The GCB DIGEST

This is a publication of the Georgia Council of the Blind

WE are an affiliate of the American Council of the Blind

An organization promoting a hand up and not a handout

Spring 2020

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 From Your Editor:

By Amanda Wilson

Hello GCB Family. We thank each one who has submitted articles in this issue of our magazine. If you have any change of home or email address, telephone number, or desired change of format, please inform our GCB treasurer. Thanks to everyone who makes our GCB Digest such a big success. I particularly want to thank Janet Parmerter, assistant editor, for the many hours she has worked on the magazine and her editing skills. Also, I want to thank our president, Alice Ritchhart, for her presidential message with information about important events, legislation and projects. Lastly, I want to express appreciation for the contributions from our new GCB Digest committee and to each member who sent articles and made suggestions.

Note

From this point forward, please send any comments, articles or messages to the GCB Digest editor in Font: Arial, Font Style: Bold, Font Size: 16 point, Font Heading Size: 20 point and please underline the Heading. This will make things more consistent for reading and for Braille.

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GCB Conference and Convention Update:

Out of Caution for all of our members, the board has decided to postpone our GCB May Conference and Convention. We plan to hold our GCB conference and Convention on November 6-7, 2020, in Gainesville, Georgia. The GCB conference and convention will be held at the Ramada by Wyndham which is located at 400 E. E. Butler Parkway, in Gainesville, Georgia. This is the same hotel we were going to go to in May, but now we are not going to Gainesville, Georgia, until November. Stay safe, and stay tuned for future updates about the plans for our fall GCB conference and convention.

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Presidential Message,

By Alice Ritchhart

I want to begin by saying I hope you all are safe, and doing what is necessary to stay that way. As you know while I sit here writing this message, we are facing a worldwide crisis. For many people they are facing new challenges in carrying out everyday life. This is especially true for the blind and visually impaired. Our children are not able to access the online school’s lessons because it is inaccessible, and at the same time Congress is trying to take away those rights that were put into place to insure an equal education, and access to job training. The older blind individuals are having even more obstacles to transportation due to fears of the virus, and getting the needed supplies to be able to survive at home. With this said I want to talk about what we as individuals in GCB can do to help ourselves and others. I also want to talk about what we as an organization can do after this crisis to be a vital part of our communities. During this crisis we can reach out to our young people and help them with their learning. You can be a peer supporter who tutors a young individual by computer or over the phone. To help our other folks you can make phone calls to see that they are doing ok, and just to give them social interaction. If you have a way to get out and shop you might see if a friend or other members need things, and pick them up for them. You maybe even want to consider helping at a church or school to give out food and supplies (only if you do not have other medical conditions which would put you at risk). GCB is a volunteer organization, and we should try to give back to the community, as once has been done for all of us.

Let’s now talk about once this crisis is over, and the idea of volunteering as it relates to everyday life. Volunteering can be a rewarding experience which can lead to improving your self-esteem. At our last board meeting I asked each affiliate to share what you were doing in your community that would show your involvement in your community. It will be our practice to do these at all future meetings. I would like to hear stories about how the chapters have gotten involved in an activity to help others, or even stories about individuals in your affiliate who are volunteering in their communities. Speaking up about your work may give ideas to other members in our organization. Our group has many talented people, and those talents can be of help to others. So I say to you keep up the good work, and let’s try to do more. I want to say I do appreciate each and every one of you, and you are and will remain in my thoughts and prayers.

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GCB Board Meeting Minutes:

By Betsy Grenevitch

Georgia Council of the Blind, Phone Board Meeting

October 19, 2019

Call to Order, Alice Ritchhart:

President Alice Ritchhart called the meeting to order at 10:12 AM.

Invocation:

Betsy Grenevitch gave the invocation.

Roll Call, Betsy Grenevitch:

Those present were: Alice Ritchhart, GCB President; Phil Jones, GCB First Vice-President; Jamaica Miller, GCB Second Vice-President; Betsy Grenevitch, GCB Secretary; Marsha Farrow, GCB Treasurer; Keith Morris, GCB Past President; Jerrie Toney, Athens Chapter; Deborah Lovell, Augusta Chapter; Cecily Nipper, East Georgia Chapter; Tonia Clayton, Rome Floyd County Chapter; Marj Schneider, Savannah Chapter; Roderick Parker, GCB Parliamentarian; Amanda Wilson, GCB Digest Editor; and Steve Longmire, GCB Webmaster. Guests include Rosetta Brown, East Georgia Chapter.

Approval of Agenda, Alice Ritchhart:

Deborah moved and Phil seconded the motion to approve the agenda. The agenda was approved.

President’s Report, Alice Ritchhart:

Most of the phone calls that she has been receiving concern issues with services. She also announced that the next Georgia Vision alliance meeting will be held on Saturday, November 2, 2019, in Augusta, Georgia.

Secretary’s Report, Betsy Grenevitch:

Deborah made a motion seconded by Jamaica to approve the minutes as they were sent out. The motion carried.

Treasurer’s Report, Marsha Farrow:

The GCB main account is $4945.41; senior fund is $1385.92.The total left in the operating fund is $1385.92. She paid $990 for liability insurance. The balance left in the general operating fund: $395.92. The GCB conference Account was $1080.40. The GCB scholarship Account was $4422.70. The GCB money market was $5742.30. The GCB long term investment was $18,493.17. The Way Financial at the end of September was $55,081.43. Alice asked about the $30 paid from the main checking account that went toward Teresa Brenner’s registration fee for the legislative seminar as it was supposed to come from the scholarship account. Marsha said that she had rectified that and redeposited the $30 into the main checking account from the scholarship account. Marsha said that Way Financial was supposed to have stopped putting money into our scholarship account but for some reason it is still taking place. She will be contacting them to take care of this error. Marsha moved for the report to be filed for audit.

Finance Committee, Jerrie Toney:

Jerrie told us that the spreadsheet for the scholarship account reflects that Marsha redeposited the money back into the main checking account for Teresa’s registration fee. She told us that it is working well to have the checks updated each month. We are going to have a secure file for all pertinent information so that if anything happens to those overseeing this information it would be available to someone else. The finance committee decided that Alice and Marsha should have hard copies of this information. This information can also be locked down on the Go Daddy website. Alice told the board that they will now be receiving the list of checks and also bank statements. Chapter presidents should be sharing any important information with their members. Marj reminded us that any changes that take place concerning the secured files need to be changed in all copies. It was requested that going forward we give a grand total of all accounts in the treasurer’s report.

Transportation Committee, Phil Jones:

The committee met on Monday, October 14, 2019. They discussed how chapters could begin their own transportation service. An email was sent to the board with this information. They also talked about expanding the transportation section on our GCB website. It would list more transportation company options around the state.

Legislative/Advocacy Committee, Steve Longmire:

On August 19, 2019, Steve met with someone in Senator Isakson’s office to discuss making fitness machines accessible for the blind/visually impaired. Bev Bond, from Mobility Services, also attended the meeting. They presented the person representing Senator Isakson with a bill concerning modifying the machines at gyms to be accessible to everyone. The bill is coming up before the senate. Steve will follow up on the progress of the bill. Alice asked him to send the bill number to Teresa and Tonia so that the information can be sent to the membership.

Voting Machines, Alice Ritchhart: There are six counties in Georgia who will be using the new voting machines in the coming election. Teresa was told that there will be accessibility on the touch screen. There will be someone at the Georgia Vision Alliance meeting with the new voting machine. Dominoes Website, Alice Ritchhart: The Supreme Court ruled not to hear the case concerning the Domino’s Pizza website. They told the company their website needs to be accessible.

GCB Digest Report, Amanda Wilson:

 \_The \_GCB \_Digest went out in September. There is a committee with members from around the state working on the Digest now. The font size and formatting have been changed to make it easier to prepare for publication. They are looking for more people to interview so please contact Amanda if you are interested or have any recommendations. Articles for the next issue need to be sent to Amanda by the middle of December.

 Youth Awareness Committee, Cecily Nipper:

The committee is waiting to find out where the next conference and convention is going to be held before planning any activities. If there is not enough space to hold something for the youth, then an event will be planned over the fall break in 2020.

Technology Committee, Steve Longmire:

The committee met on October 17. They discussed smart phones, adding more transportation options on the GCB

Website, and another phone option that still uses buttons—the Shell Phone... This option was brought to their attention by Rosetta. Deborah was familiar with this phone and will send Steve information about this phone. Rosetta also told the committee about the Rivo which is a numeric keypad that allows you to do tasks on the iPhone or Android using buttons instead of gestures. It also had a microphone and an earphone jack that you can Bluetooth with your smart phone.

Senior Report, Marsha Farrow:

Since our conference and convention we have helped one gentleman purchase a pair of magnifying glasses who is in the VISTAS program. We also purchased Apple Pods for a gentleman and a set of earphones for another gentleman. Another person has inquired about the fund, but the request is still being worked on. In September, we received an anonymous donation to go toward the senior fund. Marsha will send out the guidelines for the senior fund to the chapter presidents. Chapters need to be doing fundraising to help with this fund. Alice suggested that Marsha mention this fund at the Georgia Vision alliance meeting since a lot of providers will be present.

Conference and Convention Search Site Committee, Marj Schneider:

They have now met three different times. She thanked her committee members for their help. They are working on the idea of holding two shorter conference and conventions during the year and potentially going back to a site more than one time. They are looking at holding these meetings during the first weekend in May and the first weekend in November. They have discussed several different cities as possibilities for location. A list of criteria has been developed to use when doing their research. The meeting room needs to hold between 60-70 participants. The meeting room costs are very high as well as the guest room prices. Cecily found a place in Perry, Georgia, that looks promising. It is the Comfort Inn and Suites. The guest room cost would be $92 per night and the meeting room cost would be $175 per day if we book 30 guest rooms. This was quoted to her for the first weekend in May. The only concern was that the meeting room only holds 60 people. The Madison Day’s Inn is a possibility, but the staff was not sure when the renovation was going to take place on their banquet room. The place we met in Savannah in 2016 is another possibility but Marj was concerned that people may not be willing to go to Savannah for more than one year in a row. Marj recently contacted Dianne Roberts about the Ramada Inn located in Gainesville but has not heard back from her yet. Jamaica knows a manager of a hotel in Athens who would like to work with GCB in hosting a conference and convention. She will send his information to Marj so he can be contacted. After some discussion, it was decided to check with the Gainesville Ramada Inn about holding our next conference and convention. Alice suggested they check with places in the Albany area as well. The time for the work of the search committee will be expanded until the January board meeting. It was stressed that each chapter needs to do fundraising to help their members be able to attend the conference and conventions.

Georgia Guide Dog Users, GGDU, Betsy Grenevitch:

Betsy reported that she had attended the ADA committee meeting at the airport. She also informed us that there will be a GGDU phone meeting on Saturday, November 16, 2019. Alice asked Betsy to send the announcement about the upcoming meeting out so it can be put on the GCB website and on the GCB Facebook page. It will also go out to the entire membership.

Membership Committee, Amanda Wilson:

We have lost two members to death. The committee is trying to meet once a month. They are trying to schedule Cindy Van Winkle, ACB’s membership coordinator, on one of the calls. Dues need to be sent to Marsha by November 15.Phil spoke about doing a membership forum at chapter meetings to discuss how to increase membership. Alice suggested that he give the information he received from national to Steve to be put on the website.

 Unfinished Business, Alice Ritchhart:

The unfinished business concerned our investment account. Marsha told us that we are receiving only $.60 a year on the money market account. She spoke to someone at Regions Bank and found out that we could receive $60 a year in interest if we would put the money into a CD. She would like permission to put $5 thousand into this new account for a year and to move the $742.30 remaining in the account into our main checking account. Marsha made a motion that the board would allow her, as treasurer, to move $5 thousand from the money-market account into an account where we would receive $60 in interest each year. The remaining amount would go into the main checking account and would be used for operating expenses. Betsy seconded the motion and the motion carried.

New Business:

There was not any new business.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting is scheduled to take place on Saturday, January 18, 2020. Steve will check to see if we can hold it at the Decatur Recreation Center. Roderick suggested that we choose an alternate date in case there is a conflict with the Martin Luther King holiday weekend. Deborah made a motion seconded by Keith that we have our board meeting on Saturday, January 18, 2020, with Saturday, January 11, 2020, as an alternate date. After some discussion, the motion was amended by Cecily and seconded by Marsha that we save Saturday, January 25, 2020, as an alternate date. The motion carried.

Announcements, Everyone:

The Chattahoochee River Walk is going to take place on Saturday, November 9, 2019.

Keith suggested that the search committee check out the Wyndham Wingate Hotel in Macon as a potential conference and convention site.

DJ came on at the end of the meeting. She asked the chapter presidents to let her know about any meeting changes so she can keep the Facebook page updated.

Adjourn:

We adjourned at 11:52 AM.

Respectfully submitted by,

Betsy Grenevitch, GCB Secretary

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Member profile: Pagiel Griffith:

By Cecily Nipper, Junior

Recently, I had the opportunity to interview Pagiel Griffith, a 17-year-old young man who joined the Georgia Council of the Blind about two years ago. The injury that took Paige’s eyesight happened on October 8, 2017. “Ever since I lost my sight,” Pagiel said, “I feel freer to be honest. I was in a dark place when I tried to attempt suicide. Through this, God saved me.” Now, he views being blind as a blessing. A collaborative book written about Pagiel’s life, which is called “Pagiel”, can be found by going to Pagiel.Life. After losing his vision, Pagiel and his mother worked hard to learn how to navigate this new world. In early 2018, they discovered the Georgia Council of the Blind and have been actively serving in the Northwest Chapter ever since. How to navigate the world on his own using a long white cane is one of the services Pagiel received from Vision Rehabilitation Services. His mother also helped him to learn a navigation technique known as echo location, which helps him identify his surroundings using audio alone by clicking his tongue. Pagiel’s mom, Bethany Leigh, educates him at their home in Chickamauga, Georgia, where he receives his assignments each day via email. Since losing his vision, Pagiel’s ability to learn Romanian has increased because, in his own words, “I must take it slow and by audio.” Learning the Romanian language is his favorite subject. Becoming a Romanian language translator is one of his future goals. For fun, Pagiel enjoys skateboarding, kung fu, writing music as well as playing the guitar, the ukulele, the bass guitar, the violin and a small amount of piano. He wants to encourage others to follow their dreams: “Everyone can do what they put their minds to.”

If you wish to contact Pagiel Griffith, please do so by calling him at 423-414-7183, or send him an email at romaniancavaler@gmail.com.

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GCB Chapter News:

The Athens Chapter is planning its annual gathering this June. Council members proposed a change for the Athens chapter to meet at a restaurant. Depending on the results of an online poll, members will decide whether to meet at Memorial Park for the picnic or an alternative venue such as a restaurant in Athens. Due to the concerns surrounding the spread of coronavirus, the chapter met over the phone for our March meeting. The Athens chapter meetings are held on the fourth Saturday, at Multiple Choices, located at 145 Barrington Drive in Athens, Georgia from 10:30 AM, until 12:00 PM.

For more information about the Athens Chapter, please contact Jerrie Toney at 706-461-1013, or via email at jerriemt2@gmail.com.

The Augusta Chapter is not meeting now. The Augusta chapter meetings are held on the second Saturday, at the Friedman Branch Library, 1447 Jackson Road, Augusta, Georgia from 10:00 AM, until 12:00 PM.

For more information, please contact Deborah Lovell at 706-726-4054, or via email at lovell.d2000@gmail.com.

The East Georgia Chapter reported that at our January meeting we heard from Wendy O’Steen, who is a health educator. Wendy spoke on Non-24. Patricia Ganger Spoke about Facebook and Instagram. She referred to her student’s reactions towards these Social media platforms. Cecily Nipper spoke about an Instagram group CRAB (Children Raised around the Blind). This group was started by DJ McIntyre, Betsy Grenevitch daughter. Cecily learned that the hashtag (#) is about the topic. Cecily encouraged us to always caption pictures. She then talked about labeling and showed us how she uses regular paper labels (Avery labels) and brailed them to label jars, etc. Cecily also shared ideas on how to use puff paint to label appliances. She gave small puff paint pens to those who wanted one. She also showed us her new Braille writer from the Braille Superstore and Amazon, which is like a slate and stylus but doesn’t require you to braille in reverse. Elizabeth Cantrell informed us that Lucas Montalvo received student of the month award at his school. He will participate in the Braille Challenge in a few weeks. The East Georgia chapter meetings are held on the second Saturday of each month from 10:00 AM, until 12:00 PM, at the Conyers Presbyterian Church, 911 North Main Street NE, in Conyers Georgia.

For more information, please contact Patricia Ganger at 770-853-2040, or via email at Patricia.Ganger@outlook.com.

The Greater Hall County Chapter reported that we are not meeting now. The Greater Hall County chapter meetings are held on the second Saturday, at the Smokey Springs Retirement Residence, 940 South Enota Drive, Gainesville, Georgia from 10:30 AM, until 12:00 PM.

For more information about the Greater Hall County Chapter, please contact Diane Roberts at 770-932-1112, or via email at harveyroberts2@att.net.

The Northwest Chapter reported that at their January meeting, we heard from Byron Meador from the Signal Centers, Inc., The Signal Centers is located in Chattanooga, Tennessee. It offers services for the blind and visually impaired. There is counseling available, orientation and mobility, cooking without looking classes, Braille and technology courses. Mr. Meador, along with Mr. Rob Christie, teaches the technology course, showing students how to learn to use iPhones and iPads and JAWS computer system. He spoke of his journey with Stargardt’s and from being the blind bartender to the technology instructor at Signal. Please contact Lana little, the director for more information or to sign up for one of the many courses or camps at Signal Centers. (423) 698-8525

We stated that at our February meeting we shared our personal experiences over the past month. Ron Burgess gave us a history on our chapter, which we will be sharing soon and discuss the upcoming conference. We talked about what festivals we would like to attend this year to represent our chapter and get our presence out in the community. At our February meeting, Virginia Dorsey from The Walker County Fire Department came to speak about fire safety and ask PEOPLE WITH visual impairments how they, as the fire department, could better serve the visually impaired. Virginia explained that being sightless before a fire can be an advantage. No one can see in a fire and those without sight are more familiar with their surroundings. If you are in a fire and your bedroom door is hot, stay in the bedroom. Always sleep with your bedroom door closed because it will keep the fire out and you can wait on the firemen to rescue you. Have an escape plan ready. If you ever hear your fire alarms go off, call the fire department. Call them every time without hesitation; they want you to do so. Call your local fire department and have free smoke detectors installed and have them go over an escape plan with you, you will also be registered as a visually impaired person at your address and they can respond accordingly. Prevention is the key to being prepared. Most fires are started in the kitchen by cooking so be vigilant in not leaving your stove while cooking and making sure your stove is clutter free. Keep space heaters far away from anything else. Do not use power strips for anything medium or high voltage, but only use the strip for chargers or small electronic devices. Candles can be dangerous and if in a glass container, throw away once the candle is burned down to ¼ inch. Do not let your home clutter with things as this is a fire and an escape hazard. Never leave your dryers running and never store gas or propane in the home. Always keep flame and sparks away from oxygen tanks. We only have 3 minutes to exit our homes and now that they are filled with so many synthetic materials, the smoke is so much more toxic than it was in years past. Make sure there are numbers on your mailbox so emergency vehicles can easily find you. The Northwest chapter meetings are held on the second Tuesday, at the Lafayette-Walker Library 305 South Duke Street, in Lafayette, Georgia from 1:00 PM until 3:00 PM.

For more information, please contact Fred McDade at 706-278-4084, or via email at nwgachaptergcb@gmail.com.

The Rome Floyd County Chapter reported that we did not meet in January. Tonia Clayton had surgery on her neck and now is doing well. In February, we met and had our business meeting but did not meet in March. However, we plan to meet in April and hear from Dorothy Griffith from NFB Newsline, unless the library is still closed. The Rome Floyd County chapter meetings are held on the third Tuesday at the Rome Floyd County Library, 205 Riverside Parkway, Rome, Georgia from 11:00 AM, until 1:00 PM.

For more information, please contact Tonia Clayton, at 706-346-8940, or via email at toniaclayton@comcast.net.

The Savannah Chapter reported that we are not meeting now. The Savannah chapter meetings are held on the third Thursday at the conference room at J. C. Lewis Ford, 9505 Abercorn Street, Savannah, Georgia, from 6:00 PM until 7:30 PM.

For more information, please contact Marj Schneider at 912-352-1415, or via email at marjschneider@bellsouth.net.

The South Atlanta Chapter reported that we are trying to make less walking when connecting from rail to bus accessing Marta. It is in the early stage of the movement. We will keep you posted as it moves forward. In this world, people who are blind or visually impaired want to walk at least a city block, maybe further, and to continue their transfer from rail to bus. This is happening at the Buckhead Marta rail station and at the Lenox Marta rail station. The South Atlanta chapter meetings are held on the second Thursday, at the Piccadilly Cafeteria, 2000 Crescent Center Blvd. in Tucker, Georgia, from 4:00 PM until 6:00 PM.

For more information, please contact Brent Reynolds, at 404-814-0768, or via email jbr53@samobile.net.

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Georgia Guide Dog Users News:

By Betsy Grenevitch

Due to the postponement of the Georgia Council of the Blind conference and convention that was to be held in May, our plans for the spring have changed for GGDU. Our board will be meeting soon to discuss what to do about our spring meeting. I hope to have more news for the next edition of The GCB Digest. All guide dog handlers have been in anticipation of what will take place next concerning the proposed rulemaking about emotional support animals. It sounds like they have received thousands of responses to the request for comments which is great news.

If you are interested in learning more about the Georgia Guide Dog Users group please contact Betsy Grenevitch via phone 678-862-3876, or via email at blindangel61@gmail.com. You can also visit their web site by going to:

[www.georgiaguidedogusers.org](http://www.georgiaguidedogusers.org/)

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In Memory Of: John Milton Brown:

John Milton Brown was born on July 8, 1941 and passed away on October 24, 2019. He was 78 years old when he went to be with his Lord. Before his passing, he lived on Lucy Chapel Rd in Danville, Georgia and his funeral services were held on Saturday, October 26, 2019, at 2:00 PM. Elder Franklin Bryant was in charge of his funeral service which was held at Reece Funeral Home and he was buried in Cool Springs Primitive Baptist Church Cemetery. John Milton Brown was the son of the late Joe Lee and Willie Ann Howell Brown. He was preceded in death by his siblings, Thelma Griffis, Corine Jones, Paul Brown and Joe L. Brown. In 1961, Jr. Milton graduated from the Georgia Academy of the Blind as a certified piano tuner. For 58 years he tuned pianos at various Colleges, Schools, Churches, other private businesses and for numerous individuals. Milton was a member of the Macon Chapter of the Georgia Council of the Blind. Survivors include Kaye Hall, his companion of 37 years, his Grandchildren Lila and Jude; nieces and nephews Lisa and David Allen, Caye Brannen, Sherree and Braxton Wallace, Mark Jones, Mike Jones, Rodney and Sherry Griffis, Roy and Kathy Griffis and many Great Nieces and nephews.

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Georgia Blind Lions: We've been talking:

By Mike Hall

One thing that can spice up a meeting, whether it is a GCB meeting or a Lions Club meeting, is a good program with an interesting speaker. Georgia Blind Lions had just such a meeting on Thursday evening February 6th during our monthly conference phone call. Kathy Saunders with Southeastern Guide Dogs was on the call to speak about the organization. Southeastern Guide Dogs is located in Palmetto, Florida and they have a campus where students may stay for a month of training. Meals are provided in their banquet hall and each room has a screen door opening leading to a dog relief area. Not only does Southeastern Guide Dogs provide guide dogs for blind adults, but they are now serving teenagers. A trainer will go work with the student at his, or her, high school and companion dogs are provided to children who are blind to help them with getting out and becoming comfortable with an animal. Veterans receive dogs as well and there are always good stories. Southeastern Guide Dogs not only has puppy raisers, but they have their own breeding facility. Last December, kennel cough was going around, so kennels were closed for the month, but it was time for the dogs to give birth. The organizations veterinarian advised that the dogs should be allowed to give birth in the homes where they were staying and two days before Christmas, staff came in for one particular birth of happy puppies. For about three weeks, the puppies stayed in their family home until the kennels reopened. There campus is located at 4210 77th St. east, Palmetto FL 34221. The phone number is 941-729-5665.

On a previous Georgia Blind Lions call, we had a brief discussion of the new voting machines in Georgia. It was pointed out that the machines are not accessible. My GCB chapter, the Greater Hall Chapter, had Chris Harvey with the Secretary of State's office to come and demonstrate the machine. While the presentation was well done and we were able to hear the machine talk, one of our members who are very involved with voting and quite tech savvy took about five minutes to get through the demonstration ballot. He was the first blind person to make it through the entire ballot according to Mr. Harvey. Since that conference call, I have learned that the Secretary of State's office plans a hearing on a rule allowing the use of cell phones to read the printed ballot. Once a voter has used the machine to go through and vote the ballot, a printed ballot is produced showing the voter's ballot choices. The ballot must then be scanned with a scanner, near the voting machine to record the vote. Some comments have been submitted suggesting that the proposed rule allowing for cell phone use to read the printed ballot would not fix the accessibility problem. D-Instead, the state is being asked by these visually impaired voters to provide a machine at each polling location to either digitally enlarge the printed ballot or to read the printed ballot. That hearing was scheduled for February 28th, which should have already happened by the time you read this. Georgia Blind Lions has started accepting a volunteer dues contribution of $10.00 annually. This money will be used for any service projects we identify. We are looking for project ideas and we are looking for program ideas as well. You do not have to be a Lion to give a program or to visit the call. The call is held at 8:00 PM on the first Thursday of the month.

For more information, please contact Georgia Blind Lions Chair Marsha Farrow at (706) 859-2624, or via email at marshafarrow@windstream.net

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Sloppy Floyd Lions Christmas Camp:

By Jan Morris

This winter, the Northwest Georgia Lions Clubs were selected to receive Operation Round-Up grants to be used for the Clubs Annual Christmas Camp sponsorship.  The Trion Lions Club received $1500, the Chatsworth Lions Club received $1200 and the Dalton Lions Club donated $500 to be used for the camp. All grants were provided by Operation Round-Up and were made possible by the generosity of NGEMC's membership. We are grateful to all the members who participate by rounding up their power bills to the nearest dollar each month. On December 9-12, we met at James H. Floyd State Park in Chattooga County for our Christmas Camp.

Camps for individuals with visual impairments are rare.  Fifteen adult campers with severe vision loss and volunteers experienced a great time. Volunteers for camp were Ann Brown, Mildred Cordle, Larry Gilreath, Debbie Young, Chris Holbrook, Patti Smith, C.L. Dunn, Doug Ellis and Jan Morris. Three of our campers are Guide Dog Handlers and the dogs also enjoyed the Park.  The Lions provided transportation to and from the camp. The campers enjoyed bowling at Calhoun Bowling Center as well as going to the Cartersville Cinema and listened to the movie, "A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood", starring Tom Hanks.  Transportation to the Cinema was provided by Central Avenue Baptist Church. One morning, campers enjoyed doing crafts, painted bird houses, made Santa Claus ornaments out of okra, and did other crafts. Tuesday was the only day weather did not cooperate; however, Willie Blackmon and Howard Hughes came, and we all enjoyed a songfest.  That night, the Chatsworth Club came and provided a hotdog roast and we had a great time roasting hot dogs inside. On Wednesday we had a Christmas party. The Chatsworth, Dalton and Trion Clubs used the grant money to rent all four cabins, pay for bowling and for the movie, buy popcorn and drinks at the movie and to buy groceries for seven meals. One of the members of the Dalton Lions Club, Mark Talley, donated money for the campers to buy Pizza from pizza Hut. Once again, this trip our State Park Rangers were a big help. Just to name a few of our activities, our Lions Clubs engage in childhood cancer, Diabetes Awareness, Disaster Relief, environmental programs, eyeglass recycling, eyeglass purchases, eye surgeries, feeding the hungry, health fairs and hearing programs. All of our club’s welcome new members so get involved and serve in your own way. Choose projects that are important to you.  It is your town.  Make it better. Everybody can make a difference.  We love to serve. For more information please contact Jan Morris at 706-346-7249, or via email at janmorris922@yahoo.com

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ACB 2020 Legislative Seminar:

By Cecily Nipper, Junior:

The generous leadership scholarship I received enabled me to attend the 2020 American Council of the Blind Legislative Seminar and I would like to thank the GCB for that opportunity. It was an experience I’ll never forget! On Saturday, February 22, 2020, I arrived in Alexandria, Virginia. While waiting for my hotel room to be ready, I had the opportunity to explore the area around the hotel on foot with my guide dog. I found a local grocery store and a spot called Extra Perks, which served the most delicious cappuccino. The President’s Meeting was held on Sunday, and I was able to attend as a guest of Alice Ritchhart. It was so fascinating to meet ACB leaders and get to know some of the people who I met at the 2019 National Convention. On Monday, I learned so much from the Legislative Seminar. We were presented with educational speakers, and given information about the three imperatives that we were to present at the Capitol the next day. Several issues impacting the lives of the blind and visually impaired were covered, including the following:

The need for Medicare to cover low vision devices as durable medical equipment; the need to count every child who has a vision impairment, even those who have other disabilities; and the need for accessibility in crosswalks, sidewalks, and autonomous vehicles. This experience at the Capitol was like nothing I have ever done in my life. I had no idea that the Senate and House encompassed huge buildings connected with underground tunnels! By the time we had made four personal visits with staffers at the offices of David Perdue, Kelly Loeffler and others, dropping off copies of our imperatives with all the other Georgia representatives, we had walked over five miles. It was a hard day of work, but so rewarding. During this trip, I enjoyed getting to know Alice Ritchhart better, as well as Valerie and John Hester, who also accompanied us. On the way back from the Capitol, we shared an experience I know I will never forget. We were refused an Uber because of my guide dog. The driver arrived at our location, got out of his car, and said, “No dog.” I explained to him that it was a service dog, and that it was against the law and against Uber policy for him to refuse us a ride, but he was adamant. He said he was cancelling our ride, which he did. The truly ironic thing about this experience is that the day before at the seminar, a representative from Uber had spoken to us about the training their drivers receive, and how things are different now for people with disabilities. After reaching our hotel via taxi, with the help of some other guide dog users, we immediately filed a complaint. That same night, Uber called us back to interview us about the incident. The next day we received word the driver had been fired from Uber. When I returned home on Wednesday, I was very tired, but my heart and mind were full of new experiences and in the future, I look forward to visiting Capitol Hill again to advocate for the rights of the blind and visually impaired. Again, I want to thank GCB for making this trip possible for me.

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Pick it, Clear it and Place it:

By Pagiel Griffith

Even though I do not have sight, the above motto helps me make sure my room is cleaned well. The first step is picking it up. Choosing a smaller area is best, so you do not have to clean large areas all at once. The second step is clear it. Once you have selected your area take all of the objects away from that location. After that is done, place those objects on a table or on the floor in a safe place. Now that your area is clear, wipe it clean of dust, stains, or possible germs. The last step is placing it. Now that your area and items are clean put them back where they belong. What I have learned is when you place things on shelves or tables it is best to put them side by side. This makes it so you can pick things up without knocking others over. With this technique I am able to keep my room clean and no longer have to deal with stepping on tools, items, and valuables.

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THE VOTING PROCESS: Interview with a poll worker:

By Cecily Nipper, Jr

This week, I had the opportunity to interview Melissa Coker, who for the past eighteen years has been a poll worker in Newton County, Georgia. On May 19, 2020, the new polling machines are scheduled to be used statewide for the first time. Many of us in the visually impaired community have questions about what this will mean for us. The Official Code of Georgia Annotated is used for poll worker training and will be referenced in this article as, O.C.G.A. Those with a disability automatically qualify for assistance

(O.C.G.A. 21-2-409), either by the helper of their choice (must not be an employer or agent of a union), or by a poll worker. The key word here is to “ask”. Tell the poll worker, “I need assistance”, and then proceed to explain the type of assistance you would like. Poll workers are trained to treat persons with disabilities with respect and to give them “unhurried attention”, keeping in mind that it may take a person with a disability extra time to go through the voting process. In addition, handicapped spaces and wheelchair access to the voting machine are required at all polling places. To view some of the videos used at poll worker training, or for other information, please visit: georgiapollworkers.sos.ga.gov. O.C.G.A. 21-2-385.1 provides for voters with a disability to be allowed to vote, “at the next available voting…booth without having to wait in line”. When accommodating voters with disabilities, poll workers are instructed not to touch a person’s medical “equipment without prior consent”. This includes white canes and guide dogs. Also on the subject of guide dogs, “Animals that assist people with disabilities should be admitted into all buildings. DO NOT pet or distract these Assistance animals, as they are working animals, not pets”. I asked Melissa for a description of the process, from start to finish and we talked about areas where special accommodations need to be made in order for us, as blind and visually impaired people, to vote independently. New to this election are “polling pads”, which are Apple iPads on a swivel base with a photo ID holder in the back and a slot for the voter card to be activated. Upon arriving at a polling place, the voter is asked for their photo ID and the poll worker will place the photo ID in the holder on the back of the polling pad. The voter’s information will come up on screen and they will be asked if the information is correct. For those with low vision, there is an enlarge button, and upon request, for those who wish to have audio, in a computer synthesized voice, the machine will also speak what is on the screen. Once this information is verified, the voter will be asked to sign their name. The poll worker may assist by placing the pen on the line to be signed and I suggested having signature guides on hand to help with this process. At this point, if the voter has chosen to have someone assist them at the voting machine itself, it would be necessary to let the poll worker know so the assistant can also sign the screen. Next, the voter card will be activated and handed to the voter. The voting machine is now called a “ballot marking device”, and each polling place must have at least one unit that is equipped with an audio visual component for headphones and a “Gameboy” style controller with tactile colored buttons. Having heard the experience of those who tried the voting machines at the Capitol, I informed Melissa these buttons were not easy to use. Though Melissa had been shown a controller at poll training, she said she was not really shown how to use it. However, there is a diagram in the training materials about the function of each button, but my questions were directed toward determining how a blind person could independently vote. Each ballot marking device is equipped with a large touch screen, which for those with low vision, has the capability of reverse contrast and magnification. The voter card goes in the bottom of the machine, but will not “click” into place as on the older machines. Once the voter makes the selection for their ballot, they will be given the opportunity to review their choices on screen and then press “print”. The voter will remove the voter card from the machine and paper from the printer. Melissa provided me with an example of the tiny printout showing the voter’s selections. The recommendation for poll workers are to set up, “and area…to provide magnifying tools for paper ballots”, including standing magnifiers, handheld magnifiers and reading glasses. It is at this table that the voter will be allowed to review their selections. Traditionally, phones have not been allowed in the polling place because it is illegal to take a picture of a ballot. Also, photography within a polling place could infringe on the voting rights of others. However, in the training, an exception has been made if a visually impaired person must use their phone for “more powerful magnification”. Then, I asked about pictures being taken in order to use text to speech software to read the ballot. (By reading the sample printed ballot with Seeing AI, I demonstrated how this could be done.) While this should be allowed, Melissa stressed that poll workers would ask the voter to delete any such picture after it has been used in order to uphold the rule of not photographing ballots. Once the voter is satisfied with how they have voted, the poll worker will direct them to slide the printout into a polling place scanner, which electronically counts each vote using the QR code printed on the paper and also keeps the printed copy of the ballot cast. Should a voter feel that their rights have been violated, they are free to file a complaint at their local election office or the Secretary of State’s office. We must be sure our freedom to vote is being safeguarded, but we must also realize that there are plenty of hard-working poll workers like Melissa out there who take an oath each Election Day to safeguard this freedom also. It is up to us, as voters who are blind and visually impaired, to show up and take advantage of the privilege to vote.

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News from GCB Members At Large:

By Betsy Grenevitch on behalf of Valerie Hester

I want to publicly thank Valerie, our GCB at-large representative on the board, for allowing me to have the privilege of trying to begin something new for our GCB at-large members. GCB member-at-large members now have a meeting place. It does not matter where you live in the state or if you have transportation since the meetings are held over the phone. At this time they are informal, but we hope to grow in number so that we can invite speakers to our meetings or discuss what is happening in our lives. We held our first meeting on February 17 and had seven in attendance. We had our second meeting on March 16 and had three in attendance. It may be a small group but if it is an encouragement to even one person it is worth spending the time together. If you are a member at large and you would like to join us we will be meeting the third Monday of each month at 7:00 PM. The number to call is (605) 562-0400 and the code is 780-5751 pound. We hope to see more of you on our next call.

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Ponder This:

By Evan Bradford (Athens Chapter)

When you hear a loud noise, what comes to mind? Every day, the world has all kind of various sounds. Concepts about such sounds might seem obvious at first, but think about the first time that you heard the siren of a firetruck.

For one thing, I remember it being loud and how it "fired" me up. But I also thought to myself, what in the "blazes" is going on? It hurts to hear these loud noises. Make them stop. Consider how a child who is totally blind might react to the sound of the siren of a firetruck. That child has no concept of past experiences or a visual memory of fires, firefighters, fire hoses and fire engines. When we think about how to teach these missing concepts to a child with a visual impairment, they need direct, tangible experiences with the objects, sounds and images that are associated with the firetruck. For teaching the concept of "hot" things such as fire, by allowing a child to touch fire is not safe, however, with parental supervision; a child might hold a small wick candle and feel the heat from the tip of the candle. Another idea for gaining an understanding of firetrucks is a visit to a fire station. Meeting a firefighter can be an immersive experience for any child. Plus, the child who is visually impaired can directly interact with the essential tools and vehicles found at a fire station. Parents and guardians can also teach the sounds directly to their children by reading a story about firetrucks. Then, making the "whoo whoo" sound of a siren is a helpful way for a child to associate that sound with the presence of a real-world firetruck. Concepts about the world are so important for children with visual impairments and other disabilities. By learning why those loud sounds happen in the world at large, children who are blind, or have low vision will be one step closer to becoming functional and independent adults.

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2020 Census Announcement:

If anyone wishes to do their 2020 census form over the phone, the number is: 1-844-330-2020. They can look up your 12 digit ID number which appears on the snail mail invitation, that everyone is supposed to receive, and which you need to complete online.

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GCB Board meeting via the Phone:

The next GCB board meeting will be on Saturday, April 18, 2020, at 10:00 am. The phone number is 1-605-562-0400, and the access code is 7805751, pound sign. If you have any questions please contact Betsy Grenevitch at 678-862-3876, or via email at blindangel61@gmail.com.

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Mickey or Max: Experiencing Disney World Orlando:

By Marsha Farrow

“Mom, it’s for a Charity”, my adult daughter Megan urged me on in a local Faith Based Fund Raiser in the fall of 2019. The dinner and auction was being held to raise funds for the Faith Based City of Refuge North. The much-needed funds were designated to support and combine our local outreach services under one umbrella. In these difficult days, living in our lovely community of Summerville has both benefits and challenges for our residents. Many are struggling to overcome addictions, poverty and unemployment. This Auction for the City of Refuge was vital to new beginnings for so many of our citizens. With these critical needs in mind, I kept raising my hand and my bid for the Disney Package. My daughter, enjoying every moment of the bidder war, was determined that we were headed to Disney. At the height of the excitement I heard the Auctioneer asking for any additional bids and then he loudly announced, “Sold”. Excitedly, I asked my daughter, “Did I have the highest bid?” “Yes”, she replied with extreme enthusiasm! I took a deep breath of relief and everyone in the room seemed so happy, knowing the funds were designated for individuals in very needy circumstances. Now, we were headed to Orlando! After months of planning, our Orlando flight was set for February 9, 2020 and our first day at Disney World was the following day on February 10th. Our family’s Disney Package included a week’s stay in a large house, with a heated pool and VIP Tickets. Our family included my husband, son, daughter, her husband and three children ages 13, 6, and 8. Yes, Disney World is a wonderful experience for the entire family, however, please let me add that kindness and patience is required for both kids and their Mimi. At Disney, being severely visually impaired is challenging, as space is limited everywhere, due to very large crowds.

I was determined to make the best of every situation and utilize this experience to share teachable moments, not only for my family, but for the Disney Cast, and other Disney Guests. Here are some of my most enjoyable moments and memories. Is that you Mickey Mouse? At the end of our VIP Tour, one of the Disney Cast Members approached me along with a costumed character. Using my limited vision, enthusiastically I asked, “Are you Mickey?” When the Disney Cast Member told me that the character was Max, Goofy’s son, I felt so bad. Max was such a loving character and held my hand so sweetly and made every effort to communicate with me without any spoken language. The grandchildren and I had our photo made with Max. After Max went on his way to the Dance Party, I chuckled to myself about thinking Max was Mickey, and how my lack of vision had created yet one more teachable moment, then wondered what the human inside of Max’s costume believed about people who are visually impaired. Did the human inside contemplate ways others could identify the character without using words? I surely hope Max understood that to a visually impaired guest, he really did favor the King Mouse of Disney! As I often say, “I have just enough vision to help me get into deep trouble”. On our last day at Disney, we arrived very early and stood in line like a herd of race horses at the starting gate. When the gate opened and we had our security clearance, we headed for Pandora, which was a delightful experience and filled with surprise. Each individual rode on his own Avatar which was a winged character. Audio description was available and when the Pandora Cast Member obviously noticed my white cane, I was asked if I would like the audio description. Of course, I wanted to have the audio device which was a fabulous description. The cable was placed in a special port on the Avatar and I wore an ear- piece. The audio description enabled me to fully participate in the experience and I was totally included. The audio description allowed me to discuss every detail of Pandora with my grandchildren. Other outstanding event in our schedule was the lunch with Disney Princesses and this was an absolute delight. My daughter Megan had many opportunities to practice her own method of audio describing as she worked hard to describe each Princess. My granddaughter Ella and Ginna, were mesmerized by the lovely ladies wearing beautiful floor length dresses and sparkling crowns. Elsa and Ana from the movie Frozen were their all -time favorite. As the restaurant continually filled with gorgeous European ladies, all dressed as Princesses, we ate and enjoyed our delicious meal. Ella and Ginna smiled with wonder as each lovely Princess came to our table and introduced her. The occasion ended with a grand finale, when every little girl was invited to join in the Princess Parade held right in the restaurant.

Next, we decided to go wild! Let me explain, wild, like jungle animals in the Animal Kingdom’s Safari. Finally, with very tired feet, we climbed into our jungle bound vehicle and headed off for the Savannah. The Driver gave many verbal descriptions and facts related to all of the seldom seen animals of the jungle. The detailed descriptions were interesting and amazing. I will admit the wait time of one and one-half hours was awful. We had Fast Passes on the VIP Tour and on some other experiences, but not for the Safari. Among the many animals living in the Savannah, we saw lions, elephants, hippopotami and giraffes. My favorite was the five baby giraffes which had been born in recent weeks. Disney World is supporting major endeavors in the area of conservation and is contributing greatly to reducing the numbers of endangered species. If you plan to visit Disney World in the future, I highly recommend you find out these important facts. Take note of where all the audio description is made available find out if you need to pick up a separate player or if you will be provided a head set or earpiece. I urge you to make each cast member, in charge of roller coasters and other moving cars, aware that you are visually impaired in case you need extra time to load, buckle, and unload. In addition, since many rides are on a sort of conveyer belt which never stops, you may need to make a special request that your ride vehicle come to a stop to give you time to safely load and buckle. Nevertheless, even with the large crowds, your safety is very important, and these requests are teachable moments. Yet, I found the Disney Cast to be very helpful and concerned about my needs. In the very large crowds, my husband and daughter both worked very hard to provide sighted guidance. All in all, together, our three generations had a very enjoyable experience. For years to come, I believe each member of our family will fondly remember this fun-filled week. No doubt, we will each look back at our time at Disney with unique memories, ones that will always bring smiles and laughter!