

the center of the circle is a pencil drawing in gently cradling a Georgia peach. A slender of the peach, originating from a short brown thumb. The peach radiates warm hues, colors and yellow tones. In the center of the peach, accompanied by corresponding Braille dots reads: A hand up, not a handout Georgia



gray tones. It is a palm of an open right hand green leaf gracefully hangs down from the top stem on the left side and draped over the like the warmth of the sun, with vibrant orange bold uppercase letters GCB stand out in black, positioned directly below the three letters. Text Council of the Blind. Established in 1956

The GCB DIGEST

Published by the Georgia Council of the Blind
An affiliate of the American Council of the Blind,
Our organization promotes hand-ups, not handouts.
Spring 2025

GCB Officers for 2024-2026:

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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 to the GCB Digest Committee, who have made our GCB Digest such a considerable success, each member who sent articles, and those who made suggestions. I want to thank our President, Cecily Laney Nipper, for her presidential message, which included 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](#). 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

Our recent trip to Washington, D.C. was an inspiring and productive experience as we advocated for critical issues impacting the blind and low vision community — including website and medical device accessibility, as well as the importance of audio description. We had the opportunity to meet with legislators and attend advocacy seminars, all of which helped strengthen our collective voice.

It was also a wonderful chance to connect with other members of the American Council of the Blind and explore new ways to engage and make a difference. One of the highlights was watching Stacey Orr, recipient of this year's leadership scholarship, thrive and grow throughout the seminar. Her energy and dedication were truly uplifting.

Personally, I was reminded of how far we've come — and how strong our roots are — as I spent time with Alice Ritchhart. It brought back memories of my first leadership conference in 2020, where she introduced me to national advocacy. So much has changed since then, yet one thing remains constant: our shared commitment to advancing the rights and quality of life for people who are blind or visually impaired.

Back home in Georgia, that commitment continues. Within our own advocacy space at the Georgia Council of the Blind, we're continuing to push for accountability at the highest levels of Vocational Rehabilitation. We remain engaged by attending their monthly check-ins and advocating for real, measurable change to better serve our community.

This message wouldn't be complete without a look at our upcoming conference, so please review the following announcement and be prepared for a link and phone number to reserve your hotel room, starting in May:

Mark Your Calendars: 2025 GCB Conference & Convention at the Doubletree, Brunswick, Georgia on November 6–8, 2025

Planning is in full swing for the 2025 GCB Conference and Convention, and we're thrilled to announce that it will be held at the beautiful Doubletree in Brunswick, Georgia! Join us for a fun, informative, and engaging weekend packed with informational sessions, tours and local excursions, fun and social activities, and our all-important Membership Business Meeting—your voice matters!

We're excited to see many of you there in person. But if you can't make the trip, don't worry! We remain committed to accessibility, and many sessions will include a Zoom component, allowing you to listen in and participate from anywhere. We can't wait to connect with all of you—whether in Brunswick or virtually!



Pictured at the Georgia State Capitol on the Senate floor.

Left to right: Senator Gail Davenport, Stephanie Scott, Valerie Hester, Cecily Laney Nipper, Dorothy Griffin

Georgia Council of the Blind Board Meeting Minutes

Saturday, January 18, 2025

Call To Order, Cecily Laney Nipper:

Cecily Laney Nipper called the meeting to order at 10:06 AM. Since Sharon Nichols, the GCB Chaplain, was not on the call yet, Cecily Laney Nipper asked Amanda Wilson, the GCB Secretary, to do the roll call, with an invocation to follow.

Roll Call, Amanda Wilson: Secretary:

Amanda Wilson conducted the roll call. The following board 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, Immediate Past President; Jerrie Toney, Athens Chapter President; Ron Worley, Augusta Chapter President; Phil Jones, East Georgia Chapter President; Dianne Roberts, Greater Hall County Chapter President; Sharon Nichols, Northwest Georgia Chapter President; Crystal Gentry, Peach Chapter Vice-President; Kim Harrison, Savannah Chapter Representative; Tyah Longmire, South Metro Chapter Representative; Betsy Grenevitch, Georgia Guide Dog Users, GGDU, Representative; Deborah Lovell, Alliance on Ageing and Vision Loss, AAVL, Representative; Steve Longmire, Web Master; Tiffany Montalvo, GCB Digest Representative. Guests include Jamaica Miller, Stacey Orr, and DJ McIntyre. There was a quorum.

Invocation:

Sharon Nichols gave the invitation.

Approval of Agenda, Cecily Laney Nipper:

Cecily Laney Nipper stated that the agenda had been sent out via email. Phil Jones made a motion to accept the agenda as sent out via email. Debbie McDonald seconded the motion. Marj Schneider stated that the agenda said minutes from October 18, 2024, and the correct date is October 25, 2024. The motion passed with no objection.

President's Report, Cecily Laney Nipper:

Cecily Laney Nipper says she has been contacted by a lady who needs services from Project Independence and is having the hardest time getting a return call. Cecily said that this is why we must fight for a Commission. The lack of support in Georgia is clear and can be seen every day in exact cases like this one. She urges if you can make it to the Capitol or share your story with those of us who will be going to the Blind Day at the Capitol please do so.

Cecily Laney Nipper stated that there will be a leadership conference in Washington DC at the Sheraton Hotel in Arlington, Virginia, from March 14 through 18, 2025. Some of these will be on Zoom. She will send out emails about how you can become a virtual participant. She said that she thinks there is no cost to participate in the seminars on Zoom. March 18, 2025, is when they will attend the Capitol Hill meeting. She mentioned that if you are interested but unable to travel to Washington, DC, and need assistance in arranging virtual meetings with your representatives, the legislative committee can help set those up. Contact Cecily Laney Nipper or Alice Ritchhart, who will assist you and, if possible, accompany you to meet with your legislative representatives. This is your opportunity to advocate on a national scale

An email will be going out with the list of the national imperatives. They include the following: audio description, access to websites, and durable medical equipment. Once that official list comes out it will be forwarded to everyone. This conference is an excellent opportunity for advocacy. Cecily Laney Nipper appointed Stacey Orr as chair of the Sunshine Committee. Debbie McDonald and Debbie Holcomb will be assisting Stacey on this committee.

Secretary's Report, Amanda Wilson:

GCB Board Meeting Minutes from July 27, 2024:

Alice Ritchhart made a motion to accept the July 27, 2024, Board meeting minutes, and Judy Presley seconded the motion. Betsy Grenevitich moved that July 27, 2024; minutes be approved with the correction of GIB instead of GBI. The motion passed with no objections.

GCB Board Meeting Minutes from October 18, 2024:

Deborah Lovell made a motion to accept October 25, 2024, Board meeting minutes, and Phil Jones seconded the motion. Marj Schneider made the correction that the minutes should say be in person or on Zoom instead of in person or in the zoo. The motion passed with no objection.

Treasurer's Report, Marsha Farrow:

Marsha Farrow said that as of January 15, 2025, the balance in the main checking account is \$15,517.53. She stated that there were two major donations to the General Fund: Michael Benson donated \$5,000.00, and Dr. Myra Shivers donated \$1,000.00. The total of all the designated funds as of January 15, 2025, is \$5,732.46.

The general operating expenses as of January 15, 2025, are \$9,785.07.

Marsha Farrow listed all the income and expenses that are associated with this account.

The Regions Athene Long Term Investment balance as of January 16, 2025, is currently \$21,972.26, and it will mature on May 24, 2027.

The Way Financial Investment merged with LPL Financials, and as of December 2024, the current balance is \$73,688.78.

The total of all accounts as of January 15, 2025, is \$121,967.88. Jerrie made the correction that the QuickBooks cost went from \$30.00 to \$35.00.

The report is being filed for audit.

Finance Committee Report, Jerrie Toney:

Jerrie Toney sent out the income and expense report. She said that she neglected to change the in-kind donation amount to 4,000 on the 2024 revenue spreadsheet. She said she would make that correction. She said she would add to the interest we received for the year. Cecily Laney Nipper said that we do not vote on this report. Jerrie Toney said that the 2025 budget was sent out to everyone with corrections that she discussed with the finance committee. Cecily Laney Nipper stated that the budget is not balanced, but a budget is necessary to spend money within the organization. Alice Ritchhart made a motion to approve the 2025 budget and Deborah Lovell seconded the motion. Marsha Farrow stated the total of all our assets as it stands right now is at \$1021,967.88. The motion passed with no objection.

Fundraising, Cecily Laney Nipper:

Cecily Laney Nipper wants to suggest a fundraising idea that came from the fundraising committee consisting of Cecily Laney Nipper, chair, Marsha Farrow, Jerrie Toney, and Marj Schneider. The fundraising would involve using a website called Terri Lynn. You can order by website or by phone. It is an indirect giving system where orders made for nuts, fruit, and candy in GCB's name will result in 20% of the profit being donated back to our organization. We would not be outlaying any funds, we would not be ordering any items, and we would be advertising this web store. Ron Worley made a motion to accept this Terri Lynn fundraiser as presented, and Phil Jones seconded the motion. After some discussion, the motion passed with no objection. Cecily Laney Nipper said a vote is needed to decide where the funds from the Terri Lynn fundraiser would go. Alice Ritchhart made a motion to split the funds from the fundraiser between the Youth Gap Fund and the Senior Fund. Ron Worley seconded the motion. The motion passed with no objection.

Youth Gap Fund Report, Ron Worley:

Ron Worley stated that he had asked Tiffany Montalvo to give this report. Tiffany said that she and Ron were the only ones on this committee at this time. The Youth Gap Fund is supposed to pick up the slack where the senior fund cannot assist younger people. They used the senior fund application and edited it a couple of weeks ago. They added the age range of zero to fifty-four and the committee's contact information and it was sent to Steve Longmire to put it on our website. Amanda Wilson will send it out to our members. Alice Ritchhart suggested that they send the application to GVRA and talk to Shirley Robinson. Cecily Laney Nipper stated that she would be taking the applications for the Youth Gap Fund and the Senior Fund to an expo that Multiple Choices for Independent Living, in Athens, Georgia is holding on Wednesday, January 29, 2025. Cecily thanked the Youth Gap committee. She said they are still looking for another person to serve on this committee. Please contact Cecily privately if you wish to work on this committee.

Senior Fund Report, Alice Ritchhart:

Alice Ritchhart reported that the senior fund helped three people with supplies. One person was given an iPad; one person was given a Blind Shell phone; and one person was given a cane, a talking watch, and a recorder.

Sunshine Committee Report, Stacey Orr:

Stacey Orr thanked Cecily for appointing her as chair of the Sunshine Committee. She is excited to be working with Debbie Holcomb and Debbie McDonald on spreading a little sunshine to our members. She stated that we are a new committee but have been busy. She stated if you know of someone who is sick or who has lost a loved one please email Stacey to let her know so she can send them a card. The next GCB Digest newsletter will have more information on this new committee and how to contact them. Stacey said they have also reached out to the GCB members at large. Those members have been contacted either by email or by phone. The possibility of Braille or audio cards was discussed.

Convention Report, Alice Ritchhart and Cecily Laney Nipper:

Cecily Laney Nipper stated that she sent an incomplete contract to this board for review. We would be responsible for seventy-room nights at an eighty percent attrition rate. Those nights would be available to us from Wednesday, November 5, through Sunday, November 9, 2025. The room rate is \$129.00 per night which includes breakfast. There is no fee for the meeting space. The meeting space would be for the general meeting and for the breakout meetings.

Cecily asked whether the board would like to move ahead with the contract or wait for the final food prices in April when its re-opens as a Double Tree. A lively discussion was had about food prices for the four meals that are typically included in the convention. Marsha Farrow made a motion to hold our state conference in Brunswick, Georgia, on November 5-8, 2025, at the Double Tree Hotel with the understanding that we do not go over eighty dollars per person for meals. Debbie McDonald seconded the motion. The motion passed with no objection.

Scholarship Report, Marj Schneider:

Marj Schneider said that the AI and Cora Camp Academic scholarship is gearing up at this time. Some revisions have been made to the application and the guidelines. The application is on the GCB website. Marj Schneider has been emailing colleges and other places to share the scholarship with them. The deadline is Friday, March 7, 2025, for applicants to apply for this scholarship.

Technology Committee Report, Steve Longmire:

Steve Longmire, chair of the GCB Technology Committee reported that he is so excited about the GCB Tech Talk Time Committee. He discussed the success of the technology committee's convention programming. He is looking forward to doing this again at our 2025 Conference and Convention. Steve thanked everyone who participated in the first technology meeting about the Meta Glasses with guest speaker, Rosa Allen. He talked about working on the website and making improvements to it. Steve said that the GCB Link is still working as well. Steve thanked Amanda for sending the push notifications.

Legislative Report, Alice Ritchhart:

Alice Ritchhart stated that the legislative session has started. She said that the Legislative Committee consists of Betsy Grenevitch, Alice Ritchhart, Marsha Farrow, and Stacey Orr. She said that the Commission for the Blind bill has not dropped. She stated we are looking at the middle of February to have the Day at the Capitol, starting around 8:30 AM. We will have a Zoom link and bring in a couple of states that have Commission for the Blind so that they can hear why a Commission for the Blind is important. She informed us that the Randolph Shepard Vending Program in Georgia is in serious trouble. A new leader, Chris Wells has taken over and is not following the rules. She urges everyone to contact their representatives and push for the Commission for the Blind to promote independence and provide better services for the Blind community.

Dianne Roberts sent out emails about an accessible voting survey to all our GCB members. Steve Longmire placed it on our website for anyone with disabilities who used the accessible voting machine during our voting cycle. Dianne said that there were not too many responses from our GCB members, but the few received have been negative. She hopes to receive even more feedback to give to President Cecily Laney Nipper to show our representatives what we must go through here in the state when it comes to voting.

Georgia Guide Dog Users Update, GGDU, Marj Schneider:

Marj Schneider reported that the Georgia Guide Dog Users, GGDU, received a donation from Michael Benson and a Chewy gift card raffle fundraiser. They will be holding a special membership meeting on Thursday, February 6, 2025, to finalize what to do with some of that money. They have discussed using the money to set up a program to help cover vet bills.

Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss, Alice Ritchhart:

Alice Ritchhart said that Bingo night was a considerable success! The senior prom was lots of fun! She said that she got a lot of valuable feedback and that they are still making their quarterly calls on the third Monday at 7:00 PM. The next call is going to be on spam and frauds on the internet with Stanley Lope as their speaker.

Membership and Public Relations Committee, Amanda Wilson:

Amanda Wilson stated that during the meeting the committee discussed the accessible voting survey. The calendar of meetings is sent out every month, with the same Zoom link now being used for all Zoom calls related to GCB. Amanda Wilson asked everyone to let her know of meetings so that they can be added to the expert calendar. Amanda said we are still holding our monthly book club and praise and prayer phone calls. Tiffany is still doing our public relations activities such as posting our events on Facebook and Instagram. GCB has now been approved for a Google Workspace, and the goal is to use our info email address so that multiple people can check the phone and respond to those emails or voice mail messages.

GCB Digest Report, Amanda Wilson:

Amanda Wilson said the GCB Digest committee is working hard. They meet on Zoom to edit the newsletter. She described the monthly newsletter for announcements that need to go out in between editions of the GCB Digest. The monthly newsletter will be emailed only. Marj Schneider said that she was concerned about the monthly newsletter being too much work for the committee. The committee responded that this short newsletter would be a pilot program.

Member At Large Representative Report Debbie McDonald:

Debbie McDonald said she received the updated list of GCB members at large. She said that she thinks it will keep growing. She said that she wanted to thank Stacey and the Sunshine Committee for sending her a sympathy card.

Unfinished Business

Cecily Laney Nipper called for unfinished business. There was none.

New Business:

Time and Place of the Next Board Meeting:

Cecily Laney Nipper proposed a hybrid meeting at Grace Baptist Church, McDonough, Georgia, and on Zoom on Saturday, April 19, 2025, at 10 AM. After discovering that the third Saturday in April is Easter weekend, Deborah Lovell made a motion to meet on Saturday, April 26, 2025, at Grace Baptist Church, McDonough, Georgia, and on Zoom at 10:00 AM. Marj Schneider seconded the motion. The motion passed with no objection.

Adjourn:

The meeting adjourned at 12:18 PM.

Member Spotlight: Lana Carder



Pictured Lana Carder

Greater Hall chapter member Lana Carder was elected as a board member starting in 2025. Lana is from Buford, Georgia, and is married to Roy Carder, chapter treasurer. Lana was born with retinitis pigmentosa but was not diagnosed until age 18, shortly after graduating high school. Lana's younger brother was diagnosed with RP first, and the doctor asked their parents if any of their other children exhibited a similar symptom of night blindness. Her parents realized that Lana had experienced classic symptoms of RP since childhood but had received inadequate eye examinations through the years. Like typical teenagers, Lana obtained her driver's license at age 16 and drove for many years, unaware of the potential risk.

After graduating from North Gwinnett High School in 1970, Lana got her first job at the company that would later become Equifax, located on Peachtree Street in Atlanta. Lana carpooled with four friends for two years. All the girls took turns driving the round trip from Buford to Atlanta, Lana included. Lana went to work in 1972 with J.I. Case Company, Chamblee, Georgia. She collaborated with the company for 18 years, doing clerical work, mailroom duties, credit investigations, and billing until her forced retirement in 1990. During that time, Lana continued to drive, with co-workers or alone, even as her vision slowly deteriorated. She learned to make accommodations at work by using large print and magnifying glasses. She also curtailed her driving to daylight hours only. She finally gave up driving in 1984. She then had to depend on friends and family members to get to and from work each day. Lana got some help from the Atlanta Area Services for the Blind, now the Center for the Visually Impaired. She acquired magnifiers and telescopic lenses. She received white cane training. Through this organization, she also discovered the NLS Talking Book program. At some time during the 1980s, Georgia vocational rehabilitation services helped with a few low-vision aides to use in the home. Lana figured out things on her own by listening to others and experimenting. Lana purchased the family home in 1988 when her parents moved to the Georgia mountains. She lived independently with some help until her retirement and subsequent marriage in 1990. Lana and Roy were heavily involved for years in a local service organization. Lana has remained active in her local church, serving in Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, singing in the choir, and playing the piano. She adapted to her vision loss by copying lyrics into large print, through memorization and practice. In retirement, Roy and Lana continue to make their home accessible one project at a time. Lana used service dogs from 2003 to 2013. She has chosen not to continue, saying, "Having a guide dog is a big commitment, and not everyone can do that." Lana and Roy joined the Greater Hall chapter in 2012 and have grown in leadership. Roy became treasurer in 2018, and Lana became a Calling Team member. Lana encouraged Roy to develop the chapter's Facebook page and videotape guest speakers when meetings resumed after the COVID-19 absence. They coordinated the printing of chapter business cards that were donated by a local printing company. Lana said, "There is nothing special about my story." To the contrary, Lana's story mirrors most of Georgia's visually impaired citizens. Many come to vision loss gradually or after a lengthy career in the sighted world. We welcome Lana as a board member.

GCB Chapter News:

Athens Chapter:

At our January meeting, Cecily Laney Nipper spoke to us about all things related to the Georgia Council of the Blind. At our February meeting, Jerrie spoke about the Ray-Ban Meta Smart Glasses. At our March meeting, we heard from Garrick Scott from Multiple Choices. In April, we heard from Susan Love Craft, which is an organization for people with disabilities to make crafts. The Athens Chapter meetings are held on the fourth Saturday at 11:00 AM via 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:

Our February meeting was canceled so we could support our long-time member, Linda Williams, following the passing of her spouse. We appreciate the understanding of our members during this difficult time for Linda. In March, we resumed in-person meetings with a Zoom component. We enjoyed decorating cupcakes, which were generously baked and donated by East Georgia member Katie Carlock—thank you, Katie! At our April meeting, we had the pleasure of welcoming John Braden, President of the Covington Lions Club and a long-time supporter of the East Georgia Chapter. John shared the impactful work the Lions Club has been doing, including providing vision screenings this past August for every third-grade student in the Newton County School System. Students who did not pass the screening received an \$80 voucher for an eye exam and two pairs of glasses at America's Best.

We are deeply grateful to the Covington Lions Club for their continued support of our chapter and our local communities. Finally, we want to thank all of our returning and new members, bringing our total to 25 active members. Our chapter continues to grow, and we're excited about all that the future holds for the East Georgia Chapter.

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.

Greater Hall County Chapter:

The Greater Hall County Chapter January meeting was canceled due to ice and snow. In February, our speaker was Jessica Zagarella of Legacy Link. Legacy Link is our region's Area Agency on Aging, serving thirteen counties in northeast Georgia. Jessica shared valuable information about the services and activities Legacy Link offers to aging adults and adults with disabilities. In March, Judy Presley and Sheila Rousey shared information about their new Meta smart glasses. We learned about how the glasses work and some examples of how they are using them. In April, Keely Zeitlin of Zeitlin Services, LLC, shared the exciting announcement that Camp Abilities is coming to northeast Georgia. The camp will be held Labor Day weekend, August 29 through September 1, 2025, at North Georgia Christian Camp in Clarkesville, Georgia. We are excited to promote this immersive camp for blind students and students who have low vision, aged eight to eighteen. In May, Judy Presley shared about the "Meta smart glasses part two." We learned additional, specific examples of using smart glasses. We welcome new members Tonya Sykes, Don Blackstock, William and JeanAnn Miller, Dianne Beswick, and Ellis Casper. We were sad to hear of the passing of a longtime member, Mrs. Dickie Jensen, on December 3, 2024. Mrs. Dickie was a faithful member of our chapter and resident of Lanier Village Estates in Gainesville. She attended her last chapter meeting in October. Mrs. Dickie will be missed.

Lana Carder was elected board member to replace Mike Hall, who is recovering from a stroke.

The Greater Hall County Chapter meets 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

Northwest Georgia Chapter:

The Northwest Georgia Chapter meetings are held on the second Tuesday at the Bank of Lafayette community room, which is 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 of the Georgia Council of the Blind said that in January, we held an in-person meeting at Armondo's Italian Restaurant in Cartersville, Georgia. Amanda informed us about several discussions that had taken place at the GCB Board Meeting. She asked for help from the monthly newsletter, which is different from the quarterly newsletter. The deadline is the 20th of each month. We discussed having in-person meetings along with some fun activities. The purpose of having an activity along with our meeting is that some of our members need some type of interaction with other blind individuals, and to educate and inform the community that blind individuals are capable of living fun-filled, independent, and productive lives. The rest of our time was spent enjoying each other's company and some good Italian food.

In February, we met at Etowah Valley Yoga, where we spent about an hour learning yoga with Lisa Siniard as our instructor. It was quite relaxing, and our members learned how yoga can help with the anxiety that most blind people tend to experience. We then went to lunch at a local Mexican restaurant where we finished our meeting by discussing which our members might be attending this year's ACB convention in Dallas and what other types of activities we would like to do for the rest of the year.

In March, we went swimming at the Senior Aquatic Center, and afterwards, we went to eat lunch at a local sandwich restaurant.

The Peach Chapter meets on the third Monday at 11:00 AM, in person and via 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 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.

South Metro Chapter:

During our February meeting, our guest speaker was Rosa Allen. She demonstrated and answered questions about the Meta Glasses. Steve Longmire brought his Meta Glasses to the meeting so that our chapter members could try them out. Rosa Allen joined the South Metro Chapter! The South Metro Chapter meetings are held on the second Tuesday from 4:00 PM until 6:00 PM, at

the Piccadilly Restaurant, which is located at 2000 Crescent Center Blvd. in Tucker, Georgia. 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:

GGDU, an affiliate of Guide Dog Users Inc., has established an emergency veterinary care fund for guide dog handlers facing extraordinary medical expenses for their working guide dogs. This fund is available to Georgia residents and can provide limited financial assistance for emergency expenses.

For more information on the fund's guidelines and application, please contact Marj Schneider.

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

Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss:

At our April meeting, the GCB Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss, AAVL, heard from Dottie Langham, who discussed her experiences with participating in activities at her local senior center. She told us about how she rides the transit bus there and back every morning. She said that they play bingo every day, and there are daily exercise classes. She said they have options to buy breakfast or lunch. She said they have arts and crafts every day, as well as enjoy outings to plays, go shopping, and nature walks. Dottie said they accepted her and that she advocated for herself. She stated they help her when she needs it. She said that her guide dog would take her to the restroom and in and out to the bus, either coming or going.

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.

GCB Peach Talk:

From the Membership and Project Committee:

The membership committee holds an ACB community Zoom call which meets on the third Thursday from 7:00 PM until 8:00 PM. We tell lots of funny stories on this call. In March, we discussed our favorite or not-so-favorite subjects in school.

Spreading a Little Sunshine for GCB Members

Sunshine Committee

Committee Chair: 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 sickness. If your chapter has a member who needs a little sunshine due to the loss of a loved one or 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. The duties of the Sunshine Committee are evolving, so if you have an idea that the Sunshine Committee should consider, please reach out to the 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 7805751, 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 is held on the first and third Tuesday of the month at 7:00 PM. It is currently hosted by members of GCB.

We read a scripture, tell what good things have happened to us during the past two weeks, and we pray for each other and for other Georgia Council of the Blind members and their families.

GCB Book Club:

Deborah Lovell and Judy Presley

Our GCB book club has read a variety of books, including fiction, nonfiction, as well as 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 would love to have other book lovers out there join us. We meet on the last Thursday of each month at 7:30 PM, on Zoom.

In March, we read "First Lie Wins" by Ashley Elston. This book is about Evie Porter. Once she has given a name and location by her mysterious boss Mr. Smith, she learns everything there is to know about the town and the people in it. Then the mark: Ryan Sumner. The last piece of the puzzle is the job. Evie is not privacy to Mr. Smith's real identity, but she knows this job will be different. Ryan has gotten under her skin, and she is starting to envision a different sort of life for herself. But Evie cannot make any mistakes- especially after what happened last time. Because the one thing she worked her entire life to keep clean, the one identity she could

always go back to her real identity-just walked right into this town. Evie Porter must stay one step ahead of her past while making sure there is still a future in front of her. The stakes could not be higher but then, Evie has always liked a challenge..."

GCB In Memory of:

Dr. Philip Edward Dillard

Dr. Philip Edward Dillard passed away on Thursday, February 20, 2025, in Rome Georgia. Philip, born December 28, 1937, in Thomasville, Georgia, graduated from Valdosta State University where he met his future wife Carolyn Thrift in Spanish class. Philip continued in his studies at the University of Georgia, earning his Ph.D. in English Literature in 1975. Philip taught English for over 30 years, primarily at Georgia Highlands College in Rome, Georgia. Philip is survived by Carolyn, his wife of over 62 years, their three children, David Dillard (Peggy), Joe Dillard (Becky), and Miriam Dillard (Dave Baldwin), four grandchildren, Rachel Smith (Dustin), Tom Dillard (Kirstie), Walt Dillard, David Baldwin (Grace), one great-granddaughter, Tessa Belle Budd, his brother Byron Dillard and numerous nieces and nephews. In addition to teaching English, Philip taught Sunday school for decades at the Rome Church of the Nazarene. Philip played multiple musical instruments including the piano, recorder, harmonica, violin, and viola. He loved classical music, attending Shakespeare plays, and woodworking. He also enjoyed writing poems for special occasions for family and friends. Though extraordinarily erudite, he also enjoyed simple humor, such as, "The accident occurred as we entered the town of Yield." Philip was a diehard Georgia Bulldog fan who never missed a football game. His funeral service was held on Saturday, March 1, 2025, at Evergreen Baptist Church in Cobbtown, Georgia. Interment was held at Evergreen Baptist Church. In lieu of flowers, the family asks that gifts be in the form of donations to the Dillard Award at Georgia Highlands College, using the following link: <https://www.sites.highlands.edu/alumni/give-today/>

Frankie Mae Longmire (Mother of GCB Webmaster Steve Longmire)

Frankie Mae Longmire was born as the oldest girl to the late Frank and Ada McCrary Hadley in Hot Springs, Florida. She went to her heavenly home on March 7, 2025. A Columbus, Georgia, resident of 62 years, Frankie was predeceased by her late husband, Staff Sergeant Ellis, sisters Willie Bell Carreker, Robbie Robinson, Nellie Hadley, and brother, Cleo Hadley. She was a former private care nurse, stay-at-home spouse, organist, and missionary flight attendant at St. Johns A.M.E. Church, where she had been awarded Missionary of the Year. Frankie, a self-taught organist, loved playing old gospel hymns at church, as well as in her home. Gardening, cooking, walking, reading, studying the Bible, and enjoying family visits were her other past times activities. Frankie leaves to charity her generous and loving matriarchal legacy, her son, Steve (Wife, Tiyah), sister Matty Wilder, brothers Ben (Significant other, Carol), Jessie, Pete (wife, Jeanette), and a host of loving nieces, nephews, cousins, and friends.

Jerrie Charlotte Hodges Ricks

Jerrie Charlotte Hodges Ricks, age 85 of McDonough, GA, passed away surrounded by the love of family on April 22, 2025. She is preceded in death by her grandparents, parents, and sister Gayle. Jerrie leaves behind a loving family: her husband Granger, sister Glenda, her children Michael (Betsy), Charles (Sheila), and Kathy (Michael Wylder), treasured grandchildren Elyza, Daniel, Christian, Olivia, Anna Layne, Mac, and Jack, as well as her extended family, and many dear friends.

Born on September 30th, 1939, in Waycross, GA, to the late Nora E. Hodges and James C. Hodges, Jerrie was a woman of extraordinary faith, talent, and intelligence. She graduated as the valedictorian of her class at the Georgia Academy of the Blind, where she met the love of her life, Granger Ricks. Their marriage of 61 years stood as the beacon of the Ricks family: an example of enduring love, mutual respect, and a shared faith in the Lord.

Jerrie went on to attend Mercer University graduating Summa Cum Laude and later earned her master's degree in Sociology and Counseling from the University of Alabama, finishing at the top of her class during her collegiate career and excelling in every way. Her early career in social work showcased her diligence and care towards others, however, her proudest role was that of a mother to her three beloved children: Michael, Charles, and Kathy. She poured herself into motherhood with endless love and devotion.

A gifted pianist, Jerrie used her talents to bring beautiful music to her church communities at Pine Ridge Baptist Church, Morrow Church of God, and Henry Baptist Church. Jerrie was often found at her piano, entertaining and playing with grandchildren or simply sharing beautiful melodies for everyone to enjoy. She was also an incredible cook, known far and wide for her legendary chocolate cake. No one left her house hungry or without feeling deeply cared for.

Now entirely healed, she walks with a new guide, rejoicing in sight and in being with the Lord.

A graveside service was held at 1 PM on Friday, April 25th, 2025, at Evergreen Cemetery in Brunswick, GA. Jerrie's Home Going Celebration was held at Henry Baptist Church on Sunday, April 27th, 2025, at 4035 Jodeco Rd, McDonough, GA 30253. The visitation will take place at 1 PM, with the service to follow at 2 PM with Pastor Jon Estes, her son Rev. Michael Ricks, and grandson Christian Wylder officiating.

Those who wish may sign the online guest registry at www.cannonclevelandfunerals.com. Cannon Cleveland Funeral Directors, 770-914-1414.

Scott Edward Rumery

January 22, 1970 – February 14, 2025

Scott Rumery, age 55, of Jasper, Georgia, passed away Friday, February 14, 2025, at Select Specialty Hospital in Atlanta. He was born on January 22, 1970, to Carlton and Carolyn Rumery in Bristol, Connecticut. Scott was a huge baseball fan. His favorite team was the Red Sox. Scott is survived by his wife of seventeen years, Bronwyn Rumery of Jasper; sons, Scott Kelley of Bisbee, Arizona, Joshua Kelley of Kansas; daughter and son-in-law, Elizabeth and Noah Simpson of Missouri; daughter, Makayla Rumery of Bisbee, Arizona; grandchildren; brothers and sisters-in-law, George and Martha Rumery of Bristol, Connecticut, Dale and Michelle Rumery of Southington, Connecticut; sister, Patty St. Amand of Bristol, Connecticut; aunts and uncle, Shirley Brown of Brownville, Maine, Jackie and Jimmy Brown of Milo Maine, Richard and Susan Nichols of Florida. Other family members also survive. He was preceded in death by his parents, Carlton and Carolyn Rumery, and brother, Leo Gene Rumery. A Memorial Service will be planned for a later date. If you would like, memorial donations can be made to Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation in Bloomfield, Connecticut.

Robert ("Bob") Wesley Wheeler

** Please note the different locations of visitation and service **

This obituary was lovingly prepared by the family

Robert ("Bob") Wesley Wheeler was born November 25, 1942, and passed away April 24, 2025, surrounded by the love of family and friends. Born in Rocky Plains to Ira Lee and Ruthie Daniel, Bob was one of nine children who grew up in a tightknit, loving family. He survived childhood mumps and encephalitis, setting the tone for his life of defying the odds. Growing up, he was a stellar high school athlete and graduated from Newton County High School in 1963. Following high school, Bob served 2 years in the United States Army before returning home and marrying his high school sweetheart, Anne McKay, and the pair spent 58 loving years together. He was preceded in death by his parents, Ira and Ruthie Daniel Wheeler, his sister Annie Lee Parish, his brothers Ed Wheeler, John Wheeler, Jerry Wheeler, and Jack Wheeler.

While only a City of Covington policeman for one year, that year would bring Bob one of his best friends, Joe Nichols. Bob then went to work for Caldwell & Cowan Funeral Home for 25 years. During this time, he and Anne had two beautiful children, Robert Wesley ("Wes") Wheeler, Jr. (Allison Wheeler), and Dianna Elizabeth Wheeler Doss (Joe Doss). In 1991, he and his brother, Bill Wheeler, founded Wheeler Funeral Home, where he served the community until retiring. Throughout this time, Bob also served as the Newton County Coroner from 1988 to 2008. Bob was blessed with the ability to be there for those going through the difficult time of losing a loved one, his steadfast personality calmed and reassured all.

Throughout his life, Bob was an avid hunter and fisherman who enjoyed being out on the water and in the woods. Bob's infectious personality and straight-shooting style endeared him to all who he met. Bob enjoyed being a part of the Covington Elks Lodge, he was also a Mason and a member at both Golden Fleece Lodge #6 and Pace Masonic Lodge #558, and he was a Shriner. Bob and Anne enjoyed spending time together in the North Georgia Mountains by the Kellum Valley Creek. Bob was a proud "Papa" to his five grandchildren: McKayla Doss, Davis Wheeler, Katie Doss, Sam Wheeler, and Lucy Wheeler. He is also survived by his brother Norman Wheeler (Pat), his sister Betty Harvey, and his brother Bill Wheeler (Jane), sisters-in-law Diane Wheeler and Miriam Wheeler, along with a host of nieces, nephews, other family members, and friends. Bob and his neighborhood friends loved to commune nightly in Richard Pace's garage sharing stories and laughs.

A man true to his word and willing to help others in any way he could, Bob will be remembered as the truest version of a simple, southern man. He loved his family and friends so strongly that his love will continue to comfort us all in this difficult time. To everyone, take comfort in the knowledge that Bob was a God-fearing man and is now rejoicing in his perfect heavenly body.

Funeral services for Mr. Wheeler were held at 2 o'clock on Monday, April 28, 2025, at the Chapel of Wheeler Funeral Home, 11405 Brown Bridge Road, Covington, GA 30016. Interment will follow at Covington City Cemetery. The family received friends at J.C. Harwell and Son Funeral Home, 2157 East Street SE, Covington, GA 30014, from 2:00 PM until 4:00 PM on Sunday, April 27, 2025. Serving as pallbearers were Wes Wheeler, Davis Wheeler, Joe Doss, David Ford, Rob Delisle, and Tommy Davis.

To send flowers to the family or plant a tree in memory of Robert "Bob" Wesley Wheeler, please visit our floral store.

John Williams (husband of longtime East Georgia Chapter member Linda Williams)

With profound sadness, we announce the passing of John Raymond Williams, who left this world on February 2, 2025, at the age of 73. Johnny was a devoted husband, father, grandfather, brother, and friend. He will be remembered for his kindness, wisdom, deep love for his family, and Star Trek. Born in Copperhill, Tennessee to Carlton and Ruth Williams, Johnny grew up with strong values of integrity and compassion. He dedicated his life to his wife, children, and the soccer fields. A lifelong Tennessee fan and UT alumni, Johnny bled orange and white, proudly cheering on the Volunteers through every season. Whether he was at Neyland Stadium, watching from home, or debating plays with fellow fans, his passion for all Tennessee sports was unmatched. Beyond sports, Johnny found his greatest joy in the company of his loved ones. Whether sharing stories, offering wise advice through sarcasm, or simply enjoying a quiet moment, he had a way of making every interaction meaningful. Johnny survives his loving wife of over 50 years, Linda Williams; his children, Alvin (Lisa) Williams, Mary (David) Brown, and Michelle (Jason) Reynolds; his cherished grandchildren, Bradley, Josephine, Collin, Hayden, Paul, and Noah; his brother, Robert (Evelyn) Williams and sister-in-law Betty Williams. He was preceded in death by his parents, his brother Rick, and sister Vivian. A celebration of Johnny's life was held on Saturday, February 8, 2025, at 11:00 AM, with a visiting hour from 10:00 AM to 11:00 AM, at Scot Ward Funeral Home, located at 699 American Legion Road NE, Conyers, Georgia 30012, where friends and family gathered to honor his memory. The family requested casual attire. In lieu of flowers, consider donating to the ASPCA or your local animal shelter. Johnny will be dearly missed,

but his spirit will forever live on in the hearts of those who loved him, especially on Saturdays in the fall when the Vols take the field. Go Vols and May You Live Long and Prosper.

Unlocking Accessibility: A Guide by Sophia Curtis

Getting the Most Out of Alexa

Amazon Alexa is a powerful voice-activated virtual assistant that can make life easier. Whether you are using an Echo device or the Alexa app on your smartphone, here are 10 top tips to help you get the most out of it:

1. Control of Smart Home Devices

Alexa integrates with smart home devices like lights, thermostats, and locks. Set up smart devices in the Alexa app. Use voice commands like "Alexa, turn on the living room light." Or say, 'Alexa, turn off all the lights.'

2. Enable Voice Purchasing

Alexa allows hands-free shopping with voice commands. To prevent accidental orders, you can set up a voice code for confirmation. Go to the Alexa app, then More, then Settings, then Account Settings, finally Voice Purchasing. Enable purchasing and set a 4-digit voice code for security.

3. Set Up Routines for Automation

Routines let you automate multiple actions with a single command. In the Alexa app, go to More, then Routines, then Create Routine. Choose a trigger (e.g., a voice command like "Good morning"). Add actions such as playing news, adjusting smart lights, and providing weather updates.

4. Use Alexa as a Personal Assistant

Alexa can help with reminders, alarms, and calendar events. Say, "Alexa, remind me to take my medication at 8 AM." Link your calendar by going to Settings, then Calendar & Email in the Alexa app.

5. Make Calls and Drop In

Alexa can call contacts, send messages, and even serve as an intercom between Echo devices. Say, "Alexa, call [contact name]." Use "Alexa, Drop In" to instantly connect with another Echo device in your home.

6. Get Real-Time Information

Ask Alexa for the weather, sports scores, and translations. Say, "Alexa, what's the weather like tomorrow?" Or say, "Alexa, how do you say, 'thank you' in French?"

7. Use Alexa for Reading Books and News

Alexa can read Kindle books, Audible audiobooks, and news articles aloud. Say, "Alexa, read my Kindle book" or "Alexa, read [book title] from Audible." For news, ask, "Alexa, what's in the news today?"

8. Listen to the Bible

Enjoy listening to the Bible, narrated by 1000-character voices, as well as music, books, dramas, and more. To activate, say, "Alexa, enable jw.org." Say, "Alexa, ask jw.org to play John chapter 11 verse 32," or say, "Alexa, play original songs on jw.org."

9. Play Games and Entertainment

Alexa offers trivia, interactive games, and mindfulness sessions. Try "Alexa, open Jeopardy!" or say, "Alexa, play relaxing sounds."

10. Customize Alexa's Responses

You can create personalized fun responses using Custom Q&A in the Alexa app. Go to More, then Skills & Games, then Your Skills, then Create Custom Responses. For example: say, "Alexa, who is the best cook in the house?" Alexa: "Of course, it is you! No one makes meals as delicious as you do."

With these tips, Alexa can become a helpful companion, making daily tasks easier and more enjoyable.

Rhyme and Reason: Tactile Art

by Sophia Curtis

With fingertips that gently glide,
I feel the surface far and wide.
A bump, a curve, a textured trace,
Each contour whispers in its place.

The smoothness calls, the ridges hum,
A soft embrace, a touch becomes.
A crack, a line, a groove so deep,
In every fold, a secret is kept.

No eyes to see, but hands to roam,
Exploring each texture, like it is home.
A world of wonder, rich and real,
All in touch that I love to feel.

A vision forms with every trace,
Revealed by hands that softly embrace.
Each layer speaks, each texture sings,
A masterpiece born from simple things.

In this creation, I stand in awe,
For tactile art defies every law.
Now I feel the artist's touch,
A world of wonder felt so much.

Washington, D.C. Leadership Conference

By Stacey Orr



Pictured Stacey Orr at the Capitol.

The American Creed begins with, "I believe in the United States of America as a government of the people, by the people, and for the people..." After attending the American Council of the Blind's Leadership Conference in Washington, D.C. and advocating on Capitol Hill for the lives of Americans affected by blindness or low vision, I was able to see those three sides of our government and just how important one person's voice can be, and even more so how powerful the voices of a group of people can be. It was truly an empowering and life-changing trip that I will never forget. I hope to continue the advocacy work here at home.

When the idea of attending a leadership conference was first presented to me by Marsha Farrow and Cecily Laney Nipper, I was honored they would think of me in this capacity and excited to learn more. But, when I learned it would involve advocacy with our Senators and House of Representatives, I grew nervous, as this is something I have never been involved with in my life. I began to ask questions about what exactly we would be advocating for, who we would talk to, and what I should expect. I did a lot of searches on Google, made many phone calls to Alice Ritchhart, Cecily, and Marsha over the next several weeks, and I even revisited that old Schoolhouse Rock song called "I'm Just a Bill" that I learned as a child learning about government. In talking to my husband, who attended with me as my sighted guide, he assured me that these people we would be meeting on Capitol Hill are just regular people. He reminded me that as elected officials, they work for us. That was when the first part of the American Creed made sense. The people we would speak to are the part of our government system elected "of the people, by the people, for the people." I had a right to be there to share my concerns with them and have my voice heard. Now, I just needed to go, hear from our ACB leaders and seasoned members, and jump right in!

Our first day at the conference was about learning, meeting new people, and experiencing new things. Matt and I sat with Cecily and many other ACB members, guide dogs, and guests. Cecily introduced me to other Leaders and members in ACB as they walked by. The room was large, but it was still a little tough to navigate at times, so my husband, Matt, helped those who needed and accepted his help to find their table. Our first speaker was Claire Stanley, who introduced herself and the work of her advocacy team. She also introduced the very hard-working Hannah Park, our ACB Communications Coordinator. We heard from Dan Spooone, who is over the Fundraising and Resource Development Team at ACB. He shared about the fundraising opportunities we can do as an Affiliate to earn money. There are two main program opportunities: Brenda Dillon Memorial Walk and the Monthly Monetary Support Program. We heard about the updates to the Audio Description Program. I am fairly new to this and cannot wait to find out more about this because it can really open doors to entertainment for the blind/low vision community, and it is one of our imperatives that we are advocating for! We heard from the Accessibility and Training Support team, the membership development team, ACB's chief financial officer, and finally, our Media, Podcasts, and Radio team. I also attended a breakout session on how members perceived the effectiveness of ACB's communication. I shared that as a new member, communication can often be too much to move through, and it would be nice to have a place to go to for more information about ACB committees and their roles. Others said they wanted more office hours with staff and board members.

The next morning, with coffee in hand, we headed back to meet with Cecily and Alice to learn more about our imperatives and what we would be doing on Capitol Hill. For this conference, we were given summaries of three imperatives on one sheet of card stock. The three imperatives were introduced in last year's Congress; however, none went past Committee. The day's sessions were broken into three rounds where we heard speakers share the details, importance, and even a short role play to watch what a meeting with a congressman would be like. It was very informative, and questions were able to be answered each time. At lunch, we heard the most inspiring and encouraging message from Army Sergeant First Class Jeff Bosma from Indiana. SFC Bosma was gravely injured and lost his sight in a roadside attack while serving in Iraq in the early 2000s. After a long recovery, Jeff shared how he helped create Bosma Enterprises to provide help and employment for people with disabilities and visual impairments. The overall theme of his message was teamwork. The most touching part was when he was thanked for his service, he replied to the crowd, "You're worth it."

The following morning, we headed out early to meet with office staff at Senator Warnock and Ossoff's Office. We went straight through security and had a cup of coffee in a small café before our appointments. The interns working in the offices were very friendly, and I found out one was from my area. We had a really good meeting explaining the imperatives to Health and Human Services staffers. They took notes and assured us they would get it in front of the Senator.

After the morning meetings, we asked the Senate interns about getting over to the House buildings. To our wonderful surprise, one of the interns from UGA took us through the underground tunnels to get us from the Senate side to the House Side. There was a mini train, a bookstore, a convenience store, wall hangings, and tunnels that went everywhere. Alice asked our guide if we could make a quick stop to see the Helen Keller Statue in the Capitol Building. She was happy to help us, and we rode an elevator out of the tunnel and popped out into the middle of the Capitol Building! We saw Lady Freedom, which is the white stone replica of the statue that stands atop the Capitol. We then found the statue of Helen Keller. I was moved and a little emotional as I got to take Alice's hand and let her feel Helen's shoes and hand beneath Helen's water pump. The statue depicted Helen Keller at 7 years old holding a water pump in one hand and her other hand just below the pump where she is feeling water. Her face has a surprised look because "water" is the first word her teacher, Anne Sullivan, taught her. Cecily read to us the Braille inscription stating that March 3, the day Anne Sullivan arrived, was the birthday of Helen's soul. I wiped my tears, and we headed back to the tunnels to make it to the House of Representatives buildings to conduct more meetings and drop off materials. I had really good feedback from the Offices of Brian Jack, Dr. McCormick, and Representative Williams. Each of the three offices I met with were accommodating and took my information. I plan on following up with them in the coming weeks. We did find out that Congressman Buddy Carter is the Chair of the Subcommittee for healthcare issues. We are hoping this may help get these bills introduced and into the committees.

Matt and I ate a late lunch at a café called "We the Pizza." We still had one more meeting, while the rest of the group was finished and had headed back to the hotel. After a delicious lunch, Matt and I went back to the Senate office of Alabama Senator Katie Britt for a scheduled meeting. My dad lives in Alabama and was able to secure an appointment for me. Her staff for Health and Human Services was Ann Hall, and she was great. Matt and I both shared with her the three imperatives and why they are important, using our stories and the stories of others we know. After this meeting, we got an Uber and headed back to the hotel to meet up with Alice and her team for dinner. We shared some good laughs and stories over a delicious Irish meal of Fish and Chips.

The ACB Leadership Conference taught me a lot about myself, advocacy work, and that our stories can help make life better for others. We may not always see eye to eye on every detail, but we can listen and learn to compromise to make life better for those around us now and in future generations. I urge you to reach out and share your story and concerns with your representatives locally, at the state level, and national level. Your story matters!

A special thank you to Cecily, Alice, Marsha, Marj, and the members of GCB for making this trip possible. I will continue to pursue advocacy for our members to the best of my ability. I have already shared about our great group on social media and to those I meet, so they know who we are and how we help. It is an honor to be a part of this group of special people.

If you would like to reach out to your elected officials to share your story, please use this link to input your location to find your Congressmen for your District:
<https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>.

Letter to Brad Raffensperger, Secretary of State:

Cecily Laney Nipper
President, Georgia Council of the Blind
41 Butler Bridge Road
Covington, Georgia 30016
470-218-7885
info@georgiacounciloftheblind.org

March 20, 2025
Brad Raffensperger
Secretary of State
Georgia Secretary of State's Office
214 State Capitol
Atlanta, GA 30334

Subject: Analysis of 2024 Accessible Voting Survey Responses
Dear Secretary, Raffensperger,

I am writing to bring to your attention the results of an analysis conducted on the 2024 Accessible Voting Survey responses, compiled on February 24, 2025. This survey collected feedback from voters with disabilities regarding their experiences using accessible voting machines during the recent elections.

Survey Overview:

Total number of responses: 23 from individuals residing in ten Georgia counties.

Key Observations and Voter Feedback:

- Several voters reported that accessible voting machines failed to function correctly, requiring assistance from poll workers or family members.
- Common issues included the machine not speaking through the headphones, the handheld controller failing to respond, and initial programming errors with the voter's card.
- While some poll workers were able to resolve issues by troubleshooting, others lacked adequate training and could not assist voters effectively.
- Several voters had to rely on family members or friends to complete their ballots, undermining their ability to vote privately and independently.
- Some respondents praised the poll workers' helpfulness, but many reported significant delays and multiple failed attempts before they could vote successfully.

The data suggests that while some voters successfully used accessible machines, a significant percentage encountered obstacles that compromised their voting experience. The issues primarily stemmed from malfunctioning equipment and inadequate training of poll workers to address technical difficulties.

To ensure full accessibility and compliance with federal and state voting rights laws, I urge your office to consider:

1. Conducting a thorough review of the accessibility features in Georgia's voting machines.
2. Enhancing training programs for poll workers on troubleshooting and resolving issues related to accessible voting machines.
3. Implementing a more robust system for testing and maintaining these machines prior to elections.
4. Providing additional outreach and support to voters who rely on these machines to vote independently.

Ensuring that every eligible voter can cast their ballot independently and with confidence is critical to upholding the integrity of our democratic process. I appreciate your attention to this matter and welcome any opportunity to discuss potential improvements to Georgia's accessible voting system.

Sincerely,

Cecily Nipper

Georgia Council of the Blind

470-218-7885

info@georgiacounciloftheblind.org

Visual Hearing

by Ronald L Worley Jr.

Listening to the world's whispers unfold,
Where sounds, stories and secrets are told.
A hidden language that ears softly trace,
The art of hearing's curious embrace.

From the leaves of waving trees,
a melody carries in the breeze.
With the sound of consistent footfalls,
they echo off various walls.

To hear a heartbeat in a crowded room,
or sense a smile in the darkened gloom.
So is, listening beyond the spoken word,
A deeper truth in silence is heard.

Being attuned to the echoes and noise,
We find comfort in many joys.
In every sound, a story we behold,
So, with listening, we discover life's gold.

The Braille Challenge:

By Lucas Montalvo

The Braille Challenge is the only academic competition of its kind for students in grades 1-12 who are blind or visually impaired. Organized by the Braille Institute, it promotes Braille literacy through rigorous academic competitions. There are two parts to the Challenge. Part one consists of the regional events held across several states from January to March. Part two is the Braille Challenge Finals, where the top 50 regional participants in the United States and Canada compete in the final rounds in June.

I participated in the Georgie Regional Braille Challenge at the Georgia Academy for the Blind in Macon, Georgia, on February 27, 2025. The Braille Challenge is broken up into categories based on the student's Braille level. The levels are: Foundational, Apprentice, Freshman, Sophomore, Junior Varsity, and Varsity. I competed in the Junior Varsity level alongside several other students.

The competition itself is kind of like testing. We are taken into different testing areas where we are administered different activities, which include reading comprehension, spelling, speed and accuracy, proofreading, and, for the higher groups, charts and graphs. We use our Braille writers.

I took 3rd place in my group, Junior Varsity. I received a \$10 Walmart gift card. I really enjoyed participating in the Braille Challenge. I am able to meet kids my age who love Braille just as much as I do. I can't wait to participate again next year!

2025 AI and Cora Camp Scholarship Awardees

By Marj Schneider

On April 26 at our spring meeting of the Georgia Council of the Blind board, four students were each awarded \$1000 scholarships to assist with their college expenses. GCB has been able to offer this scholarship to blind and low vision students for many years 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 into the future.

I want to thank the members who served on the scholarship committee with me this year: Deborah Lovell, Granger Ricks, Tom Ridgeway, and Mary Woodyard. It's so helpful to have a group to discuss and evaluate the applications we receive. We are pleased to award this year's scholarships to Hadley Gunn of Atlanta, Georgia; Duane Hale of Riverdale, Georgia; William Orr of Villa Rica, Georgia; and Ayden Skipper of Loganville, Georgia.

Hadley Gunn is a high school graduate this year of Pace Academy in Atlanta. She plans to attend George Washington University in Washington, D.C., where she will be majoring in public affairs. After college, Hadley hopes to return to Atlanta with a degree that will enable her to serve the community.

Hadley has always had low vision, but she found it became increasingly challenging in high school as homework assignments became more complex. but she created her own accommodations by photographing assignment sheets with her phone and then enlarging the print and changing the color contrast. She was so successful that her grades resulted in her gaining a spot in the National Honor Society. The recommendation letters Hadley submitted to us with her scholarship application from her chemistry and Latin teachers were glowing reports of her considerable academic ability. And beyond high school classes, Hadley has taught herself several computer languages and the process of creating video games.

Hadley has also been active in clubs and community service projects at her school. For a number of years, she has helped organize a team for a fundraising walk for the Marfan Foundation. Hadley has Marfan syndrome, so her efforts to raise funds for the foundation are important on a personal level.

Unlike our other scholarship recipients, Duane Edward Hale is not embarking on his college years this fall; he will be completing his doctoral dissertation in educational leadership at Kennesaw State University. Duane has undertaken the demands of this graduate program, despite his being new to vision loss.

In writing to the GCB scholarship committee about this degree, Duane says, "My educational journey is not just personal—it is a mission. I am pursuing my Doctorate in Educational Leadership with the ultimate goal of becoming a visually impaired superintendent in Georgia's public school system. This role is about more than overseeing schools; it is about transforming them into environments where faculty, staff, and students with disabilities are not just accommodated, but empowered to thrive."

His doctoral research explores the influence of instructional coaching on the morale and self-esteem of social studies teachers in a suburban middle school. His research aims to provide insights into how coaching affects teaching practices and educators wellbeing.

Duane has an extensive professional background in education, serving in a variety of teaching positions and as a school principal. He is also passionate about community service and public health advocacy, has worked with the American Heart Association and the American Diabetes Association, and has been involved as well with philanthropic efforts supporting education and civic engagement.

Our third scholarship recipient this year is William Orr, whose last name should sound familiar since his sister, Addie Orr, was awarded scholarships in 2023 and 2024. Their mom, Stacey, has become an active member of GCB.

Will graduates from Villa Rica High School this spring and is starting this fall at Gordon State College, majoring in engineering and playing baseball for the school. He hopes to transfer to Georgia Tech and wants to specialize in healthcare engineering, with the goal of helping to design devices that will promote independence for people with disabilities. He wants to eventually pursue a master's degree in business administration to learn about how to market and make available the sorts of products he hopes to be involved in designing.

Growing up with a mother who has low vision, Will participated with Stacey at their church with the children's ministry and also in their community with projects to serve veterans. Being involved alongside his mom with so many activities has led Will to volunteer even more, both at his school and in the community. His extensive list of volunteer projects ranges from serving in student

government at his high school to baking cupcakes for clients at the Carroll County Disability Training Center to help celebrate their birthdays.

Another of our scholarship awardees who is graduating from high school this spring is Ayden Skipper of Loganville, Georgia. He will be attending the University of South Carolina this fall, majoring in data science. Ayden says he has always shown a strong aptitude for math, and when he took an advance placement course in statistics, he realized that the combination of computer science and data collection was the degree he wanted to pursue. He will be starting college with the goals of maintaining high grades and landing a job in this field before he graduates.

Earlier in his education, Ayden attended school at the Louisiana School for the Visually Impaired, where he gained a strong sense of who he was as a person with a visual impairment. He lost his sense of having a community when attending a mainstream high school, which prompted him to become involved in playing goalball with other blind and low vision youth in the Atlanta area.

Ayden has also been involved in volunteer projects, as a peer reader for young children at his local library, helping at a food pantry, and at a holiday toy drive. Ayden shared with the scholarship committee how much these activities and the clubs he joined at school have meant to him, how they contributed to his own self-discovery.

I'm sure you will join me and the GCB scholarship committee in offering congratulations to our 2025 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 four awardees every success, and we look forward to hearing from each of them in the coming year in the pages of the GCB digest.

AI Camp Induction in Georgia Military Hall of Fame Museum on March 18, 2025, at the Georgia State Capitol at 1 PM

Bob and Marsha Farrow were privileged to attend the prestigious ceremony to honor our beloved Alfred Camp and thirteen other war heroes. Governor Brian Kemp and his wife, Marty Kemp, were also present. Governor Kemp addressed the attendees of approximately one hundred invited family and guests of the fourteen Military Hall of Fame inductees. Debbie Camp Williams and her son Jason Williams were in attendance, and Marsha had the honor of sitting beside Debbie during the ceremony. Also serving as Master of Ceremony was Colonel Rick White, and his wife, Pamela White, was also in attendance. Pamela White is the former Queen of the Pasadena Rose Parade in 1969. Sargent Roger Wise, who is also assisting with the GCB Braille Flag Project. Several Cadets were in attendance, and a Cadet held the photo of each Military Inductee. The ceremony was extremely reverent and well-orchestrated. Each time a deceased Inductee was honored, a bell was rung in memory of the Inductees' military service. When AI Camp's name was read, his daughter Debbie stood with her father's Georgia Military Hall of Fame Medal in her right hand.

Georgia Blind Sports Association Announcement

Georgia Blind Sports Association will be hosting the 2025 Southeast Regional Goalball Tournament the weekend of May 16th to 18th at the Smyrna Community Center. We will need volunteers beginning with setup on Friday morning through breakdown Sunday afternoon. We will also need drivers for the shuttle van throughout the weekend.

This year, GBSA will be handling the streaming of the games via Facebook. We could use help with the broadcast and technical side of the streaming. You can email me directly if you are interested.

You can register through our website, www.gablindsports.org, or by following the link below.

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfDufR-0BBHqw5w89NwcY8Egi1KauFthJYKLcgUFsS4aLD76A/viewform?pli=1>

Thanks for your continued support.
Hal Simpson
Georgia Blind Sports Association

The End