GCB FALL 2026 DIGEST

In the center of the circle is a pencil drawing in gray tones. It is a palm of an open right hand gently cradling a Georgia peach. A slender green leaf gracefully hangs down from the top of the peach, originating from a short brown stem on the left side and draped over the thumb. The peach radiates warm hue colors like the warmth of the sun, with vibrant orange and yellow tones. In the center of the peach, bold uppercase letters GCB stand out in black, accompanied by corresponding Braille dots positioned directly below the three letters. Text reads A hand up, not a handout. Georgia Council of the Blind Established in 1956

The GCB DIGEST
Published by the Georgia Council of the Blind
An affiliate of the American Council of the Blind,
Our organization promotes a hand-up, not a handout.
Fall 2026

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From Your Editor

Hello, GCB family. We thank each one who has submitted articles in this issue of our digest. If you have any change of address, telephone number, or email address, or desire a change of format, please inform our GCB treasurer.

Thanks go out to the GCB Digest Committee who have made our GCB Digest such a considerable success. Thanks to each member who submitted articles, to those who made suggestions, and finally, I want to thank our President, Cecily Laney Nipper, for her presidential message with information about momentous events, legislation, and helpful projects.

Note: The GCB Digest is on NFB Newsline and on Vocal Point, formerly known as Georgia Radio Reading Service (GARRS).

Connect with us on social media! To find it, search on Instagram for gacouncilofftheblind. That represents ‘Georgia Council of the Blind without spaces and in all lower-case letters. Also, on Facebook Georgia Council of the Blind.

Attention:

ACB Braille Forum Cartridge Subscribers

In over a year, more than half of our cartridge subscribers have not returned any cartridges. If you are one of those individuals, please note, we must receive the unreturned cartridges as soon as possible to allow us to send new ones. The cartridges are just like the books borrowed from your NLS library, and GCB cartridges must be returned the same way. Look through your homes, find the cartridges, flip over the card on the mailing box, and put them out for the next mail pickup.

GCB Presidential Message

By Cecily Laney Nipper

Sitting down to write my final message as your president is emotional for me. The past five years have been full and productive, and I am grateful for you all, the membership, who make the Georgia Council of the Blind great.

At our 2026 convention in Covington, Georgia, we celebrated the 70th birthday of the Georgia Council of the Blind, established in 1956. Looking ahead to the years to come, members exercised their right to vote for officers, amendments, and resolutions. The democratic process gives every member a voice. Let’s always stand on those principles, remembering our grassroots, and working at the chapter, state, and national level as we are able.

Don’t forget to offer a hand up, as our logo says, to those who call you and those you encounter in the community. Answering referral calls has been my favorite part of being president, since it is a concrete way to always leave the life of the person who calls better than it was when they called. Sometimes a kind word or a simple referral, or just a listening ear, is all that’s needed to make someone’s day. Who knows, you might be the difference-maker in their new life with vision loss. You make a difference!

Appreciation must be expressed to the chapters who have consistently welcomed me on visits and phone calls, and who provide the bedrock of our council. The local support is so vital. At-large membership is growing, and the elected officer who represents that membership body cannot do it alone. Let’s recognize at-large members and welcome them consistently, whether that be when they come on a call, or simply by learning their name and getting to know them. Did you meet someone new at convention? Give them a call. Ask to be connected to them with contact information so that you can continue that relationship and mutual support.

You matter! Thank you, and it’s not goodbye, only see you later from me as I step into a new role in the Georgia Council of the Blind.

Georgia Council of the Blind Board Meeting Minutes

Saturday, April 18, 2026, 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM

Hybrid, on Zoom and in-person, Grace Baptist Church, McDonough, Georgia

Call to Order, Cecily Laney Nipper:

President Nipper called the meeting to order at 10:01 AM.

Invocation, Sharon Nichols:

Sharon Nichols, President of the Northwest Georgia Chapter, gave the invocation.

Roll Call, Amanda Wilson:

The following members were present: Cecily Laney Nipper, President; Marj Schneider, First Vice-President; Judy Presley, Second Vice-President; Amanda Wilson, Secretary; Cecily Nipper, Sr., Assistant Secretary; Marsha Farrow, Treasurer; Debbie McDonald, GCB Member at Large Representative; Alice Ritchhart, Past President; Jerrie Toney, Athens Chapter; Ron Worley, Augusta Chapter; Phil Jones, East Georgia Chapter; Dianne Roberts, Greater Hall County Chapter; Sharon Nichols, Northwest Georgia Chapter; David Hoppman, Peach Chapter Representative; Betsy Grenevitch, Georgia Guide Dog Users Representative; Deborah Lovell, Alliance on Ageing and Vision Loss Representative; Steve Longmire, Webmaster; and Tiffany Montalvo, GCB Digest Representative. Guests: Jamaica Miller, Patricia Tusing, Phong Luong, Johna Wright, Hoyal Presley, Granger Ricks, Zack Nipper, Angela Zimmerman, Danielle McIntyre, Aarushi Ammavajjala, Cellbee Brooks, Sherry Brooks and Johna Wright. A quorum was present.

Approval of Agenda, Cecily Laney Nipper:

Cecily stated that we have one change to the agenda. The Alliance on Ageing and Vision Loss report needs to be right after the scholarship presentation. She asked for a motion to accept the agenda with that amendment. Marsha Farrow made the motion, and Alice Ritchhart seconded the motion. Cecily asked for discussion. Hearing none, she called for the vote, and the motion passed with no opposition.

President’s Report, Cecily Laney Nipper:

President Nipper welcomed Johna Wright, one of our GCB Scholarship recipients. She said that we would have two more recipients joining us.

Cecily reported that she had asked Melissa Woolston to come on the call to talk about the Washington, DC Leadership Conference, but she was unable to make it.

The Washington, DC Leadership Conference was held in March in Arlington, Virginia. Cecily and Melissa Woolston from the Northeast Georgia Chapter attended the conference in person. Cecily reported that it was a fabulous conference. They were able to participate in two days of leadership training, meet with legislators, and attend the ACB board meeting.

Cecily said that ACB is consistently building partnerships and inviting affiliates to build those partnerships. She hopes that they continue to do so in the future. The Washington, DC Leadership Conference will be held again in March of 2027 at the same hotel.

One of the bills we were advocating was the Telecommunications Act, which will improve audio description. Cecily noted that over one hundred people went to Capitol Hill to advocate with their legislators, including Melissa. Another imperative in progress is improvements in accessibility for medical devices. The legislation would require that modern medical devices, such as blood sugar monitors, include beeps or speech capabilities.

Cecily added, while none of the federal legislation we had our eyes on was passed, yet, on the state level there was movement on the Braille bill.

Currently, there are two versions of it. The first version was put out by the National Federation of the Blind, NFB. The second version, with some alterations, was worked on by a task force made up of Stacey Orr, Katy Nicks, and Melissa Riccobono, First Lady of NFB. The second version consisted of language that would broaden the bill to include more students with low vision. This was similar to the bill that was passed by the NFB in Louisiana, so they are calling it the Louisiana Language. Although neither bill went through, the hope is that it can be reintroduced as a combined initiative between the two bills.

Cecily informed the board that although Stacey is working on the bill, she is not doing so as a representative for GCB. Alice Ritchhart questioned if GCB should appoint someone as a representative, and Cecily added Stacey could be the representative if the board approved, with the expectation she would actively and consistently keep the board updated. It was also requested that members receive a copy of the Braille Bill with the new language, and those who would like can also assist with the bill. Betsy Grenevitch and Marsha Farrow are interested in collaborating with Stacey, such as at a town hall where the task force could update all in attendance.

Cecily announced that she has appointed a person for the nominating committee representative, delegate, and alternate delegate for the Summer ACB National Conference and Convention on Zoom that will be held July 13-18, 2026. The in-person and hybrid portion will be held in ST. Louis, Missouri, July 24- 31, 2026. Marsha Farrow has agreed to serve as our nominating committee representative, and Alice Ritchhart has agreed to serve as an in-person delegate. Amanda Wilson, who will be Zoom, has agreed to serve as the alternate delegate. This will allow them to work together to collect members 'votes.

For anyone who is new to this process, voting is held for candidates who are running for office and for constitution and bylaw amendments to the national constitution and bylaws. You will be given the opportunity to hear the debate and speakers, and then at the given time you can cast your individual vote. You will be able to vote in person, by phone, or by computer. GCB currently has over 150 members, which entitles our organization to six affiliate votes. More information on voting, candidates, and any amendments will go out in email, and information will be available during the in-person morning general sessions Monday through Thursday during the week of the national convention. There will also be an evening general session that Saturday.

GCB Scholarship Presentation, Marj Schneider:

Marj stated that scholarship season has once again arrived for the Georgia Council of the Blind. She noted that the scholarship program has been a part of GCB for decades and that she has served as chair of the Scholarship Committee for the past seven years. Marj shared that this work has been one of the most rewarding aspects of her involvement with GCB. She emphasized the importance of providing assistance to students pursuing education in a variety of fields, locations, and stages of study. As in previous years, the committee received applications from several outstanding students. Marj commented that this year's applicants were especially impressive in their achievements, goals, and dedication to their educational pursuits.

The committee selected three scholarship recipients for 2026: Aarushi Ammavajjala of Marietta, Georgia, a first-year student at Georgia Tech; Marcelle (Cellbee) Brooks of Fairburn, Georgia, an undergraduate student at Georgia State University; Johna Wright of Macon, Georgia, a doctoral student at Mercer University pursuing a PhD in higher education leadership.

Marj expressed how inspiring it was to review the applications, and invited the recipients to join the board meeting, either in person or via Zoom, to briefly discuss their studies and future goals.

Cecily invited Johna Wright, who was attending via Zoom, to introduce herself. Johna thanked the board for the opportunity to be present. She shared that she is a first-year PhD student in Education at Mercer University, focusing on higher education leadership. Her research centers on making college campuses more accessible and creating more inclusive and engaging learning environments for students with disabilities.

Johna also explained that she works full-time at Mercer University as the Assistant Director of Fellowships, where she assists students who are applying for scholarships, fellowships, and other academic awards. She concluded by thanking the board for its support and for the opportunity to speak.

Cecily thanked Johna for her remarks. She then noted that the other two scholarship recipients would be presenting either in person or via Zoom later in the meeting. Marj stated that Marcelle (Cellbee) Brooks would be attending in person, while Aarushi Ammavajjala would be joining via Zoom. Cecily said that both recipients would be given an opportunity to speak when they were available.

Cecily concluded by thanking Marj and the Scholarship Committee for their dedication and hard work in administering the scholarship program.

GCB Alliance on Ageing and Vision Loss, GCB AAVL, Deborah Lovell:

Deborah informed us that the GCB AAVL business meetings are held every month on the third Monday at 7:00 PM on Zoom, and once a quarter they hold educational community calls that are open for all GCB members to attend. The upcoming quarterly community call will be on Monday, April 20, 2026, at 7:00 PM on Zoom. This month, their speaker will be Sharmori Lewis from the Senior Medicare Patrol. The topic will be about medical fraud and how it affects beneficiaries, caregivers, and family members.

Deborah stated that the GCB AAVL will be having elections this year, so President Alice Ritchhart will be appointing a nominating committee. If anyone is interested in running for any of the offices, please contact Alice.

The GCB AAVL will be sponsoring our welcome reception and bingo night at our upcoming GCB conference and convention in October. The affiliate is also co-sponsoring the Unity Band to play music for the dance after the banquet on Friday night at the conference and convention.

Aarushi Ammavajjala, GCB Scholarship Recipient:

Cecily welcomed Aarushi Ammavajjala. We wanted to invite her to share about herself and her studies.

Aarushi said she was honored to be here today. She is a computer science student at the Georgia Institute of Technology and is concentrating on cybersecurity and privacy in artificial intelligence. Through her studies and research at Stanford University, the Mayo Clinic, Microsoft, Oracle, and the United Nations, and now Georgia Institute of Technology, Aarushi has decided to pursue a career in software engineering. Specifically in AI healthcare,

Aarushi believes AI can be integrated into the healthcare field to improve patient diagnoses, treatment plans, and the quality of care a patient receives. She plans to obtain her master's degree in artificial intelligence in the healthcare field. Cecily thanked Aarushi for coming to speak to us.

Secretary's Report, Amanda Wilson:

Cecily stated the minutes of the January 7, 2026, board meeting had been sent out through email. Cecily asked for a motion to accept these minutes. Phil Jones made the motion to accept the minutes, and Deborah Lovell seconded the motion. Cecily asked if there were any additions or corrections to the minutes. The motion passed with no opposition.

Treasurer's Report, Marsha Farrow:

GCB Main Checking #9530: As of 04/15/2026, $13,566.37; 01/16/2026, $13,752.21. As of 4/15/2026, Designated Funds within Main Account:

Legal Advocacy Training Fund, $1,000.00

Senior Support Fund, as of April 15, 2026, $3,355.54; Three Seniors were approved and received items.

January 2026, $2,855.24; November 2025,

$3,443.65.

Youth GAP Fund: April 15, 2026, $1,967.92; January 2026, $1,967.92.

Total of all Designated Funds: April 2026, $6,323.46; January 2026, $5,823.16.

General Operating Expenses: $7,242.91; January 2026, $7,929.05.

American Council of the Blind Annual Dues: As of 4/15/2026, $745.00; 149 Members plus four ACB Lifetime Members = 153 members. In 2025, GCB had 137 Members: $685.00. In 2024, GCB had 128 Members $640.00.

The Hartford Company GCB General Liability Annual Debit Payment: 11/14/25, $505.00; 10/14/2024, $487.00

The Hartford GCB Officers and Directors General Liability Insurance: $611.00 Annual Payment was paid on 01/28/2026.

Utilized Main Account Debit Card: QuickBooks Intuit Program (utilized by Phyllis Waters of Waters Accounting Bookkeeper)

QuickBooks Charges Recurring Monthly: January 2026, $38.00; November 2025, $38.00; October 2024, $30.00. Increase of $8.00 for 2025-2026. Mrs. Waters 'Services Include: record keeping using QuickBooks Software; filing taxes annually with the IRS; completing required Georgia Secretary of State and Georgia Charities Reports.

Al and Cora Camp Scholarship Fund #9557, as of 4/15/2026, $102.00; January 2026, $102.00.

Conference Account #9685: As of 4/15/26, $12,077.90. Total Deposits: $1,277.06; 01/21/26, Deposit 277.06; 01/21/26, Deposit $1,000.00,

$1,000 was donated by Zack and Cecily Nipper Senior for conference meeting room sponsorship. $277.06 was a counter deposit of a check from Way Financial to reimburse Conference First Timer's Scholarship expenses. January 2026: $10,800.84, $12,811.92.

Conference Donors: Zack and Cecily Nipper Senior $1,000.00 for conference meeting room sponsorship; Miller Family Donation $1,000.00; Helen, Georgia Presbyterian Ladies Fund for Conference Lodging/Travel $1,000.00; Vanda Pharmaceuticals Conference 2025 Support $500.00. Diamond Sponsor Dr. Myra Shivers Fund $2,000.00 for lodging/Travel.

GCB Regions Athene Long-Term Investment: 04/15/2026, $22,999.44, Interest $207.83; Total Interest: $3,070.97. 01/16/2026, $22,791.61; Interest accrued from 11/03/2025, to present is $174.00. 11/03/25, $22,617.57; As of October 31, 2025, Interest accrued $226.97; 10/23/24, $21784.70, Interest received on 5/24/24, $331.44. Daily Compounded Interest since May 25, 2024, = $132.42. Total Interest as of 01/16/2026 is $2,863.14. October 2024: $1,990.58; Matures on May 24, 2027. Athene Investment History: November 1, 2023, $21,012.12; July 18, 2023, Total $20,790.77. Initial Investment: $19,928.43 (Athene Initial contract finalized on May 24, 2022; interest rate of 3.75 fixed for five years.

Way Financial Investment: As of March 2026, $68,030.33; February 2026, $66,587.42; January 2026, $67,931.13; December 2025, $73,688.78; November 2025, $67,109.36; October 2025, $68,367.08; September 2025, $73,688.78; August 2025, $70,026.33; July 31, 2025, $70,026.33.

Total of all GCB Regions Accounts: April 2026, $25,746.30; January 2026, $24655.00. Total of all GCB Accounts, including Athene Investment and Way Financial Investment: April 2026, $116,776.00; January 2026, including Athene and Way Financial: $121,135. 61; November 2025, $127,424.00. The treasury report was filed for audit.

Marcelle (Cellbee) Brooks, Scholarship Recipient:

Marj thanked Cellbee for attending the board meeting and sharing information about his educational journey and future goals.

Cellbee began by expressing his gratitude for receiving the scholarship. He shared that his journey began when he lost both his eyesight and kidney function at approximately the same time. He thanked his wife, Sherry, for helping him through the difficult challenges that followed.

Cellbee explained that he spent the past five years on dialysis, describing the experience as feeling like he was in prison. Because of his vision loss and the requirement to undergo dialysis treatments three times each week, he felt limited in what he could do and where he could go.

Prior to losing his sight, Cellbee worked as a photographer and filmmaker. He recalled that his last photography assignment was a two-week project in Jamaica, where he captured many memorable images. After returning home, he drove to work one final time, not realizing it would be the last time he would ever drive a car.

Following these life-changing events, Cellbee eventually received a kidney transplant. He shared that the donor was a thirteen-year-old child who had passed away from an overdose. Learning about the donor deeply affected both him and his wife. He said that receiving such a gift made him feel compelled to give back and help others in a meaningful way. After recovering from the transplant, Cellbee experienced a newfound sense of freedom.

No longer tied to dialysis treatments three times a week, he was able to travel, move about more freely, and enjoy activities without the constant concern of scheduling around treatments or feeling exhausted afterward.

As he considered how to use this second chance, Cellbee decided he did not want to remain idle. Instead, he chose to return to school and pursue a degree in psychology so that he could help others facing challenges in their own lives.

Cecily asked Cellbee if he would be able to remain through lunch so that a photograph could be taken and he could receive his scholarship check. Cellbee confirmed that he could stay. Cecily jokingly reminded him not to leave without his check and thanked him for joining the meeting and sharing his inspiring story.

Finance Committee Report - Chair, Jerrie Toney

Cecily stated that the board would next discuss the financial report that Jerrie had distributed by email prior to the meeting. She asked if there were any questions regarding the report.

Hearing none, Cecily requested a motion to accept the financial report as presented. Phil Jones made a motion to accept the financial report as distributed by email. Alice Ritchhart seconded the motion. Cecily asked for any further discussion. Hearing none, she called for a vote, and the motion passed without opposition.

Cecily then reported on the success of the Interstate Auction. She thanked everyone who donated items, purchased items, and worked together to make the fundraiser successful. The auction raised $596.00 for GCB. She noted that, by vote of the membership at the Fall Conference membership meeting, proceeds from the Interstate Auction would be deposited into the General Fund to help support the organization's operating expenses. Cecily expressed appreciation for everyone's support in making the fundraiser successful.

Cecily welcomed Patricia Tusing, one of the meeting's guests, and thanked her for her ongoing support of GCB. She noted that Patricia is a member of GCB, supports several affiliates, and serves as Chair of the Interstate Auction Steering Committee. After Cecily emphasized the Interstate Auction would not be possible without Patricia's leadership and dedication, she thanked Patricia for donating the door prizes for today's meeting.

Cecily opened discussion regarding whether GCB wished to participate in the Interstate Auction again in 2027, on the proposed date of March 20, 2027. Following the discussion, the board expressed unanimous support for again participating in next year's Interstate Auction.

The board then considered another fundraising opportunity available through Blind Girl Designs. Cecily provided a brief overview. She explained that Blind Girl Designs requires a $500.00 deposit to create a custom Georgia-themed design that can be printed on various items, including T-shirts, sweatshirts, hooded sweatshirts, aprons, blankets, and tote bags. GCB would receive $7.00 from each item sold. The fundraiser would run for approximately eight months. Cecily noted that at least 72 items would need to be sold for GCB to recover the initial investment. After discussion regarding the costs, potential sales, and overall value of the fundraiser, the board decided not to participate in this fundraiser. During the discussion, it was suggested that local chapters could contribute toward the deposit if interest in the fundraiser increased in the future.

Patricia then shared information about the City Pop Popcorn fundraising program. She mentioned that she had attended several GCB technology meetings and complimented the organization on its leadership and innovation in the area of technology. She noted that many other affiliates could benefit from the knowledge and experience GCB members share. Patricia also spoke about the growth of Interstate Auction, explaining that it began three years ago and continues to expand. Patricia noted that seven of Georgia's auction items had been purchased by members of other affiliates and that approximately ninety people attended the auction. Ten affiliates are expected to participate in next year's event.

Turning to the City Pop Popcorn fundraiser, Patricia explained that participating organizations receive approximately fifty percent of the retail value of each bag sold, excluding shipping costs. She stated that the company is easy to work with, provides excellent customer service, and at the conclusion of the fund raiser, they deposit proceeds directly into the participating organization's account. She also noted that the fundraiser can run for several months and that the popcorn is of high quality. Participants may purchase popcorn for themselves or send it as gifts to family and friends.

Cecily thanked Patricia for sharing information about the fundraiser.

Following a positive discussion, the board agreed that the City Pop Popcorn fundraiser would be a worthwhile opportunity for GCB. Cecily requested a motion to participate in the fundraiser. Alice made the motion, and Marsha seconded it. Cecily noted that because there is no upfront cost to participate, she would be willing to establish the online storefront on behalf of GCB. Steve added that the fundraising link would be posted on the GCB website and mobile app to help promote sales.

The motion to participate in the City Pop Popcorn fundraiser passed without opposition.

Greater Hall Chapter Name Change -, Cecily Laney Nipper

Well in advance of the meeting, Dianne Roberts, President of the Greater Hall County Chapter, submitted all documentation required by the GCB bylaws to both the Secretary and Treasurer regarding a proposed chapter name change. The chapter voted to change its name from the Greater Hall County Chapter to the Northeast Georgia Chapter of the Visually Impaired. The chapter submitted a membership roster consisting of 32 members, including 24 members who are visually impaired and 8 sighted members.

Cecily invited Dianne Roberts to explain the reason behind the proposed name change.

Dianne stated that Judy Presley, a charter member of the Greater Hall County Chapter since its founding in 1999 and chair of the chapter's Constitution Committee, suggested the name change. The committee was appointed in February of this year to review the chapter's governing documents and make necessary updates.

Dianne explained that the chapter serves individuals throughout the Northeast Georgia region rather than just Hall County. While there had been previous attempts to establish additional chapters in the area, those efforts were unsuccessful. As a result, the chapter currently represents members from multiple counties across Northeast Georgia. During discussions at a chapter meeting, members agreed that a broader name would more accurately reflect the chapter's service area and mission. The chapter also took the opportunity to correct several typographical errors in its constitution. Dianne stated that the chapter wishes to welcome and serve all individuals who are blind or visually impaired throughout Northeast Georgia and has already received interest from individuals in neighboring counties. For these reasons, the members felt that the name "Northeast Georgia Chapter of the Visually Impaired" would better represent the chapter and its future growth.

Cecily asked Dianne whether she wished to make a formal motion requesting that GCB approve the chapter name change and issue a charter under the new name. Dianne made the motion. Cecily then asked Judy Presley if she would second the motion. Judy seconded the motion. Cecily stated that it had been moved by Dianne Roberts and seconded by Judy Presley that the chapter name change be approved and that the chapter be recognized by the Georgia Council of the Blind as the Northeast Georgia Chapter of the Visually Impaired. Cecily opened the floor for discussion and commented that expanding the chapter's name to reflect a larger service area was a positive step toward reaching more individuals throughout the region. Hearing no further discussion, Cecily called for a vote. The motion passed without opposition.

Following the vote, Cecily asked Tiffany Montalvo to read the chapter charter.

The charter reads:

"The Northeast Georgia Chapter of the Visually Impaired Charter of Affiliation with the Georgia Council of the Blind.

The Georgia Council of the Blind, a non-profit organization, is an affiliate of the American Council of the Blind. This charter certifies that the Northeast Georgia Chapter of the Visually Impaired will continually strive to elevate the quality of life for all people who are blind or visually impaired; will provide a forum for the sharing of views of all people who are blind and visually impaired; will encourage and assist people who are blind and visually impaired through financial and peer support; will promote self-advocacy; will promote and support outreach efforts to enable individuals, parents, and families impacted by blindness or severe vision loss to reach their full potential. We commit to continually advocating and supporting improvements in education, rehabilitation, and employment for all people of all ages who are blind and visually impaired."

Charter accepted by Dianne Roberts, President of the Northeast Georgia Chapter of the Visually Impaired.

Charter Accepted at the Georgia Council of the Blind Board of Directors Hybrid Meeting this 18th day of April 2026, signed by Cecily Laney Nipper, GCB President, and electronically signed by Amanda Wilson, GCB Secretary.

Congratulations to the Northeast Georgia Chapter!

Youth Gap Fund Report – Ron Worley

Ron said that the committee has had some requests, but they were unable to approve them because the individuals did not have the rest of the cost beyond the allowed two hundred dollars. Ron stated that the application is out there and that they would be looking forward to assisting someone in the near future.

Senior Fund Report - Co-Chair, Alice Ritchhart

Alice reported that the Senior Fund currently has a balance of $3,355.54. She shared that the committee recently assisted a newly blind individual by purchasing equipment needed both at her workplace and in her home. Items provided included a computer and several adaptive household devices to help her maintain independence.

Alice noted that the committee continues to receive referrals from individuals in need of equipment and encouraged board members to spread the word within their chapters. She emphasized that the funds are available to help seniors who need assistance performing daily household tasks and maintaining their independence.

Marsha provided additional examples of individuals who had recently received assistance through the Senior Fund. One recipient needed help monitoring her blood pressure independently, so the committee purchased a talking blood pressure monitor for her use. Marsha also described assistance provided to an unhoused woman whose circumstances required specialized support. The committee purchased a rolling suitcase, backpack, voice recorder, and keychain watch to help her manage her belongings and daily activities, particularly since she frequently moves between shelters.

Marj said she was aware that efforts have been made to publicize the Senior Fund application throughout the state, and she explained that six agencies administer Project Independence services across Georgia, suggesting that GCB work directly with representatives from those agencies to help distribute information about the Senior Fund to older adults who may benefit from the program. Marsha responded that outreach efforts are already underway with several agencies. While she was unsure about participation in the Savannah area, she reported that the other agencies have been informing their clients about both the Senior Fund and the Youth GAP Fund programs.

During a broader discussion about outreach and services, the board discussed the role of Georgia's Centers for Independent Living (CILs), which serve adults with disabilities. Members agreed that services and support for individuals with visual impairments should be available throughout the lifespan, from childhood through older adulthood. Debbie McDonald reported that the board of the Center for Independent Living, CIL, will hold its next meeting on April 30, 2026, at 1:30 PM.

Lunch Break:

During lunch, two names were drawn for the two door prizes. Judy Presley received the in-person prize of a Stanley Cup with a bag of City Pop popcorn. Sharon Nichols received the Zoom participant door prize of a McDonald's gift card.

Convention Report - Co-Chairs, Cecily Laney Nipper, and Tiffany Montalvo

Cecily provided an update on plans for the 2026 GCB Conference and Convention. She noted that Deborah had already shared a brief preview of some of the activities being planned through the Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss. Cecily explained that the conference will include two primary components, educational workshops, and recreational activities. In addition to GCB's traditional events, the convention committee is planning activities specifically designed for youth and young adults with visual impairments. Saturday afternoon programming will focus on sports, recreation, and adaptive activities that encourage participation and engagement. Special programming is also being planned for the senior population on Friday.

Cecily reminded attendees that GCB is holding a contest to select the conference theme. The deadline for theme submissions is April 15, 2026, and the convention committee will select the winning theme. As 2026 marks GCB's 70th anniversary, the chosen theme will celebrate this milestone.

To commemorate the organization's 70th birthday, a special cake will be served at the banquet. Following the banquet, attendees will enjoy live music provided by a band. Members may choose to listen, socialize, or dance during what is planned to be a fun, Hollywood-themed evening. Attendees are encouraged to dress in Hollywood-themed attire. The conference will also feature an exhibit hall and a banquet meal. Cecily reported that considerable effort has been devoted to planning the menu and ensuring a quality dining experience for attendees.

Hotel accommodations have been arranged at the Courtyard by Marriott Atlanta Covington, located on Foxfield Way in Covington, Georgia. The room rate will be $129.00 per night plus applicable taxes. Hotel reservation information will be distributed by email on May 1, 2026. Members will have the option of using an online reservation link or contacting the hotel directly to make reservations. Cecily noted that transportation assistance and financial support will be available for eligible attendees. She also shared that GCB has already received several generous donations to support the conference and convention.

Cecily recognized Sophia Curtis for her work developing local area information for the conference website. The website will include details about the hotel, local services, restaurants, veterinary services, and other resources that attendees may find useful during their stay. Because GCB expects to remain at this location through 2027, much of the information can remain on the website and be updated as needed. Attendees will receive this information in their conference packets, but they will also be able to access it online in advance to assist with travel planning and personal research.

Cecily reported that no formal Thursday tour has been scheduled this year. Tiffany has encountered challenges coordinating with the primary tourism contact in Covington. However, Tiffany has compiled a list of local attractions and activities that will be available to attendees. As an alternative to a Thursday tour, GCB will offer an optional informational session on Thursday afternoon following registration and prior to the welcome reception and Bingo. This session will provide an opportunity for early arrivals to participate in an organized activity before the evening festivities begin.

The conference schedule will otherwise follow a format similar to recent years. On Saturday, following the luncheon, GCB will conduct its closing board meeting before transitioning into an afternoon of recreational and adaptive activity presentations.

Planned presenters include representatives from the Miracle League baseball program for children with special needs, Hal Simpson from Georgia Blind Sports, Dawn Wells presenting adaptive yoga, and Keeley Zeitlin discussing adaptive activities for students with visual impairments.

A question was asked whether any convention sessions would be broadcast on ACB Media. Cecily confirmed that the Convention Committee has voted to explore broadcasting selected sessions. She noted that GCB successfully hosted its first hybrid conference in 2021 in Cartersville, Georgia, and believes that broadcasting selected educational sessions could expand awareness of both the conference and the organization. While not all sessions will be streamed, popular presentations, such as the technology sessions, are strong candidates for broadcast.

Cecily explained that the goal is to provide access to selected sessions that may have statewide or national interest while encouraging listeners to learn more about GCB and consider attending future conferences in person. She has submitted a request to ACB Media to broadcast selected sessions, although the convention committee has not yet finalized which sessions will be included.

Tech Talk Time Team Report - Chair, Steve Longmire

Steve shared his enthusiasm for the work being done by the GCB Technology Team. He explained that in the past, technology-related meetings were held only occasionally. However, the team now meets regularly on the second Monday of each month at 7:00 PM via Zoom. Steve emphasized that all members are welcome and encouraged to attend these meetings.

He reported that the team has been actively working on improvements to both the GCB website and mobile app. While he serves as the team's leader, he noted that many individuals have contributed valuable ideas, expertise, and feedback to help improve GCB's technology resources and ensure that information is presented in an accessible format. Steve expressed his appreciation to Ron Worley, Sophia Curtis, Jerrie Toney, Caesar Mattioli, Amanda Wilson, Janet Parmerter, Tiffany Montalvo, and Tiyah Longmire for their contributions and dedication to the project.

Among the recent improvements, Steve noted that scholarship information has been reorganized into three separate links rather than being grouped under a single section, making it easier for users to navigate. He also announced that online registration for the 2026 GCB Conference and Convention will be available through both the website and the mobile app. Members can also access and download the latest GCB Digest through the website and mobile app. The website's news section provides information about upcoming GCB events and activities, while the social media section includes links to the Facebook pages of GCB chapters throughout the state. He said that information about the upcoming conference and convention will continue to be added to both platforms as plans are finalized. He expressed excitement about the team's accomplishments and noted that GCB's technology efforts are receiving attention at the national level.

Cecily shared that Steve has been invited to participate in an ACB Community Call focused on membership engagement, where he will discuss GCB's website and mobile app as examples of effective outreach and communication tools. She explained that the invitation resulted from recognition by ACB's Membership Committee, which specifically noted the quality and effectiveness of GCB's technology initiatives.

Steve encouraged members to continue visiting the website and using the mobile app, noting that additional features and improvements are planned for the future. He stated that the technology program has become an important tool for promoting GCB's mission and activities.

Cecily also announced that a technology session will be presented during the ACB Conference and Convention on July 29, 2026, at 3:00 PM. Steve has been invited to participate and discuss GCB's technology efforts as a model for membership engagement that other affiliates may wish to follow.

A question was raised about the possibility of recording the monthly technology meetings and distributing the recordings to chapters. It was noted that doing so would require editing before distribution. Steve responded that he would explore the possibility of recording future meetings. He noted that Sophia Curtis has already been editing audio recordings from past GCB Conferences and Conventions and may be able to assist with this effort. In the meantime, detailed notes are taken during each technology meeting and can be distributed to anyone interested in receiving them.

Finally, Steve reported that he and Tiyah Longmire had been invited to speak at several chapter meetings, including those of the Athens Chapter, East Georgia Chapter, and Northwest Georgia Chapter. During these visits, they shared information about technology resources and discussed the work being done by the GCB Technology Team.

Affiliate Scorecard discussion and action, Cecily Laney Nipper:

Cecily stated that anyone who listened to the recent DC Leadership Conference sessions or attended a recent presidential call may already be familiar with the Affiliate Scorecard initiative being promoted by ACB.

She thanked Marj Schneider, First Vice President of GCB, for attending several meetings on her behalf, including both the Georgia Stakeholders meeting and the "Hump Day Happy Hour," where affiliate presidents meet regularly to discuss issues affecting their organizations.

Cecily explained that the Affiliate Scorecard is a self-assessment tool designed to help affiliate boards evaluate their strengths and identify areas for growth. The scorecard consists of six major categories, each containing a series of questions. Affiliate leaders meet together, discuss each area, and

assign scores ranging from one to five, with five indicating that the affiliate serves as a model in that area and one indicating a need for improvement or additional support.

She emphasized that the purpose of the scorecard is not for ACB to grade affiliates. Rather, the information can help ACB identify common challenges among affiliates and develop training opportunities or resources to address those needs. For example, if a significant number of affiliates indicate a need for assistance in financial management, ACB may choose to offer training sessions focused on nonprofit finance and budgeting.

Cecily explained that affiliates have considerable flexibility in how they use the tool. ACB offers the assistance of a board liaison who can facilitate the discussion if requested. Affiliates may also choose whether or not to submit their results and summary information back to ACB. Participation is entirely voluntary, and there is no cost to use the scorecard.

As a possible approach, Cecily suggested dedicating a portion of the next board meeting to the Affiliate Scorecard process. To allow adequate time for discussion, routine reports could be shortened. She estimated that reviewing and discussing the six categories could take approximately two hours and would provide valuable insight into GCB's strengths, opportunities, and future priorities. She noted that the information gathered through the process could be used as a positive planning tool to help strengthen the organization and guide future board discussions and initiatives. She then invited comments and questions from the board regarding whether GCB should participate in the Affiliate Scorecard process.

Following a lively discussion with many positive comments from board members, a motion was made to participate in the Affiliate Scorecard assessment and to request that Jeff Tom serve as facilitator. Alice made a motion for the GCB Board of Directors to participate in the Affiliate Scorecard process. Betsy seconded the motion. The motion passed without opposition.

Georgia Guide Dog Users Update - President, Marj Schneider

Marj said that she had only a brief update to share. Since the board's last meeting in January, there had been relatively little activity to report. She stated that efforts have recently resumed to promote the Emergency Veterinary Assistance Fund that was established last year. Marj emphasized the importance of regularly publicizing the fund to ensure that guide dog handlers in Georgia and others who may benefit from the program are aware of its availability. Most of the outreach efforts have been conducted through Facebook and various communication channels associated with the national organization, Guide Dog Users, Inc. As a result of these promotional efforts, several inquiries have been received; however, no formal requests for financial assistance have been submitted at this time. Marj expressed hope that continued outreach and increased awareness will help connect the funds with individuals who may need support in the future and also noted that the committee would welcome ideas for additional projects and initiatives to pursue during the spring and summer months.

GCB Membership and Public Relations Committee - Chair, Amanda Wilson

Amanda stated that the committee meets every other month on the second Thursday at 7:00 PM via Zoom and welcomes anyone interested in attending. She shared that all GCB chapters are currently meeting either virtually through Zoom, in person, or through a hybrid format that offers both options. She reported that GCB currently has 153 members, consisting of 149 paid members and 4 ACB Lifetime Members. Amanda noted that GCB continues to support several ongoing community service projects. Members are still collecting aluminum can tabs for donation to Shriners Children's Hospitals and collecting used eyeglasses for donation through the Lions Clubs. She also reported that GCB continues to host its Praise and Prayer Community Call on the first and third Tuesdays of each month at 7:00 PM via the conference phone line. In addition, the GCB Book Club continues to meet on the last Thursday of each month at 7:30 PM via Zoom.

Amanda recognized Tiffany Montalvo for her work overseeing public relations efforts and maintaining GCB's presence on Facebook and Instagram. She also thanked Debbie McDonald, Member-at-Large Representative, for sharing and promoting GCB information through social media channels.

Amanda encouraged members interested in membership recruitment, outreach, or public relations to become involved with the committee. She emphasized that all members are welcome to attend meetings, listen, share ideas, and participate in committee activities.

Cecily thanked Amanda for her work preparing and distributing the monthly GCB Calendar of Events. She noted that the calendar includes meeting dates, times, and contact information, making it easy for members to participate in GCB programs, committee meetings, and community calls.

GCB Digest Report - Tiffany Montalvo

Tiffany said that the deadline for articles for our next GCB Digest newsletter will be on Friday, May 15, 2026. Articles can range from wellness and fitness, short biographies of special members, events going on in your chapters, pictures of your officers and members, meeting locations, new members, deceased members, special speakers, recipes, iPhone apps, guide dogs, blindness related issues, tactile household items, transportation, riddles, brain teasers, trivia, fundraising, hobbies, crafts, leisure activities, and helpful hints. The GCB Digest committee consists of Amanda Wilson, Tiffany Montalvo, Janet Parmerter, Sophia Curtis, Betsy Grenevitch, Danielle McIntyre, and Cecily Laney Nipper. We produce the GCB Digest three times a year in Braille, large print, audio on digital cartridges, email, on our web page, and on our GCB Link app.

Reminder: please return your digital cartridge so we can send you the next issue. Just flip over the card and put it back into your mailbox.

The GCB Digest is on NFB Newsline and Vocal Point. If anyone wants to help, please contact us.

GCB Members At Large Report – At-Large Representative, Debbie McDonald:

Debbie stated that we have 32 at-large members. She said that she has 119 followers on her Facebook page. To find it on Facebook, you search for GCB at-large chapter. Debbie stated that she sent Jack Lewis a sympathy card to let him know we are thinking of him as he mourns the loss of his brother, Bill Lewis.

Unfinished Business or New Business:

Ron Worley reported on the status of the Georgia Blind Lions Committee. He stated that he has served as president of the committee since 2002, following the death of Jack Cofield, who had asked Ron to assume leadership of the organization when he was no longer able to manage its operations. Ron explained that the committee initially enjoyed strong participation and visibility, including presentations at the Georgia Lions State Convention. However, over time, changes within the convention's leadership and planning committees resulted in fewer opportunities for special programs to participate in convention activities. Ron believes these changes significantly reduced the committee's visibility and outreach efforts. Currently, the committee has 14 listed members; however, only three members regularly participate in meetings. Ron noted that participation has declined further due to the loss of key leaders. Mike Hall, who served as secretary, is no longer able to fulfill that role, and Terry Johnson, the committee's vice president, recently passed away. As a result, the committee has been unable to fill several leadership positions. Ron also discussed financial and administrative

challenges facing the organization. He explained that the committee had been operating under the Georgia Lions Club's Employer Identification Number (EIN). However, the organization was informed that it could no longer do so because it is not officially affiliated with or operating under the Lions Club's organizational umbrella. Consequently, the committee must remove the Georgia Lions EIN from its bank account. Ron reported that the committee's account is held at Regions Bank, which requires a minimum balance of $1,500. Failure to maintain that balance would result in monthly fees that could quickly deplete the organization's funds. Despite these challenges, Ron expressed his commitment to continuing the committee's work and asked for volunteers who are both Lions Club members and individuals who are blind or visually impaired to become involved. He emphasized the importance of increasing awareness of services, resources, and opportunities available to people with visual impairments throughout Georgia. Ron noted that the Lions organization has long embraced Helen Keller's challenge to become the "Knights of the Blind." He believes that more can be done within Georgia to support and advocate for individuals who are blind or visually impaired and hopes to strengthen those efforts through renewed participation and leadership. He announced that the committee will meet on the first Thursday of each month at 7:00 PM. While meetings have traditionally been conducted via conference call, the committee plans to transition to Zoom. Ron encouraged anyone interested in becoming involved to contact him by phone or email for additional information.

Following Ron's report, Cecily asked the board to consider providing an honorarium to Grace Baptist Church. She noted that Pastor Tim Davenport and the church congregation had graciously allowed GCB to use the facility for its board meeting for the second consecutive year. Cecily reminded members that the board had approved a similar thank-you gift the previous year.

Discussion followed regarding an appropriate amount. A suggestion was made to provide a gift of $150.00. Marsha Farrow made a motion to present Grace Baptist Church with a $150.00 honorarium in appreciation for its hospitality and support. Ron Worley seconded the motion. The motion passed without opposition.

Time and Place of Next Board Meeting:

Alice Ritchhart made a motion for the next GCB Board meeting to be held on Saturday, August 15, 2026, at 10:00 AM on Zoom. Betsy Grenevitch seconded the motion, and the motion passed with no opposition.

Announcement:

Betsy Grenevitch stated that on Monday, April 27, 2026, at 5:00 PM on Zoom, there will be a call about people who are totally blind and who have dementia.

Adjourn

The GCB Board Meeting adjourned at 12:59 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Amanda Wilson, GCB Secretary

GCB Chapter News

The Athens Chapter:

You can find the Athens Chapter on Facebook by searching for Athens Council of the Blind. The Athens Chapter meetings are held on the fourth Saturday at 11:00 AM on Zoom. For more information about the Athens Chapter, please contact Jerrie Toney at 706-461-1013 or via email at jerriemt2@gmail.com

Augusta Chapter:

The Augusta Chapter in-person meetings are held in the odd months on the second Saturday of the month at Walton Options located at 948 Walton Way, Augusta, Georgia, from 10:00 AM until 12:00 PM. During the even months, we meet at local restaurants. For more information about the Augusta Chapter, please contact Ron Worley at 706-726-9483 or via email at listeningacuity@gmail.com.

East Georgia Chapter:

In June, the East Georgia Chapter welcomed a speaker from CVI. We did not hold a meeting in July, as several of our members attended the ACB National Convention.

In August, several members shared highlights from their experiences at the ACB National Convention, both in person and virtually via Zoom.

In September, we held our meeting via Zoom and welcomed Zelda Gebhard and Patti Cox from the Low Vision Alliance. They spoke with us about ways people with low vision can become involved in ACB. Our second speaker was April Martin, who shared information about the American Association of Blind Teachers. Christine Chaikin, who is a member of both organizations, also joined us for the meeting.

You can find the East Georgia Chapter on Facebook by searching for East Georgia Chapter of the Georgia Council of the Blind.

The East Georgia Chapter in-person meetings are held at the Conyers Presbyterian Church and via Zoom on the 2nd Saturday of every month at 10:00 AM. For more information about the East Georgia Chapter, please contact Phil Jones at 770-713-3306 or via email at Brilman1952@gmail.com.

Members At Large:

You can find the GCB Member at Large Facebook page by searching for Georgia Council of the Blind At Large Chapter.

Northeast Georgia Chapter:

The Northeast Georgia Chapter did not meet in July and August. On July 14, chapter members went to Lanier Olympic Park in Gainesville and enjoyed a kayak and canoe outing hosted by Lanier Canoe and Kayak Club. The club provided kayaks, canoes, paddle boards, and life vests. After putting on the vests, they received some basic instructions from Keely Zeitlin, who is a certified kayak instructor. Lanier Canoe and Kayak Club members assisted them with getting into and out of the various watercraft and the efficient use of paddles. A safety boat with a diver was present in case we needed rescue. No rescues were needed, and a total of fourteen adults and three children enjoyed two hours of skimming across the water. Special thanks to

Keely for arranging this event with Kim Martin, Executive Director of Lanier Canoe and Kayak Club. Ms. Martin and the club members were great hosts, and she invited them to come again.

At our September meeting, we reviewed summer activities and started making plans for a chapter picnic. The picnic will celebrate our new chapter name and introduce us to our Northeast Georgia community. We awarded one sponsorship and two first-timer scholarships for the 2026 GCB Convention. Recipients are Keely Zeitlin, Jessie Brownlee, and Anna Williams. Keely Zeitlin, Melissa Woolston, and Jessie Brownlee also attended the 2026 ACB National Convention in St. Louis, Missouri. As our speaker, Keely shared her experiences at the convention. We welcome new member Anna Williams.

You can find the new Northeast Georgia Chapter on Facebook by searching for Greater Hall GCB. The Northeast Georgia Chapter meetings are held on the second Saturday of each month, from 10:30 AM to 12:00 PM at Smoky Springs Retirement Residences, 940 South Enota Drive, Gainesville, Georgia. For more information about the Northeast Georgia Chapter, contact Dianne Roberts at 770-932-1112 or via email at harveyroberts2@att.net.

ANNOUNCEMENT:

The Northeast Georgia Chapter of the Visually Impaired is having a picnic!

When: Saturday, October 24, 2026, Pavilion reserved from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM.

Where: Dogwood Pavilion at Longwood Park, 20 Pearl Nix Parkway, Gainesville, Georgia.

Lunch: We eat around 12:00 noon. Lunch will be catered by Johnny's Barbeque of Gainesville.

Northwest Georgia Chapter:

The Northwest Georgia Chapter meetings are held on the second Tuesday at the Bank of Lafayette community room located at 104 North Main Street in Lafayette, Georgia, from 1:00 PM until 3:00 PM.

For more information about the Northwest Chapter, please contact Sharon Nichols at 423-255-4551 or via email at sharonnichols347@icloud.com.

Peach Chapter:

The Peach Chapter met at Morris Market Restaurant in Cartersville, for our June meeting. President Cecily Laney Nipper was there in person, and she gave us an overview of the activities that will be going on during the upcoming GCB State Conference and Convention in Covington, Georgia, At our July meeting, we met at Los Arko, a Mexican Restaurant, in Cartersville. We welcomed back former member Doug Davis and his mother, Darlene Davis, to our meeting. At our August meeting, we went swimming at the Senior Aquatic Center, and then we went to eat at Armondo's Italian Restaurant in Cartersville, Georgia.

For more information about the Peach Chapter of GCB, please contact Amanda Wilson at 770-547-4700 or via email at moonrocks@bellsouth.net

Savannah Chapter:

The Savannah Chapter meetings are held by telephone conference call on the first Thursday at 7:30 PM.

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

South Metro Chapter:

The South Metro Chapter meetings are held at the Piccadilly Restaurant located at 2000 Crescent Center Blvd. in Tucker, Georgia, on the second Tuesday from 4:00 PM until 6:00 PM.

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

GCB Special Affiliate News

Georgia Guide Dog Users:

For more information about the Georgia Guide Dog Users group, please contact Marj Schneider at 912-352-1415 or via email at marjschneider@bellsouth.net.

GCB Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss:

For more information about the Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss special affiliate group, please contact Alice Ritchhart at 912-996-4213 or via email at alice.ritchhart@comcast.net.

Spreading a Little Sunshine for GCB Members

Sunshine Committee

Committee Chairperson: Stacey Orr

Committee Members: Debi Holcombe and Debbie McDonald

If your chapter has a member who needs a little sunshine due to the loss of a loved one, a serious illness, or injury, please email staceyorr829@gmail.com or call 770-853-3489, and our committee will be sure they receive a card from GCB.

GCB Community Zoom Calls

The Georgia Council of the Blind is holding community Zoom calls.

Here is the schedule for GCB community Zoom calls:

Praise and Prayer:

Sharon Nicols and Dianne Roberts host the Praise and Prayer call, which is held on the first and third Tuesday of the month at 7:00 PM on Zoom.

GCB Book Club:

Deborah Lovell and Judy Presley host book club at 7:30 PM on Zoom, on the last Thursday of the month. Our GCB book club has read a variety of books, including fiction, nonfiction, and biographies. Sometimes when you read a delightful book, you feel like you must share it with others. This is what makes book clubs so much fun. That is why we encourage our members to suggest their favorite books, and we would love to have other book lovers out there to join us. We look forward to hearing from each of them in the coming year on the pages of GCB Digest. We have read the following books:

“No Ordinary Bird”: drug smuggling, a plane crash, and a daughter’s quest for the truth by Artis Henderson. This book is about Artis, who was five years old when a plane crash killed her beloved father.

“The Correspondent, by Virginia Evans. This book is about Sybil Van Antwerp, who has used letters to make sense of the world and her place in it.

“Theo of Golden,” By Allen Levi. This book is about Theo, who buys all the paintings hanging in the coffee shop and returns them to their owners.

GCB In Memory of: Carolyn Lucy Thrift Dillard

Carolyn Lucy Thrift Dillard passed away on Monday, August 24, 2026, in Rome, Georgia. Carolyn was born on December 3, 1938, to Pat and Eloise Thrift on their farm in the Evergreen community. Although she was an only child, she was blessed with numerous aunts, uncles, and cousins living nearby to play with and learn from. At the age of six, Carolyn became a residential student at the Georgia Academy for the Blind in Macon. While there, she met lifelong friend Gerry Ricks who she loved as a sister. Although she received a good education, she deeply missed her family and friends at home. After graduation from the academy, Carolyn completed a bachelor’s degree in teacher education at Valdosta State University, where she met her husband, Philip Dillard, in a Spanish class. Carolyn continued her studies at Peabody College in Nashville, Tennessee, earning her master’s degree in history and later a second master’s degree from Florida State University in Special Education. Her first professional position was as a home teacher for blind children in Talladega, Alabama. Philip and Carolyn married in 1962. After starting a family, Carolyn taught blind and low vision students in Rome, Polk County, and Haralson County school systems for almost three decades, and lived her faith by helping others. She volunteered with the Talking Book library in Rome, the Pilot Club of Cedar Valley, the Cedartown High School Band Parents, and the Rome First Church of the Nazarene, where for decades, she and Philip were members. In her final years, Carolyn volunteered extensively with the Georgia Council of the Blind and within the community, continued to give presentations about Braille. Being patient, generous, and kind, Carolyn always tried to help everyone around her be happy and inherited her love of reading and calm demeanor from her father. These traits allowed her to wrangle three rambunctious children and countless students without losing her patience. She inherited her love of Coca-Cola, sweet tea, and delicious treats from her mother. Every time we visited, we met with a cake, a pie, or chewy bread. Her children have tried to make her scrumptious buttery biscuits but still cannot make them just like hers. All her favorite memories centered on her parents, the farm, and her children and grandchildren. Carolyn is survived by her three children, David Dillard (Peggy), Joe Dillard (Becky), and Miriam Dillard (Dave Baldwin), four grandchildren, Rachel Smith (Dustin), Tom Dillard (Kirstie), Walt Dillard, David Baldwin (Grace), and two great-granddaughters, Tessa Belle Budd, and Clara Jay Dillard. She is predeceased by her husband of over 62 years, Philip Dillard.

Her funeral service was held at 3:00 pm on Sunday, August 30, 2026, at EVERGREEN BAPTIST Church, located at 5250 Highway 129, in Cobbtown, Georgia 30420.

GCB Augusta Chapter of the Georgia Council of the Blind Cane Bank Project

Cane Bank Application

1. Eligibility Requirements

   A. Must be legally blind as determined by an eye doctor.

   B. Must be unable to obtain a free white mobility cane from another source (such as the VA, Vocational Rehabilitation, or a school system)

Priority Consideration is based on available funding and demand; priority will be given in the following order:

   C. Augusta GCB Membership

   D. Membership of GCB

   E. Non-GCB, Non-ACB membership (based on need or safety concern)

Applicants are not eligible if a free mobility cane is available through another organization or program.

2. Type of Cane Provided

   A. Must be considered a white cane for the blind for mobility purposes.

   B. Can be folding or non-folding.

   C. Type of cane tip will be selected based on the recipient’s personal preference.

   D. While the shaft of the cane must be white, the handle grip and lower section of the shaft can be a color choice based on recipient’s personal preference.

E. Support canes will not be considered, should be available via medical insurance, as these are prescribed to prevent falls not for blindness.

F. Type of cane, cane tip, shipping address will be managed by Low Vision Supply

3. Orientation and Mobility (COMS) Experience

A. Recipients should have received Orientation and Mobility (O and M) training at some point in their life.

B. Newly blind recipients should have a formal O and M assessment with recommendation for a white cane, including length and type of tip by a professional in the field.

4. Frequency of Cane Issuance

a. Only one cane may be issued every 24 months.

b. No exceptions will be made for canes that are lost, stolen, or broken.

5. Cane Source and Handling

a. ALL canes will be obtained through Low Vision Supply

b. After submitting an application, applicants will be contacted by Low Vision Supply to confirm cane preferences and shipping information.

6. Funding Per Cane

a. Funds will not exceed $60.00 per cane, to include cane, tip, shipping, and handling.

b. The cost allowed per cane can be reset annually as prices are subject to change.

My Public Testimony on Future Voting Equipment and Accessibility

By Marj Schneider

I sent the following testimony to the Georgia General Assembly Joint Election Equipment Specifications and Standards Committee, which was established this summer to evaluate specifications and requirements for election equipment using hand-marked paper ballots. This committee held several public hearings, but because GCB members didn't know about the first of these hearings and were unable to attend one held in mid-September, I thought it was important to submit written testimony from my perspective as a blind voter. My comments follow.

I am Marj Schneider, a resident of Savannah, Georgia, for the past 23 years. I am writing to share my perspective as a blind voter on this committee's recommendations for changing voting procedures in the State of Georgia.

I have been voting since the presidential election of 1976, voting in my home state of Minnesota until I moved to Georgia. Each time I voted required the same laborious process: two election judges, a Republican and a Democrat, crammed into a voting booth with me, or standing next to me at a counter. One of them would read me the choices on the ballot, and I would quietly tell them my selections. To be sure they had gotten it right, one of them would loudly verify my choices. "You want to vote for Paul Wellstone?" The judges took their job very seriously, but imagine my embarrassment. Everyone in the room was alerted to how I had voted.

Fast forward to 2004, my first opportunity to vote in Georgia, and things had changed. I walked to my neighborhood polling location knowing that I needed to ask for the audio ballot rather than the large-print version available to low-vision voters. In Chatham County, for what I believe was the first time, the voting instructions and ballot had been recorded. I could listen using headphones and make my selections on a device resembling a telephone keypad.

The poll workers had been trained in how to set up the audio ballot, and although that took a while, I was eventually able to put on the decrepit headphones provided, listen to a very poor recording of the ballot, and follow the instructions to make my choices.

I walked home proudly wearing the peach "I voted" sticker, feeling so gratified! At the age of 46, I had, for the first time, been able to vote independently, privately, and secretly.

I have continued to vote in this manner, hoping each time that the poll workers would be able to set up the audio ballot. It often required calling someone on the Board of Elections for help before they could get the equipment working properly. It always takes far longer for me to finally be able to vote than it does for anyone else, but I would rather it take extra time than not be able to cast my own vote.

The use of the Dominion machines beginning in 2020 introduced a different device and an audio ballot that was at last a decent recording. The challenge of poll workers knowing how to set up the equipment has continued, but at least the accessible equipment has been available at every election. Georgia's current system specifically recognizes that a voter using the Audio Tactile Interface without assistance from another person is not receiving voting assistance.

My concern is that if the committee recommends that voting return to hand-marked paper ballots, blind and low-vision voters could lose the ability to vote independently and privately that I have experienced in Georgia for more than 20 years.

I urge this committee to make accessibility an essential part of the specifications for any new voting system. Every location where Georgians vote in person should have accessible ballot-marking equipment that allows voters who need it to access the entire ballot, using audio, large print, tactile controls, or other appropriate accessibility features; mark their choices independently; privately review and verify those choices; make corrections if necessary; and cast the resulting paper ballot without another person knowing how they voted.

The accessible system should produce a paper ballot that records the voter's selections and can be counted and audited through the same process as other voters 'paper ballots. Georgia's current system demonstrates that a voter-verifiable paper record and private, independent voting by people with disabilities can coexist.

It is also essential that poll workers receive hands-on training in setting up and operating the accessible equipment. If an accessible machine fails or cannot be made to work, there must be a backup method that still allows the voter to vote privately and independently. The answer cannot simply be to have a poll worker, or another person, mark the ballot for the voter.

Finally, I urge the committee to have blind and low-vision voters actually test any proposed new voting system before it is adopted. We need to know that we can use the equipment, navigate the entire ballot, review our selections, make corrections, and cast our ballots independently and privately.

For me, independent voting means that no other person has to know whom or what I voted for. I urge the committee to ensure that a change in Georgia's voting system does not take that right away.

Thank you for your consideration.

GCB 1Touch Self Defense Workshop

Everyone deserves to feel safe in their community. The Georgia Task Force for Empowering Blind Independence, in partnership with the Georgia Council of the Blind and Healed Focus with Milk and Honey LLC, welcomes 1Touch Self Defense accessible personal-safety training to Augusta, Georgia. Space is limited to 16 participants per workshop, and it builds confidence, teaches practical strategies, and helps you be prepared!

Join the course on Saturday, November 7, 2026, from 11:30 AM until 4:00 PM for a half-day course with firsthand training at the Augusta University campus (details provided upon registration). The cost is $20.

By the end of the session, candidates will be able to:

- Understand how communication can affect others and how to avoid and resolve conflict.
- Raise awareness of personal safety, legalities, perceptions of vulnerability, and the definition of self-defense.
- Identify, demonstrate, and apply techniques of self-defense.
- Recognize diverse types of aggression and know what to look out for.
- Practice being on guard, releasing from grips, and controlling a perpetrator (introduction to joint locking).

If you have any questions, please contact Ron Worley at 706-726-9483 or Dr. Ebony Collins at ecollins13407@yahoo.com.

Advance registration is required: Complete the online registration form and scan the QR code below to pay the $20 course fee with PayPal or visit www.tfegi.org and click on Donate now in the top left corner of the landing page.

A second sessions is offered, Wednesday, November 11, 2026, from 11:30 AM until 4:00 PM, for a half-day course with firsthand training at Mercer University Atlanta campus (details upon registration). The cost is $20.

If you have any questions, please contact Melissa Woolston at 770-519-5448 or via email at kalixlv7@gmail.com.

Advance registration is required: Complete the online registration form and scan the QR code below to pay the $20 course fee with PayPal or visit www.tfegi.org and click on Donate now in the top left corner of the landing page.

Sponsored By: Healed Focus with Milk and Honey LLC, Georgia Council of the Blind, and Task Force for Empowering Blind Independence

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Introducing a New Georgia Writer

By Janet Parmerter

Georgia has some outstanding professional writers, and in my opinion, Stephen Browning is one of the best. This comical poem called "My Glasses Are Empty" is clever, witty, and at the same time, intellectually humorous. After reading it, I had a good laugh and pictured the man whose glasses were empty shouting, "Attention, attention, brain, stop the madness!" So, enjoy the curious brain of both Stephen Browning as well as the man who had an empty pair of eyeglasses.

My Glasses Are Empty

By Stephen Browning

I saw my life flash before my eyes, and I'm nearsighted

so I couldn't make out half of it.

One blur may have been my ex-girlfriend or my pet beagle Roebuck?

They both used to bark at me.

Another blot could have been my dad yawning or maybe talking?

Closed caption was apparently off too.

I heard my mom saying something, but I couldn't tell which browser page she was on

and I couldn't find the X to close them down.

I saw what I think was a big book; it could have been Shakespeare

or maybe a King James Dean?

Better to have lost love than to have never lost at all, sayeth thou, Romeo.

A snake, a boa python anaconda, was wound and coiled and huge after eating an elephant. I squinted and realized it was my first wife.

An easy mistake, even with glasses.

I magnified one memory to 60x and finally recognized my high school sweetheart—or at least her left eyebrow.

By the time I scrolled over to the rest of her, she had married somebody else.

Then my screen reader tried to narrate the whole thing:

“ Regret. Button. Unlabeled image. Second marriage. Skip link.”

Apparently, my life wasn’t accessible—or worth updating.

I find my diary written in Braille. I ran my fingers across it and thought,

“I didn’t know I slurred this badly.”

Then I realized I was wearing gloves.

Once I put on my glasses, I could clearly see one of the most beautiful people I had ever beheld.

I leaned in to kiss such an amazing face, and then, bang! My head hit the mirror glass.

Rhyme and Reason: Restaurant Dining

By Sophia Curtis

The British roast is on my plate

It smells so good, I cannot wait

With knife and fork poised in my hand

What discovery will I land

As my prongs hit the heaped large mound

I’m yet to know what I have found

My lips touch carrots soft and sweet

But really though, I wanted meat

Another stab, I try to find

Sausage wrapped with bacon rind

Here it is, I have the package

Oh no yuk! It’s just the cabbage!

As I try to scoop some food up

Peas fly elsewhere, even in my cup

I found the chicken, here it is

No, it’s not, for this is a quiz

This hot gravy sauce tastes so nice

But it drips and spills, I pay the price

Now to detect my next delight

But an empty fork is my bite

The portion size must be so small

No, on the table it did fall

Finally, parsnips, honey glazed
No spills, no errors, I’m amazed

Using fingers, this is risky
Tasting roast potatoes crispy

So much effort, let’s sip the wine

Forgotten floating peas are mine

As people chat and cut their food

My focus on this servitude

Chasing nutrients around my plate

This is a sure way to lose weight!

Unlocking Accessibility: A Guide by Sophia Curtis

The NLS Digital Talking-Book Player

Do you enjoy reading audiobooks?

The National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS), part of the Library of Congress, provides specially designed talking-book players on free loan to eligible readers. Books, magazines, and playback equipment are supplied through cooperating libraries, with postage-free delivery and returns.

The player is designed with large buttons, tactile markings, Braille labels, and spoken instructions. Adjustable volume, reading speed, and tone allow listeners to make the sound comfortable for them. A rechargeable battery allows listening away from an electrical outlet.

Choosing a player

The familiar DS1 Standard player provides basic playback controls. The DA1 Advanced player adds bookmarks and detailed navigation through a book’s chapters or sections. These additional controls are very useful when studying or returning to a particular passage.

NLS also offers the newer DA2 Advanced player, which includes Wi-Fi for downloading books directly from BARD, Bluetooth connectivity, and internal storage.

Getting started with the DA1 model.

For the traditional cartridge-based players, listening does not require an internet connection. Your library can send books already loaded onto a cartridge.

1. Connect the power. Plug the player into an electrical outlet to charge its battery.
2. Insert a cartridge. The cartridge slot is at the front, below the Play/Stop button. Insert the connector end, leaving the round finger hole accessible for removal.
3. Turn on the player. Listen for its spoken announcement.
4. Press Play/Stop. This is the large green button near the front. Press it again whenever you want to pause.
5. Adjust the sound. Use the Volume, Speed, and Tone controls on the left and right sides of the player to suit your hearing and listening preferences.
6. Move through the recording. Rewind and Fast Forward controls

When a cartridge contains several books, use Bookshelf mode to choose one. On the DA1, hold Play/Stop until the player announces “Bookshelf.” Use Fast Forward or Rewind to hear the available titles, then press Play/Stop when you hear the book you want.

Learning the controls

The DA1 includes spoken help and a built-in user guide. The Advanced model’s navigation and bookmark controls help readers move between sections and mark places to revisit.

The newer DA2 has its own button arrangement and spoken menus. To hear its built-in user guide, hold the Bookshelf button for two seconds. Its optional Wi-Fi connection allows registered BARD users to download reading material without transferring it from a computer.

Who can receive one, and where do you apply?

NLS serves eligible residents of the United States, including its territories, and eligible American citizens living abroad. A qualifying condition may be temporary or permanent and can include blindness, low vision, or a physical, perceptual, or reading disability that prevents someone from reading or handling regular print.

To apply:

7. Call 1-888-NLS-READ — 1-888-657-7323 or visit the NLS application page.
8. Complete the application and arrange the required eligibility certification. Your local librarian can certify it or call them to explain whomever else can do it.
9. Once enrolled, request a talking-book player and discuss your reading interests and preferred formats.

The player is lifetime loaned to you, rather than purchased. Your cooperating library remains your contact for books, equipment questions, and assistance using the service.

Once you receive your player, or if you already have one, to obtain a free ABLE Cartridge containing over 200 hours of audio content including music, audio videos with audio description, dramas, audiobooks and publications for all ages, and an outstanding Bible with over 1000 volunteer narrators reading every character voice, fill out the accessible form at www.AbleAssist.org/en/ABLE and a cartridge will be mailed ‘free matter for the blind’. These cartridges are designed to work in model DA1 and DA2 NLS Digital Talking Book players, or you may order a free SD card for a Victor Reader, which does not have to be returned, but is yours to keep.

Send comments on the digest to editor Amanda Wilson at moonrocks@bellsouth.net

THE END