

In the center of the circle is a pencil right hand gently cradling a Georgia peach, side and draped over the thumb. The of the sun, with vibrant orange and uppercase letters GCB stand out in dots positioned directly below the three Georgia Council of the Blind Established



drawing in gray tones. It is a palm of an open peach. A slender green leaf gracefully hangs originating from a short brown stem on the left peach radiates warm hue colors like the warmth yellow tones. In the center of the peach, bold black, accompanied by corresponding Braille letters. Text reads A hand up, not a handout. 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.  
Winter 2026

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#### Table of Contents:

#### The GCB DIGEST

From Your Editor  
GCB Presidential Message  
GCB Board Meeting Minutes  
GCB Chapter News  
GCB Special Affiliate News  
GCB Community Phone Calls  
GCB Melissa Woolston's GCB Conference and Convention Letter  
GCB Scholarship Winner Update from Will Orr  
GCB Scholarship Winner from Duane Edward Hale  
GCB Conference and Convention Overview  
GCB Augusta, Georgia Council of the Blind Chapter Project  
GCB Voices in My Day  
GCB How to Avoid Scams by Phone, Text, and Email

#### 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 to the GCB Digest Committee, who have made our GCB Digest such a considerable success, to each member who sent articles, and to those who made suggestions. 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 Newslines and on the Georgia Radio Reading Service, GARRS.

Connect with us on social media! To find it, search on Instagram for [gacounciloftheblind](#). That represents 'GA 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

More than half of our cartridge subscribers have not returned any of them in more than a year. If you are one of them, please note that we must receive the unreturned cartridges ASAP to enable us to send new ones. The cartridges are just like the books you borrow from your NLS library – they must be returned. Look through your homes, find the cartridges, flip over the cards on the mailing boxes, and put them out for the next mail pickup. The same applies for GCB cartridges.

### GCB Presidential Message

By Cecily Laney Nipper

Greetings, GCB members and friends! As 2026 begins, I am filled with anticipation for a momentous year to come for the Georgia Council of the Blind. Our recent conference was a tremendous success and truly reflected the strength, dedication, and unity of our organization. One of the most exciting outcomes is that we have officially locked in our rates for the next two conferences to be held at the Courtyard Marriott Atlanta Covington in Covington, Georgia.

Kudos to the Tech Team and especially to the chair, Steve Longmire. His outstanding work and placing the recorded convention sessions on our website is an excellent flex for GCB and clearly demonstrates that our online presence is strong and expanding. We continue to see more downloads of our GCB Link app available in iOS and Android, and these recordings further highlight our commitment to accessibility and engagement.

Giving back remains a core value of our organization, and I am proud to share that during our conference we collected over twenty pounds of aluminum can tabs. These tabs will be converted into dollars to support Shriners Children's Hospital. Due to popular demand, this collection effort will continue through Convention 2026. I encourage everyone to begin collecting can tabs now through October and bring them with you on behalf of your chapter.

As we move into this legislative cycle, please stay tuned for information regarding our upcoming Day at the Capitol. This important event brings GCB members together in Atlanta to meet with legislators and advocate for the issues that matter most to our community.

Thank you for your continued dedication and support. Together, we are building a strong and vibrant future for the Georgia Council of the Blind.

### GCB Board Meeting Minutes

#### GEORGIA COUNCIL OF THE BLIND BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Saturday, JULY 26, 2025, 10:00 AM - 11:55 AM, on Zoom

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 on the Zoom call. Cecily Laney Nipper, President; Marj Schneider, First Vice-President; Judy Presley, Second Vice-President; Amanda Wilson, Secretary; Cecily Nipper, Senior, Assistant Secretary; Marsha Farrow, Treasurer; Deborah 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; No Representative from the Savannah Chapter; Tyah Longmire, South Metro Chapter Representative; No representative from Georgia Guide Dog Users; Deborah Lovell, Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss, Representative; Steve Longmire, Webmaster; and Tiffany Montalvo, GCB Digest Representative. Guests on the Zoom call were Angela Zimmerman, Jamaica Miller, and Granger Ricks.

There was a quorum.

Approval of Agenda, Cecily Laney Nipper:

Cecily asked for approval of the agenda. There were no changes. Phil Jones made a motion to accept the agenda as sent out, and Deborah Lovell seconded the motion. The motion passed.

President's Report, Cecily Laney Nipper:

Cecily stated that at the American Council of the Blind (ACB) National Conference and Convention, members voted to keep the affiliate vote. Georgia had ten people who attended the Conference and Convention in person. Cecily received the Margarine G. Beaman Volunteer Award at the Convention banquet. Cecily Laney and Cecily Sr. participated in a panel about people with visual impairments and on a panel with ACB Next Generation. They both spoke about what it is like to live with vision loss.

Cecily was invited to attend the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act celebration with Multiple Choices in Athens, Georgia. This was a community event at their local library. If your community is having an event and would like GCB to be represented, please let her know.

President Nipper attended the Georgia Vision Alliance meeting back in June. At that meeting, they discussed ways to move forward, how to divide the workload, and changes they could make to the Commission Bill to make it more attractive when it is brought up for its second year. This is an advocacy task that continues to be at the top of the list.

Cecily provided us with an update on the fundraiser we had previously decided to participate in. The Terry Lynn company has gone out of business. She said that she has another fundraising idea we could potentially be part of the Interstate Auction of ACB affiliates. Nine states are involved, and it will be held on March 21, 2026. We donate the items, and they are auctioned off, along with items from other states. She asked for feedback about the Interstate Auction, and Deborah requested some clarification. Cecily stated that individuals or chapters in Georgia would donate items to the auction, which can be anything from snacks to electronics or gift cards. She stated that we would discuss this more at the GCB business meeting in November. She said that we would have to decide where the money that we would raise would go, potentially to the scholarship fund.

Secretary's Report, Amanda Wilson:

Deborah Lovell made a motion to accept the minutes from the April board meeting that had been sent out, and Marsha Farrow seconded the motion. Corrections were made, and Deborah and Marsha accepted the corrections to their motion and second. Marj Schneider is going to send her list of corrections to Amanda. The motion passed with no objection.

Treasurer's Report, Marsha Farrow:

GCB Main Checking #9530: \$13,081.00 as of 7/24/2025; \$12,488.01 as of 4/23/2025; difference: \$592.99.

Major Donors for General Fund: Michael Benson \$5,000.00; Myra Shivers \$1,000.00.

Designated Funds within Main Account:

Legal Advocacy Training Fund: \$1,000.00,

Senior Support Fund: \$2,855.24 as of 7/24/2025; \$3461.57 as of 4/23/2025; \$2,855.24, difference: \$606.33. Senior Fund Donations: 7/24/2025, \$100.00, 6/25/2025, \$200.00, 6/16/2025, \$300.00, 4/27/2025, \$100.00, Total: \$700.00.

Youth GAP Fund: \$1,803.14 as of 7/24/2025; \$1,967.92 as of 4/23/2025; difference: \$164.78. Note: Youth GAP Fund sponsored \$164.78 to refurbish a donated Perkins Braille and purchase a cover for it.

Total of all Designated Funds: \$6264.71 as of 7/24/2025; \$5,823.16 as of 4/23/2025.

General Operating Funds: \$9619.43 as of 7/24/2025; \$6,664.85 as of 4/23/2025; difference: \$2954.58. Note: \$4,000.00 for the 2025 Scholarships cashier's checks that were purchased from the GCB Main Account were replaced in the GCB Main Account with funds from Way Financial Investment.

GCB Insurance: THE HARTFORD: GCB Officers and Directors General Liability Insurance \$611.00 annual payment was posted on 02/05/2025.

QuickBooks Intuit Program (utilized by Phyllis Waters, Waters Accounting). This is a recurring monthly fee of \$35.00. Mrs. Waters' is filing all annual Tax Reports with the IRS and completing all Reports required by Georgia's Secretary of State and the Georgia Charities Division.

Al and Cora Camp Scholarship Fund #9557: \$102.00 as of 7/24/2025; \$102.00 as of 4/23/2025.

Conference Account #9685: \$11,687.31 as of 7/24/2025; \$10,687.31 as of 4/23/2025; difference: \$1,000.00.

Conference Donors: 2024 Miller Family Donation \$1,000.00; Helen, Georgia Presbyterian Ladies Fund for Conference Lodging and Travel \$1,000.00; Vanda Pharmaceuticals Conference Support \$1,000.00; Dr. Myra Shivers Fund \$1,000.00, Lodging and Travel.

ACB Membership Dues: \$665.00 was posted on 4/9/2025, for 133 Members + 3 Lifetime Members=136 Members. Note: On 7/24/2025 GCB Treasurer phoned the ACB Financial Office to make payment for new GCB Members and spoke with Chris Sawyer. Mr. Sawyer informed the Treasurer that Nancy Feela would be sending invoices for new members around mid-August 2025.

GCB Athene Investment: \$22,390.60 as of 7/23/2025, Interest: \$395.70, Total Interest: \$2,462.17; \$22,192.75 as of 4/25/2025, Interest: \$220.49; Initial Investment: \$19,928.43. (Athene Initial contract finalized on May 24, 2022, interest rate of 3.75 fixed for five years. As of 4/25/2025.

Way Financial Merged with LPL Financials: 6/30/2025, \$70,026.33; 5/31/2025, \$68,042.83; 4/30/25, 66,587.81; 3/31/2025, \$71,809.84; Total of Athene and Way Financial Investments: 7/24/2025, \$92,416.93; 4/23/2025, \$94,002.59; Difference: \$1585.66, Total of all GCB Account Balances: As of July 24, 2025, \$117,287.24; As of April 25, 2025, \$117,279.91, Difference: \$7.33.

Dianne Roberts asked about the Athene and the Way Financial accounts. Marsha explained the history of the Way Financial account. She stated that we inherited that money from the Atlanta Chapter when it closed. That money has been invested for years. Bob and June Willis and a lot of other veterans raised that money to build an apartment building for disabled veterans. They realized that this was not a goal they could accomplish, so they kept the money. Then, when their chapter closed, they decided to use that money as a trust. It would be used for scholarships for students going to college. It can also be used for someone who is attending a leadership conference. We established the Athene account when we saw that we had a huge amount of money that was not getting any interest. We used this Athene money when we purchased the Braille printer. We are planning to pay this money back to the account when it matures. It is also an emergency fund.

Jerrie Toney asked about the name of the Athene account. Marsha stated that it had stayed the same. She said that Way Financial has changed its name to LPL.

Marj Schneider asked Marsha if the Way Financial report reflected the four scholarships. Marsha said yes. She said that the market is doing so well that it does not look like we took out that much money. The treasurer's report will be filed for audit.

Finance Committee Report, Jerrie Toney:

Jerrie stated that the finance committee met, and Betsy Grenevitch asked if we could reimburse DJ McIntyre for the money that she spent requesting the open records for the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, and the committee agreed. Marsha wrote DJ a check for \$100.00. This money was taken out of the legislative fund. The revenue and expense reports were sent out to all the board members.

Jerrie stated that she corrected that Athene is the correct name of that account. Alice Ritchhart stated that she would like to see the open records reports. Jerrie stated that she would email her and ask for DJ to share the reports with us.

Senior Fund Report, Alice Ritchhart:

Alice stated that there have been no requests since the last board meeting. She said that we should send out our information about the senior funds to the centers, and we should do that once or twice a year. If you are 55 or older and require assistance to attend our state conference, please submit a request to this committee. Please pass this information along to all members.

Youth Gap Fund Report, Tiffany Montalvo:

Tiffany said that there were no requests.

Legislative Committee Report, Alice Ritchhart:

Alice said that the Georgia Vision Alliance, GVA, met in June on Zoom, and they are meeting again in August. Alice stated that she and Betsy have been trying to get a meeting with Senator Harbin. At the legislative seminar in February, he said that he would try to get together with other republicans to talk about the issues with GVRA. Senator Harben could provide help with getting the Commission Bill passed.

The committee learned that Janet LaBreck, a former head of the Rehabilitation Services Administration, who was also the director of the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind, now lives in Rome, Georgia. Members of our legislative committee had a call with her and were given helpful information on what we need to do with the bill, which included referencing the regulations from the Rehabilitation Act, referring to services required to be provided to blind VR clients. They have been revising the bill and have a final copy, which they gave to Senator Davenport.

Braille Bill made it out of the House of Representatives. Stacey Orr is working on this bill. They met with one representative and told them about Braille literacy. They are meeting with the chair of the education committee in August, and they will report on that at the August GVA meeting.

Alice stated that the next GVA meeting will be held on August 30, 2025, from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM. The Zoom link will come out closer to the meeting.

Marsha stated that she thinks that a Commission would be beneficial for students in schools that have a shortage of teachers of visually impaired orientation and mobility instructors. Marsha said that a teacher of the visually impaired was let go and replaced with one through Zoom. She shared that this is happening more. The state thinks this action is cheaper, but it is not safe to learn mobility over the computer. It is sad that our students are not getting what they need in Georgia.

Alice suggested that we call our representatives and senators and tell them what we think about this.

Convention report, Alice Ritchhart and Cecily Laney Nipper:

The draft of the registration form will be sent out by August 1, 2025. It will be mailed out in Braille and large print and emailed. The convention committee is waiting on menus from Paula, the restaurant's general manager. Cecily outlined the choices for the Friday and Saturday box lunches and the banquet meal. Breakfast is included in your hotel fees. Registration will be \$25.00. There will be two tours. The first one is on Wednesday at 5:00 PM, a sunset dolphin tour for \$20.00. The second tour is the Jekyll Island trolley tour on Thursday at 2:00 PM, also \$20.00. Betsy stated that she had gotten volunteers from different Lions Clubs to assist us at our state conference and convention. The Membership meeting will be on Saturday, November 8, 2025, at 9:00 AM. There will be Zoom options for all meetings. Proposed amendments are due to the Constitution and Bylaws committee chair by August 15, 2025.

GCB Digest Report, Tiffany Montalvo:

The GCB Digest Newsletter committee decided to stop sending out the monthly newsletter. We will still send out the calendar of events and any upcoming announcements. We have articles in the following areas: our presidential message, Braille competition, 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 GCB website. DJ keeps up with the list of who to send the digital cartridges to and who is sending them back.

Technology Committee Report, Steve Longmire:

Steve reported that a technology session will be held at the GCB conference and convention. The GCB Tech Talk Time committee has been busy working on our GCB website and our GCB Link app. Steve works hard to improve the social media links, news section, convention links, and chapter contact information. If you have any suggestions about the technology session at our state convention, please contact Steve.

Membership and Public Relations Committee, Amanda Wilson:

Amanda stated that we have 143 members. She said that June Willis had passed away. The GCB Praise and Prayer Community Call is going strong. This call meets on the first and third Tuesday at 7:00 PM. The GCB Book Club is also doing well. They have been reading books by Rebecca Yaro. They meet on the last Thursday of the month at 7:30 PM on Zoom. The GCB Peach Talk meets on the third Thursday at 7:00 PM on Zoom. They are still looking for options for a phone system. President Nipper is currently taking calls weekly from people with different requests or who are looking for resource referrals. All chapters and special affiliate groups are meeting either in person or in the Zoom.

Georgia Guide Dog users, GGDU, Marj Schneider:

GGDU held a spring membership meeting on Zoom. Members are going to meet in person in November at the GCB conference and convention. They will have a speaker and a business meeting.

GCB Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss, AAVL, Alice Ritchhart:

AAVL holds quarterly calls on Zoom. They were hoping to hold a meeting about emergency preparation. They have noticed that if you are a disabled person in Georgia during an emergency, you are on your own. Alice called the Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA), but they were no help. They told her that there were too many different disabilities to have a plan for every disabled person.

Alice and the GVA committee want to request that GEMA produce a plan for people with disabilities and then distribute it throughout the state to the emergency management staff. We need this for any situation where people with disabilities need to be evacuated.

Alice said that we would plan to have this call again in August.

AAVL is sponsoring the welcome reception and Bingo night at our state conference and convention. They are planning to have finger foods such as flat bread pizza, fruit and vegetable platters, and a selection of desserts. At this year's National AAVL membership meeting, Larry Johnson put forth a constitutional amendment that all state affiliates should have representation on the national AAVL board. Right now, there are only two state affiliates, California and Georgia. The amendment passed.

Sunshine Committee Report, Stacey Orr:

Stacey sent in her report. She stated that no cards have gone out and no cards have been requested since our April board meeting. Cecily stated that she has known of some health issues, including serious hospitalization. Cecily is going to send out a copy of Stacey's contact information. Also, please send information on any new members to Stacey, Debbie McDonald, or Debi Holcomb. GCB Member At Large Report, Debbie McDonald:

We have 21 members at large.

Debbie has created a Facebook page for the members at large. You can find the profile by searching for the GCB At Large Chapter on Facebook.

Unfinished Business:

Phil asked about transportation to the state conference and convention. Steve is hiring a van to make the drive from Atlanta to Brunswick. We are trying to make sure that everyone who has asked for assistance has a seat. There will be a cost to ride the van. Marsha, Jamaica Miller, and Judy Presley are on the transportation subcommittee.

Announcements:

Ron Worley stated that the Augusta Chapter and their local Lions Club, along with Low Vision Supply, a store with accessible devices for people with visual impairments, have created a cane database program that will supply a cane for all GCB members who are in need of a new cane. This information will be sent to everyone. There is an application. We plan to put this on our website as well. If you have any questions, please contact Ron Worley.

Next GCB board Meeting:

The next GCB board meeting will be at our state convention on Saturday, November 8, 2025, at 3:30 PM, at the DoubleTree Hotel in Brunswick, Georgia, and on Zoom.

Adjourned:

The meeting was adjourned at 11:55 AM.

GCB Board Meeting Minutes  
DoubleTree by Hilton Brunswick  
138 Glynnco Parkway  
Brunswick, Georgia 31525  
In-person and on Zoom  
Saturday, November 8, 2025

Call to Order:

Cecily Laney Nipper called the GCB closing board meeting to order at 3:08 PM.

Roll Call, Amanda Wilson, Secretary:

Amanda Wilson, GCB Secretary, conducted the roll call. The following members were present at this board meeting. They include Cecily Laney Nipper, President; Marj Schneider, First Vice-President; Amanda Wilson, Secretary; Cecily Nipper, Senior, Assistant Secretary; Marsha Farrow, Treasurer; Deborah McDonald, GCB Member at Large Representative; Alice Ritchhart, Past President; Jerrie Toney, Athens Chapter; Ron Worley, Augusta Chapter; Phil Jones, East Georgia Chapter; Diane Roberts, Greater Hall Chapter; Debbie Young, Northwest Georgia Chapter Representative; David Hoppman, Peach Chapter; Vivian Loesch, Savannah Chapter Representative; Betsy Grenevitich, Georgia Guide Dog Users, GGDU; Deborah Lovell, Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss, AAVL;

Guests: Zack Nipper, Jamaica Miller, Jennifer Bray, Gwendolyn Barron, Debbie Holcomb, Don Moss, Kathy Morris, Keith Morris, Sophia Curtis, Granger Ricks, Kathy Ricks Wilder, Michel

Next meeting, Cecily Laney Nipper:

Cecily Laney Nipper suggested that our next GCB board meeting be held on Saturday, January 17, 2026, at 10:00 AM on Zoom, due to the weather. Phil Jones made the motion to accept this, and Deborah Lovell seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Diane Roberts asked about next year's conference and convention. Cecily Laney Nipper reported that no members submitted a bid. During the January meeting, we will prepare bids, but we may need to call a board meeting beforehand if two weeks' notice can be given. If held, the board meeting would focus on discussing a contract for next year's conference, as this was not addressed at this year's conference. The motion to hold the January board meeting on Zoom passed without opposition.

New Business:

Cecily Laney Nipper, GCB President, asked for any other business. Hearing none, she stated that the GCB board meeting was adjourned at 3:16 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Amanda Wilson, GCB Secretary

GCB Called Board Meeting Minutes  
Saturday, December 6, 2025, at 9:00 AM, on Zoom

Call to Order, Cecily Laney Nipper:

President Cecily Laney Nipper called the GCB special board meeting to order at 9:04 AM.

Roll Call: Amanda Wilson, GCB Secretary:

Cecily Laney Nipper, President; Marj Schneider, First Vice-President; Judy Presley, Second Vice-President; Amanda Wilson, Secretary; Cecily Nipper, Senior, Assistant Secretary; Marsha Farrow, Treasurer; Deborah 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; David Hoppman, Peach Chapter; Tyah Longmire, South Metro Chapter; Betsy Grenevitch, Georgia Guide Dog Users, GGDU; Deborah Lovell, Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss; Steve Longmire, Webmaster; Tiffany Montalvo, GCB Digest Representative. Guests: Althea Blackstock and Jamaica Miller. We have a quorum.

Discussion and Action on October 8-10, 2026, bid from the Courtyard by Marriott Atlanta Covington:

President Cecily Laney Nipper stated that the bid had been sent out to the board via email, and it was a full contract. She stated we would talk about it and then ask everyone's questions. Cecily stated that the date was in October since her parents would be traveling in November, but, if necessary, the date could be changed. The Courtyard is offering us \$129.00 per night room rate and \$1,000.00 per day for the meeting room, making it a total of \$3000 for the three days.

There were some advantages offered if we were to sign a contract for both 2026 and 2027, which included a locked-in rate at \$129.00 and \$1,000.00 off the meeting room for the three days in 2027.

Information about the hotel:

It was built a little over a year ago, currently holds 4.4 stars, and Cecily stated she toured several rooms while doing two onsite inspections with Tiffany Montalvo and Cecily, Sr. Tiffany told us a little about the local area, stating the hotel and rooms were genuinely nice and clean, and spacious with ample seating throughout. The showers had a walk-in door, while double bedrooms had a regular bathtub. The meeting space was beautiful and spacious, with big windows that provided ample natural lighting. All around the hotel were sidewalks, crosswalks, several restaurants and stores, as well as the hotel and shopping area. Cecily informed us we would not be required to use the hotel catering; rather, we can use outside-licensed catering, which would bring the food cost down. In the morning, anyone who would like a grab-and-go breakfast for a small fee, the hotel has agreed to prepare the food; however, they also have a restaurant which serves breakfast and dinner.

There would be no need to split the meeting room to make space for exhibitors, because the hotel has a very wide hallway, which would allow for exhibit tables to be in the hallway outside the meeting room.

Cecily asked everyone to take a turn asking questions or to give comments, and started with Steve, who stated he liked everything he had heard so far. Then, he asked about the lighting and walking to nearby restaurants. Cecily stated that she thought the lighting and the sound quality were particularly good, and the room had a carpet, and added there were restaurants nearby, but stated it probably would be best to get a car because it is a busy area, adding we will try to have all meals brought in for everyone.

Amanda stated that she did not have any questions and that she was looking forward to another great conference and convention in 2026.

Betsy asked about the 25 percent service charge. Cecily stated that it was a normal charge, and at our last convention, we paid a 22 percent service charge. Betsy asked about the charge for breakfast. Marriott hotels do not usually have free breakfast. Betsy said that we should not vote on the 2027 conference until we see the condition of this hotel. Betsy stated that the date should be changed. Cecily stated that we must decide before November 25, 2026, and Cecily will change the date when we sign the contract. For the 2026 conference contract, the date will be December 8, 2025. Betsy asked about a room with wheelchair accessibility. Cecily said that there are two wheelchair accessible rooms and two hearing-impaired rooms. Cecily stated that she would ask for the rooms to be a part of our block. Cecily stated that there is an adjoining hotel that can assist with overflow should we sell out of our block of rooms. We currently must fill 70 rooms. The adjoining hotel has wheelchair accessible rooms as well.

Deborah asked about the grassy area for guide dogs. Cecily stated that there was a grassy area for the guide dogs to use.

Ron stated that 90 percent is 63 rooms.

Alice asked about the \$1,000.00 off on the second year, and Cecily thought it was offered, so we will sign up for a second year.

Cecily stated that we can cancel the 2027 contract if we do it one year in advance.

David had no questions.

Debbie asked if there were coffee pots, refrigerators, and microwaves in the rooms, and Cecily said every room had a standard coffee pot, microwave, refrigerator, shampoo, conditioner, and body wash in the same shower location.

Marj asked about the block of rooms and what would be the solution if we needed more rooms. Cecily said they were happy to sell us more rooms if we did so by the cut-off date, September 8, 2026. Marj also questioned the contract's mention of facility fees, function space fees, and room fees. Cecily stated it was 90 percent, but if we do not meet the 70 rooms, then we are responsible for 63 rooms. Marj asked if the dates in the contract are flexible. Cecily said that if someone gives a compelling reason to change the date, we certainly can change it, then Marj asked if the hotel was available the following weekend. Cecily said yes, the hotel was available from the 15th to the 17th, 2026. Cecily stated that after everyone had a chance to ask questions, she would ask for a motion about the dates for the upcoming conference.

Marsha stated that she thought the contract looked good. In the past, we did meet earlier in the year but having it a little further out in the fall has been nice in comparison to what it once was. Marsha thinks the contract is up to date and reasonable.

Diane did not have any questions and agreed with Marsha, stating she talked to the Marriott hotel in Gainesville, Georgia, and they wanted much more money, so she thinks this contract is more reasonable.

Jerrie said she agrees with Marsha that the contract is a good one and stated we have held the conference much earlier in the year, and it has always been successful, feeling October is not much different than having it in November.

Phil said he agrees with the contract as well as the dates and does not think that we will have a problem with the date if we begin planning early. He asked about the sound quality in the meeting room. Again, Cecily said it has carpet, and she hopes that the sound quality will be good, as we will be allowed to bring in our own sound system.

Cecily said that Jamaica and Althea are guests of this board meeting and that they could ask a question if they wished. Cecily Laney Nipper asked for a motion for no more discussion. Deborah Lovell moved that the discussion be closed and that we agree to hold our conference and convention on October 8-10, 2026, at the Courtyard by Marriott Atlanta in Covington, Georgia. Phil Jones seconded the motion. Cecily asked for a discussion on the 2026 conference, and hearing none, she asked for the vote. It passed with no objection.

Cecily Laney Nipper then asked for discussion and action on the contract for the 2027 conference and convention. An additional contract for the Courtyard by Marriott Atlanta Covington for October 7-9, 2027. Cecily stated again that the advantages of going to this hotel two years in a row are the \$1000 discount for the meeting room and the locked-in rate for the rooms. One change that would have to be made before we sign is that the date be changed to allow us to cancel after our membership meeting in 2026, should the membership decide not to go back in 2027.

Marsha Farrow made a motion to go forward with the 2027 contract with the understanding that we could cancel it at our 2026 conference if needed. Jerrie Toney seconded the motion. Cecily asked for any discussion. It was stated that it was a clever idea to nail down dates and a location in advance so we can plan accordingly. We have until after our next conference to cancel the 2027 contract. It was stated that signing a contract for two years would be a wise thing, so that we can build on the 2026 conference and make the 2027 conference even better. It was moved to close the discussion. Cecily stated that the discussion be closed and that we move to the vote, which passed without objection. Cecily called for the vote on Marsha Farrow's motion, and it passed without objection.

Next GCB Board Meeting:

The next GCB board meeting will be on Saturday, January 17, 2026, at 10:00 AM, on Zoom.

Any other Business:

President, Cecily Laney Nipper, asked if anyone had anything else to bring to the floor, and Dianne Roberts asked if she could give an update on Mike Hall. Dianne stated that she had talked to Mike on the phone, thanks to Mike's friend being able to put him on speaker. He told her that he was unable to answer or make calls on his phone. Diane said that they talked and laughed for twenty minutes.

Adjourn:

President Cecily Laney Nipper adjourned the meeting at 9:47 AM.

Respectfully Submitted by, Amanda Wilson, GCB secretary

## GCB Chapter News

### The Athens Chapter:

For more information about the Athens Chapter, please contact Jerrie Toney at 706-461-1013 or via email at [jerriemt2@gmail.com](mailto: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 odd 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](mailto:listeningacuity@gmail.com).

### East Georgia Chapter:

At our September meeting, we welcomed Jane Boynton from Vocal Point, formerly known as Georgia Radio Reading Service. She shared with us all the new and exciting changes coming to Vocal Point. In October, we celebrated White Cane Safety Day. We walked with signs to help spread awareness of the importance of the white cane and how independence would not be possible without it. We also swore in a new slate of officers: Phil Jones as returning President; Cecily Laney Nipper as Vice President; Returning Secretary and Treasurer Linda Williams and Linda Cox; and three new board members, Anne Wheeler, Jeff Dugan, and Lucas Montalvo. In November, we made beaded ornaments out of foam balls and 3-prong beads. In December, we held our annual

Christmas party. President Phil Jones' sister, Susan, graciously provided a home-cooked meal while several members provided desserts and drinks. We also collected non-perishable food items to donate to Giving Hands Food Pantry in Covington, Georgia. We were so glad to be able to help our community. If you are interested in helping out or need assistance and live in Newton, Jasper, or Butts counties, you can find more information about Giving Hands Food Pantry and all they have to offer at [www.givinghandsfoodpantry.org](http://www.givinghandsfoodpantry.org) or contact Margaret McDonald: [foodpantry@covingtonfirst.org](mailto:foodpantry@covingtonfirst.org).

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](mailto:Brilman1952@gmail.com).

#### Greater Hall County Chapter:

For our September meeting, our guest speaker was Daphne Veitch, Director of Sales for Smoky Springs Retirement Residences. Daphne provided especially important and timely information about housing options. Our own Melissa Woolston was awarded the GCB First-Timer's scholarship to the state conference and convention. Our chapter provided funds for her transportation. For our October meeting, our guest speakers were Brandy Robertson and Sarah Trowbridge from Georgia Library Services (GLS), Atlanta. They demonstrated and described the new NLS talking book reader with its enhanced features. For our November meeting, our own Keely Zeitlin was the guest speaker with a great presentation about vision loss and stress. She offered multiple tips on how to avoid stress during the holiday season. Chapter officers were re-elected for the coming year. Melissa Woolston and Judy Presley gave reports about attending the 2025 GCB convention in Brunswick, Georgia. Melissa shares her first-timer's perspective in an article below. In December, we enjoyed a Christmas luncheon at Cheddars Scratch Kitchen in Gainesville. Senior member Ted Brackett joined us for the first time since the mild stroke in the spring of 2025. Ted also won the door prize. For our January meeting, we kicked off the new year with "Art in the Dark," a fun project using quick-dry modeling clay. Instructed by Keely Zeitlin, Jessie Brownlee, and sighted volunteers, everyone expressed their individual creativity and took the finished products home. We welcomed new and returning members, Ted Brackett, Jessica Brownlee, Sally DeLisle, Suzanne Schilling, Janice Smeyna, and Ann Sumners.

The Greater Hall Chapter meets 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 Greater Hall County Chapter, contact Dianne Roberts at 770-932-1112 or via email at [harveyroberts2@att.net](mailto: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](mailto:sharonnichols347@icloud.com).

#### Peach Chapter:

At our October meeting, we met at a local nail salon, and then we ate lunch at a local Chinese Restaurant. We enjoyed talking, laughing, and eating. We confirmed our plans to attend the GCB statewide conference in Brunswick, Georgia. We are leaving on Wednesday, November 5, and returning on Sunday, November 9, 2025. For our November meeting, we met on Zoom to plan our December Christmas party. In December, we met at Armondo's Restaurant, where we had lots of fun eating, talking, and laughing. We enjoyed playing White Elephant, which is a fun gift swap game. We talked about some ideas for our meetings in 2026.

The Peach Chapter meets 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](mailto:moonrocks@bellsouth.net).

#### Savannah Chapter:

The Savannah Chapter meets by 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](mailto:marjschneider@bellsouth.net).

#### South Metro Chapter:

The South Metro Chapter meetings are held at the Piccadilly Restaurant which is 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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:alice.ritchhart@comcast.net).

#### Spreading a Little Sunshine for GCB Members

##### Sunshine Committee

Committee Chairperson: Stacey Orr

Committee Members: Debi Holcombe and Debbie McDonald

A new committee has been established for the year 2025 for GCB members in hopes members can receive a little encouragement from us. This committee's focus will be to send cards to members who have experienced a loss in their immediate family or are experiencing serious illness. 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](mailto:staceyorr829@gmail.com) or call 770-853-3489, and our committee will be sure they receive a card from GCB.

The duties of the Sunshine Committee are evolving, so if you have an idea that the Sunshine Committee should consider, please reach out to Committee Chair, Stacey Orr at the contact listed above.

#### 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 the fourth Thursday of each month at 7:30 PM, on Zoom.

#### GCB Melissa Woolston's GCB Conference and Convention Letter

By Melissa Woolston



Image of Melissa Woolston (right) sitting with her Convention roommate and Savannah Chapter member, Vivian Loesch (left). They are sitting on chairs situated on the hotel patio surrounded by a decorative fence and palm trees.

My name is Melissa Woolston. I was asked to write about my experience at the State Convention that was held in Brunswick, Georgia, last November. I would first like to thank every member of GCB for making my trip possible by awarding me the First-Timer Scholarship. The costs of the convention being covered allowed me to genuinely enjoy the experience. The trip was truly memorable. The night before the ride down from Atlanta, I was privileged to stay with Steve and Tiyah Longmire. I felt right at home with them and was inspired by their kindness, not just to me but to each other and everyone they encounter. After a bus ride to Brunswick, we arrived just in time to check into our rooms before heading off for the next adventure.

The hotel we stayed in was perfect. The staff really understood the needs of the visually impaired. They went beyond to help us go where we needed. They never made us feel like we were a burden when we lost our keys, etc. The rooms were great, exceptionally clean and comfortable. The on-site restaurant was good, too. The staff accommodated my allergies and made sure I had enough to eat.

Being assigned a roommate I had never met was a new thing for me. Vivian and I were a perfect match. I came to vision loss later in life, and I now realize that it is a continuing challenge to keep from being placed in a corner and letting someone else do things for

me that I should do—things like ordering a meal in a restaurant and paying for it myself; getting my own drink; interacting with an employee. Vivian taught me how not to exhibit “learned helplessness.” Partnering with her brought to my notice for the first time those trivial things that sighted people should refrain from doing unless asked. Vivian has great confidence and taught me so much about being self-sufficient.

The bus tour around Jekyll Island was very well done. I got to meet even more of the amazing people who make GCB great, including the lovely Amanda Wilson, who sat next to me. She is a very gentle and kind person. She works extremely hard for GCB, and her enthusiasm and cheerful outlook made her a joy to be around. The tour guide took extra care to describe the buildings we passed. He stopped and described a historic cemetery. He stopped several times and told us the island's history and let us get out. He was really a great sport.

Cecily is an absolute joy to be around, and she put so much heart into ensuring this convention was a success. The meetings on both days were informative and entertaining. Following the schedule was easy, and both Cecily and the volunteers immediately responded to us with any direction we required. During all the meetings, we could clearly hear the speakers. We always had access to refreshments and had a coordinated box lunch.

Steve Longmire, Ron Worley, and I, presented a tech talk about AI, ChatGPT, and the Haptics bracelet I am currently beta testing. The Haptics company recently announced that it is merging bracelet technology with Meta Smart glasses. A prototype is coming soon for me to evaluate. A local expert, Patrick from the Mosaic Museum, gave an interesting presentation on the history of African music and its impact on Jekyll Island. The convention finished with a final business meeting, awards and recognitions, and a presentation regarding education and the IEP for students who are blind. ACB and GCB are encouraging increased outreach to the next generation.

I think I can speak on behalf of the majority of the attendees when I say the best part of the experience was the way everyone supported and encouraged each other. We shared ways to achieve greater independence, explore our own gifts, and utilize our strengths to build strong relationships within our communities. Every member of GCB plays a vital role and should be as involved as possible in forwarding our cause. I cannot say enough about how important it is to attend our conventions in person if you are able; it is even possible to attend virtually. Again, thank you sincerely! I hope to meet up with all of you at this year's convention. I hope that you will find hope, inspiration, and new friendships just like I did. It is worthwhile for a person who is blind to attend the GCB convention at least once, more like an imperative. I learned so much by interacting with others. Each conversation was a teaching experience of how others navigate the world. I learned that I can still do anything. Thank you, GCB.

#### GCB Scholarship Winner Update from Will Orr



Image of Will Orr sitting in front of a dark backdrop wearing a suit and tie.

I am close to finishing my first semester at Gordon State College. I am proud to say that I am on track to earn all A's. College has been an adjustment with living away from home, learning to manage my time, and studying for a variety of classes. I have really enjoyed my Chemistry and Pre-Calculus classes this semester. I have signed up to take my first engineering class next semester, and I am excited about that. I have also been playing baseball for Gordon. That has been a lot of fun, meeting new people and playing at the college level, a big dream of mine.

The GCB scholarship has helped me with the purchase of a new computer, which I have found extremely helpful in writing papers and completing my online class. I am very thankful that GCB has helped me to be successful in college. Thank you all for believing in me.

#### GCB Scholarship Winner from Duane Edward Hale

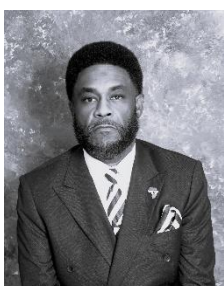


Image of Duane Hale sitting in front of a marble backdrop wearing a suit and tie.

This fall, Duane successfully defended his dissertation in the Doctor of Education in Teacher Leadership program at Kennesaw State University. His research explores civic justice and equity in educational leadership, focusing on how professional learning environments support teachers who shape the civic identities of our youth.

As a blind Black scholar, Duane emphasizes the importance of advocacy, equitable access, and representation in both education and disability services. He worked closely with KSU's Student Disability Services to ensure full accessibility throughout his doctoral journey, reflecting the belief shared by many GCB members that access is not a favor — it is a right. Duane looks forward to using his expertise to support the mission of the Georgia Council of the Blind and uplift the voices of individuals with visual impairments throughout Georgia and beyond.

Inspirational testimony version (for speeches/church/podcast)

"As a blind Black man, I walked into a doctoral program not simply to earn a degree, but to prove that God still opens doors no system can close. I defended a dissertation rooted in civic justice — because our vision for a better world does not require sight, but faith, purpose, and a willingness to stand for equality. To my siblings in the blind community, your brilliance, your resilience, and your dignity are powerful forces. With this degree, I am committed to amplifying our voices and representing us with excellence wherever God leads me."

Encouragement to other blind scholars

"If you are navigating higher education without full sight, do not doubt for a moment that you belong in every academic room in this country. Our presence is not symbolic — it is transformational. Blindness is not a barrier to brilliance; it is a call to innovate, advocate, and lead."

## GCB Conference and Convention Overview

### Riding the Waves Together



Image of the Conference and Convention meeting room. There are round tables set up with Convention attendees sitting around them for the GCB Membership meeting.

The Georgia Council of the Blind Annual Conference and Convention was held on Thursday, November 6, through Saturday, November 8, 2025, in Brunswick, Georgia.

Welcome to Brunswick, Georgia! The convention committee members, without whom this convention would not be a reality, are as follows: Marsha Farrow, Betsy Grenevitch, Phil Jones, Steve Longmire, Deborah Lovell, Jamaica Miller, Cecily Laney Nipper, co-chair, Judy Presley, Alice Ritchhart, co-chair, Marj Schneider, Jerrie Toney, and Amanda Wilson.

On Thursday, November 6, 2025, we took the Jeckel Island trolley tour. We then attended our annual welcome reception and bingo night, which was sponsored by the GCB Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss. Back by popular demand, Phil Jones was our bingo caller, with his sidekick, Cecily Laney Nipper, filling in a couple of games. We played bingo, won prizes, and enjoyed flatbread pizza, fruit, and veggies.

On Friday, November 7, 2025, we listened to a presentation given by the GCB Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss from Pamela Rogers, Aging Services Director of the Area Agency on Aging for coastal Georgia. You might be surprised by what services they provide for those with a disability. Services offered by "Triple A's" include weatherization and Meals on Wheels, not just for elderly

people with disabilities. This session was a perfect opportunity for members to learn how to get involved in the agency in their region and ask questions.

The GCB Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss held its business meeting and hosted a game of trivia about the history of the Georgia Council of the Blind and the American Council of the Blind.

Exhibitors' showcase: We listened to each exhibitor who shared a little about what they have at their exhibit tables. We then headed to the exhibit hall to check out the exhibit offerings. Here is the list of exhibitors:

Just Us Blind Girls, Vanessa Meadows, president, Phone: 678-592-2929, Email: [Justusblindgirls1994@gmail.com](mailto:Justusblindgirls1994@gmail.com)

JW.org, Daniel Ortiz, Phone: 470-406-8733, Email: [bortizdaniel@gmail.com](mailto:bortizdaniel@gmail.com)

Kaleidoscope, Bronwyn Rumery, Phone: 706-669-2115

Multiple Choices Center for Independent Living, Garrick Scott, Executive Director, Phone: 706-850-4025, Email: <https://multiplechoices.us>

Ron Worley, Phone: 706-726-9483, Email: [listeningacuity@gmail.com](mailto:listeningacuity@gmail.com)

Visual Enhancements, Jason Bombelyn, Phone: 770-361-9589, Email: [jbombelyn@gmail.com](mailto:jbombelyn@gmail.com)

We listened to the GCB Technology Program; the facilitator was Steve Longmire. The GCB Technology session included an introduction from Sophia Curtis, welcomed by Steve Longmire, Paul Edwards describing the NLS E-Reader, and Ron Worley demonstrating how to use a couple of AI apps to create documents, download them to a phone, and use voice input features. The panel is rounded out by Melissa Woolston who discussed the AI Eye wearable device that enhances lives by providing individuals who are blind, low-vision, or deaf-blind access to nonverbal communication cues, and Janet Parmerter, who shared a new app called "A Priceless Educational Family Library." Lastly, the GCB Tech Time Team held a general question & answer session with the Convention Audience.

The Georgia Guide Dog Users group held a brief business meeting, followed by a presentation of interest to all. "Pedestrian Safety Tips" is a recorded talk by Lukas Franck, a retired instructor from The Seeing Eye. Throughout his career and continuing today, Lukas has focused on those challenges in our environment faced by blind and low vision travelers, whether they use white canes or guide dogs. This thoroughly informative presentation by a dynamic speaker is from November of 2023 and came to us courtesy of Pine Tree Guide Dog Users.

At the banquet, we had the invocation by Pastor Zack Nipper and the welcome by President Cecily Laney Nipper. The meal was served. We listened to the first reading of the proposed amendments to our constitution. We then listened to Hearing History: African music on Jekyll: Jekyll Island Mosaic Museum. Patrick Carmody, Museum Educator, has a master's degree in public history as well as a graduate certificate in Museum Studies from the University of West Georgia. He presented a "Hearing History" of African American Music on Jekyll Island. Then there was the cake walk performances performed by the Black employees of the Jekyll Island Club. There were ragtime and the Club era. Maurice Ruddick and the Dolphin Club was where legendary performers such as BB King, Percy Sledge, and Otis Redding performed. The program included music from these different eras on Jekyll. The Georgia Library Service presented a trivia game.

On Saturday, November 8, 2025, we held our annual membership business meeting. We remembered the members who have passed away since our last conference and convention. They include Mary Dorothy Davis from the East Georgia Chapter; Richard A. Bagley, from the Greater Hall County Chapter; Teresa M. Watkins-Gaston from the South Metro Atlanta Chapter; Aaron Luke McIntyre, Danielle McIntyre's son; Timothy Daniel Spencer, Debbie McDonald's life partner; Jan Elders, from the Savannah Chapter; John Raymond Williams, Linda Williams' husband, from the East Georgia Chapter; Scott Edward Rumery, Bronwyn Rumery's husband, from the Peach Chapter; Dr. Philip Edward Dillard from the Rome Floyd County Chapter; Frankie Mae Longmire, Steve Longmire's mother; June Carol Jones Morgan Willis, a GCB Lifetime member; Jerrie Charlotte Hodges Ricks, Granger Ricks' wife, a GCB lifetime member; Robert Wesley Wheeler, Anne Wheeler's husband, from the East Georgia Chapter; Brenda McAbee Maddox from the East Georgia Chapter; William Talent, Angela Zimmerman's father. We held our annual GCB membership business meeting, where we listened to the minutes from last year's business meeting.

Georgia Council of the Blind Annual Membership Business Meeting Minutes  
Friday, October 25, 2024  
Courtyard Marriott Atlanta Conyers  
hybrid and on Zoom

While the call to order was mistakenly listed later in the agenda, the meeting began at 9:01 AM. The Trail Life Troop from First Baptist Conyers, Georgia, presented the colors and led in the pledge of allegiance. A recording of Kolby Garrison performing the national anthem was played. Mayor Vince Evans of Conyers, Georgia, welcomed the assembly and read a proclamation.

In Loving Memory, Betsy Grenevitch: Betsy Grenevitch read from the program the names of those who have passed away since the last convention: Myrtle Butler, Rebecca Elizabeth Moisant and Barbara Wakeman Keathley. A moment of silence was observed by those individuals. Sharon Nichols gave the invocation.

Roll Call, Assistant Secretary, Cecily Nipper, Senior: Officers present were President, Cecily Laney Nipper; First Vice President, Marj Schneider; Second Vice President, Judy Presley; Immediate Past President, Alice Ritchhart; Assistant Secretary, Cecily Nipper, Senior; Treasurer, Marsha Farrow; At-Large Representative, Betsy Grenevitch.

Members present were: Debbie McDonald, Dianne Roberts, Aletha Blackstock, David Hoppman, Deborah Lovell, Tiffany Montalvo, Wendy Simone, Jerrie Toney, Debbie Young, Angela Zimmerman, Sharon Nichols, Zack Nipper, Debi Holcomb, Carolyn Stegall, Janet Parmerter, Keith Parmerter, Marlene Koncewicz, Elaine Paccione, Hoyal Presley, Ron Worley, DJ McIntyre, Jamaica Miller, Stacey Orr, Steve Longmire, Amanda Wilson, Phil Jones, and Chris Holbrook.

Guest were Rachael Sandlin, Don Blackstock, Dr. Myra Shivers, Michelle St. Clair, Kristin White, Brie Spencer, and Joyce Feinberg. Dr. Myra Shivers, Diamond Sponsor, gave an address on "Progress."

Review of Amended Agenda: Cecily Laney Nipper asked for a motion to approve the agenda with the amendment that the call to order be listed first. Alice Ritchhart made the motion, seconded by DJ McIntyre, and the motion carried.

President's Report, Cecily Laney Nipper:

Cecily Laney Nipper thanked the convention committee for their service. She highlighted the stakeholder's meeting taking place between the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, organizations serving the blind in Georgia including GCB, and the Centers for Independent Living. She expressed hope that those meetings would facilitate blind Georgians being better served.

Secretary's Report, Cecily Nipper, Senior:

Cecily Nipper, Senior read the minutes from the Membership Meeting held November 4, 2023. Phil Jones made a motion, seconded by Alice Ritchhart that the minutes be approved. The following corrections were offered to two names: Theresa Watkins and David Hoppman. The minutes were approved as amended.

Treasurer's Report, Marsha Farrow:

The Main Checking contains \$14,218.33.

Within main checking, \$1,000 is for legal advocacy expenses, \$2955.27 comprises the senior fund, \$1667.96 the youth gap fund. These funds total \$5623.23. The general fund totals \$8595.10.

GCB paid the American Council of the Blind dues for a total of 128 members. Other expenses included liability insurance for \$487 and the officers and directors' coverage of \$611. Phyllis Waters continues to keep Quick Books records for GCB and file reports such as the Secretary of State's report and others.

Marsha announced that Debi Holcomb was the first timer for the convention this year, and that she was provided with \$310, including the \$66.35 left over from past fundraising for first timers, which has now been used. Marsha recognized convention sponsors included: Dr. Myra Shivers for \$2000, Vanda Pharmaceutical, Helen Presbyterian Women, Miller Family, all for \$1000.

The long-term investment account now has \$21,784.70, with interest earnings at \$1990.58 and a mature date of May 24, 2027.

The new Juliet Braille embosser cost \$4195, and the shipping and taxes were \$358.92. This amount was taken from Way Financial and will be reimbursed out of the long-term investment when it matures.

Way Financial reports were not available as they are in a merger. Reports will be sent out when available. Not including Way Financial, our assets are \$45,557.13. Including July balances for Way Financial, a total of all our funds would be \$118,606.39.

Marsha made the motion to file the treasurer's report for audit, seconded by Deborah Lovell. The motion carried with a clarification from Cecily Laney Nipper that out of Dr. Shivers' \$2000 contribution, \$1000 was for convention and \$1000 was for the general fund.

Finance Report, Jerrie Toney:

Jerrie Toney stated that the revenue and expense report was made available to the membership and highlighted that \$200 was given from the president's travel fund to Stacey Orr at Cecily Laney Nipper's discretion. These funds are to help Stacey attend AI Camp's induction ceremony into the military hall of fame in November as Cecily Laney Nipper is unable to attend.

Alice Ritchhart presented to Cecily Laney Nipper a donation of \$5000 from Michael Benson for the general fund.

Amendments, Marj Schneider:

Cecily Nipper Senior read the proposed amendments to the constitution and bylaws in Section VIII of the constitution and bylaw 3 concerning changing the date that dues are required to be in to the state to December 31 in both the constitution and bylaws. Marj Schneider made a committee motion recommending a due passage of the amendments. Cecily Laney Nipper reminded the body that a two thirds majority was required for the amendments. After some discussion they were approved unanimously.

Cecily Nipper Senior read the proposed amendments to the constitution and bylaws in article XIII of the constitution and bylaw 8 concerning allowing amendments to be turned into the committee one month prior to the convention rather than two months. Marj Schneider made a committee motion recommending a due passage of the amendments and the motion carried unanimously.

Elections, Alice Ritchhart:

Alice Ritchhart offered the following slate of officers from the nominating committee made up of Alice Ritchhart, Chair, Jerrie Toney, and Steve Longmire. President, Cecily Laney Nipper; First Vice President, Marj Schneider; Second Vice President, Judy Presley; Treasurer, Marsha Farrow; Secretary, Amanda Wilson; At Large Representative, Debbie McDonald.

Alice Ritchhart conducted the elections, and the following officers were accepted by acclamation: President, Cecily Laney Nipper; First Vice President, Marj Schneider; Second Vice President, Judy Presley, At Large Representative, Debbie McDonald. For treasurer, Steve Longmire nominated DJ McIntyre from the floor. Voting was held with index cards in the room and members attending virtually used email, phone, or text to nonbiased vote counters. Marsha Farrow was elected 17 to 16. In the secretary's race, Marj Schneider nominated Betsy Grenevitch from the floor. An election was held, and Amanda Wilson was elected 18 to 16.

Resolutions, Alice Ritchhart:

Michelle St. Clair read the resolutions. Resolution one was that GCB include "Established 1956" beneath our logo on all documents, flyers, and online platforms. The committee recommended a due course. After clarification that this would include the app, Digest, and any communication, and further discussion of the age of the organization. Alice Ritchhart, Marsha Farrow, Marj Schneider and

others repeated that the Georgia Council of the Blind, then called the Georgia Federation of the Blind, was formed in 1956. Deborah Lovell called for the question, and the resolution was adopted.

Resolution two was a thank you resolution to the Courtyard Marriott Atlanta Conyers and gratitude to Renee Crayton and her staff. The committee recommended a due pass, and the resolution was adopted unanimously.

Resolution three was a thank you resolution to sponsors and volunteers. The committee recommended a due pass, and the resolution was adopted unanimously.

Legislative Update, Alice Ritchhart:

Alice stated that the legislative committee was trying a new strategy, meeting with Senator Davenport and waiting for a new commission bill to be dropped. On the topic of the Older Americans Act, low vision, blindness, and deaf blindness were not included in the wording of the act, despite advocacy efforts.

Hotel Bids, Alice Ritchhart:

Michelle St. Clair read three bids for convention hotels in Brunswick, Georgia. Alice Ritchhart recommended the Doubletree, which is currently a Holiday Inn but is undergoing transition. The price per night would be \$109, with the meeting room rental at \$350 per day. The proposed dates were November 6-9, 2025. Some questions were raised. Jamaica stated that the Miller family would be donating to pay for the meeting room. After questions about the contract and renovations being complete, Cecily Laney Nipper explained that a motion made today should be to accept the proposal, with a contract to follow. That contract would come before the board for a vote, either in January or at a special board meeting.

Cecily Laney Nipper took a vote on accepting this provisional arrangement of November 6-9 at the Doubletree Brunswick and it passed unanimously.

GCB Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss Report, Alice Ritchhart:

The older blind fund awarded an iPad to a victim of Hurricane Helene who lost all her assistive technology in the storm. Alice Ritchhart reported that the prom was an enormous success, as was Elvis' performance. Cecily Nipper Senior and Zack Nipper were the prom king and queen, and Judy and Hoyal Presley won the costume contest. At the business meeting held on October 24, GCB AAVL held elections for officers and Alice Ritchhart presented a \$2500 donation from Michael Benson to GCB AAVL. GCB AAVL completed their Ray Ban Meta Glasses fundraiser, and the winner was awarded.

Georgia Guide Dog Users, Marj Schneider:

Marj Schneider reported that GGDU had its meeting on October 24. A speaker, Janine Stanley, spoke about the recent ride share protest in San Francisco. Elections were held for officers. The Chewy fundraiser held by GGDU for a \$200 gift card was a success.

Alice Ritchhart presented a \$2500 donation from Michael Benson to GGDU. At the close of the GGDU meeting, Jason Thorne conducted the drawing for Ray Ban Meta Glasses donated by his company, which was one of our exhibitors.

Unfinished Business/New Business: There being none, President Cecily Nipper introduced the following informational speakers: Garrick Scott, Multiple Choices; Jeff Thom, Board Director, American Council of the Blind; Kristin White, Georgia Library Service. Adjourn, Cecily Laney Nipper: There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:04 PM.

Respectfully Submitted, Cecily Nipper Senior, Assistant Secretary

Resolutions:

Policy regarding GCB date of establishment

Resolution 2024-01 Passed

Whereas the Georgia Council of the Blind (GCB is the oldest blind consumer organization established in 1956, and whereas, part of the mission/ purpose of GCB is to improve education and by expanding vocational opportunities for the blind and low vision in Georgia, and whereas, GCB to meet its mission/ purpose when established in 1956 operated a thrift store, and today fundraise and gifted trust which provides scholarships, and needed technology and devices to assist with Georgians to achieve independence, and whereas, it is important that the membership be knowledgeable about the history of when GCB began and its mission so it can continue to empower individuals who are blind or have low vision to be able to take an active part in their communities. Now therefore be it resolved, this 25<sup>th</sup> day of October 2024 at the Courtyard by Marriott, in Conyers, Georgia that all documents such as brochures, letterheads, the home page of our website, and awards display "established in 1956".

Commending the Courtyard by Marriott

Resolution 2024-2 Passed

Whereas it is appropriate that this conference/ convention express its thanks to our host hotel.

Now, therefore be it resolved, that the Georgia Council of the Blind in conference/ convention assembled on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2024, at the Courtyard by Marriott in Conyers, Georgia, that this organization communicate its deep gratitude to Renee Crayton and staff of the Courtyard by Marriott Conyers, Georgia for their warm welcome, thorough service, and reliable professionalism.

Thank you Sponsors and Volunteers

Resolution 2024-3 Passed

Whereas it is impossible to conduct a conference without the help of sponsors and volunteers. And, whereas it is appropriate that this conference / convention give it is thanks to sponsors and volunteers who contributed with financial assistance or with their time to assist members preparing and during the conference.

Now, therefore be it resolved, that the Georgia Council of the Blind in conference/ convention assembled on the 24<sup>th</sup> day of October 2024, at the Courtyard by Marriott Conyers, Georgia, that this organization communicate its deepest gratitude to all the sponsors and volunteers for their friendliness and their gracious assistance.

We listened to the yearend report from the treasurer and finance chairperson. We voted on amendments to our constitution and bylaws.

We held our annual GCB awards luncheon with Paul Edwards as our speaker who was entertaining and inspirational keynote, and as we recognize some special members and friends of our community. We will also be awarding the first, second, and third prizes for chapters who collected the tab for Shriner's Children's Hospital. Ron Worley received the Gerald Pye Community Service Award; Marj Schneider received the Walter R. McDonald Service Award; and Gwendolyn Barron received the Presidential Diamond Award.

We listened to a presentation about building strong IEPs: a roadmap for blind and visually impaired students by Katie Nix and Stacey Orr. This workshop will guide parents and educators through the key parts of an IEP and explore what makes a strong, effective plan. Together, we will focus on strategies to ensure students with visual impairments receive the services, support, and tools they need to thrive.

Finally, we held our GCB closing board meeting, where we discussed our next GCB board meeting to be on Saturday, January 17, 2026.

### GCB Augusta, Georgia Council of the Blind Chapter Project

#### Cane Bank Application

##### 1. Eligibility Requirements

- a. Must be legally blind as determined by an eye doctor
- b. 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. GCB Membership
- 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. Cane tip type 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 personal preference of recipient
- 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.

### GCB Voices in My Day

by Sophia Curtis

The clock speaks softly, tells the time,  
I wake up ready, feeling fine.

Alexa starts the day for me,  
The kettle sings politely.

The microwave lets out a beep,

As if it knows I am half asleep.

The talking scales speak calm and clear,  
They say the truth with no veneer.

My phone speaks up to guide my way,  
VoiceOver greets the start of day.

The crossing clicks, my cue to go,  
A trusted sound I always know.

The bus app speaks, it will arrive,  
It keeps my patient hopes alive.

At work the screen reads what I need,  
Each word is spoken at good speed.

The keys respond with steady sound,  
We work in rhythm closely bound.

At lunch the glass begins to beep,  
It saves my shirt with warnings deep.

At night the play is brought to life,  
Audio words replace the sight.

A voice describes each scene and cue,  
The stage appears in sound so true.

Back home a book speaks soft and slow,  
My talking player starts the flow.

The house grows quiet, voices rest,  
Their help today has been their best.

The clock falls silent, darkness stays,  
Till morning speaks and starts the day.

### [GCB How to Avoid Scams by Phone, Text, and Email](#)

A practical guide by Sophia Curtis

Scams are becoming increasingly sophisticated. Knowing the warning signs and using a few simple habits can greatly reduce the risk.

One important rule to remember is that urgency is the biggest red flag. Scammers try to rush you, so you do not have time to think, check, or ask for help. If someone pressures you to act immediately, it is important to pause.

Phone scams often begin with a caller claiming to be from a bank, a government office, a delivery company, or technical support. The caller may say there is a problem with your account, your money, or your device. They may ask for personal information such as PIN numbers, one-time passcodes, card details, or remote access to your device. Some callers try to prevent you from hanging up or checking independently.

If you receive such a call, hang up immediately. Legitimate organizations will not object to this. Call the organization back using a phone number you already trust, not one given by the caller. Do not press keys or say confirmation words if prompted.

Text message scams often involve messages claiming there has been a missed delivery, a suspicious bank transaction, or an unpaid bill. These messages may contain shortened or unfamiliar links, poor grammar, or unusual wording. They often ask you to confirm or verify details.

If you receive a suspicious text message, do not tap on any links. Delete the message. If you are concerned, open the official app or website manually rather than using the link. Use your phone's report-spam option if it is available. When using a screen reader such as VoiceOver or TalkBack, pay attention to how links sound. If a link sounds too long, random, or unclear, it is safer to treat it as unsafe.

Email scams often appear to come from banks, online stores, or streaming services. These emails may ask you to verify or update information, include attachments you were not expecting, or come from a sender address that does not match the organization's name.

When dealing with emails, check the sender's email address carefully. Do not open attachments unless you are certain they are safe. Avoid replying to suspicious emails and use your email app's report-phishing feature when available. Screen reader users should ensure the full sender email address is read, not just the display name.

Different devices offer additional safety features. On iPhones and iPads, it is helpful to enable Silence Unknown Callers and filter unknown senders in Messages. Activate it by following these steps: 1. Open Settings 2. Tap Phone 3. Tap Silence Unknown Callers 4. Turn the switch ON. Allow VoiceOver to read web addresses slowly before activating them and enable two-factor authentication on important accounts. On Android devices, spam filtering can be enabled in the Phone and Messages apps, and built-in call screening may be available.

Many scams rely on what is known as social engineering. This means manipulating emotions such as kindness, trust, fear, or embarrassment. Scammers may pretend to help you, claim you made a mistake, say you will lose money or access, or appeal to authority. It is important to remember that you are always allowed to pause, hang up, and verify.

If you are unsure about a message or call, contact the organization directly using a known phone number, and take your time. Legitimate companies will allow you to do this.

If you believe you have been scammed, contact your bank immediately, change your passwords, and report the scam to your local consumer protection agency. Do not feel embarrassed. Scams are designed to deceive, and anyone can be targeted.

Remember, if something feels urgent, unexpected, or secretive, stop and verify. With awareness, good habits, and the right tools, it is possible to use technology safely and confidently.

The End