

GCB SUMMER 2026 DIGEST

Image: In the center of the circle is a pencil cradling a Georgia peach. From a short brown down from the top of the peach and drapes over of the sun, with vibrant orange and yellow tones. out in black, accompanied by corresponding reads A hand up, not a handout.

Georgia Council of the Blind Established in 1956



drawing in gray tones of an opened right-hand palm, gently stem on the left side, a slender green leaf gracefully hangs the thumb. The peach radiates warm hue colors like the warmth In the center of the peach, bold uppercase letters GCB stand Braille dots positioned directly below the three letters. Text

The GCB DIGEST

Published by the Georgia Council of the Blind
An affiliate of the American Council of the Blind,
Our organization promotes hand-ups, not handouts.
Summer 2026

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From Your Editor

Hello, GCB family. We thank each one who has submitted articles in this issue of our magazine. 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, to each member who submitted articles, and to those who made suggestions. In addition, I want to thank our President, Cecily Laney Nipper, for her presidential message with information about momentous events, legislation, and projects.

Note: The GCB Digest is on NFB Newsline and on the Georgia Radio Reading Service, GARRS.

Connect with us on social media! To find it, search on Instagram for [gacounciloftheblind](https://www.instagram.com/gacounciloftheblind). 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 you borrow 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

There are so many exciting things happening within the Georgia Council of the Blind, and I am proud of the energy and enthusiasm that our members continue to show.

First, our City Pop Popcorn Fundraiser is underway! This is a fun and delicious way to support GCB because 50% of every purchase comes directly back to the Georgia Council of the Blind and helps support our general fund. Whether you enjoy sweet, savory, or classic flavors, there is something for everyone. We encourage you to share the fundraiser with family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors as we work together to support the important work of GCB. The direct link is: https://citypopfundraising.com/collections/citypop-snacks?bg_ref=KQCUwQv6TD

We are also looking ahead to the upcoming national convention. At our last board meeting, I announced that Alice Ritchhart will serve as our delegate, Amanda Wilson will serve as alternate delegate, and Marsha Farrow will represent Georgia on the nominating committee. We appreciate each of them for their willingness to serve and represent our affiliate on the national stage.

One of the most exciting accomplishments to celebrate is our continued membership growth. Thanks to the dedication and hard work of our membership committee, along with every member who has joined or renewed, we currently have 159 members! Reaching the 150-member mark gives the Georgia Council of the Blind six affiliate votes at the national level. That is a tremendous achievement and a strong reflection of the growing voice and presence of Georgia within ACB.

As the national convention approaches, please remember the importance of casting your individual votes as well. You can stay informed about candidates, through general sessions, and voting opportunities by listening to ACB Media 1 throughout the convention.

Speaking of conventions, we have our own state convention for October 8 through 10, 2026, and it is a milestone conference where the Georgia Council of the Blind, which was established in 1956, will celebrate its 70th birthday! Because of that, the theme selected by the convention committee is, "Georgia Council of the Blind: 70 years starring in advocacy and support." Make plans to join us. We have a reasonable registration fee, hotel rooms are \$129 per night plus tax, and we'll have a mix of fun and informational activities. Most importantly, you'll get to participate in our election of state officers. More on that in a moment.

The convention committee has voted to stream some events during our convention on ACB Media (see the ACB link app, acbmedia.org, or your Alexa device, information coming soon), and we'll have our usual hybrid connection by Zoom, making the convention available to those who can't join us in Covington. If you are unable to come in person, you can register for only \$25 to receive your Zoom information to join us on much of our programming Friday and Saturday, including the ever-popular technology session, which will also be streamed on ACB Media. What is the advantage of paying for a virtual registration when some programs are streamed on Media? It means you can interact, speak up, and get your questions answered, which you cannot do through a one-way connection like streaming. Things that will not be incorporated into Zoom or stream include the social times, like the welcome reception and banquet entertainment, the interactions you cannot't replicate behind a screen, so make your plans to join us in Covington.

Membership in this great organization entitles you to a vote in our elections and in our business! That means every member has access. How? Through the Zoom information and telephone number for our business session being disseminated by email, and through phone calls to each non-email member to provide them with the phone number to call in to the business meeting. Then, during the business meeting on record votes and on any contested elections, those in the room will vote with notecards as per our bylaws, and those members attending by phone or Zoom will be given a phone number to call to cast their votes with a non-member vote counter. We will take a break and do just that, and the votes will be tallied. Please attend, either in Covington or by Zoom or phone to make your voice heard as we vote for officers. It has been my pleasure being your president, and I know the future of this organization is bright.

Thank you all for your continued support, participation, and belief in the mission of the Georgia Council of the Blind. We are truly better together and let us keep working toward the mission to improve the lives of people who are blind in Georgia!

Georgia Council of the Blind Board Meeting Minutes Saturday, January 17, 2026, 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM, on Zoom

Call to Order, Cecily Laney Nipper:

GCB president Cecily Laney Nipper called the meeting to order at 10:01 AM.

Invocation, Sharon Nichols:

Sharon Nichols from the Northwest Georgia chapter gave the invocation.

Approval of Agenda, Cecily Laney Nipper:

Cecily asked for a motion to approve the agenda. Deborah Lovell made a motion to accept the agenda as it was sent out. Marsha seconded the motion, and it passed with no objection.

Roll Call, Amanda Wilson:

The following board members and guests were on the Zoom call. 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 president; Ron Worley, Augusta Chapter president; Phil Jones, East Georgia Chapter president; Diane Roberts, Greater Hall County Chapter president; Sharon Nichols, Northwest Georgia

Chapter president; David Hoppman, Peach Chapter representative; Betsy Grenevitch, Georgia Guide Dog Users representative; Deborah Lovell, Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss representative; Steve Longmire, Web Master; Tiffany Montalvo, GCB Digest representative. Guest: Jamaica Miller, Danielle McIntyre, Granger Ricks, Janet Parmerter, and Jeanette Sickie. There was a quorum.

President's Report, Cecily Laney Nipper:

Cecily told us about the American Council of the Blind (ACB) Legislative Seminar and Leadership Training Session taking place at the Sheraton Pentagon City hotel, from March 6 through March 10, 2026, with Hill Day being on March 11. Cecily is going in -person because there is an ACB board meeting. She will attend the legislative training as well. She stated that Melissa Woolston said that she wants to attend the ACB national convention and the legislative seminar as well. The three impairments are the same as last year. They include the Communication Act for audio description and Emergency Alerts, accessible medical devices, and website accessibility. We will be making our Hill appointments with the offices. Cecily will make appointments with Georgia senators and her local representative. If anyone else wants to make appointments with their representative, please contact Cecily or Alice. They will tell you how to do this and go with you if you want them too, as well as offering guidance and literature to help with those appointments. Cecily would like a group of us to meet with the senators. We will need to set those appointments for late February or early March. We could start our planning for our appointments. This will depend on scheduling with their offices.

Cecily would like to commend our active committees and wanted to commend Steve for getting the recordings up on the website and Sophia for assisting us by editing those recordings, which are recordings from the GCB State Conference and Convention.

Cecily stated that she still is getting referrals from people through ACB from Cindy Hollis. After Cindy searches the web for assistance for a loved one, when she can, Cindy gives them resources they are looking for, then invites them to become members of GCB. She said she does not know how many members we have as of today. She said we will hear more about that later in the membership report. As for legislation, she will leave that to the legislative report, only to say that she stays in contact with the various organizations who are serving our population through stakeholders' meetings. Lately, there have been a few different meetings.

An announcement from Shirley Robinson. Jack Gilson, who retired from the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, is now on the Vocal Point board where he is assisting them with creating and printing Braille materials. Paul Raymond is a new member of the GVRA board as well. Cecily stated that we would hear more about this during the legislative report from Alice.

Secretary's Report, Amanda Wilson:

Phil Jones made a motion to accept the board meeting minutes from July 26, 2025, as they were sent out, and Marj Schneider seconded the motion. The motion passed with no opposition. Phil made a motion to accept the minutes from the November 8, 2025, board meeting as they were sent out, and Debbie Mc Donald seconded the motion. It passed with no opposition. Deborah Lovell made a motion to accept the minutes from December 6, 2025, specially called board meeting that were sent out. Jerrie Toney seconded the motion and the motion passed with no opposition.

Treasurer's Report, Marsha Farrow:

GCB Main Checking #9530: January 16, 2026, \$13,752.21. As of 11/03/2025, \$18,203.83. (Note balance included PayPal and Stripe payments later transferred to conference Account).

Designated Funds within the Main Account: Legal Advocacy Training Fund \$1,000.00; Senior Support Fund, January 2026, \$2,855.24; (Correction: \$2,306.59 ;) November 2025, \$3,443.65; October 2024, \$2,955.27. Youth GAP Fund: January 2026, \$1,967.92; (Correction: \$1,767.92 ;) November 2025, \$1,970.92; October 2024, \$1,667.96. Total of all Designated Funds: January 2026, \$5,823.16; November 2025, \$6,414.57; October 2024, \$5,623.23.

General Operating Expenses: January 2026, \$7,929.05; November 2025, \$11,789.26; (Note: this amount included PayPal and Stripe Payments later transferred to Conference Account); October 2024, \$8,595.10.

American Council of the Blind Annual Dues: 2025, GCB 137 Members, \$685.00; 2024, GCB 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 Company GCB Officers and Directors General Liability Insurance \$611.00. Annual Payment Date Paid 02/03/2025; Date Paid 02/06/2024; (Utilized Main Account Debit Card.)

QuickBooks Intuit Program (utilized by Phyllis Waters, of Waters Accounting) QuickBooks Charges Recurring Monthly: January 2026, \$38.00; November 2025, \$38.00; October 2024, \$30.00. Increase of \$8 for 2025-2026. Mrs. Waters Services Include: Financial record keeping utilizing QuickBooks Software. Files Taxes annually with IRS. Completes required Georgia's Secretary of State and Georgia Charities Reports.

Al and Cora Camp Scholarship Fund #9557: January 2026, \$102.00; November 2025, \$102.00; October 2024, \$412.00.

Conference Account #9685: January 2026, \$10,800.84; November 2025, \$12,811.92; October 2024, \$8,730.20.

Conference Donors: 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; Lodging/Travel.

GCB Regions Athene Long Term Investment: 01/16/2026, \$22,791.61; Interest accrued from 11/03/2025 to present \$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, \$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 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: \$24655.00.

Total of All GCB Accounts: \$121,135. 61; November 2025, \$127,424.00.

The treasury report was filed for audit.

Finance Committee Report, Jerrie Toney:

Cecily noted that there was \$400.00 budgeted but not spent on Phyllis Water's business accounting services this year. Cecily called her and asked her to please invoice us for 2025 for her services. Phyllis stated that she would like to start from 2025 and going forward will complete her services for us pro bono. She will not be requesting any money except the filing fee for \$30.00 for the Secretary of state's report. Cecily told her that would be great. Cecily spoke to Nancy Marks Becker, the chief Financial Officer for ACB, who said that if we exchange paperwork with Phyllis to recognize the amount of money we would have paid her, we could include that under in-kind contributions and so could she. That is something Cecily will be exploring with Phyllis and the finance committee, if she would like to take that off her taxes as an in-kind contribution. Alice asked if Phyllis is saying she is not doing this anymore. Cecily stated that Phyllis wants to continue assisting us.

Jerrie stated that when the finance committee met, they wanted to make some changes to the layout of her reports. She made those changes to the Word document. If anyone does not like this or if they have issues with it, please let her know.

Cecily updated us with the conference figures. She stated that the total collected was \$11,162.32, and the total expenses were \$11,369.43, which is a loss of \$207.07. Alice wanted to know if we could see the monthly statements from PayPal. Jerrie said that we have it by the year. Jerrie noted that Steve would have to generate that report. Jerrie said she could break it down by month and send it out. Cecily stated that she would like to see that either monthly or quarterly. Steve agreed to send out the PayPal reports on a quarterly basis.

Phil made a motion to approve the 2026 budget as it was sent out. Debbie McDonald seconded the motion. Cecily asked if we should move Phyllis Water's money to the in-kind category now. Jerry said we should go ahead and move it now. Deborah Lovell said that she did not receive the budget report. We said we would check on that and send it to her. Cecily asked her if she wanted it to be read aloud. Deborah said no, just please send it to her. Marj stated that the budget went to the finance committee, but she does not recall if it went out to the entire board. After no other discussion, the motion passed with no opposition.

Cecily is the liaison for the Interstate Auction taking place in March. The membership voted to take part in this auction during the annual business meeting on November 8 at the 2025 GCB convention. This auction will allow us to put in nine items. There are eight to ten states participating. The deadline to submit items for the auction from Georgia is February 10. If, for example, we donate a pound of fudge, we will pay to ship the fudge, and GCB will collect the money and place it in the general account. The auction will be held on Saturday, March 21, 2026, at 7:00 PM, on Zoom. We have from February 10, 2026, until March 21, to advertise this auction. If you or your chapter would like to donate items, please let Cecily know by February 10, and please include a picture of your item. Cecily stated that we already have some items for our Interstate auction that include a headset, a piece of carryon luggage and some other items.

Youth Gap Fund Report, Ron Worley and Tiffany Montalvo:

Tiffany stated that they had a couple of people submit applications, but it just did not work out. The total of the items was over the amount we would like to pay for equipment. One lady needed contacts, which went over our amount, and she could not pay the remaining cost. There was a student who needed an iPad, so they bought one from Amazon. This item went over our amount, but the family was able to pay the remaining amount. Tiffany stated that this was their second purchase from the Youth Gap fund. She said that this fund is moving along in that people are getting the applications and then getting equipment. Tiffany mentioned that people are searching the web for assistance from us. Cecily stated that progress is great, and she tells everyone about our funds when they call for support. She tries to direct them to the service they are entitled to, and then, for what is not covered, she directs them to us.

Senior Fund Report, Alice Ritchhart:

Alice reported that we helped six members to attend our state conference in Brunswick, Georgia last November. The committee assisted an individual to get a pair of Meta Ray-Ban glasses. This person was referred to through Debi Holcomb's senior peer support group. Debi assisted her in purchasing the product and gave her some training, so she would be able to use the glasses.

Cecily stated that she is going to take literature about our organization to a Braille book fair, a pizza lunch and audio-described movie. This event is taking place at the Villa Rica Library, in Villa Rica, Georgia, on Saturday, February 28, 2026. Marsha is going to represent GCB, and she will take brochures about GCB with her to this event.

Discussion of proposed constitutional amendment, Cecily Laney Nipper:

Cecily stated that the GCB constitution and bylaws committee approached her about an amendment they want to propose at the conference and convention in October 2026. The committee wants to start a discussion with the board, but this cannot be a motion at this meeting because it is not a board decision; it is a membership decision. They want to know where the board stands before the committee writes the amendment if it is desired. This amendment is about a record date for voting at the GCB membership meeting. Cecily did some research at Marj's request, and this would mean that sixty days before our conference could be a standing number of days for a record date. This means that if our conference begins on October 8, 2026, then members who joined after August 8, 2026, would not be eligible to vote. All members who joined before August 8, 2026, would be eligible to vote. Since we are incorporated in Georgia and the nonprofit code dictates that it cannot be more than seventy days, we are bound by that stipulation. It could be sixty days. The smallest number she saw was twenty days.

Marj stated that we were considering this mostly because of concerns that there is a potential for things being pushed through with new members joining and not being very informed about our organization. This would give us a safeguard that newer members would be taking time to learn more about the organization before voting on those things we do vote on. This is common in ACB organizations such as Guide Dog Users, Inc. Members must have joined at least forty-five days before voting in an election. Marj stated that this is insurance for safeguarding the policies and procedures of our organization. The reason behind this amendment is because we have not had a record date in the past. Marj asked for input from other board members. Everyone who spoke up thought this amendment would be a clever idea. This amendment, if passed, would have to have some education in advance. Marj welcomes anyone to join the constitution and bylaws committee at any time. She stated that at our conference and convention we could make note of any new members we have at that sixty-day cut off and those people could be given a badge with an assorted color from other members. We can put procedures into place to make sure this is followed through. It would not be that many people. If we bring this forward it would be voted on in 2026, and if it is approved, it would not be put in place until 2027. There was a lively discussion about dues, which was sent to the membership committee for more research and discussion. Cecily asked to close the discussion about the proposed amendment, with mostly consensus on it.

Sunshine Committee Report, Stacey Orr:

Stacey Orr, chair of the Sunshine Committee, submitted a written report which Cecily Nipper, SR, read.

"It is truly an honor to serve our organization by sending cards for members who are dealing with a recent illness or struggle or who had an immediate family member pass away. Please send me the names of those members who you would like a card sent to on the behalf of our Georgia Council of the Blind. This committee includes Debbie McDonald, Debbie Holcomb, and Stacey Orr. Stacey Orr appreciates both Debbie's work and being willing to serve and to help to spread sunshine through cards from GCB. Stacey would like to thank the East Georgia Chapter for creating the handmade Braille cards that we can use to send to those members who are Braille readers. Recently, we have mailed cards to Gwendolyn Barron for the loss of her father; Cecily Nipper, SR., as she recovers from surgery; Betsy Grenevitich, as she helps with her son Paul's recovery from a major heart issue; Cecily Laney Nipper, as a note of encouragement. Stacey says thank you for the opportunity to serve."

Cecily said that Gwendolyn Barron's last name was incorrect and that the Braille cards were made as a service project by Grace Baptist Church ladies' group, not by the East Georgia Chapter. Cecily stated that the Sunshine Committee will continue in 2026. Stacey does not get a lot of requests for cards, so we all should be diligent in remembering that and Cecily would like to see chapters take this on. Please do kind things for your chapter members when they are grieving a loss.

Conference and Convention Committee Report, Cecily Laney Nipper and Tiffany Montalvo:

Cecily said that Tiffany is the co-chair of this committee and that Tiffany has helped her a lot already. The contracts that we voted on at our December board meeting were changed and signed on December eighth and ninth, respectively. We have our link for reserving rooms; however, it is too early to send it to the membership for our October conference and convention. The convention committee will start meeting soon. Watch your email for the correct dates and times. If you want to be on the committee, please let Cecily know. She plans to invite all those who served last year, with the addition of Tiffany and Danielle McIntyre.

Tiffany mentioned that there is a nonprofit organization called Menus for All that provides Braille and accessible menus for restaurants. The organization is willing to provide large print and Braille menus for restaurants located around the Courtyard by Marriott, Covington. In return the organization wants us to advertise their services in our program and to place a flyer in our welcome goodie bags that will have the QR code to go to their website. Cecily has looked at their website, and it supports Voiceover. The suggestion was made that we could give them a small donation if they do an excellent job.

Exhibitor policy discussion and action:

Cecily stated that this is a policy that Marj wrote on behalf of Jerrie and Cecily to address issues that we had in the exhibit hall at the last convention. It reads:

Georgia Council of the Blind Conference and Convention Exhibitor Policy

Adopted January 17, 2026.

The following provisions will be included in letters and applications sent to prospective exhibitors for the GCB annual conference and convention.

The fee charged to exhibitors will be determined each year by the conference and convention committee. GCB chapters, special interest affiliates and blind-owned small businesses will pay half this fee.

The exhibitor application and payment must be submitted in advance to reserve a table.

Due to hotel regulations, exhibitors must agree to not sell or give away any food items.

For the exhibit area to be comfortable for all participants, exhibitors must agree to not demonstrate products of any kind with fragrances. Scented products in packaging may be sold.

If, due to unforeseen circumstances, an exhibitor is unable to attend the conference and convention, a request may be made to the exhibits coordinator to refund the fee.

Marj made a motion to approve this policy. Jerrie seconded the motion. Cecily asked for discussion. It was suggested that we add that they are not allowed to exhibit unless they pay their fee in advance. Cecily asked Marj and Jerrie if they would accept this addition, and they agreed. It was asked if food that was wrapped could be at the exhibit table. If it is wrapped in a bag, it can be given away. Hearing no other discussion, Cecily asked for the vote, and the motion passed with no opposition. This policy will be added to the exhibit letter.

Scholarship Report, Marj Schneider:

Marj said that the scholarship committee is in the beginning stage of our 2026 AI and Cora Camp Scholarship application process. The application has changed as it does every year. Thanks to Jerri and Steve for placing it on our website. Marj asked Jerri and Steve if we could separate the scholarships on our website. Currently the text of the First Timer's, the Leadership, and the Camp scholarships are all grouped together. She asked if our scholarships could have different links on our website. Marj reported that she has circulated an announcement about the scholarship to offices for students with disabilities at colleges and universities in Georgia. She has also sent this announcement to InfoLink at CVI and to Shirley Robinson at GVRA. Marj hopes that it will be circulated among the counselors at GVRA. Marj noted that March 9 is the deadline for applications. She said that she can send out an announcement to GCB members who might know someone who might apply for a scholarship. It will go out to all the Georgia Teachers of the Visually Impaired for high school students through Chris Davis. Marj stated that she does all she can to circulate the word about this scholarship. The committee will be meeting in March to consider applications. Marsha asked if students get GVRA money and scholarship money, would they lose the equivalent amount in GVRA support. Marj stated that we do not usually get applications from students who are being served by GVRA. Debbie McDonald volunteered to send the announcement to colleges in South Georgia that could have potential applicants.

Technology Committee Report, Steve Longmire:

Steve stated that he is excited about the GCB technology committee. They meet on the second Monday at 7:00 PM, on Zoom. They are working on a lot of projects that include making sure the website and the app are kept up to date and that they are accessible. Steve reported that they will separate the three different scholarships. He said that the conference and convention information for this year and last year is on the website, as well as information for the national conference and conventions. Our site also includes audio files of our past conventions that are clear. Steve stated that we are getting a lot of downloads on the app on both the Apple and Android sides. Steve added that we discuss new devices which include a new wearable or bracelet that can detect facial expressions. Marsha thanked Steve for joining their chapter meeting to discuss technology with them. Deborah Lovell asked about having a link to the cane bank on the first page of our website.

Legislative Committee Report, Alice Ritchhart:

Alice said that the legislative committee has disbanded. The committee scheduled two meetings, once before the session started and again after the beginning of the session, but no one showed up except for Betsy and Alice. Alice said that it is hard to conduct legislative work when you have no people backing you up and to help you with legislative activities. The bills are there because they are being delivered. They were where they were when the session ended. They are on committees. The NFB Braille Bill is in the Education Committee. The Commission for the Blind Bill did get the amendments added to it but does not know if they kept all the added amendments, because no one will give her a copy of the bill.

The bill that she is working on now is Senate Bill 222, and it is in committee. There is supposed to be a new bill which is about emergency evacuation for people with disabilities. We were trying to get speakers to talk to us about this for the Alliance on Aging and Vision Los community call, but we found out that there are no standards in place for emergencies. That has been passed off to the Red Cross. It is up to them to decide where people with disabilities can find shelter during an emergency. There is a bill being put forward to address standards for this issue and a clear path for what these entail. This means you go to your county with emergency workers, or Red Cross workers. They should all be on the same page and include people with disabilities, but we are still waiting for that bill to be dropped.

That is what is happening at the state level. The session started this past Monday. The governor has already given his state address on Thursday and since it is an election year, they want the session to be quick so they can get out and start campaigning. All House and Senate seats are up for reelection, but cannot campaign during session, so they are going to be quick about getting the budget done.

Alice does not know what is going to happen to the bills. She does know that Stacey and Kathleen are working on Braille Bill. They are trying to get more representatives involved, but she does not know the status of it, and stated the legislative sessions or seminars are ongoing, but when they are in session you must be available to do what needs to be done to get the bill through. Otherwise, it is not going to go anywhere. Until we get involved, we cannot move legislative bills forward.

At the national level there is one more piece of legislation to come forward that will affect Georgia and other states. It is with the Department of Education dismantling the priority for blind vendors in military dining facilities. They are requesting that blind vendors move out and that the department of Defense take over. At the national level, Scott Thornhill reported on what is happening with the Randolph Shepard program. Even though we have several military dining places here in Georgia using blind vendors, they could be closed. This is going to be a hard fight because they have told new vendors it is up to them to find their own place to work. Yet, that is not how the program works. They are already starting to dismantle the vendor program here in Georgia, which matters to younger people who are looking for work.

Alice stated that she would like to step down as chair of the Legislative Committee. She says she is not going away but she feels that someone else could do more with this committee. Cecily thanked her and told Alice that she would look for someone to take over the Legislative Committee. Betsy said the same thing, that she would be willing to help but she did not want to be on the Legislative Committee. Cecily said thank you to Betsy as well. Marsha thanked Alice and Betsy for all their hard work. Cecily will work on getting information about our legislative committee on our website and instructions on how to contact our senators and representatives.

Georgia Guide Dog Users Update, Marj Schneider:

Marj reported that Georgia Guide Dog Users (GGDU) had an informal gathering last week. For the second time they discussed Glide, which is an AI-powered mobility device that is being developed by Guidance. Sheri Richardson, who is a Glide tester, was on the call. She talked about her walks with the machine and how it has improved over her several testing opportunities. She is on the list to receive a Glide when it is released sometime this year. There are a lot of encouraging things about it, and this is why GGDU has had several discussions about it. If you are interested in learning more about Glide, visit glidance.com. Glide is one of a variety of devices in the realm of developing mobility technology. Marj said that GGDU is always looking forward to assisting our members and to finding new members, ways we can help guide dog users in Georgia. GGDU has an emergency veterinary care fund for guide dog handlers in Georgia.

Cecily noted that we have reached out to Glidance to give us a demonstration in Georgia, but they have not responded to her. She said we could reach out again and see if they would come or be on Zoom in the future.

GCB Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss (GCBAVL) Deborah Lovell:

Deborah stated that they hold quarterly calls. This month's call will be a presentation by Ready Red Cross. AAVL members learned that no one really wanted to take on emergency preparedness for people who are blind. The Red Cross has taken this on, and we have a representative who will be speaking with our group on Monday, January 19, 2026, at 7:00 PM on Zoom. We hope that they will answer our questions and provide information. You do not have to be a member to come and listen. Deborah noted that the Georgia Council of the Blind Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss meets every month on the third Monday at 7:00 PM on Zoom.

Membership and Public Relations Committee, Amanda Wilson:

Amanda reported that the membership and public relations committee met last week. We are currently collecting membership dues. She said that between January and March is when we collect all contact information and dues to send to the ACB for its database. Our goal is 150 members, and we think we will have that and more. If so, we will have 6 affiliate votes during the ACB National Conference and Convention. She stated that all our chapters meet every month either in person or on Zoom or both. She added that every chapter has some new members or returning members from the past. She mentioned that Debi Holcomb, who is a peer support leader in Jasper, has gotten some of her members to join GCB.

We are still holding our book club that meets on the fourth Thursday at 7:30 PM on Zoom. We are still holding our Praise and Prayer call on the first and third Tuesdays at 7:00 PM on our conference call line. We are still collecting can tabs for the Shriners Hospital. Cecily is going on Sunday, January 25 to weigh in the can tabs we collected last year. Tiffany and Cecily will go to her church, Covington Presbyterian Church, to be recognized for collecting so many can tabs.

Tiffany, our public relations 'co-chair, told us that most of our chapters are on Facebook. Ron from the Augusta chapter stated during our membership meeting that they were creating a Facebook page for their chapter. Tiffany is good at posting events on Instagram and on Facebook for us. Debbie McDonald, our member at large representative, posts events on their Facebook page as well. Amanda said if you have any ideas for projects like collecting can tabs, glasses, or lightly used gadgets, please let her know. The membership and public relations committee meets on the second Thursday of the odd months, at 7:00 PM on Zoom.

GCB Digest Report, Tiffany Montalvo:

Tiffany said that the GCB Digest includes articles in the following areas: our presidential message, Braille competitions, poems, accessible technology, leadership conferences, interviews, chapter news, committee reports, and special affiliate reports. We produce the GCB Digest Newsletter in Braille, large print, audio on digital cartridges, email and on our website. We send out the calendar of events and any upcoming announcements at the beginning of the month. If anyone wants to help, please contact Amanda Wilson.

GCB Members at Large Report, Debbie McDonald:

Debbie stated that she does not have the final number of members at large. The list is still being compiled. She will have those numbers in April. She noted that she found the emails for all Facebook pages, and she posted them on the GCB members at large Facebook page. Debbie said that she has 109 followers on her Facebook page. Cecily said that Debbie is being modest because Cecily calls her every week and tells her about someone who needs support. She says I will be happy to talk to them and assist them in any way.

Unfinished Business or New Business:

Phil stated that the Georgia Radio Reading Service has a new name. It is Vocal Point: Home of the Georgia Radio reading Service. Their website address is seevp.org.

Phil stated that the Peach Talk call on ACB Community is no more. He has been doing it for three years, and he thinks he has come to the end of his time and ideas for topics. We thanked Phil for leading this Zoom call and he said that he had enjoyed it, but he did not want to continue it in 2026.

Next Board Meeting:

Marsha made a motion that we meet at Grace Baptist Church, in McDonough, Georgia and on Zoom on Saturday, April 18, 2026, at 10:00 AM. Alice seconded the motion and it passed with no opposition. There will be an option for lunch. We will discuss a donation later for Grace Baptist Church.

Adjourn:

Deborah Lovell made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Amanda Seconded the motion and it passed with no opposition. Cecily adjourned the meeting at 12:18 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Amanda Wilson, GCB Secretary

[GCB Chapter News:](#)

[The Athens Chapter:](#)

The Athens Chapter held our summer picnic on Saturday, May 16, 2026, at Memorial Park at shelter #2. 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, which is 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 706-726-9438 or via email at listeningacuity@gmail.com.

East Georgia Chapter:



A group shot of several East Georgia Chapter members at the annual picnic held at East Georgia Chapter member Anne Wheeler's home.

In January, we held our meeting on Zoom and shared how braille as well as braille devices are essential to our everyday lives.

At our February meeting, we hosted a Valentine's Day meeting with special themed treats. So, everyone could explore their braille devices, a few members brought in their own personal braille products.

In March, we welcomed GCB Web Master Steve Longmire and his wife Tiyah. They talked to us about the tech improvements within GCB and how we can also be a part of the exciting changes.

At our April meeting, we welcomed via Zoom ACB First Vice President, David Trott, who talked about all the exciting things happening at the national level and what we could look forward to in the future.

In May, we held our annual picnic, where we had chicken catered in, and several members brought various side dishes and desserts.

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:

Debbie McDonald, the Member at Large, stated that we have 32 members at large. This includes GCB lifetime members as well as all members at large. GCB At Large Chapter Facebook page has 121 followers.

You can find the GCB Member at Large Facebook page by searching for GCB At Large Chapter. Debbie McDonald posts something interesting every day.

Northeast Georgia Chapter:



From left to right: Guide Dog Luther, Northeast Georgia Chapter Vice President, Judy Presley, GCB President, Cecily Laney Nipper, Northeast Georgia Chapter President, Dianne Roberts. President Cecily Laney presented the chapter with a proclamation for its name change.

The Northeast Georgia Chapter stated voted unanimously in March 2026 to change our official name to the Northeast Georgia Chapter of the Visually Impaired, commonly referred to as the Northeast Georgia Chapter. Since we represent most of the Northeast Georgia region, we want our name to reflect this and to extend GCB's reach into more communities.

For our February meeting, the theme was transportation. Members shared their subjective experiences in obtaining rides and offered valuable tips to navigate the many available modes of transportation. We voted to sponsor member, Melissa Woolston, to the 2026 ACB Leadership Seminar in Washington, D.C., held in March.

For our March meeting, Tom Braatz and Curtis Crawford, IT specialists with Hall Voter Elections, were our speakers. They brought Audio Tactile Interface (ATI) devices and trained us how to successfully use the devices for voting in the 2026 election season.

For our April meeting, members demonstrated handy gadgets and tips for navigating vision loss at home. Melissa Woolston shared her experiences at the 2026 ACB Leadership Seminar in Washington, D.C. On April 25, chapter members participated in a horseback activity at Alderwood Equestrian Center in Clermont. Staff and volunteers assisted us in petting, grooming and riding horses. This was the first time for some of us. Thanks to Keely Zeitlin for coordinating and leading this wonderful outing. Special thanks also to Anderwood for their generous donation of the facility, personnel, and resources. We welcome new and returning members, Dickie and Laurie Cannon, Shelly Ladd and Tonya Sykes.

For our May meeting, Dickie and Laurie Cannon presented a wonderful musical showcase with guitar and autoharp.

In June, we enjoyed food and fellowship at Cheddars Scratch Kitchen of Gainesville before the summer break.

Please pray for Ted Brackett, who suffered a heart attack in May, after recovering from a mild stroke in 2025. Ted will turn 100 years younger in October 2026. He and his late wife, Millie, were "almost" charter members of our chapter. Calling Team member, Jane Bell, is recovering from recent skin cancer surgery. We wish the best for them as they recover. Congratulations to member, Jessica Brownlee, on winning the Arnold Sadler and the Rudolph Dillman scholarships to attend the 2026 ACB Convention in St. Louis, MO July 24 through July 31. We also voted to sponsor Melissa Woolston and Keely Zeitlin, who plan to attend a limited part of the ACB Convention.

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.

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 stated that at our February meeting we met at the local Olive Garden restaurant where we ate, talked, and laughed. We discussed all the things that were going on in GCB.

In March, we met at the local Panera Bread Company where we ate, talked, and laughed. We talked about attending an audio-described movie and everything that was going on in GCB.

In April, we attended our local AMC theater to watch an audio-described movie. Afterwards, we went to a local Chinese buffet restaurant. In June, we are planning to eat at an outdoor restaurant for our summer picnic.

The Peach Chapter meetings are held on the third Monday at 11:00 AM, in person and on Zoom. For more information about the Peach Chapter, please contact Amanda Wilson at 770-547-4700 or via email at moonrocks@bellsouth.net.

Savannah Chapter:

The Savannah Chapter meetings are held by the telephone conference call on the third 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 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.

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 Phone Calls

The Georgia Council of the Blind is holding community phone calls. The phone number for all the GCB community calls is 1-605-562-0400, and the access code is 780-5751, followed by the pound sign. If you cannot get in, then use the alternative phone number. It is 1-717-275-8940, and the access code is 7805751, followed by the pound sign.

Here is the schedule for GCB community phone calls:

Praise and Prayer:

Praise and Prayer are held on the first and third Tuesday of the month at 7:00 PM. It is currently hosted by members of GCB.

GCB Book Club:

Deborah Lovell and Judy Presley

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 just 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 meet on Zoom, on the fourth Thursday at 7:30 PM.

In March, we read "The Party Line," by Carolyn Brown. Lila Matthews inherited her Aunt Gracie's house, a field of the freshest strawberries, money, and a secret. Lila must solve the mysterious secret. In April, we read the Seven rings, the third book in the "The Lost Bride trilogy," by Nora Roberts. Sonia must solve the mystery of the seven stolen wedding rings from seven dead brides. In May, we read "My Friends," by Fredrik Backman. Louisa, an aspiring artist is determined to find out the story of these three enigmatic figures in this painting. In June, we read "The Great Alone," by Kristin Hannah. In 1974, Ernt Albright moves his family, including wife Cora and thirteen-year-old daughter Leni, north to Alaska.

GCB Awards Committee and Criteria:

Judy Presley, chair, PO box 231, Helen GA 30545, 706-400-2185, judygpresley23@gmail.com

The June Willis Guiding Eyes Award:

The recipient must be a sighted GCB member who is known to GCB members through attendance at GCB state activities, and through his/her willing assistance and service to the blind and low vision community.

June Willis Guiding Eyes Award Committee Members:

Keith Morris chair, 3359 White Oak Road, Thomson GA 30824, 706-595-1465, keithmorris53@icloud.com

Laurie Cannon, 404-797-9635, simp749@bellsouth.net

Tiyah Longmire, 404-922-7474, manifestiqueworks@gmail.com

The Gerald Pye Community Service Award:

The recipient must be an active legally blind member of GCB in good standing. He or she must have demonstrated superior service to his or her community in several ways that exemplify the work of Gerald Pye. The candidate must be nominated in writing by a GCB member who knows firsthand of the candidate's community services. Examples of this service must be included in the written recommendation.

Gerald Pye Community Service Award Committee Members:

Cecily Laney Nipper, chair, 41 Butler Bridge Road, Covington GA 30016, 470-218-7885, cecilynipper@gmail.com

Dianne Roberts, 770-533-3601, harveyroberts2@att.net

Kathy Morris, 706-466-2253, mkumorris@yahoo.com

The Rhoda Walker / Ann Sims Award:

(suggested by Rhoda's sister, Helen Wasileski):

The recipient can be a blind or sighted individual. Services rendered must be of non-paying status. Services may be any endeavor in the field of teaching, service, and betterment of life for the blind. The recipient must provide public awareness through speaking, seminars, and/or demonstration. There must be involvement of the educational field/teaching braille. The recipient must push any innovation involving blindness or blind people.

Rhoda Walker / Ann Simms Committee Members:

Hoyal Presley, chair, PO box 231, Helen GA 30545, 706-878-6041, hoyalpresley@gmail.com

Jeremy Adams, 706-200-2087, Adamsj154@gmail.com

Phil Jones, 770-713-3306, Brilman1952@gmail.com

The Walter R. McDonald Service Award:

The recipient is an outstanding low vision individual who has, through his/her leadership and service, contributed significantly to the betterment of the blind and low vision community, and has demonstrated by deeds and achievements his/her dedication to the principles incident to blindness espoused and practiced by the late Walter R. McDonald. The recipient may or may not be a member of the GCB.

Walter R McDonald Service Award Committee Members:

Deborah Lovell, chair, 3215 Lake Forest Drive, Augusta GA 30909, 706-667-3085, lovelld2000@gmail.com

Amanda Wilson, 770-547-4700, moonrocks@bellsouth.net

D J McIntyre, 678-343-7550, dgrenevitch@me.com

Lifetime Membership Award:

Alice Ritchhart, chair, 125 Willow Pond Way, Brunswick GA 31525, 912-996-4213, Alice.ritchhart@comcast.net

Amanda Wilson, 770-547-4700, moonrocks@bellsouth.net

Marsha Farrow, 706-859-2624, marsha.farrow@gmail.com

The nominations shall include the name of the candidate; plus, the reason the candidate deserves the award. Nominations for all awards shall be submitted to the respective award committee chairperson in writing (including email) no later than September 22, 2026.

Is the Tour Director Having Fun Yet?

by Janet Di Nola Parmerter

As some GCB cruise lovers know, like the Presley's, the Ritchharts, and the Nippers, a European cruise can be the glamorous trip of a lifetime. However, the glamour fades and stress levels soar when it is your job to take care of the tourists who booked the cruise. Still, this one particular year, because my new husband was one of my passengers, I hoped I could also steal time to relax and have some fun. However, on a group trip, the surprising obstacles thrown at the tour director are a major challenge. Such unexpected problems, or as I prefer to call them, unexpected 'situations', often come from in many directions.

Having worked as an international tour director for over forty years, the first thing I learned was, tourists paid to have problem free vacations. Therefore, in front of clients I made it a habit never to use the word problem, and wisely, or maybe discreetly, called every problem a "new situation." The first warning this Mediterranean cruise would be rough sailing came as Keith, and I was preparing to leave for the airport. An email arrived from Carnival Cruise Line, informing us the ship would no longer dock at the port of Naples but was now scheduled to dock in Salerno. Since we had already hired a private coach from Naples for a breathtaking excursion along the curving high cliffs and cobalt sea of the Amalfi Coast, immediate phone calls had to be made to the bus company, tour guides, and restaurants. Being an Italian citizen, whose favorite country happens to be Italy, I am fully aware it is not known for being the most organized country and knew that change would create some inconvenient situations.

Having worked years in Italy, a country that worried about things domain and not today, I always expected numerous unexpected problems, or rather situations. Realistically, that is not a disparaging comment about Italy or my heritage, it is merely a fact about their 'do it later' lifestyle. Seasoned travelers know each country has their own customs and ways, and Italians like a relaxed atmosphere with less stress, so things are often put off or postponed until domain.

To reinforce the point of different countries having their own ways, on the first day of a ski tour in Switzerland, I stressed to the group the importance of being exactly on time for the posted schedule of every train, bus, and ski lift tram. This was because, like the precision of a Swiss clock, each mode of Swiss transportation was designed to meet people at the exact minute they arrived, and to promptly transport them onto the next mode of transportation which would depart in time to arrive at the precise minute of the next train or bus. After a long ski day, the group enjoyed the ride down the Alp on the huge ski tram. When we arrived at the street level of the tiny town, everyone felt rushed when I told them we had to hurry to the

bus stop because the bus would be there in exactly two minutes. Some wanted to use the bathroom, so I said, "OK, but you will miss the bus and the connecting train, so you will have to wait another hour for the next bus and train." When they said they would be fast, I elaborated, "You do not understand. In thirty seconds, a bus is going to turn that corner, and we must be on it. So, unless you feel comfortable finding your way back to Interlaken, I would suggest you stick with us." After looking down the street, they moaned, "Nothing is coming, and we will be quick." Just then, we heard a bus turning the corner and everyone laughed as they ran for the bus. Though the group was impressed with the on-time bus, they were even more amazed when they heard the train whistle one minute before the posted time of arrival. For the first two days, everyone was delighted by the clock like precision of Switzerland, and that was the talk of the tour. But on the fourth day, people began asking, "In this country, is everything ALWAYS so perfectly scheduled and organized?" Yes! By the end of the week, as the first plate hit the dinner table precisely at 7 PM, I heard people grumbling, "I have never seen such an organized country, and I would like to see just one thing run late." Others commented, "It would make me feel good to see something, anything at all, be late." Then I heard, "Just let one thing be late in this country so I can feel good." Hearing the attitudes change 180 degrees from that first day, I began laughing and announced to the group,

"Late? You all want to be late? Well, take my tour to Italy, and you will have exactly what you want. Italy has posted time schedules that are elastic and stretch or shrink according to the owner's mood. So, if you really want things to be more disorganized, you will love the beauty, food, people, and unique style of Italy.

Further testimony to the truth of that statement is expressed in this classic tour guide joke. Of course, any experienced traveler would also understand the accuracy of this satirical humor. "According to Countries, it would be heaven if:

All the police were English bobbies, with a baton in hand rather than a gun, if all the organizers were Swiss, if all mechanics were German, if all lovers were French, and all chefs were Italian.

In contrast, Hell, would be: If all the organizers were Italian, all the chefs were English, all the lovers were Swiss, all the mechanics were French, and all the police were German." As the British say, "Give it a think," then I am sure any well-traveled tourist would have a hearty laugh. Anyway, getting back home to the changed cruise situation, after we made the needed phone calls to Italy, we left for JFK Airport. Usually, I fly in the day prior to the group so I can make tour preparations prior to meeting the passengers, however, on this tour, eight other passengers also booked earlier flights to spend an extra day in Barcelona. That meant two hours after landing, I would need to start work by doing a 'meet and greet' for their incoming flight. Unfortunately, before taking off, our plane had its own situation with a three-hour delay on the New York runway. Thus, our scheduled early morning arrival slid into an afternoon landing, so my passengers completely missed my cheerful meet and greet. Then, the Illinois Travel office notified me of the next situation. One woman was rushed to the hospital and would spend her time on a hospital bed rather than on the Mediterranean Sea. The first evening is always the 'Welcome to Wherever' orientation meeting, when the week's itinerary is discussed along with all tour excursions. But for some reason, I was welcoming seven fewer passengers including the one in the hospital bed. The following day we discovered why. One couple was so jet lagged from their overseas flight; after arriving in their hotel room, they collapsed into a deep comatose sleep. Not only did they miss lunch and dinner, but they never heard our repeated phone calls to join the welcome orientation. After sleeping for twenty-four hours, the next day they made their own way to the ship and at dinner, they finally met the rest of the group. In addition, the office phoned and said a California woman missed her European flight by five minutes, and two Tennessee women had a domestic air delay, therefore, all three missed their international connection. Yet there was a solution to this new situation. Feasibly, if things worked out correctly, they could catch up with the ship in Marseilles, France.

Nevertheless, there was still the sixth person missing from Georgia, who did not miss her flight at all. Incredibly, thinking her flight was the following day, she never even went to the airport. The next evening, when she arrived at the Hartsfield Airport check-in counter, the airline told her the flight left 24 hours ago and said she would have to buy a new ticket; but refusing to pay for a new ticket, she simply stayed home and lost all her money.

With all that sad news, as the ship slowly cruised out of Barcelona, I wondered, was I having fun yet? I think not, but maybe soon. On the following sun-drenched morning, the first port of call was Marseilles, France, and we hired a bus to drive the group to Aix and Provence. Since the afternoon was free, the group had time to explore the historic city first settled by the Greeks, then Romans, then officially founded in 843 and formally named the Kingdom of Provence. Affectionately known as the city of a Thousand Fountains, the group happily shopped in the outdoor market and strolled past exquisite architectural cathedrals, castles, and amphitheaters. The next situation happened late that afternoon. The bus had to pick up our passengers on the busy street where it could not stop or park, so passengers had only a minute to board. The difficulty was coordinating our hired bus quickly to pick up our forty-five cheery carefree passengers, who were oblivious to the urgency of leaving the city before the ship sailed.

The stressful situation soon escalated, because after taking count on the bus, the number was two fewer passengers than when we arrived. Two more would be fine (which happened in Istanbul) but two fewer were unacceptable. Since passengers were not yet familiar with each other, we called names from the passenger list and waited to hear silence after someone's name was called; then worried after discovering two older women were missing. Have I mentioned how wonderful it was to have Keith, my bloodhound husband on this tour? Well, it truly was. With walkie talkies in hand, Keith and another passenger ran off the bus and through crowds of people, searching for the two lost sheep. It was like looking for a needle in a haystack, but forty minutes later, my walkie talkie squealed, "We have them!" Apparently, they forgot to reset their wristwatches to European time and were leisurely enjoying their shopping, oblivious to the fact that everyone on the bus was worrying if these two older women were safe and if we could board the ship before it left France. On a positive note, it was a relief to know the three lost women from America were on the ship. Still, we were disappointed they and the Sleeping Beauty couple all missed the first itinerary orientation meeting. So, rather than giving ourselves a well needed early to bed pampering, we invited all five of them to our cabin for a private rerun of the welcome to Spain orientation. The next glorious morning, the ship docked at the industrial port of Livorno, Italy. The first planned excursion was a photo stop at the Leaning Tower of Pisa, with the second stop in Renaissance Florence. In Pisa, our private bus transported the group to the coach parking lot, then we all walked to a public bus for a ten-minute ride to the Leaning Tower of Pisa on Miracle Square. After everyone took the standard long-distance photo which made it look like a person holding up the tower with their hand, a new situation occurred. Before boarding the public bus back to the parking lot, I took count. Once more, the number was wrong, and we were missing one passenger. Again, my bloodhound Keith was off and running. Without success, Keith searched through hordes of foreign tourists and listened for an American accent but returned alone. It was a mystery. No one knew what happened to Adrian, not even her roommate. She was simply gone.

Then something startling happened. A strange man approached someone in our group and handed his mobile phone to her. When Karen put it to her ear, a man was rambling in Italian. Totally confused, Karen handed me the phone and said,

"I don't know what this man is saying." When I listened, the man said he had a lost woman, and she wanted to talk to Janet. Imagine how I felt hearing a stranger say my name. Incredibly, he was with Adrian, all the way back at the coach parking lot.

That stranger recognized a terrified woman who thought she was going to be left in Pisa. Without either of them speaking the other's language, he correctly assumed she needed to be at the bus lot, escorted her onto the public bus, and brought her to the correct coach. Then, he phoned a friend back at the tower, asked him if he saw any American tourists, and the friend just happened to be at the bus stop next to Karen. Yes, we were at Miracle Square, and yes, we felt we had experienced a real miracle. When we arrived at our coach, we saw Adrian in tears. She said she was so frightened that she prayed for help, and then this man approached her. At first, she was afraid to speak to him, but he persisted, and eventually she trusted him and let him help. Ironically, she had forgotten to put my Italian mobile phone number in her purse, so she could not even have her rescuer call me. When that stranger next to Karen handed her the phone, and I heard "Janet," it was such a bizarre feeling of surprise, then finally relief when I heard Adrian's voice, which gave me a chilling feeling about being on 'Miracle Square. 'The third day was Civitavecchia, a port ninety minutes outside Rome. The morning included a stop at a Bible printing facility called Bethel, an authentic pizzeria for lunch, then a group photo in front of the Arch of Titus. Next were the Colosseum, the Pantheon, the Trevi Fountain, and other famous Roman sights. The day was beautiful and without any situations, so that evening Keith and I decided to make a reservation at an onboard restaurant and forgo the included dinner with the group. Would the tour director and her husband have some fun alone?

No! Because when departing a port, the worst nightmare of a tour director is to hear a client's cabin number announced within an extensive list of cabins, followed by, "Please immediately report to the Purser's office!" That statement is a dead giveaway those passengers are not on board. Consequently, as soon as we were seated for dinner, the cabin number of four young girls was announced. Instantly, I knew they would never make it to the Purser's office. Why?

It was because the previous night, they told me the Rome excursions cost too much, so they planned to go to Rome using public buses and trains. With fear in my heart, I sat them down to discourage such an alarming plan. For the next two hours, I detailed a few serious situations which could come from such an unwise decision and explained they did not need to purchase a two hundred-to-three-hundred-and-fifty-dollar excursion. They could simply book the ship's round trip transport to Rome and back to the ship. That would ensure the ship's personnel would take care of them. After I stressed the disorganization of Italy, I reminded them about the elastic transportation schedules, the language barrier, and the possibility of spontaneous labor strikes, known as 'scioperi. 'Further, I explained it was common for people or companies to have absolutely no reason at all to suddenly hold an inconvenient strike. Italians often joke they strike when the weather is good, and people want a day off to go to the beach. Then I shared an experience from a past trip, when our friend woke us in the middle of the night and warned us to immediately pack our suitcases and get a train out of Italy. That night, he heard about an unplanned strike and feared if we didn't buy a ticket back to Austria, we would miss our flight to America. Rapidly, we threw our clothes into our suitcase and took the first train out of Italy.

Speaking candidly to the girls, I stressed that the ninety-minute journey from the port to Rome was, at the very least, a risky and arduous journey, and thought I had successfully convinced them to book the Rome transfer. Unfortunately, with that announcement, I suspected I had failed and quickly rushed to the Purser's office; but we were excited when we saw one of the four girls. As happy as we were to see Sarah, I was equally upset to learn she stayed on board because she was afraid to go with the other girls. The last announcement sickened us all. Eighteen cabins were now reduced to just one cabin number. Sarah's. Of course, the ship left port, and we later learned by the time the girls got back to Civitavecchia, that night they had to pay for a hotel. The next day, they had to make their way back to Rome, then find trains to Naples and finally Salerno. Sadly, that learning experience became a costly situation, totaling seven hundred fifty dollars and two lost tour days.

Palma de Mallorca passed with only the standard minor situations at charming Porto Christo, but the final port, the Rock of Gibraltar, brought a situation I had never encountered in four decades of being a tour escort.

Native to North Africa are the famous tailless primates called Barbary macaques, the only wild monkeys living in Europe. For centuries, these monkeys have made the Rock of Gibraltar their home. At the top of Gibraltar, Keith wanted to photograph me with a backdrop of the Mediterranean Sea. As I sat on a huge, flat boulder. Suddenly, a large monkey sat beside me and touched my arm. Naturally, I jumped, but Keith told me not to move and stay calm. Stay calm? How could I be calm when my body was shaking? The huge monkey leaned forward, examined my face, and I hoped he would smile. Next, he fiddled with my purse, which was strapped across my body, and I froze.

With two hands and his face in my purse, he rummaged through it, but like a stone statue I didn't flinch an inch. He found what he smelled, a cookie. As he happily scampered away and munched on his treasure, I finally took a deep breath and laughed. Question, was the tour director having fun? Answer, yes, the most fun ever!

2026 AI and Cora Camp Scholarship Awardees By Marj Schneider

On April 18 at our springboard meeting of the Georgia Council of the Blind, to assist with their college expenses, three students were each awarded a one-thousand-dollar scholarship. For many years, GCB has been able to offer this scholarship to blind and low vision students because of the dedication of GCB members AI and Cora Camp, their years of helping to raise funds and providing the solid foundation that scholarship programs need to continue.

I want to thank the members who served on the scholarship committee with me this year: Deborah Lovell, Granger Ricks, and Duane Hale. In 2025, Duane was one of our scholarship recipients, and we are grateful he is participating now as a committee member. It is so helpful to have a group to discuss and evaluate the applications we receive. This year, we are pleased to award these scholarships to, Aarushi Ammavajjala of Marietta, Georgia; Marcelle (Cellbee) Brooks of Fairburn, Georgia; and to Johna Wright of Macon, Georgia.

Aarushi Ammavajjala is a freshman this year at Georgia Institute of Technology, where she is pursuing an undergraduate degree in computer science with concentrations in cybersecurity and artificial intelligence. Her long-term goal is to obtain a PhD in the use of artificial intelligence in healthcare but is hardly new to these fields. Beginning in high school, Aarushi served as an intern working on artificial intelligence research at institutions like the Mayo Clinic, Georgia Tech, and Stanford, Cornell, and Midwest Universities. Other internships have involved serving teams developing medical related and corporate software for managing data. Aarushi founded, MelaninMed, the first racially equitable, AI-powered skin cancer detection app. Existing skin cancer detection systems are trained primarily on lighter skin tones, making them dangerously inaccurate for people of color. Through the many diverse projects Aarushi has been involved with, she has earned international recognition and a variety of awards.

Aarushi inherited retinitis pigmentosa from her father. She says about herself: "Losing my outward sight caused me to turn inward, allowing me to reflect on myself with 20/20 vision. Despite my physical disability, my mental strength is unshakable: I am resilient and fiercely optimistic. Despite the looming threat of eventual blindness, I work even harder toward building my technical repertoire. Despite pessimistic doctors and my concerned parents, I never let any person or situation define my capabilities until I define them myself."

Before losing his vision in 2017, Marcelle Brooks, who goes by Cellbee, was a screen writer, film maker and photographer. In 2022, he was on dialysis before receiving a kidney transplant, and the fact that his kidney donor had died from a drug overdose inspired him to pursue a BS in psychology, with the longer-term goal of a PhD that will enable him to counsel people who face similar health challenges. Because Cellbee is decades older than other students in his psychology classes, he feels a sense of urgency to obtain his doctorate TO be able to PRACTICE as a psychologist. Of his goal Cellbee says, "I am dedicated to using my lived experience to ensure that no one else has to walk this path alone."

To learn how to function as a blind person, Cellbee has gotten assistance from Vision Rehabilitation Services, the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, mobility training, and training with using technology like smart phones and tablets. At the same time, he has had to address many challenges along the way at Georgia State University that have required he advocate for himself to gain access to course materials, access to websites and access in the classroom. While carrying this extra load along with his courses, he has found time to help other low vision GSU students who face similar barriers at the school. Cellbee says of this role, "Even though it is not a 'job' on paper, I am already counseling others on kidney issues, blindness, and how to survive the GSU landscape."

Johna Wright is in her first year of a PhD program at Mercer University in educational leadership, focused on higher education leadership and organizational change. Her research agenda is centered on disability-inclusive learning environments. One area of her research focuses on the concept of playful learning as access. She is collaborating on a qualitative case study that looks at how play-based teaching approaches in higher education classrooms can support engagement, creativity, and inclusive participation. Looking to the future Johna says, "My long-term goal is to become a faculty member researching and teaching in the field of higher education at a high research activity university while also contributing to institutional leadership. Hopefully, over time I can serve in roles such as department chair, dean, or even university president, where I would be positioned to influence policy and institutional priorities in ways that advance accessibility and inclusion."

Along with her course and research work Johna is currently employed as the Assistant Director of Fellowships and is an instructor in academic writing. She serves as faculty liaison to ABLE Mercer, which focuses on creating community among students with disabilities and promoting disability awareness on campus. Johna was the founder of that organization when she attended Mercer as an undergraduate. Through her several roles on campus now, she is a mentor for students, helping them reflect on their goals, experiences and the contributions they want to make.

Johna says of herself, "Across all these activities – research, advocacy, mentorship, and community engagement – my goal is to contribute to a more inclusive educational landscape. As a blind and autistic scholar-practitioner, I have experienced both the barriers and the possibilities that exist within academic spaces. These experiences have shaped my commitment to ensuring that students with disabilities have access not only to accommodation, but also to mentorship, leadership opportunities, and communities that affirm their identities."

I am sure you will join me and the GCB scholarship committee in offering congratulations to our 2026 AI and Cora Camp scholarship winners. They are all amazing students with definite goals, with the ability and motivation to achieve them. We wish our three awardees every success, and we look forward to hearing from each of them in the coming year in the pages of the GCB digest.

Rhyme and Reason: Spring by Sophia Curtis

Soft breezes drift through blooming cherry trees,

Warm robins sing above the humming bees.

I walk the narrow path through silver rain,

While puddles dance beside the cobbled lane.

My tapping cane keeps rhythm on the ground,

Each dripping gutter adds its gentle sound.

I hear the sparrows splash in puddled rain,

The distant rivers laugh beside the lane.

The earthy scent of moss drifts through the air,
Sweet roses bloom with fragrance rich and rare.
A passing child's laughing through the park,
Her skipping footsteps fading through the dark.

The morning breeze brings scents of growing pine,
Wet blossoms drift through perfumes soft and fine.
A neighbor greets me warmly by the gate,
His cheerful whistle tells me not to wait.

The baker's doorway breathes of sugared bread,
Warm cinnamon and spice around me spread.
The buses rumble slowly through the street,
While raindrops whisper softly at my feet.

I pause beneath the softly swaying trees,
And feel spring's living song within the breeze.
Though I cannot behold the skies above,
I know this world through every sound I love.

For spring is more than bright and new colors,
It lives in every scent and makes a sound shining through.

[Unlocking Accessibility: A Guide by Sophia Curtis](#) The WeWalk Smart Cane: Technology Designed for Blind Travelers

For many blind and low-vision people, the white cane is far more than a mobility tool. It represents independence, confidence, safety, and freedom. Whether traveling through busy city streets, finding a bus stop, or navigating an unfamiliar building, the cane provides vital information about the environment.

Now, modern assistive technology is adding new features to this trusted tool. One example is the WeWalk Smart Cane, created by WeWalk. The device combines traditional cane travel with smartphone technology, obstacle detection, voice navigation, and AI-powered assistance.

A White Cane First

One important thing about the WeWalk cane is that it is still a long cane. It is not designed to replace orientation and mobility skills. Instead, it adds extra tools that may help during travel.

Many blind travelers already have strong cane skills. The WeWalk system is intended to support those skills by providing additional information about surroundings.

The cane can still:

- *Detect curbs and drop-offs
- * Find steps and pathways
- * Help maintain orientation
- * Support safe travel technique, because the smart features are there to add another layer of awareness by detecting Obstacles above Waist Height

Traditional canes are excellent at detecting hazards on the ground. However, many blind travelers know the frustration of walking into something above cane level, such as:

- *Tree branches

- * Street signs

- * Open cupboard doors

- * Hanging objects

The WeWalk cane includes ultrasonic sensors that can detect overhead obstacles. When an object is detected, the handle vibrates to warn the user.

This feedback is silent and tactile, which is important because many blind travelers rely heavily on environmental sound while traveling, so the vibration will not interfere with other sound cues.

These customizable vibration or sound alerts allow users to receive warnings in the way that feels most natural to them, while built-in lighting improves visibility in low-light environments,

These features can be controlled directly from the cane without needing to reach for a smartphone.

Navigation and GPS Support

Through the WeWalk app, the cane connects to a smartphone using Bluetooth so users can access:

- * GPS directions

- * Nearby locations

- * Public transportation information

- * Walking routes

- * Voice assistant features

With step-by-step voice guidance delivered through the cane, users can navigate to shops, restaurants, and landmarks without holding their phone.

The system works with:

- * Google Maps

- * Apple Maps

- * Siri

- * Google Assistant

A traveler could ask the cane for directions to a train station while continuing to use normal cane technique. The device can audibly provide directions, train times, public transport information, and nearby travel assistance.

AI Features

One of the newer additions to the WeWalk Smart Cane 2 is built-in AI support powered by ChatGPT integration.

Users can speak directly to the cane to ask questions about their surroundings, read menus, identify landmarks, or receive general information. This can be especially useful in unfamiliar areas or while traveling independently.

For example, a user could ask:

"What restaurants are nearby?"

- * "What bus stop is this?"

- * "Read this menu."

- * "Tell me about this landmark."

The goal is to provide quick access to useful information without requiring the user to constantly manage a phone.

Designed With Blind Users in Mind

The WeWalk cane was developed with blind and low-vision users involved throughout the design process. Features such as tactile feedback, voice interaction, physical controls, and accessibility-focused navigation reflect that approach.

Rather than replacing traditional mobility skills, the device is designed to work in harmony with them.

Comparing WeWalk Smart Cane 1, 2 and 2 plus. (The WeWalk Smart Cane 2 Plus includes an active subscription to the Intelligent AI Voice Assistant, whereas the Base 2 model requires you to pay for the AI subscription separately.)

Smart Cane 1:

- Cost: Around \$299.
- Basic ultrasonic sensor that alerts you via vibrations when obstacles above chest level are detected.
- Physical buttons
- Connect to your smartphone via Bluetooth to provide navigation through the WeWalk app.
- Most navigation features are controlled through your phone.

Smart Cane 2:

- Cost: Starts around \$850 (with a Smart Cane 2 Plus version going up to about \$1,150).
- 25% lighter. 40% thinner. Three times more powerful.
- Weatherproof, more ergonomic handle with tactile buttons for controlling navigation directly from the cane.
- Touchpad
- Advanced obstacle detection at chest and head level and 30% more accurate and focused than Smart Cane 1.
- Built-in voice navigation, customizable vibration or sound alerts, and a built-in flashlight.
- Premium audio with Harman speakers and AI support (2 Plus version) for enhanced guidance.
- Designed to provide many functions independently of your phone.

In short, Smart Cane 2 provides more robust obstacle detection, direct controls, built-in navigation and AI features, while Smart Cane 1 relies more on your phone and offers basic obstacle detection.

Limitations

Like any assistive technology, smart canes are not perfect.

- * Smart canes are much more expensive than standard white canes.
- * The electronic features require charging.
- * Users may need time to learn the controls and navigation systems.
- * Some travelers may prefer the simplicity and lighter weight of a traditional cane.

Final Thoughts

For blind and low-vision travelers, independence is not about having the newest technology. It is about having reliable tools that support safe and confident travel.

The WeWalk Smart Cane combines the familiarity of the traditional white cane with modern connected technology. For some users, that combination may provide extra awareness, improved navigation, and greater confidence while independently traveling.

More information about the device is available on the WeWalk Official Website.

Announcements:

Door Dash Accessibility Telephone Number:

The DoorDash Accessibility telephone number is 1-855-300-8985. When you call there will be an option to create a new account. When you get a person just tell them you want to sign up for the "Dash Pass" which is \$9.99 per month. But if you pay for a full year, it only ends up costing \$8.00 per month.

City Pop Popcorn Fundraiser:

GCB is holding a City Pop Popcorn Fundraiser. Half of the proceeds of the popcorn will go to GCB.

Use this link to shop our fundraiser.

<https://citypopfundraising.com/38815381>

This fundraiser is from May 1, 2026, until December 31, 2026.

Georgia Council of the Blind Conference and Convention Announcement:

Georgia Council of the Blind: 70 years starring in advocacy and support.

GCB is turning 70 at this year's convention. Make plans to join us Thursday, October 8, 2026, through Saturday, October 10, 2026, at the Courtyard Atlanta Covington, in Covington Georgia.

The room rates are \$129 a night plus tax. The address is 11500 Foxfield Way, Covington, Georgia, 30014. Come join us for a great conference where we will play bingo, have great educational and fun sessions, an enjoyable evening dinner, socialize with old and new friends, and learn more about the Georgia Council of the Blind. If you have any questions or need further assistance, please contact Cecily Laney Niper [at 470-218-7885](tel:470-218-7885), or [via email at cecilynipper@gmail.com](mailto:cecilynipper@gmail.com).

The End.