our WCB family during times in their lives when things may have felt very dark. Whether for a phone call, a care package, or a greeting card, I wanted people to know they weren’t alone in their struggles, that we as an organization actually saw them and wanted to be supportive. So, I approached our president at that time, Steve Fixdal, about starting a new committee that would later be called WCB Cares. Steve knew that there would be times when the needs would be many, and that it would be a lot to take on. However, his belief in me gave me strength when I was tired.

A few years later, I had the idea of putting on a women’s expo at the convention. This would be a place where women could go and be pampered, do a little shopping, walk away feeling seen by vendors who cared, have fun with other blind women who loved fashion and makeup, and explore healthy choices regarding food and at-home-delivery programs. We had so much fun trying on clothes from the two clothing vendors who showed up, and the one-on-one attention made us feel special, which is something we don’t always have the luxury of experiencing. Were you one of the lucky women who got to participate in the fashion show? What a fabulous time we all had, and a big part of that was thanks to Laurie Felt, a California fashion designer, who so generously donated the clothing to be gifted to those selected women. Asking was a long shot but a dream that I had and look what happened.

Fast forward again, and I recall asking myself why we no longer had the youth track at our conventions. I always loved seeing youth at conventions when Alan was leading that effort at many past events. And, it was just at that time I was asked to consider stepping up to chair the Families with Blind Children Committee, now known as WCB Families.

So, where were these families? The children were still out there, the parents still needing connection and support, and the organization still hoping to welcome in future leaders. Well, the only way to get it going again was to look further into those questions and figure out what needed to be done.

It wasn’t as hard as I thought. Our committee quickly formed an awesome partnership with Department of Services for the Blind staff, and we were off to the races. As amazing as the first youth track was, it has only gotten better.

In case you aren’t noticing a theme, it’s all about my need to love on others and help them find their love for themselves. I don’t say any of this to come across as cocky or to appear that I have it all figured out. Look, it takes somebody struggling with their own self-worth and search for purpose to have the desire to help others find that, too. In helping others, that has filled my cup, given purpose and kept my hope alive and wanting more.

For me, most of the time, I find my courage in my belief or passion for the cause. This is usually what drives me to step out of my comfort zone and stand up tall to put my desires out there on the table. Each one of these events is special to me for different reasons. Each started off as a dream and with hope, a vision, the desire to make a difference in others’ lives, and then, coming in last for me, was finding the courage to ask, knowing that no might be the answer I received.

It isn’t always about hearing yes when you ask for help or follow a dream. It isn’t about whether or not everything goes perfectly, as many things about that dream may change along the way. It isn’t about feeling less than or better than others based on the response you get. It’s about allowing your dreams to carry you through the difficult times. It’s about figuring out the steps that need to be taken to make those dreams a reality. My dreams may look very different from yours. It doesn’t matter how big or small the dream is or how others might view it, but rather about caring enough to have that dream in the first place. What if I had never had the courage or “audacity” to ask? None of the above would have happened, and they all would have been visions brushed under the rug because I was afraid to ask. Don’t close your eyes tonight, having that conversation with yourself that goes something like this, “I wonder if…oh never mind, that’s never going to happen.” How do you know unless you ask?

**Doing Concert Sound Without Sight  
by Frank Cuta**

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I have always loved operating sound equipment. It has been a big part of my life to be the principal sound man for the Three Rivers Folklife Society (3RFS) here in the Tri-Cities. It is enjoyable and rewarding, supporting some of the best folk musicians in the country, and my blindness has never been much of a problem.

It is not hard to do concert sound without vision. You should have some understanding of the technical requirements, a love and appreciation of the music, and a respect for the needs of the performer. Blind or sighted, you depend mostly on your ears to maintain audio balance, to preserve the tone of the acoustic instruments, and to keep the vocals clear. Sometimes when the act includes a lot of instrument sharing between the performers, I ask someone to sit with me and warn me about surprising changes on the stage.

I started out with a couple of old Shure microphones and a Vocalmaster mixer that I had picked up in college, and I used the amp and speakers from my living room stereo system. Over the years, I have updated and put together a pretty decent system, but it is mostly older technology. All of the new professional sound consoles utilize rotary encoders, menu displays, and touch screens. These types of controls are either very challenging to use or, as is more often the case, totally inaccessible to a person who is blind. Apple, with its iPhone, has proven that the touch screen on a product can be very accessible if you design it from the ground up with these concerns in mind. But the manufacturers of professional audio gear have a lot of catching up to do.

When we started 3RFS in the late 1980s, we paid our folk acts about $100, and we were paying a local audio business about the same amount to provide them with concert sound. This seemed a bit crazy. By the third or fourth concert, I volunteered to do this same job for free, and I have never looked back. Everyone benefited from this arrangement. It allowed us to significantly increase the amount that we were paying our performers, and it ensured that I always had a ride to the concerts.

Putting on concerts is much more than just running the sound board. I am tremendously grateful to all of my many folklife friends. A producer takes care of booking the performers, reserving the venue, advertising the concerts, and managing ticketing. Someone else helps transport me and my equipment to the concerts. This leaves me free to concentrate on working with the performers and operating the sound console during the concert.

Thinking back, it seems that when I was 30 years younger, I did help a lot more with the lifting and carrying. Also, in those days most of the performers were about my age. Now, younger people do all of the loading and unloading, and I find myself two or three generations older than some of the performers.

Over the years, I have had the pleasure of doing sound for such nationally known personalities as Tom Paxton, Bill Staines, Utah Philips, Chuck Pyle and Robbin & Linda Williams, as well as celebrities from the Northwest, such as Dan Maher, Linda Waterfall, Brian Bowers, Heidi Muller, and Hank Cramer. My favorite place of all time to do concerts was at the Battelle Auditorium on the north Richland campus of Battelle Northwest Labs where I worked. It was there that I did sound for such great artists as Reilly & Maloney, David Roth, Christine Laven, David Mallet, and Hawkeye Herman.

It is great to see our audiences steadily coming back as we recover from the pandemic. 3RFS is a completely volunteer-based operation, and I hope to be able to continue my contributions for many more years.

## My Audacious Dream by Marilee Richards

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When I was growing up, I had many dreams, but they all went unfinished because I was too afraid to step up and speak my mind. I have spent my life taking care of children, and the mentally ill, and know how necessary it is for someone to speak for them. That, it seems, I do for others with no problem. However, speaking for myself is a totally different story.

Our WCB group has grown, and there are many new members who are newly blind or visually impaired who are looking for help and training to find their way in this new dark and blurred world. These folks need simple things to improve their daily lives. It is not acceptable that they have to wait a year and a half to be served. My group continues to get more older adults that are drowning in this new environment of vision loss. I have lots of numbers to give out, but that is empty chatter like I gave out for years at the Crisis Line for referrals, knowing that the funding just wasn’t out there to provide help anytime soon. These older adults have so much to offer our communities if we would give them access to the equipment they need to move forward, instead of feeling like they are stuck in quicksand taking them further under with each day that goes by.

I am hoping that we might be able to find a grant that provides help in the northwest part of the state, that is more central to the Snohomish area, along with help for those in Eastern Washington, too. I do not understand why everything has to be located in King County.

I am thankful for the work of the Department of Services for the Blind with students, but this is a new century with so much more need to help the elderly with late-in-life vision loss, not just the young and returning students like I was. So often a blind or visually-impaired student completes their degree and then can’t get a job unless they are willing to move to Seattle to get a job that will show others how capable they are in their work. Why is it such a difficult thing to provide the elderly a bit of security and training in their later years?

Solving this problem will involve a lot of boldness, and risk-taking. I know there are grants for everything one can think or dream about. I had to find grants that would meet the qualifications for the need I was investigating for a college course. I have talked with others about this need. Until someone pushes the boundaries, nothing will happen.

In college, I learned that “fear is the evidence of something that appears real.” Let’s not let fear keep us from finding the things we need to move forward in our lives. There is too much work that needs to be accomplished, and we need everyone on board to get this train moving forward.

As I said at the beginning of this article, this is indeed my audacious dream. Perhaps others will help me make it a dream that can come true.

## Empowerment by Tim Downie

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In a recent class on advocacy at my synagogue, we were looking at the story of Queen Vashti and Esther. We were asked to break into small groups to discuss times when we felt empowered.

That actually left me drawing a blank. The past two years have been anything but empowering. I lost my vision, temporarily lost my ability to walk, was hospitalized, had four surgeries, and I am still fighting with insurance companies, Social Security, and the VA. I lost my ability to drive, my driver’s license, my car, my income, my ability to simply walk into a grocery store. I haven't set foot in a fast-food restaurant for over two years. Going to the pharmacy is a project. I have to plan everything days in advance, from how I will get somewhere, to strategizing about combining trips. Walking outside without falling or getting hit in the face by a sign or tree branch, or being scared by strangers I can’t see, is all a challenge.

That is hardly empowerment. So, what to answer?

I thought.

I did speak at the state convention for the blind last month, before a large crowd. But that did not feel empowering. It felt like laying myself bare and vulnerable and, thankfully, it was met with acceptance. It was very intimate, and good, but the feeling it left me was more just being at peace, rather than feeling empowered.

I thought more.

I thought of my life before the past two years. I had many examples of where I had some power, and was able to act.

But now?

Then I remembered the White Cane Day Walk in Seattle I participated in with many friends. One person, who a few months before was completely housebound due to blindness, decided to make the walk, and without any of her family members present. She walked by me the whole time down many Seattle city streets. Later, she told me, “Tim, I walked next to you the whole way, and I felt very safe.”

That was what made me feel empowered – that even in this place where I am so vulnerable, I could actually help and give strength to someone else. That was what made me feel empowered.

# LIFESTYLE

## It’s A Dog’s Life Chapter III by Marilee Richards

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Wow! What a journey. I am home with my new guide dog, T. This all began in February, when I filled out paperwork to get a guide dog. She is a COVID dog through and through. She was born the day the country was shut down, but even then, new life was happening all around us.

Training at Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB) in Boring, OR, was amazing. The staff were excellent, the volunteers numerous (drivers, meal servers, puppy raisers, and puppy foster homes). I realized this would not be as great a program without each of these people, and I hope to put the spotlight on them.

After having COVID the first time, I needed physical therapy. One of the therapists had a brother who is blind and came to Boring from New York to get his first dog. I had already started the process and decided I would go to Boring, too. My next physical therapist had raised a puppy for GDB. She shared how hard it was to keep a dog for 14 months and then give it over to them. Her dog became a breeder and went down to the California campus. She still goes down to visit her dog. She decided giving a dog up was too hard after having them for so long.

My dog was raised by a young couple in Boise, ID, where there is a large puppy-raising group. They were very excited to hear that their dog had been chosen. This was the second puppy they raised. They have moved to Portland where it is close enough to volunteer at GDB in Boring. Working with many dogs on campus would be easier than giving one puppy up after raising them, and would be less of an attachment for them. Most of the handlers I know received their dogs from GDB.

Each owner of a guide dog I have talked with has bragged about the great job their puppy raiser did. One of the many jobs they have is to expose the puppy to a variety of environments. Jeanne, my roommate at the American Council of the Blind convention, talked about a number of things her dog was exposed to before she received her, and one of them was fireworks. We went to the Fourth of July fireworks, and she was not afraid at all. This is very unusual for dogs that I have observed over the years. I believe my dog’s gentle spirit, the joy she has guiding my way, and her love for almost every person she is introduced to, is a direct correlation to what her puppy raisers taught her while in their care.

In the class, we had two folks from the States and two from Canada. We had four yellow Labs, two male and two female. All of us were cane users. I had never had a dog, Rick had a pet dog, and Jenn and RaLynn were getting their second guide dogs. We each had specialized training. Jenn and RaLynn were far ahead of Rick and me. My little girl had some special volunteers work with her, as she had a rash on her tummy and needed to be in a dryer environment, so she was put in puppy foster care for quite a while. The folks who took her home also provided meal servers on campus, so T was able to greet them when they came to work.

Each of us had a specialized training route twice a day. We went into Gresham, OR, to visit the guide dog campus there. Each of us had different routes. We all walked by the statue of “Mr. Gresham,” who was holding three cups of coffee. His daily work was delivering coffee and other needs to the sweets store, and sweets back to the coffee shop, along with many other deliveries each day. I know my own Mr. Gresham, so each time I passed by, my heart was happy with good memories of him. My friend passed away this past summer, so this was very special to me.

My special route included streets without sidewalks and crossing multiple-lane, busy streets with changing light signals. I used blinders three times to feel what it felt like to follow my dog’s lead. It feels totally different than walking with limited vision. We did a night walk, played in a fenced yard with the dog, and I had to learn how to play with T as I have never had a dog before. Rick and I did not go into Portland because we don’t go to large cities often enough.

Since getting T, I don’t know how I survived without a dog. No wonder they say that a dog is a man/woman’s best friend. There is no one more dedicated to you than a dog.

This article will be followed by a podcast with my dog’s puppy raisers. Please watch your emails for an announcement. We will be learning more about the ins and outs of training from puppy-raiser experts.

## Cane Quest Comes to the Tri-Cities by Frank Cuta

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When I was blinded in an accident in the 1960s, I was faced with several difficult choices. A major one was how I was going to get around independently. I was in my teens, and I was pretty sure that I did not want to be guided around by sighted friends for the rest of my life. It turned out that my key to a life of independent personal travel was to master the use of the long white mobility cane.

In recognition of its importance to us, Oct. 15 has been designated in this country as White Cane Safety Day. For the first time in the state of Washington, a group of intrepid blind and visually-impaired students got together this past year to celebrate this special day by having their travel skills challenged. Our Cane Quest event was organized locally by Linda McFall and Mandy Carpenter from the Richland School District, and co-hosted by the Department of Services for the Blind (DSB). It was held on a beautiful day at Leona Libby Middle School, located on the outskirts of West Richland.

Cane Quest is a cane travel skills competition that is regionally judged, and has been held in many other parts of this country for the past 13 years. It was originally developed by the Braille Institute of America to promote confident independent travel skills for blind and visually-impaired students in grades 3 through 12. While having fun, the contestants are challenged to demonstrate fundamental orientation and mobility skills and travel techniques necessary to navigate the sighted world they live in. In addition to building travel skills, the Cane Quest program can be extended to include associated topics such as self-advocacy training and career exploration.

Although participants were invited to attend from all over Washington and the adjoining states, this year most of the students came from the Tri-City area. We had six students in the younger Scouts/Pathfinders category, who tested their skills on an indoor course. We had seven students in the older Explorer/Trail Blazer category. These students had to negotiate a more difficult route that was outdoors and included a street crossing. There were several support stations along each course, and each contestant was "shadowed" by a route monitor. Guidelines for judging included cane anatomy, cane technique, navigating intersections, cardinal directions, navigating obstacles, dealing with doors that have door handles, independent course corrections, and seeking assistance.

Cane Quest Day also included presentations from DSB and Ben Franklin Transit, pizza for lunch, and an awards ceremony in the afternoon. The event was extremely well attended, if you count the volunteers as well as the participating students. Between the officials, volunteers, parents, police, and fire personnel, there must have been four or five support persons for each contestant.

As each student was called up to the front of the room to receive their award, I shared their pride and enthusiasm. We are definitely coming back next year to do it all over again. I am confident that we will have new challenges, a greater regional response, and even bigger prizes.

## Why I Love to Talk by Holly Turri

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How can audacity affect talking? Well, one way is if you get up the nerve to tape the person who is rambling’s mouth. That could have quite an interesting set of scenarios. So far, no one has tried this on me. Don’t get any ideas, OK?

Even more fun is listening. It’s amazing what we can learn just by taking time to really hear what the other person is adding to the conversational mix. No, dear friends, we don’t pay attention just so we can relate a totally exciting remark to what they are saying.

Back in 2020, when Covid first joined our lives and lexicon, I wanted to talk to people who didn’t live in my house, building, or complex. Julie Brannon and Cindy Hollis decided to conduct Saturday morning virtual coffees. First, these were on the phone, and then on Zoom. What a thrill it was to listen, learn, and chat with people all over our state and beyond.

Now, I don’t recall the exact series of events, but I do remember being offered and accepting the responsibility to host this call. This was two years ago, and we’re still going strong.

At first, to break the ice, we played games and answered the question of the day. Now, we know one another well enough that speaking comes naturally. The call lasts one hour, from 10 to 11 a.m. every Saturday. An announcement is sent to participants on Thursday or Friday containing all the contact information.

Our participants come from as far away as Colorado and Minnesota. In this informal call, we share ideas on anything from assistance for people whose vision is fading, to local services, book reviews, dogs, cooking, and just about anything you can imagine. Don’t forget good ol’ technology, too.

You might be thinking, “Why is this audacious?” Well, until recently, the host of WCB Coffee and Conversing, which is me, would never have dreamed of doing this. Back in college, I spoke in a stage whisper. When I was required to give presentations on my job, beforehand, I’d have to drive the porcelain bus. Thanks to the encouragement from my husband and Zoom buddies, I am much more confident.

Since I liked this adventure, I went on to host calls on the ACB community, teach classes, and write a lot more.

Hey, take a walk on the wild side and visit us some Saturday. We’d love to listen to your contributions to the conversational stew.

## Check Out Hadley Institute by Alco Canfield

Founded in 1920 by William Hadley, an educator who lost his sight later in life, Hadley has provided educational resources for blind/visually-impaired individuals since that time. Its emphasis has changed to focus on seniors experiencing vision loss. Learning can occur either through Hadley’s podcasts, workshops, or discussion groups. Instruction and materials are provided free of charge. Hadley not only supports the individual, but friends and family, as well.

For more information about this excellent resource, call (800) 323-4238 or check out their website at [www.hadley.edu.](http://www.hadley.edu)

## The Sporting Spotlight Blind Football by Beth Greenberg

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There are two kinds of football or futbol or futsal (pronounced fotbal or futsal).

Here in the U.S., we have American football, in which the ball is not usually moved down the field with your foot. In American football, the ball is usually thrown or carried down the field. The American football field is 100 yards long, not including the end zones for each team (add 10 yards for each team), and the field is 53.3 yards wide. When the offense for each team has the ball, they are tasked at moving the ball at least 10 yards towards the other team’s goal. They get four attempts at moving the ball those 10 yards.

So, you may hear the commentator say “Seattle is 2nd and 6,” which would mean it is their second attempt to move the ball, and they have 6 more yards to go.

The defense of the other team is trying to keep the offense from moving the ball the 10 yards. If the offense doesn’t move the ball those 10 yards on the 4th down (or attempt), they can choose to kick the ball towards the other team or play the 4th down and risk the other team getting the ball where they are at on the field. There are 32 teams in the National Football League (NFL). The NFL is the governing body over American Football in the U.S.

In the U.S., we call the other futbol soccer. But, in the rest of the world it is futbol or futsal.

Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) is an international governing body of association football, beach football and futsal. FIFA was established in 1904. FIFA soccer fields are 110-120 yards long by 70-80 yards wide.

Today, the IBSA (International Blind Sports Federation) governs blind football as well as some other blind sports, including goalball and judo for the Paralympics, chess, nine-pin bowling, powerlifting, showdown, ten-pin bowling, and torball.

Blind football is also played by FIFA rules with some differences. It is a 5-a- side sport (four blind outfielders and one sighted or partial goalkeeper). The futsal has a bell (like a jingle bell) inside. The outfielders are required to say “voy” (Spanish for go) when trying to steal the ball. The outfielders are also required to wear sleep shades. The game is 40 minutes long – 20 minutes a half with a 10-minute halftime. There are no throw-ins or offside rule; there are only kick-ins. The ball sometimes can get kicked out of play going off the kickboard, which is only a foot or two high. If there is a penalty kick, the attacking coach will tap the sidebars and crossbar to make a sound so the player knows where to place their kick. Those who are watching have to be quiet until a goal is scored, then they can cheer.

There are different blind classifications to play blind football. B1 – Totally or mostly blind (have light perception but cannot recognize shapes or hands). B-2 –Partial sighted can see shapes and 5 degrees of vision. B-3 – Partial sighted 2/60-6/60 and 5-20 degrees of vision. B-1 – Plays blind football as listed above. There is a different set of rules for B-2 and B-3s. An article on [www.goalfixsports.com](http://www.goalfixsports.com) says that blind soccer started in Spain in 1920 and joined IBSA in 1996.

The U.S. Association of the Blind started in 2018 the process to have a U.S. team in the Paralympics. They have 11 players, 3 coaches, and 2 officials from 10 different states. They are hoping to participate in the 2028 Paralympics in L.A. If you would like to know more about the U.S. team, please go to [www.usba.org/clubs-sports/blind-soccer/](http://www.usba.org/clubs-sports/blind-soccer/).

On the International level, they do have a women’s division.

As a kid, I did play soccer between 10-12 years old. I had more sight back then. But by the descriptions above I would be in the B-3 class. I did not get interested in American football until I was 13 or 14 years old and watching the Superbowl with my stepdad.

I have to say I am used to reading about a blind or deaf kid playing American football on the high school level. I started out thinking those would be the articles I would find about blind football and was definitely intrigued by what I found. I am interested in learning more about the other sports that IBSA has on its docket.

I hope you learned as much as I did about blind football. Want more info? Go to https://[www.blindfootball.sport](http://www.blindfootball.sport)

## What’s On Your Plate? Warm Winter Side Dishes by Hayley Agers

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I’m having such a good time, once a month, in our “Cooking with Confidence” Zoom calls. Not only are we sharing recipes, cooking tips and tricks, but we are also getting to know one another on a deeper level. This is what I wanted it to be about all along. I wanted to share with you a few of the recipes we drooled over on our December call as we discussed side dishes for the holidays. Hope you enjoy them all winter long.

**Corn Casserole**

Ingredients:

* 1 pkg. cornbread mix
* 2 cups of fresh or 1 14-oz. can whole kernel corn
* 1 14-oz. can creamed corn
* 1 cup sour cream
* 1 egg
* 1 stick of butter, softened

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Spray a 3-quart baking dish with cooking spray. Combine the muffin mix, creamed corn, corn kernels, butter, sour cream, and egg in a large mixing bowl and mix thoroughly. Pour the mixture into the prepared dish. Cover and bake for 55 to 60 minutes. Uncover and bake for an additional 10 minutes or until the top is crusty and browned.

**Crockpot Sweet Potatoes**

Ingredients:

* 6 to 7 sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks
* 1 ½ tbsp. corn starch
* 4 tbsp. salted butter (1/2 stick)
* 1 cup packed brown sugar
* 1 tsp. pumpkin pie spice
* ¼ tsp. cayenne
* 1 tsp. vanilla extract
* Juice of 1 orange
* Pinch of salt
* Chopped walnuts, for serving
* Chopped fresh parsley, for serving

Toss the sweet potatoes with the corn starch to coat them. Add the potatoes to the crock pot and dot with butter. Sprinkle over the brown sugar, pumpkin pie spice, and cayenne. Pour on the vanilla, orange juice and ¼ cup water. Season with salt. Place the lid on the crock pot and cook low, stirring once or twice, until the sweet potatoes are tender but still hold their shape. This takes about 4 hours. If in a pinch, cook on high for the first hour and then turn down to low for an additional 2 to 2½ hours. Toss the potatoes one more time and then transfer to a serving dish. Sprinkle with the toasted walnuts and parsley.

# BRAIN FOOD

## Technically Speaking A Short Guide to a Wealth of Audio Listening Resources by Frank Cuta

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Are you satisfied with your current level of access to audio listening material? Very few blind persons take full advantage of the huge wealth of live and recorded reading materials that are at our disposal. Not only can you devour insane quantities of recorded books and magazines, but you can also listen to live broadcasts of many local papers, listen to audio-described movies and TV shows, and listen to internet radio and podcasts with your accessible technology. Most of this material is free.

There are over 15,000 blind and visually-impaired people in Washington state. We can only hope that most of them have heard about statewide services such as our wonderful Washington Talking Book and Braille Library (WTBBL). If you are not yet a patron of the free services offered by WTBBL, you can get signed up by calling 800-542-0866. The library makes available over 130,000 book titles, in both audio and Braille formats, as well as most of the more popular magazines. Both the books and the audio players are free. Through a limited agreement with Bookshare, WTBBL also offers more than 1.2 million additional titles, mostly as text files.

Many people discount the value of their local newspaper. It is actually a tremendous resource. Only there do you find grocery ads, comics, and columns like Dear Abby and Carolyn Hacks. For us, the only remaining live radio reading service in this state is here in the Tri-Cities. But readers throughout the state might still benefit from our grocery ads from Safeway and Fred Meyer, which probably do not vary much from one side of the state to the other. Here in the Tri-Cities, we can listen to the paper for an hour each morning starting at 8 a.m. using specially modified radio receivers. But these early morning readings are also broadcast statewide, and are archived through a Facebook group that I manage. This group is hidden from the general public. Contact me if you wish to be invited to join it.

If you use a streaming service such as iTunes or Tune-in Radio, you can also easily connect to the GSR Radio 1 service in Vancouver, plus about 20 similar local radio reading services from all over the country and the world. Just search your streaming service for "radio reading." Most of these  
services offer 24-hour programming. If you browse through these radio reading services, you will find tons of obscure special-interest periodicals that you might not find anywhere else. My favorite tool for listening to such internet streams is my Humanware Victor Stream, but you can also use streaming services on your smartphone, computer, or possibly even your smart speaker.

If it's commercial big screen movies that you long for, most of your local theaters, such as those run by AMC, have available upon request hand-held radio receivers that you can check out for any showing. These units use an audio earphone to provide you with a description of the non-verbal action on the screen. You will be absolutely amazed by how well some of these extremely high-action films are described.

However, if you do not care about the big picture, the big sound, and the big expense of your local theater, most popular audio-described movie soundtracks are also now available free on the internet through a website called audiovault.net. Online registration for audiovault is free, using either your computer or smartphone, and gives you access to tens of thousands of movies, plus many complete TV series. I have downloaded whole years of South Park, See, Big Bang Theory, Star Trek, and Almost Human. These files do not take up a lot of storage space on your personal device since they just contain the audio – no video.

Also available via the web is an enormous wealth of podcasts, internet radio, and social media resources. To get started, I encourage you to download our American Council of the Blind app, ACB Link. Here, you will find 10 channels of blindness-related programs and activities, including the immensely popular Media 5, the community channel of the American Council of the Blind.

All of the popular podcast apps, like Overcast and Downcast, can provide you with access to the recorded content of ACB national conventions, and our own "WCB Newsline Unleashed" podcast. This last is a Washington Council of the Blind program produced by Zack Hurtz and the Newsline podcast team. In addition, ACB has a monthly newsletter called the Braille Forum, available on www.acb.org. The WCB also has a quarterly newsletter, the Newsline, available at [www.wcbinfo.org](http://www.wcbinfo.org).

The National Federation of the Blind (nfb.org) offers us another unique resource for reading local newspapers and many popular magazines. It is also called the Newsline, not to be confused with our WCB newsletter. If you want to keep up with things going on in your hometown, this is the way to do it. To subscribe to this service, you must be a patron of WTBBL, or have some other way to prove that you are legally blind. The NFB's Newsline service can be accessed through dial-up phone or via downloaded text files.

Lastly, two of our blind friends here in Eastern Washington, Rick and Deb Lewis, have an internet radio service that you may want to check out if you like talk shows and music from the fifties and sixties. It is called "The Ride" and you can find it on ooTunes, or ask for it on your smart speaker. It is automated most of the time, but there are also several great live programs. Try Saturday morning at 8 a.m.

Mostly in this article I hope to increase your awareness of WTBBL and services like the reading of local papers and described movies. For technical details on how to connect to Bookshare, WCB Unleashed, Audiovault, and the NFB Newsline, I encourage you to join us on our monthly WCB Tech Chat, held by phone conference every third Saturday at 7:00 p.m.

## Podtastic Casts Artificial Intelligence Meets the Optacon by Reginald George

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This article is about the intersection of two very different technologies, one very old, and one brand new. It’s about the Optacon, a reading machine for the blind that changed my life at the age of 12. At the Kansas State School for the Blind, we were given extensive training, and those of us who excelled in its use were provided with this wonderful $3,000 device, about the size of a textbook. It enabled us to read normal print. This was the stuff of science fiction at that time. It took over 50 years and the invention of the Kurzweil reader before technology would truly catch up with the portability of the Optacon, if not its functionality.

Those of you who also received this training, I would love to hear about your experiences with this wonderful reading machine that has never been duplicated in quite the same way and was so far ahead of its time.

This story is also about a new artificial intelligence (AI) network in the news, which was only released in November. It is very difficult for me to explain. It’s a computer program, software, an app, I can’t get my head around it, a neural network named Chat GPT, which stands for Generative Pre-Trained Transformer, that lives at a research institute called Open AI. It scoops up information from all over the web and learns from it. They are training it, kind of like Watson from the ‘80s, to communicate and answer questions, but it does so much more. It writes articles, stories, poems, essays, computer code, letters for people, speeches and reports. It simulates human thought. It’s not self-aware yet, but it’s definitely disruptive to society because people are seeing the potential of how much this technology could change the world and automate the tasks that, before, only humans could perform. For a limited time, anyone can create a free account on Chat GPT for research purposes and have a play.

I knew I wanted to write about the Optacon. I’ve done my homework and collected lots of facts about the history and the people who made it happen. But being a rather lazy fellow by nature, I thought maybe my new friend Chat GPT wouldn’t mind writing it for me. From now on, let’s just call him Chatbot. I had already been thinking about my old Optacon because there was not very much information on the internet. So, I thought that might be a good way to test the capabilities of this new system everyone is raving about. There is one guy out in California, Richard Oehm, who still repairs old machines. We will get to him later. Richard is alive and well. Optacons will still read things that any other reading machine like an iPhone can’t even touch, such as allowing a blind person to teach themselves to read things like schematic diagrams for building electronic circuits by learning what the shapes of the symbols mean.

I opened up a free account so I could meet Chatbot and put it to work. The process was accessible and quick.

I wrote: “Please help me write a 1,000-word interesting, detailed, yet humorous article on the history of the Optacon reading machine for the blind.”

I sat back and rubbed my hands together with glee. It will never get this I thought. About 2 seconds later, this was its answer.

“Sure, I'd be happy to help! The Optacon was a groundbreaking device that allowed blind individuals to read printed text using their sense of touch. Here's a detailed and humorous article on the history of the Optacon reading machine:

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The Optacon: “A Brief (But Hilarious) History

If you're a fan of groundbreaking technology for the blind, you've probably heard of the Optacon. But do you know the full story behind this amazing reading machine? Buckle up, because it's a wild ride.”

Reg thinks to himself: “Oh boy!”

Chatbot: “The Optacon, short for Optical to Tactile Converter, was developed in the 1960s by Dr. Leon D. Harmon, a researcher at Bell Labs. Harmon was inspired to create the Optacon after seeing a blind man struggle to read a menu in a restaurant. He realized that there was a need for a device that could help blind individuals read printed text, and set out to create one.”

Reg says: “Oh my goodness, wrong, wrong, wrong, Chatbot. You are so wrong. But what concerns me the most is how blithely and confidently you spout your nonsense and half-truths as you contaminate our history. It’s hard enough to keep the record straight, with all the disinformation floating around about origin stories, without robots confusing us even more. And if this was turned in on a college paper, is a professor going to have time to run down the truth? Or are they just going to take your word for it?”

Let’s hear from Richard Oehm, who had his first job at Telesensory Systems in the 60s, the manufacturer of the Optacon. He would be considered a primary source. Here he gives us the real story of the invention of the Optacon, along with a brief description. This comes from the transcript of episode 216 of the Freedom Scientific podcast, posted in June of last year, and is absolutely worth a listen. The following is an excerpt from the podcast transcript.

Glen: “I think there are a lot of people who are listening who may have heard about the Optacon but don’t really know how it works. And it’s played such an important role in your life, I think it’s worth describing.”

Richard: “Yeah, well, sure. And especially since it’s still in my life playing a role. But at any rate it’s a device that was invented by John Linvill, a professor at Stanford, for the benefit of his daughter, blind daughter who was going through college. But the Optacon is an instrument that – the whole instrument itself is about the size of a textbook, and it’s battery powered, but you can also connect it to AC power. And it has a camera that’s about the size of a pocket knife with a zoom control on it.

“And in practice what you do is you pass the camera across a page of print or whatever it is that you’re trying to discern, and an array of tactile pins are part of the instrument, and that array of tactile pins vibrates and allows you to feel the shape of the character, the number, the symbol, whatever the camera sees. You have to know all the print – what the printed letters of the alphabet look like, what numbers look like, what various symbols look like. And then you can use the adjustments and capabilities of the Optacon to reproduce those images from a page of print or from whatever the camera is viewing.

“You know, it really does help you to see the relationships that are obvious to your sighted peers, especially when you’re looking at graphics or a table or that sort of thing. It’s very difficult to orally communicate those concepts, but it’s very easy to see them when you’re looking at it with an Optacon. So, you get a lot of spatial information. And the device was sold from basically I think 1973 until Telesensory went bankrupt in 1996. And there are still people using it today. And I hope that there will be people that will use it in the future.

“I would like to see another Optacon get developed and be available. And, of course, if it’s going to be valuable today, it would have to also have some sort of capability to interface with mobile phones, maybe computers, stuff like that. But it’s really one of the best ways that a blind person has access to graphical material and material other than just straight-ahead print.”

Glen: “How did the Optacon impact your career beyond reading meters?”

Richard: “Well, I was able to look at schematic diagrams. So, for example, if I wanted to troubleshoot a problem with my stereo receiver or a problem with my family’s television set or whatever, and if I could get ahold of the schematic, I could understand what was connected to what, how the circuit worked, and maybe be able to hone in on whatever the issue was.”

Glen: “How did you begin to understand schematic diagrams and how they worked? Did you explore with the Optacon and figure it out that way? Or did someone describe them to you and therefore the Optacon could then sort of verify what the verbal descriptions were?”

Richard: “I worked both directions actually. When I was going through school and taking electronics classes, I had readers, and my mom and other people took a Raised Line Drawing Kit, you know, the thing with the cellophane, and you can write on? … And I had them draw out the symbols. And then I would memorize those symbols and look for those with the Optacon when I had a schematic in front of me. And then the other thing is I would sometimes see symbols on the diagram that I didn’t have a library of in my Raised Line Drawing Kit cellophane collection, and in that situation then I would ask a sighted partner or somebody, what the hell is this? And then I would get it that way. So actually, I came from both directions.”

Glen: “We probably should mention that for a limited time only, for a limited number of users, you probably could assemble an Optacon and sell one to someone, right from your collection of spare parts.”

Richard: “That is correct, yes. I can do that. It’s expensive. I mean, this isn’t cheap. But the prices run anywhere from – I try to keep the thing low. But anywhere from around $800 or $900 to about $1,400 is the most I’ve ever charged for a used, warrantied replacement Optacon.”

This was an absolutely fantastic podcast episode. Richard is a radio personality in his own right, and a great interview subject who is gifted with an incredible memory. He has many stories and anecdotes about how he landed the jobs he got through the years. He worked for cable companies repairing equipment, then started his own shop repairing their equipment, and has done this work as probably the only blind person in the country. It became second nature to him to find a way. If you have Optacon needs, you can reach him at: [oehmelec@samobile.net](mailto:oehmelec@samobile.net)

You can find this FS Cast episode at [FSCast 216, A demo of the new JAWS Notification History Manager, and a visit with Richard Oehm – Freedom Scientific Blog](https://blog.freedomscientific.com/fscast-216-a-demo-of-the-new-jaws-notification-history-manager-and-a-visit-with-richard-oehm/)

Now let’s go back to Chat GPT for his version of the Optacon story.

Chatbot: “The Optacon worked by using a small camera to scan text and convert it into a series of tiny vibrations that the user could feel on their fingertip.”

Reg: “True.”

Chatbot: “The user would place their finger on the device and move it along the text, feeling the vibrations as they went. The device also had a small display that showed the user the letters and words as they were being read.”

Reg says: “No, Chatbot, no display. You obviously have some things to learn about blindness. So far, the funniest thing in this article is you! I would unroll the very thin cord from the camera and place it on the book or paper, hold it with my right hand, and move it across the lines. There were little rollers on the bottom of the camera and a little slider on the top to zoom the picture in and out. My left hand would be inside the box, and my index finger would be placed over the block of pins that would come up and vibrate making the shapes of the letters.”

Chatbot: “The Optacon was a major breakthrough in assistive technology for the blind, and it was met with widespread enthusiasm when it was first introduced. However, it wasn't without its quirks. For one thing, it was quite bulky and heavy, weighing in at over 5 pounds. It also required the user to wear a special headset, which made it look like they were part of a science fiction movie.”

Reg says: “Untrue. By the time it was released it was rechargeable and weighed about 2 pounds, and no earphones were involved. It would look impressive by today’s standards in its beautiful leather case.”

Chatbot: “Despite these drawbacks, the Optacon was a major success and helped thousands of blind individuals read printed text. It was even featured in a popular television show at the time, ‘The Bionic Woman,’ where the main character used it to read classified documents.”

Reg says: “OK, say what? As Dave says to HAL 9000 in the movie ‘2001: A Space Odyssey,’ ‘Open the pod bay doors!’ Let me out of here. You’ve lost your artificial mind!”

Chatbot: “But the Optacon's reign as the top reading machine for the blind was short-lived. In the 1980s, the development of portable electronic text-to-speech devices made the Optacon obsolete. These devices were smaller, lighter, and could read text aloud, making them much more convenient for users. Today, the Optacon is a footnote in the history of assistive technology for the blind. But it will always be remembered as a pioneering device that helped pave the way for the many advancements that have come since. So, there you have it, the (slightly humorous) history of the Optacon reading machine. It may not be the most glamorous piece of technology, but it's an important part of the story of how we've helped the blind navigate the printed world.”

So, there you have it: The story of Chatbot, who lost his mind while trying to tell me the story of the Optacon. Not quite sure how we went from hilarious to slightly humorous. That last part was considerably over simplified, and about 20 years off, but sadly, not far from the truth. The Optacon is, as Chatbot said, “a footnote in the history of assistive technology for the blind,” but it lasted for about 30 years in various forms, and right along with computers it shattered the glass ceiling, got us through higher education, showed the sighted world we could do anything, and allowed many of us to find and maintain employment in fields such as law, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Maybe it will return in another form someday. Everything old is new again if you wait long enough.

In case you have Optacons lying around that need repair or modification, or you wish to purchase or donate, Richard Ohem’s contact information follows. You may write him at [oehmelec@samobile.net.](mailto:oehmelec@samobile.net) We recently had a great chat by phone ourselves, and he hopes to remain in business for a long time to come.

For a fascinating look at the story of Chat GPT, and where this technology may be headed, check out “the Daily Podcast” from “The New York Times” called “Did Artificial Intelligence Just Get Too Smart?”

There is so much more to the story of the Optacon, and no more room to tell it here. I wanted to find Candy Linvill herself now, talking about the Optacon and what it has meant in her life. I never found that, but I found something that moves me almost as much every time I listen. This video is from 1964. Think about that. To me, this symbolizes, as much as anything, a father’s love for his daughter. She graduated from Stanford and eventually got her doctorate. He assembled this team of very smart people that made dreams come true for so many of us. Something that would have seemed completely impossible at the time. All this work came out of the Stanford Research Institute. So many blind students were going there in the 60s, doing work we didn’t even know about, creating our future. This four-minute video on the early research still puts tears in my eyes. To hear the person this was invented for, reading print, probably attached to a computer the size of a room, but the point is that it works for her, and it is historic. Maybe if you hear her reading print with this system you will understand why I was so moved. I am amazed that only 15 people have watched and liked it in the world since it was posted. This is the description from the page.

This is an excerpt from an episode of "spectrum: NET International Science Magazine", a television documentary series produced by the National Educational Television Network. This episode is entitled "Experimental Biology: New Sight for the Blind" and aired sometime during 1964-1965. The excerpt presented here is from 04:55 through 09:48 of the original show. Main personnel shown here are Jim Bliss (the researcher) and Candy Linvill (the research subject). Note that as of this film, the technology for the Optacon camera had not yet been developed, and the images projected to the tactile array were being generated by computer.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_b0J1sI-DOo>

Ten years later, I was holding one in my hands.

# HISTORY

## Voices: Our Untold Story A Cheery Voice by Chris Coulter

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During my time as a member of the Washington Council of the Blind (WCB), I have had many encounters with Marilyn Donnelly, who passed away recently. We all recognized her bright, cheery voice on the WCB phone line, and I also knew her from my time as a member of the King County Chapter. I got to know her better through the work we were a part of on the Crisis Committee. She was certainly friendly and very helpful to all of us, and was a friend to many who were involved in WCB, in which she played a major role.

My biggest recollection of Marilyn was two-fold. She was ready and willing to make connections with all of the people she knew in order to make life a little happier and a lot warmer for each of us. She also brought together the people who worked on the Crisis Committee, bringing them from all over the state and sharing information that would assist in finding the people who needed resources.

Many of us have had discussions about how much we appreciated her. She was quiet, but her voice was distinctive. She never seemed to influence people, but her influence found its way into every room she was in.

Earlier, I told you that her loving presence was two-fold, but there is a third part, which was Yummy, Yummy Grab Bags. For those who don’t know, Yummy, Yummy Grab Bags are assorted candies. I never ate one. I think they might have been all gone by the time I got there.

Editor’s Note: The following is an excerpt from the previously printed Cheshire Cat Interview #3 with Marilyn. I thought we all might enjoy hearing her own words one more time.

Marilyn Donnelly, who volunteered for the WCB 1-800 phone line for 30 years said the question she loves to ask people the most is “How are you?” It sounds simple, but let that sink in for a minute. When you ask someone this, do you really want to know the answer? Are you asking it with sincere intentions of fully listening to the reality they may be facing at that moment? She then went on to explain that sometimes if she listens closely to the answer, she might be able to find ways to help bring a little happiness to this person. And her own answer was even better... “I’m old but I’m very positive, no doom and gloom from me, so live, love and be happy.”

# ADVOCACY AND LEGISLATION

## Bell Faces Human Rights Complaint Over Alleged Inaccessibility for Blind Customers by Nicole Thompson, The Canadian Press

This excellent report from the Canadian Press first appeared December 26, 2022.

TORONTO — Bell Communications Inc. is facing a human rights complaint over allegations that it's failing to provide full service to its blind customers.

The company's set-top boxes don't include the screen-reading technology that enables blind people to navigate through menus, use applications or discern what channel they're on, Toronto lawyer David Lepofsky alleges in submissions to the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

In the initial submission filed in mid-2021, Lepofsky, who is blind, said he's not able to access the television services he pays for on his TV without the help of a sighted person.

"This is a corporate giant with gazillions of dollars," Lepofsky said in an interview. "It's not like it's some small little business. The accommodation I'm seeking is one that all their competitors provide. This is an accommodation that U.S. law has required since 2016."

In its responses to the commission, Bell acknowledged that its set-top boxes don't have screen readers, but argued in its response to Lepofsky's complaint that it complies with CRTC regulations — many of which are related to the provision of described video, an audio track that plays over TV and movies and narrates visual aspects of the story.

The commission has yet to decide how it will proceed with Lepofsky's complaint.

The lawyer has a long, storied history of advocating for disability rights and was inducted into the Order of Canada in 1995. He went on to fight a yearslong legal battle that led to a requirement that the Toronto Transit Commission announce stops on subways, streetcars and buses rather than just displaying them visually.

With this complaint against Bell, Lepofsky is seeking to entrench in law a requirement that TV service providers offer screen-reading technology for their blind customers.

"They can't possibly argue that they're entitled to refuse to provide it under the Human Rights Code because they have a duty to accommodate my blindness," Lepofsky said.

Screen readers use text-to-speech technology to read aloud the contents of a computer, phone or TV screen, whether those contents were pulled up by the system or inputted by the user. They come pre-installed in some pieces of technology — but not Bell's PVRs, which are required to access all the features provided with Bell's Fibe TV and satellite services.

Both Rogers Communications Inc. and Shaw Communications Inc. said their set-top boxes are screen-reader compatible.

The lack of a screen reader on Bell's set-top boxes means the services Bell does provide to blind customers, such as described video, are not accessible to the very people they're meant to help, Lepofsky said. He can't navigate the menu to access that feature without the help of a sighted person.

His complaint argues that puts Lepofsky and other blind people at a disadvantage. "Television and film are a key source of news and entertainment. They are also cultural touchpoints that are important to engage and participate in the community," it reads.

In outlining its efforts to make its products more accessible for blind customers, Bell also said it was making its mobile applications more screen reader friendly.

Lepofsky said he didn't receive any concrete commitments from Bell until he brought the complaint to the CHRC.

In its response to the commission, the company laid out a timeline for implementing accessibility improvements.

It's already met some of those deadlines by starting to integrate screen-reader compatibility into its apps and websites, including for Crave, the Bell-owned streaming service.

The company has also set a deadline to make Crave screen-reader compatible on "connected TV devices" by the first quarter of 2023.

"We were working on a number of accessibility improvements before Mr. Lepofsky filed his complaint, and we continue to work on providing a better experience for customers with disabilities regardless of the outcome of this case," a spokeswoman for Bell said in an emailed statement.

She didn't say which improvements were already on the agenda.

A spokeswoman for the Canadian Human Rights Commission said it was legally prohibited from discussing whether it has received a complaint or discussing the specifics of a complaint.

But if the commission decides to proceed with the complaint, it could refer the case to mediation or conciliation, refer it directly to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, or investigate the complaint further.

The Canadian Human Rights Commission said it's currently dealing with a high volume of discrimination complaints, with limited resources, so timelines are fluid.

## Why I am Proud to be Blind by Jonathan Mosen

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Partially in celebration of World Braille day, WCB Newsline proudly reprints this essay that was originally read on the Mosen At Large Podcast, and appears here with the kind permission of its author. You can find the original post here: <https://mosen.org/BlindPride>

I often mention on my Mosen At Large Podcast that I am proud to be blind. Recently, I was challenged by a listener and asked how I can possibly be proud of having a serious, debilitating condition.

I am glad to say that disability pride, and blind pride as a subset of that, is on the rise. Yet it is an incomprehensible concept to some.

I keep a gratitude journal, where I write at least 10 things every day for which I am grateful. So, it was easy for me to consult that journal, where I have often written of things relating to blindness for which I am grateful and write this piece on why I am proud to be blind. You can hear the audio of this in Mosen At Large episode 119, and I have also uploaded the audio to this page, but here is the text of what I said in case you prefer to read it.

I am profoundly proud to be blind. I am proud of the fact that as a kid, when my older siblings would have been found out for reading at night, I read in the dark as much as I liked, a Braille book tucked under the covers on winter nights.

I am proud to be blind, because it connects me with a proud history. I share a characteristic with a man who gave us the priceless gift of functional, efficient literacy. Louis Braille was an example of “nothing about us without us” in the 19th century, long before we used that phrase. His genius invention was derided by sighted people who were certain they knew what was best for us. He was ridiculed. His code was driven underground and his books were burned. But he prevailed, because he was blind. He devised his code for himself, he gave it, at considerable personal cost, to all of us.

I am proud to be blind, because of all the other blind people who followed in Louis Braille’s footsteps, blind people innovating and inventing for our collective advancement, imagining a better future and making it real. Whether it be Larry Skutchan with his methodical mind and interminable patience, or Ted Henter with his zeal and entrepreneurship, or David Costution and Glen Gordon who believed that Windows could be truly useable and then made it come true, or the blind people now working on the inside of mainstream companies who are our champions, we dreamed it, we created it.

I am proud to be blind, because blind people are the reason the 33 RPM record was developed, so talking books could be distributed more efficiently.

And speaking of talking books, I am proud to be blind, because blind people are the reason talking books exist. Now, sighted people are using them, too.

I am proud to be blind, because the original reading machine was created for us. We started the journey of digitizing printed text that resulted in the scanners that are still commonplace in offices today.

I am proud to be blind, because long before the term PDA was in the lexicon of sighted people, we were taking notes, keeping track of appointments and reading books on devices like Keynotes and Braille’n’Speaks.

I am proud to be blind, because we were one of the reasons computers started to talk. Technology is better because of blind people. There are so many examples of technology when we, proudly, have been the blind who led the sighted.

I am proud to be blind, because I am not influenced by someone’s physical appearance but, instead, gain information from the tone of a voice and the words that are said.

I am proud to be blind, because it has made me a more lateral thinker, developing and refining alternative techniques to access a wide range of information so I can thrive in a largely sight-dependent world.

I am proud to be blind, because even though my other senses aren’t sharper than anyone else’s, in fact I have a dual sensory loss, like many blind people I use them well. It makes me smile when I can tell what type of audio processor is being used on a radio station, or when another blind person can tell the kind of car that’s passing by simply by the sound it’s making, or when a blind person gives another blind person an instruction like, “when your cane hits a pole on my street that emits a fifth octave A-Flat, you’re outside my house”.

I am proud to be blind, because of the legacy of great blind civil rights leaders around the world. Often ostracised and branded radical troublemakers, they confronted, and are still confronting today, the tyranny of low expectations and the disabling decisions society has chosen to make. They challenged the damaging, fundamentally flawed notion that we had neither the ability nor the right to achieve self-determination, that it wasn’t necessary for society to be accessible, or inclusive, or accepting. Their belief in a fairer tomorrow unshackled us from institutions and shattered disempowering paternalism. Their tenacity has seen the increasing availability of better training, much of it driven by blind people ourselves, and increased opportunity through civil rights legislation.

I am proud to be blind, because as a subset of the world’s largest minority, disabled people, blind people led the way in the disability movement, securing legislative victories long before they were common for much of the rest of the sector. I am grateful every day of my life for those blind people who took on those difficult causes, displayed tenacity and stated their cases again, and again, and again until progress was slowly but surely made. I am proud of the personal responsibility I feel as a blind person to always cherish and defend, never take for granted, and constantly build upon the legacy of civil rights victories that I have inherited and benefited from. I am mindful that they must not be squandered, and I am proud to stand up, be counted, and do my moral duty to advance that legacy so that the next generation has even more opportunity than I have had.

I am proud to be blind, because it has shaped who I am, it is part of my identity and it has helped define me. I accept that. I embrace that.

I am proud to be blind, because in being blind I contribute to the rich tapestry and the diversity of humankind.

I am proud to be blind, because no matter how many negative signals are sent, I know that being blind makes me no less a person of worth.

I am proud to be blind, because the opposite of pride is shame, and my blindness is nothing to be ashamed of.

I am proud to be blind, and therefore share a characteristic with talented people from all walks of life. Blind people are parents, devoted, loving parents, some of whom have had their babies literally snatched from their loving arms, an atrocity no capable and loving parent should endure, and all for no other reason than people getting it horribly wrong about blindness. I am proud that we as blind people show those parents love, solidarity, and a steadfast determination to get those children back where they belong.

Blind people are in factories and farms, law practices and legislatures, sandwich shops and start-ups. I am proud of the blind teachers, software developers, businesspeople, mechanics, transcribers, musicians and even medical doctors. There is very little we can’t do and there are few professions where you can’t find a blind person, often to many people’s surprise. The only trouble is, the world doesn’t necessarily know that. And that’s the biggest reason I am proud to be blind. Because every day, just by getting on with my life, I defy the odds in a disabling society, we defy expectations where there is little disability confidence. When people tell us we can’t, we show them yes, we can. It can be exhausting sometimes. We may get knocked down, and sometimes we may feel like we’re down for the count. But eventually, most of us get up again. We apply for that one more job. We work around that inaccessible website. We keep calm and carry on when we’re treated like a helpless child in the street, or when walking into a store, or when yet another ride share driver declines to take our guide dog. That takes guts, it takes tenacity. The odds are stacked against us, but we march on, we make progress. Go us!

Yes, I am proud, proud, a thousand times proud to be blind.

# THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT

## Invitation to Our Table by Hayley Agers

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Each year, as the planning begins for another youth track at the Washington Council of the Blind (WCB) convention, I find myself reflecting on years past, and I can’t imagine it being any better. I am proven wrong every time and can feel it the minute the first few families arrive.

Once again this year, the WCB Families Committee partnered with the Department of Services for the Blind (DSB), to host our annual gathering of youth and their families, in conjunction with the WCB convention. We had 18 youth in attendance, along with several parents. The ages ranged from nine to early twenties, and despite this age gap, the support and encouragement these youth gave to one another was amazing.

The focus was on social etiquette, with an emphasis on dining skills. Activities included a scavenger hunt around the hotel, which was a great team-building experience, a chance for youth to work on orientation and mobility skills, problem solving, and overcoming some fears about being in a strange place with many unfamiliar faces.

They also participated in a peer-led “this is what chaos looks like” dining experience, followed by a discussion and role play of how to better deal with some issues brought up. Dining trivia was a good chance for the youth to compete for prizes, and laugh while learning.

At lunch on Saturday, while parents got a chance to connect during a private parent-only luncheon, their children enjoyed a delicious taco bar. There is always a method behind the madness, though. This wasn’t just a typical taco lunch. This was a buffet taco bar. Yup, you read this correctly. Buffets are one of the things many of us, as blind people, avoid at all cost. But here they were, these brave and willing teenagers, tackling some of their fears, advocating for themselves when help was needed, letting the person behind them know what was coming next, and so on. They did it with class and had fun doing it.

My daughter, Sydney, even got to get in on the fun. OK, she may not describe it with the same word I chose. She may actually say “frightening” rather than fun. She was made to do the meal with no vision, too, and the idea of pouring lemonade with no sight gave her anxiety.

She said, “Mum, I was so scared I’d look stupid, that I’d spill the drink all over the place, and I felt like I should be able to do this with ease, but couldn’t.”

My response to her was, “Honey, if you felt like this in the few minutes you had to do life with no vision, and you only participated in one aspect of a person’s day, imagine how blind people might feel like this much of the time.”

I love bringing her to these events, and I see her grow each time she goes. While I hope she will be helpful if needed, my hope always is that she will leave with a little more empathy and compassion, and a few more friends.

And one final thing, let’s not forget to mention how the youth rocked the talent show and the karaoke nights. What a bold statement of “you’re only young once!” They got up in front of the room, without a concern of what others would think, with the primary goal of just having fun. We could learn a lot from these youth.

A huge thank you to everyone on the WCB Families Committee who were able to be a part of the days’ events, to DSB for their help with planning and supporting these families, and most of all, to the parents who took time out of their busy lives to invest in their child’s journey on this road of blindness. I am so moved, but never surprised, by the huge hearts of these parents, in their desires to support and understand, encourage not enable, and for the love they show towards one another. It’s powerful. Every year I am truly blessed to be a part of it.

## A Parent’s Reflections by Tammy Johnson

Leading up to the 2022 Washington Council of the Blind (WCB) state convention, my list of reasons why I could not attend began to grow. I am behind on work, the guest room needs cleaning for the in-laws’ visit, my checkbook needs balancing, I need to buy ingredients for the bake sale, and maybe eventually, I will finish that book that is overdue from the library. But regardless of how long that list was, nothing was going to keep my son and me from attending, because something that has been on the top of my list this year is to connect with others in our WCB community. The convention offered the perfect opportunity for that.

As a parent of a visually-impaired child, I find tremendous value in connecting with other parents and their children. We may come from different backgrounds and journeys, but we all share a common bond through navigating this world with our children. We all desire for our children to feel accepted and confident in who they are, and for them to recognize all the contributions they make.

The convention gave our youth that opportunity. I witnessed them meeting new friends and reconnecting with old ones. I watched confidence grow as they stood up in front of the crowd and performed. I observed them contributing to the convention, not just as a youth participant, but as a member of the WCB community. As parents, we realized we are not alone, and our children were able to experience firsthand all the resources and people available to them. The WCB Families Committee and Department of Services for the Blind staff offered a supportive and welcoming environment for both parents and youth.

So, even though items on my to-do list went unchecked, and the library book had to be returned prior to finishing it, I will always make attending the WCB state convention a priority. Everything else can wait.

# AGENCY UPDATES

## DSB Update by Michael MacKillop, Executive Director, Department of Services for the Blind

**Michael.mackillop@dsb.wa.gov**

Hello, WCB Newsline. For this quarter’s submission to the Newsline, we at DSB wanted to give you a heads up to the four big-ticket items we are seeking new or more funds for from the state Legislature. I am writing this on a chilly, snowy day at the start of December, and by the time the Newsline is published the governor’s budget will have been published and we will know which parts of our ask will be moved forward by the governor.

The four areas we are seeking funding are to serve youth under age 14; bolster the Business Enterprise overhaul projects; increase vendor fees and numbers served in Independent Living; and provide for a position that ensures internal accessibility in agency documents and electronic forms, applications, and data systems.

**Item 1: Funding to serve youth under age 14**

**Brief background:** DSB lost the ability to utilize pre-employment transition service/VR dollars to serve youth under age 14 in career exploration counseling and self-advocacy services. As a result, there are no allocable funds that allow the agency to provide services to this age group.

**Ask:** A continuing $322,000 each year, totaling $644,000 for the next biennium:

* Two FTEs providing direct services statewide to over 100 youth under age 14.
* Forty percent administrative support for youth program.
* Costs for workshops, activities, supplies, and materials.

**Item 2: BEP Facilities Overhaul**

**Brief background:** The pandemic had taken a heavy toll on the BEP operations by locking customers out of government buildings, and the increased telework options require a radical shift in the model of BEP operations to be profitable for blind entrepreneurs. The agency was approved last supplemental legislative session for a total of $9.15 million over five years to overhaul existing BEP food-service facilities. Any amounts above a minimal carry forward amount ($1.52 million) requires a formal decision package. More realistic needs emerged in the first months of the project, requiring additional requested funds.

**New ask:** A one-time project total of $11.08 million

* Account for increased inflationary and supply chain costs.
* Address necessary additions such as factoring sales tax and including funds for project management.
* Re-configuration of project timelines and facilities was included.
* Training for blind BEP operators for updated facilities and business model.

**Item 3: Independent Living Vendor Capacity Rebuild**

**Brief background:** Vendor capacity for provision of independent living services statewide has decreased due to individual providers aging out and program providers losing funding. The agency needs to develop recruitment and retention efforts, including increasing vendor fees. Also, funding for independent living services for adults under age 55 has decreased by 32 percent, and adults who require services and don’t have a goal of employment are being waitlisted.

**Ask:** A continuing $500,000 annually, total of $1 million for the biennium:

* Increase ability to serve those under age 55 (+70 per year) and over age 55 (+200 per year).
* Increase provider fees to attract new talent and keep current talent.
* Create additional reasonable accommodation rates to attract new talent from within blind, deaf/blind and low-vision community.

**Item 4: internal Accessibility Coordinator**

**Brief background:** Maintaining accessibility of agency documents and tools requires a full-time FTE to provide ongoing training to staff; test tools, applications and upgraded software programs to ensure accessibility and usability; and negotiate and educate around access to partner agencies that supply required tools, documents, and forms for DSB staff.

**Ask:** A continuing $170,000 each year, totaling $340,000 for biennium:

* Fund one FTE, supplies and assorted staff costs.

We had shared this legislative ask information at the Nov. 29 Community Forum. I want to thank all the community members who joined and provided thoughtful input on how we at DSB can work to improve our outreach efforts, community partnering, and customer experience. We take community input to heart and fold it into our agency conversations – you make us better.

Thank you all, and best wishes for a great 2023 ahead for us all.

## Skills, Tools, and Confidence What is the Independent Living Program: Sarah’s Story by Kim Canaan Washington State IL Program Manager

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The Washington State Department of Services for the Blind has several programs critical to its mission of inclusion, independence, and economic vitality for people with visual disabilities. The Independent Living Program (IL) is one of those programs. IL clients experience difficulty performing customary life activities due to their vision loss, diminishing their ability to live independently. Community-based service providers around Washington state provide the skills, tools, and confidence clients need to regain their independence in their homes or communities.

IL providers help clients increase or maintain their independence in four key ways. Providers offer training in a variety of low-vision or blindness skills, like reading with a magnifier or dialing a telephone by touch. They offer support through brief adjustment counseling to help clients feel more optimistic about the future. Providers connect clients to other services they may qualify for and benefit from. Finally, clients often receive tools, called assistive technology, that make accomplishing day-to-day tasks possible or easier, including magnifiers, talking watches, canes, tactile dots for kitchen appliances, and so much more. Although clients usually participate in more than one element of the program, just one can lead to increased confidence, especially for clients new to vision loss.

The IL program is not a one-size-fits-all sort of program. Providers recognize that every client is unique. Some clients are vision-loss experts, knowing what they need before the provider arrives for their first home visit. Some clients are brand new to vision loss and terrified and have no idea what is possible (or if anything is possible at all). So, providers approach each client differently, offering to do whatever best fits the client’s needs or capacity for tackling new challenges. In addition, sometimes IL clients begin services in a state of shock or even denial. Providers recognize that these clients may need a non-intimidating entry point that opens the door to further services down the road. For these clients, often a talking book player to help them access reading materials or a talking watch that tells the time on demand is all they are ready for. Regardless of what the client’s goals are, the IL providers are ready to help them achieve it.

To become an IL client, an individual must be 24 years or older and not working, seeking work, or attending school. (People who are younger than 24 are better served through the DSB’s Pre-Employment Transition Services Program.) IL clients do not need to be eligible to work, meaning that undocumented immigrants or people here for extended visits from other countries are eligible for the IL program.

The following success story, about a woman in her sixties, is just one example of how the IL program significantly increases independence and quality of life. Her name has been changed for privacy. Sarah, a 65-year-old woman from Okanogan County, has myriad health challenges complicated by her loss of vision due to diabetic retinopathy. Facing type 2 diabetes, a partial hearing impairment, heart disease, hypotension, and regular dialysis appointments, Sarah felt that her health issues limited her ability to connect with others outside of her home. This lack of community and control over her health exacerbated Sarah’s struggle with anxiety and depression.

When meeting with her IL provider, Sarah expressed that she wanted to regain her independence. Sarah’s husband and home health aide did almost every task for her, and she wanted to have more autonomy in her day-to-day life. Sarah’s IL provider gave her an assortment of assistive technology items to use: a talking scale to take her weight privately, a talking watch and large-print calendar to keep track of her appointments, and a talking thermometer to monitor her temperature. Beyond that, Sarah’s provider wanted her to be able to enjoy her leisure time again. Sarah was given handheld magnifiers in combination with a DeskBrite lamp that she uses every day for reading mail, her magazines, and any other printed materials she comes across. Sarah was also shown TV glasses to try – she was stunned by the difference it made. For the first time in years, she was able to read the TV guide and see detail on her television.

As Sarah received services from her IL provider, those around her could see an immense change in her mood. At her first visit, the provider noted Sarah never smiled or laughed. Over time, she could tell that Sarah was now experiencing joy again. Her provider mentioned that the change in Sarah was a wonderful transformation to observe. As one of Sarah’s home health aides said, “Sarah found her smile again because of the Independent Living Program.”

If you or someone you know may benefit from the skills, tools, and increased confidence that the IL program provides, be like Sarah: call DSB at 800-552-7103 or email them at info@dsb.wa.gov and ask about the IL program today.

# WCB HAPPENINGS

## Do I Fit the Word Audacious? by Linda Wilder

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Although I do not think of myself as being audacious, I do think I was bold enough to take on the challenge of being the volunteer coordinator for this year’s Washington Council of the Blind convention when President Julie Brannon suggested I take it on. I do not know how Julie does it, but she has this sweet, insistent way of having people say yes to her request. If you know me at all, you know that if I say I will do something, by golly I will do it. Julie, being the wonderful person she is, said, “Do not worry, I will help you.” She was true to her word and was able to get 14 of her friends and family to volunteer.

This adventure was a risk for me, as I had never done anything like this before. We did not have notes or a process to follow. We were able to talk with Holly Turri, who was the volunteer coordinator at our last WCB convention in 2019. She gave us a list of places we might recruit volunteers. There were two places that were very helpful. One was Just Serv, who provided two, but the person who helped me with their website also works at Microsoft. We were able to get six wonderful volunteers, and two volunteers from the Washington Talking Book and Braille Library.

Another helpful lead was Danette Dixon, who connected us with the Seattle Puppy Raisers. This group of volunteers were all so willing to help when and wherever they could.

Most of my help came from Marie-Celeste Condon, who is a Seattle Puppy Raiser. Marie was my go-to person, as the Seattle Puppy Raisers asked her to coordinate all of the puppy raisers. Boy howdy, did she. Marie stepped right up and was so organized. She was at the volunteer desk much of the time, kept great notes on what was needed, made lists of what we might need next year, kept all the many different volunteers actively working, and helped me format the thank you letters and the survey with questions that Julie, Marie, and I decided on.

We had about 38 volunteers signed up, but there were many other people who stepped up and helped out. Many of our WCB members were of great assistance. Some of the hotel employees and guests helped out when they saw a need. Many of these volunteers worked two and three shifts. Each person that volunteered is greatly appreciated. Most of these volunteers said they want to come back next year.

I now have all the handouts we provided, such as How to be a Sighted Guide, How to Interact with a Person who is Blind, The Do’s and Don’ts for Volunteers, maps of the hotel (which need to be improved), copies of the thank you letters and surveys, a list of what a volunteer coordinator needs to do, and more. I learned so much and appreciate the opportunity to assist WCB by being the volunteer coordinator. Yes, I think I just might be audacious!

Here are a few of the many comments from the volunteers:

* “We talk about diversity a lot. But here, I got to experience diversity. It’s given me a lot to think about.”
* “So much graciousness!”
* “It means so much to see working guides. It’s our mission to raise puppies to do work like this, but we rarely get to see the outcome, or be with people, or see the diversity and sweetness of it.”
* “This volunteer experience…it’s not just about guiding people. I learned SO MUCH! I love it!”

## Volunteer Sighted Guides’ Observations and Reflections by Marie-Celeste Condon

October 2022 was Washington Council of the Blind’s first in-person convention since the pandemic began. WCB leadership found themselves in the difficult position of having to re-invent a system for organizing the volunteer sighted guides. Linda Wilder, a WCB board member and volunteer coordinator, and Marie-Celeste Condon, Seattle Puppy Raiser, became a team. With Julie Brannon’s guidance, they recruited, scheduled, taught, and supported volunteers.

Things came together well enough to meet convention attendees’ needs. Attendees and volunteers enjoyed interacting with one another. Their interactions were easy-going, relaxed, with shared warmth and good humor. Volunteers said they learned a lot and felt inspired by the stories they heard and the people they met. They were touched by the gratitude and gracious, helpful feedback they received from the convention attendees they had the honor of guiding. All Puppy Raisers said they want to volunteer again in 2023.

We revel in the reflective, collaborative, interagency conversations and celebrations of connections, and the good that came from partnerships this year.

## Awards 2022 by Jessamyn Landby

Presenting the awards this year at our WCB convention was so much fun since I was able to do so in person. On Friday at the awards luncheon, the committee gave out Chapter Growth Certificates to South King Council of the Blind and King County Chapter. Congratulations to these two chapters for having 10 percent or more in membership growth.

Official Service to WCB Certificates were given to Sheri Richardson as second vice president, Alco Canfield as secretary, and Frank Cuta, Heather Meares, and Reginald George as board directors. The committee thanks these five board members for their dedicated service to WCB.

On Saturday night at the banquet, the committee gave out five of the eight different framed awards this year. It was so much fun being sneaky and surprising this year. The five framed awards went to: Julie Brannon for Certificate of Outstanding Service to WCB; Washington Talking Book and Braille Library for the Business of the Year Award; Anything is Possible Theatre for the Business of the Year Award; Beth Sutton for the Teacher of the Year Award; and Everett Elam for the Newsline Editors’ Choice Award.

Thank you to my committee for their hard work – Melissa Hudson, Jeanne Jacobs, and Linda Wickersham. Also, special thanks to Kim Moberg and Michelle Denzer for helping make all of the awards.

## Mostly Good, But a Little Overwhelming by Alan Biné

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So how was it, the 2022 Washington State Council of the Blind Convention at the Hilton Doubletree Hotel at SeaTac, WA? From a first-timer's perspective, mine, it was good, but also kind of overwhelming.

A year ago, I could still see well enough to not be sure I was blind enough to join the Snohomish County Council of the Blind (SCCB). The Oct. 27-29 convention was an eye-opener, both a sobering and humbling experience for me. By attending the convention, I discovered that I most definitely do belong to the blind club. To be perfectly clear, I wish I didn't. I would rather see better.

Still, I was inspired by the many blind folks in attendance at the convention who had great attitudes and exceptional talents. People like Muckleshoot Tribal member John Halliday, an amazing artist who spoke during a panel about dealing with vision loss, along with Heidi Coggins and Tim Downie, members of my local Snohomish County chapter. Both Heidi and Tim are incredible cheerleaders for blind people, who not only advocate for others who are blind or have low vision, but also serve as super examples of what you can achieve to overcome various challenges. I also liked being able to help totally blind folks at the convention who linked arms with me to navigate. Since I'm still able to see some, I was able to do this. However, I need some practice or training to improve doing this. Volunteering to help others is such a two-way gift, a true blessing if you know what I mean.

Another observation about my time at the convention: Lisa George, WCB treasurer and an always-present volunteer at the convention, was a terrific help to blurry-vision me and everyone else.

I stayed at the hotel for three nights and parts of four days, and it was surprising to me how fast I learned to get to various venues even though the hotel corridors and elevators seemed very dark and rather cold to me. Although my recent vision loss made everything harder, my overworked brain seemed up to the task. I completely agree with what someone told me, that poor vision is exhausting.

I was lucky enough to meet a trio of representatives of the Washington State Department of Services for the Blind (DSB) by chance, who were sitting at the same table as I was during a lunch. And they encouraged me to call DSB's independent living section to get someone to come to my home. I especially want someone to look at the lighting by my computer. The lighting helps me see the computer screen, but could possibly be damaging my eyes.

A technology session with Al Yardley was greatly appreciated. Al not only helped me make better use of my iPhone, he agreed to come to my home in the future to help me solve some issues I'm having with my iMac computer.

About the hotel: The complimentary warm chocolate chip cookies were delicious. The steak at the big Saturday night banquet was not. And, of course, being that the hotel is right by Sea-Tac Airport, the constant noise of planes taking off and landing was, in a word, horrendous. Sorry, since my hotel bill as a first-timer was paid for me, my complaining is not very gracious. I sure appreciated my quiet home in Edmonds a lot more after the convention.

## My First WCB Convention by Tim Downie

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I am so thankful to have received a first-timer’s grant to attend my first in- person WCB convention. I became vision impaired in the past two years, so was asked to present at a convention panel on recent vision loss. I was honored to present with my friend Heidi Coggins, and the incredible John Halliday. John has such a strong, great spirit. It was an honor to present with him.

Another great joy of the convention was meeting in person some of the dear friends I’ve made. This would include my good friend Lynne Koral, who co-hosts the Jewish Hour with me on the ACB call every Monday at noon. It was so good to be with Lynne in person and to hang out with so many of my friends from our amazing Snohomish County Chapter.

But I also met new friends at the convention. I loved meeting all of you, and loved hearing your stories.

I do have some very limited vision, and I must say that the lights and sights of the convention often became too much for my eyes, and I had to retreat to my hotel room for naps and gabapentin to reset my eyes. I have some cognitive issues as well, and at times the feeling I had was as if a fire hose was turned on me. When I felt that way, I just retreated to my room for a rest. It was nice to have that option, and it allowed me to reset and rejoin the convention.

I enjoyed the meals, too, especially sitting with others, those I knew, and those new to me.

My room seemed to have been on the same floor as some of the WCB youth. I got to chat a few times with some of them. I admire their energy and spirit. I was glad they had time to get together and have fun.

When John Halliday was presenting, he mentioned he considered WCB his new tribe. I feel the same way.

When I first experienced vision loss, I tried contacting many organizations for help. I was reaching for a lifeline. One of the only people to call me back was Jim Turri from WCB. I can’t tell you what that warm friendly voice on the phone meant to me. Jim pointed me towards my local chapter and some other regular calls.

In my local chapter, our president, Marilee Richards, has been amazing. She understands the difficulties, the nightmare, of being severely vision impaired. Through my local chapter, I have made friends, people I meet for lunch, people with whom I am in contact daily. This is such a gift. My WCB friends do things, they travel, they earn PhDs, they live life.

I can’t do everything. I can’t drive. I no longer have a license. I sold my car. So, instead of dwelling on those things I cannot do, I focus on what I want to do, and how I can make that happen. Sometimes it takes planning and work. Sometimes it doesn’t go as I’d hoped, but I keep trying until I find a way that works. I’m currently looking to join in some more WCB committees so I can contribute back to the group. Thank you all for a great convention.

## Scholarships 2022 by Kim L. Moberg

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I am treated every year to learn who applies for a scholarship and what field of study they are going into. This year was no exception.

A dream is a wish your heart creates. A Washington Council of the Blind (WCB) scholarship is a way to help make that dream a reality. Every scholarship given puts that person one step closer to their dream. Let’s meet the winners for the academic year 2022-2023.

Wuroud Azeez is receiving a WCB scholarship for the first time. She is studying to be a Braille instructor. Wuroud came to the United States in 2009. She took classes to learn English, and then took the necessary classes to get her GED. Now, she is attending Evergreen Community College, studying hard to fulfill her goals. She received a scholarship of $2,100. Congratulations, Wuroud.

Chantsaa Undrahkbayar is a graduate of Washington State School for The Blind. While there, along with her studies, she started her own business, called “Cats and Mats Club.” This was part of some required volunteer work. Chantsaa would like to be a life coach. She will be attending Clark College in Vancouver, WA. Chantsaa received a scholarship of $4,200. Congratulations, Chantsaa.

Steven McCray is receiving a WCB scholarship for the second time. Not only is Steven going to college, but he cares for his 4-year-old daughter while his wife works outside the home. Steven lives on a farm. In November, he attended his first WCB local chapter meeting. Steven is studying to become a social worker in the area of substance abuse. In December 2022, he will graduate from Spokane Community College. In January, he will begin attending classes at Eastern Washington University in Cheney, WA. Steven received a scholarship of $5,350. Good luck, Steven, and congratulations.

## 2022 WCB First Timer’s Scholarship Article by Timothy Breitenfeldt

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I recently had the opportunity to attend the 2022 Washington Council of the Blind (WCB) convention in SeaTac, WA, due to the scholarship I was awarded as a first-timer attendee.

I had a great experience getting to meet new people and learn more about the inner processes of how WCB functions. At the convention, I attended some of the breakout sessions, such as the sightless self-defense session, and the natural cures and remedies session. I also attended the board and annual WCB meeting. Before the convention, I was encouraged to run for one of the open positions on the board, and I was fortunate to have been elected to the position during this year’s convention. I am excited to play a bigger role in WCB for years to come.

The opportunity to attend this year’s convention allowed me to network, learn more about how WCB elects officers and board members, and provided me with new ideas in ways I can give back to my community. I look forward to attending next year’s convention in 2023.

## My First WCB Convention by Deborah Hough

Debbieatkinson55@icloud.com

I enjoyed the convention this year as a first-timer. I have enjoyed meeting some of the new members.

The breakout session I enjoyed was the author panel. The facilitator was Mark Adreon. The panelists were Dr. Wendy David, Abby Johnson Taylor, and Heather Meares. I enjoyed listening to their stories about how they became writers and how they became published.

I now understand how WCB business meetings work. I feel that I have gained a better understanding of what WCB is and what it does, as well as how it functions. The knowledge I have gained from attending the WCB convention business meetings has helped me to become a more involved member of my local chapter, Peninsula Council of the Blind (PCB), as well as my community.

I have been a member of PCB since 2019. I have served on several committees, including committees to organize recreational and fundraising events. In January 2023, I will serve on the PCB board. Going to the convention was a very rewarding experience.

## Business Meeting Extraordinaire by Alco Canfield

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If you were unable to attend the Washington Council of the Blind 2022 business meeting, you missed out on an exciting time.

**Elections**

* Sheri Richardson was elected first vice president by acclamation.
* Danette Dixon was elected secretary by acclamation.
* Board Positions: Tim Breitenfeldt was elected to the board, as was Beth Greenberg. Frank Cuta was re-elected to the board.

**Budget**

The proposed budget for 2023 was adopted.

**Constitution and Bylaws**

The Constitution and Bylaws Committee brought forth eight amendments for consideration by the membership, all of which were adopted. A summary of changes is below, with the article or bylaw that was affected.

* Crisis aid eligibility resets every two years instead of five years - Bylaw 10
* Meetings of the board require seven days’ notice, and a provision is now made for executive sessions of the board - Article VII
* The quorum for general or special membership meetings decreased from 20% to 15% - Article VIII
* Officers and directors can now serve up to three consecutive two-year terms if elected - Articles VI & VII
* WCB made it clear that junior members may serve on the board of their local affiliate but not as officers - Article IV
* The past practice of offering members a loan to attend the state convention is now codified - Bylaw 8
* Disbursement of funds by the treasurer can now be performed electronically - Bylaw 3

Much was achieved and the business meeting ended with members feeling a great sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.

## Hats Off Compiled by Linda Wilder

We extend congratulations to, and celebrate with, the following WCB members:

* Terri Stiles celebrated her 80th birthday Aug. 3
* Alice Klein celebrated her 80th birthday Sept. 5
* Diana Softich celebrated her 80th birthday on Oct. 3
* Reginald George celebrated his 60th birthday Nov.13
* Dixie McDaniels celebrated her 90th birthday Dec. 6
* Judy Brown on her appointment to serve on the national ACB Advocacy Committee
* Jenny Anderson on her new guide dog from The Seeing Eye, a beautiful yellow lab named Freedom
* Marilee Richards on her new yellow lab guide dog from Guiding Eyes in Boring, OR, named T
* Tristen Breitenfeldt on her new position as Program Assistant in the Disability Support Services department at Yakima Valley College

If you or someone you know has something for inclusion in Hats Off, email TheWCBNewsline@gmail.com with “Hats Off” in the subject line. Those items that may not meet the criteria listed below may still be very appropriate in your local chapter’s “Around the State” article.

The following are reasons for inclusion in this column:

* Birth of a child, grandchild or great-grandchild
* Birthdays 75 years and older in 5-year increments (yearly after age 90)
* Marriage or wedding anniversary 25 years and more in 5-year increments
* Graduation from high school, college or vocational program
* New job, career promotion, or retirement
* Partnering with a dog guide
* Appointment to a city, county, statewide, or national board or commission
* Exceptional recognition or award

# AROUND THE STATE

## Clark County Council of the Blind by Bob Cavanaugh

Well, what a last couple of months. The biggest news out of this corner of the state is that not one, but two of our members got state board seats at our Fall convention. Not bad for a chapter that's been in existence less than two years!

In other news, we had our first hybrid meeting in November. Now that the downtown library is finally open, we've come to an agreement that that's where we are going to meet. Our guest speaker was Monica Butler from the Hull Foundation.

All this is reminding me that I have some things to get done. So, I'll go do those.

## Guide Dog Users of Washington State by Vivian Conger

Since our last update, GDUWS has had elections. Our board of directors consists of Andy Arvidson, president; Sheri Richardson, vice president; Danette Dixon, secretary; Holly Kaczmarski, treasurer; Jeanne Jacobs, director; Debby Phillips, director; and Vivian Conger, immediate past president. These terms take effect Jan. 1, 2023. Thanks Hayley Edict and Deb Cook Lewis for your excellent service on the board.

We also have had another focus call/school update featuring Charles Nathan from Guide Dogs for the Blind. Charles always gives a great presentation, and this time was no exception. We had participants from around the U.S. After the call, we shared the recording to various list serves. Please stay tuned for more focus calls in 2023.

## Pierce County Association of the Blind by Linda Wilder

2022 has been a year of blending our virtual and face-to-face meetings. PCAB met for the last many years at Tacoma Area Coalition for Individuals with Disabilities. Once COVID started, we went totally virtual, but once we started meeting in person again, we needed to find a new location to meet. Through a PCAB member who holds a knitting club, we learned of the Asia Pacific Cultural Center. Linda called to inquire about the possibility of PCAB meeting there. We signed a contract and have held a few meetings there but have resorted to some virtual meetings. This organization is relocating in December. We hope we can continue meeting at this facility. We are working diligently to build up our membership and hope to do better in the new year by meeting monthly in person.

PCAB had 11 members attend the WCB 2022 convention. We were impressed with how well Cathy Wilson, one of our members and one of the co-chairs of the Convention Committee, took care of all the behind-the- scenes issues and planned this first face-to-face and virtual convention. There was a huge turnout of over 250 conventioneers. Two of our members had never been to a WCB convention. According to their reports, it was a good and informational experience.

PCAB had its annual elections with David Edick elected by acclamation to remain president, Cathy Wilson elected by acclamation to remain in her position as second vice president, Kitty Cummings elected by acclamation for treasurer, and Colleen Smith elected to remain in her board position. Congratulations to each of you.

Several of our PCAB members attended the Museum of Glass in Tacoma. John Holiday, one of WCB’s members, was instrumental in working with the museum in changing its policy to make the glass artwork accessible to blind folks. We can now touch the displayed art. Next, we hope they will allow people who are blind to make a blown glass object.

PCAB is planning a Christmas party at Burs Restaurant with a gift exchange and door prizes on Dec. 10. PCAB wishes all of you a wonderful holiday and a healthy and happy New Year.

## Snohomish County Council of the Blind by Marilee Richards

At our November meeting, we re-elected Danette Dixon as our secretary and yours truly as president. Lynn Hunter was re-elected as our second board member for two more years.

We have had so many new members the past couple of months it is hard to put anyone in the spotlight like I usually do. However, I think it is worthwhile to mention that spouses of members may join the group even if they are not blind or visually impaired. We can always use sighted folks to help with things that require sight.

By the time you read this, we will have had our yearly Christmas party. We will be having a gift exchange and door prizes. Spouses are welcome. I hope to have my piano teacher, Bret Boon, with us again this year. If you are interested in piano or drum lessons, even if you are not in the area, send an email to brent.s.boon@gmail.com.

Our support group is in full action and looking forward to anyone interested in joining us. If you want more information about this, send your email address to Danette Dixon at danettedixon63@gmail.com and she will add you to her Zoom invitation list. We meet the first Saturday of the month.

## South Kitsap Council of the Blind by Kim Moberg

We may be a small chapter, but we are busy and happy to help other chapters. Since our last update, lots has gone on. We had fun activities in the summer, and in September we went out to eat at a restaurant called Everybody’s. I think it is safe to say that everybody enjoyed the activities sprinkled in with meetings this year.

Several of our members attended our state convention at the end of October. We even had a first-timer go to conference this year. Gayle Passi reported about being a first-timer. I believe she is hooked! She is excited to dig in and get involved.

And speaking of getting involved, Gayle was elected vice president of our chapter yesterday by acclamation. Congratulations, Gayle. It is always great when we can get new people excited about our chapter and about Washington Council of the Blind. Carol Brame was also re-elected treasurer. Congratulations, Carol.

Our fundraising project that we started a few years ago with Shop-with-Scrip, (now known as Raise-Right), is working out very nicely. All who place orders benefit just as much as the chapter, and it is safe to say that we who place the orders probably benefit more than the chapter does. It is simple and fun, and the chapter gains a few dollars along the way.

We have plans for a fun Christmas party. So, this year we are going out for lunch. While there, we are going to have a gift exchange.

The new year is just around the corner. I am excited to see what the new year brings to our chapter and to each of us.

## United Blind of the Tri-Cities by Janice Squires

We are moving into the cold days of winter, but nothing stops the many activities of the United Blind of the Tri-Cities. Our chapter meetings are strong and full of good information. Our speakers have been excellent, thanks to our great president, Frank Cuta. In November, we were told all about hydroponic and aquaponics gardening with our special guest speaker, Heather Meares. In September, Juan Ortiz and Reg George talked to us about their jobs with the Department of Services for the Blind. Juan is the new vocational rehabilitation counselor serving our area and Reg is the assistive technology specialist.

Our chapter keeps so busy with our monthly Tuesday support groups. We always begin the month with our delicious lunch bunch. We love playing our crazy 31 card game, and now we are going to entertain ourselves with a new dice game called “Left Right Center.” We love reading books and talking about technology. Our described play season has begun, and the first two shows attended were titled “Night Fall” and “Double Wide Texas.”

Shanna Larter, director of the Edith Bishel Center for the Blind, always has something fun for us to do each month. We all created a beautiful fall center piece in September, and a Halloween craft for October. We are all looking so forward to our wonderful Christmas holiday parties.

We have elected our new officers for 2023 and are so grateful to each one of them for giving of their time and efforts. Frank is president and Bill Hoage is first vice president. Sherry Dubbin is second vice president, Holly Kaczmarski treasurer, myself Janice secretary, and Diana Softich and Bernie Vinther are board members.

The UBTC is always trying to participate in some type of outreach in the community. Frank took part in a special program entitled Cane Quest, which was held in conjunction with White Cane Day. The Bishel Center and the UBTC joined forces and worked together at the Senior Expo. It was a very successful adventure as we have counted so many of our seniors in this area.

## United Blind of Walla Walla by Heather Meares

For the third year, UBWW was able to give gifts for the holiday season to local children who are blind or visually impaired. The chapter partnered with Grace Dostel, a TVI who helps find the children and shops for the appropriate gifts for them. We have truly enjoyed working with her and appreciate all she does. She recently received her orientation and mobility certification, as well.

In December, we attended a fundraiser hosted by the Delta Gammas at Whitman College. Several of our chapter members spoke about a variety of topics, such as guide dogs, accessible traffic signals, community outreach, and awareness of accessible voting and prescription-labeling issues. We were also joined by Juan Ortiz and Reginald George, who spoke on behalf of the Department of Services for the Blind. Our member, Dodie Orlando, made Braille place cards for the Delta Gammas and our attending members, which were very cool. We enjoyed meeting them and socializing over hors d’oeuvres and conversation. Gift baskets were auctioned and proceeds will be split between the two groups. It was great to rekindle the relationship between our two organizations as we get back to life in person again.

## Yakima Valley Council of the Blind by Sally Mayo

We had our first in-person meeting Nov. 19 at the Fraternal Order of Eagles. It was such fun to actually meet in person. Elections were held and our 2023 officers are: Sally Mayo, president; Reginald George, vice president; Tristen Breitenfeldt, past president; Lisa George, secretary; Howard Underwood, treasurer; and Alice Klein, board director.



Photo Left: YVCB members in their new meeting location at the Eagles.

Seated in front: Alice Klein, Lisa George, Sally Mayo, and her guide, Geneva

Standing in back: Don Mayo, Reg George, and Frank Cuta

YVCB had some very sad news – Anne Ridenour passed away Oct. 9. She was a very active member, participating in bowling for many years. She was such a positive person in our chapter. She will be greatly missed. She was 101 when she passed.

Some of our chapter attended an audio-described play at the Richland Players – four short plays of Edgar Allen Poe. They did a wonderful job.

Our December meeting will be at the Eagles again. We will be celebrating our 20th year as a club while we enjoy a Christmas potluck lunch. We are blessed that the Eagles are receptive to us holding our meetings there. It is accessible, as well.

Our social meetings at the Harmon Senior Center in Yakima are on hold until after the holidays. We will continue meeting on the fourth Friday of the month starting January 27, 2023 from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. We play cards, bingo, and Yahtzee, as well as our activities.

Congratulations to Tristen Breitenfeldt on her new job in the Disabled Support Services Department of Yakima Valley College. We all are so excited for her.

## WCB Calendar of Deadlines and Events

For more details on events listed, please subscribe to the wcb-l list on groups.io or call 800-255-1147. Saturdays at 10 a.m. join the WCB Coffee and Conversation Zoom call.

List of Abbreviations:

DSB Department of Services for the Blind

WASILC Washington State Independent Living Council

WCB Washington Council of the Blind

WSSB Washington State School for the Blind

WTBBL Washington Talking Book & Braille Library

**JANUARY**

**9** – WCB Diabetics call at 7 p.m. (second Monday)

**11** – WSSB Board of Trustees meeting

**15** – WCB Tech Chat with Reg and Frank at 7 p.m. (third Sunday)

**19** – WASILC meeting Zoom call from 10 a.m. to 2:45 p.m.

**23** – Presidents call at 7 p.m. (fourth Monday in odd months)

**FEBRUARY**

**6** – Treasurers call at 7 p.m. (first Monday in even months)

**10-11** – WCB Board retreat

**13** – WCB Diabetics call at 7 p.m.

**18** – WTBBL Patron Advisory Council from 9 a.m. to noon

**18** – WCB Board Meeting (on Zoom) from 1 to 3 p.m.

**19** – WCB Tech Chat with Reg and Frank at 7 p.m.

**28** – Deadline to submit articles for the WCB Newsline Spring 2023 issue

**MARCH**

**4-7** – ACB Presidents' Meeting and Legislative Seminar (virtual)

**9-12** – ACB Leadership Conference (in person) Alexandria, VA

**10** – DSB State Rehab Council meeting from 9 a.m. to noon (2nd Friday)

**MARCH (continued)**

**11** – WSSB Board of Trustees meeting

**13** – WCB Diabetics call at 7 p.m.

**21** – WCB Committee leaders call at 7 p.m.

**19** – WCB Tech Chat with Reg and Frank at 7 p.m.

**27** – Presidents call at 7 p.m.

**APRIL**

**3** – Treasurers call at 7 p.m.

**3** – Last day for chapters to sign up to participate in GiveBIG

**10** – WCB Diabetics call at 7 p.m.

**14** – WASILC meeting on Zoom – 10 a.m. to 2:45 p.m.

**16** – WCB Tech Chat with Reg and Frank at 7 p.m.

**MAY**

**2 and 3** – 2023 online GiveBIG fundraiser

**Washington Council of the Blind**

is pleased to acknowledge donors

who have generously supported our programs

in the fourth quarter of 2022

**Thank You!**

America Online Giving Foundation

Schoenfeld-Gardner Foundation

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Mark Adreon

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Darlene Hilling

Rick Lewis

Nancy Lind

Dana Marmion

Evilo Schwab

anonymous contributions through:

ACB Monthly Monetary Support Program

AmazonSmiles

Benevity Fund

PayPal Giving Fund

Washington Gives

WCB would also like to welcome

**Quincy Daniels**

as a new **Life Member**

## 2022 WCB In Memoriam

The following members of Washington Council of the Blind have passed away since our 2021 convention, and were fondly remembered with a moment of silence at the beginning of our 2022 annual business meeting.

Tyler Eckel, United Blind of Seattle

Lin Folsom, Skagit & Island Counties Council of the Blind

Byron Kaczmarski, United Blind of Tri-Cities

Rosemary Spencer, Pierce County Association of the Blind

Pat Patnode, Jefferson County Council of the Blind

Josette Kernaghan, Guide Dog Users of Washington State

Gunther Dohse, Jefferson County Council of the Blind

Cindy Glidden, Spokane Council of the Blind

Ron Bradshaw, United Blind of Whatcom County

Anne Ridenour, Yakima Valley Council of the Blind

Richard Orr, Capital City Council of the Blind

## 2023 WCB Officers and Board of Directors

President Julie Brannon, Puyallup

First Vice President Andy Arvidson, Anacortes

Second Vice President Sheri Richardson, Seattle

Secretary Danette Dixon, Lynnwood

Treasurer Lisa George, Yakima

Immediate Past President Denise Colley, Rosenberg, TX

Board Directors:

Nathan Brannon, Puyallup

Tim Breitenfelt, Vancouver

Frank Cuta, Benton City

Merribeth Greenberg, Vancouver

Kim Moberg, Silverdale

Linda Wilder, Tacoma