Spring 2020 Buckeye Bulletin

A publication of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio

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The National Federation of the Blind knows that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you or your future. Every day we raise expectations, because low expectations create obstacles between blind people and our dreams. You can live the live you want; Blindness is not what holds you back.

The National Federation of the Blind of Ohio is a 501(c)3 consumer organization comprised of blind and sighted people committed to changing what it means to be blind. Though blindness is still all too often a tragedy to those who face it, we know from our personal experience that with training and opportunity it can be reduced to the level of a physical nuisance. We work to see that blind people receive the services and training to which they are entitled and that parents of blind children receive the advice and support they need to help their youngsters grow up to be happy, productive adults. We believe that first-class citizenship means that people have both rights and responsibilities, and we are determined to see that blind people become first-class citizens of these United States, enjoying their rights and fulfilling their responsibilities. The most serious problems we face have less to do with our lack of vision than with discrimination based on the public’s ignorance and misinformation about blindness. Join us in educating Ohioans about the abilities and aspirations of Ohio’s blind citizens. We are changing what it means to be blind.

The NFB of Ohio has eight local chapters, one for at-large members, and special divisions for diabetics, merchants, students, seniors, guide dog users, and those interested in Braille. This newsletter appears three times a year and is circulated by email, posted on NFB-NEWSLINE®, our digitized newspaper-reading service by phone, and can be read or downloaded from our website, www.nfbohio.org. For information about the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio or to make address changes or be added to the mailing list, call (440) 774-8077 or email barbara.pierce9366@gmail.com. For information about NFB-NEWSLINE, our free digitized newspaper-reading service, call (866) 504-7300. Local NEWSLINE numbers are: 330-247-1241 (Akron), 330-409-1900 (Canton), 513-297-1521 (Cincinnati), 216-453-2090 (Cleveland), 614-448-1673 (Columbus), Dayton: 937-963-1000 (Dayton), 567-242-5112 (Lima), 567-333-9990 (Mansfield), 740-370-6828 (Portsmouth), 937-717-3900 (Springfield), 56-806-1100 (Toledo), and 330-259-9570 (Youngstown).

Dream Makers Circle

You can help build a future of opportunity for the blind by becoming a member of our Dream Makers Circle. Your legacy gift To the National Federation of the Blind or the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio can be made in the form of a will or living trust or an income-generating gift or by naming us as the beneficiary of a retirement plan, IRA, pension, or a life insurance policy. You can designate a specific amount, a percentage, or list NFB as one of several beneficiaries. For additional information contact Patti Chang at (410) 659-9314, extension 2422 or at pchang@nfb.org.

The National Federation of the Blind uses car donations to improve the education of blind children, distribute free white canes, help veterans, and much more. We have partnered with Vehicles for Charity to process donated vehicles. Please call toll-free (855) 659-9314, and a representative can make arrangements, or you can donate online by visiting [www.nfb.org/vehicledonations](http://www.nfb.org/vehicledonations).

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# **Note from the Editor by Barbara Pierce**

When I began assembling this issue, I never dreamed that the entire state would be on lock-down by the time it was ready to circulate. We are sailing in uncharted waters. Will we have a national convention? Will the Scholarship Committee meet somehow? Will the BELL program take place in July? We do not know the answers to any of these questions. My retirement community has already been locked down for a week. As of today we cannot leave the campus for any reason or have anyone visit us from off campus.

The NFB is trying hard to preserve our Federation family life. We are having weekly meetings of the leadership to keep one another apprised of what affiliates and the national organization are doing to try to take care of people who may get lost in the system. Last evening we were updated about efforts to see that the C 3 bill currently stuck in the Senate will have protections for blind vendors and also special needs children who may get lost in the shift to online education. There is a proposal to allow the Department of Education to impose waivers to allow schools to forget about their responsibilities for educating blind kids and other special needs students. We are fighting this effort tooth and nail. The national student division is working to help students to get the assistance they need when they are facing inaccessible online platforms for their courses. The parents division is reaching out to parents of blind children who are having trouble getting help for their blind kids.

NEWSLINE® is now available to everyone who is registered, even those who live in the five states that have not funded the program. You can register by calling 866-504-7300. Only a third of the staff is coming in, so your call may not be answered directly, but you will get a call back. When you dial in using one of the numbers listed in our masthead, choose 5, papers from other states, and then 1, the coronavirus listing of all the articles about Covid-19 that they can find in the publications NEWSLINE offers. It is a wonderfully complete review of what is new on the pandemic scene.

Because the governor of Maryland closed nonessential businesses, the National Center is now closed down. This means that the Independence Market is not open. But most people are still available at their extensions. This seems like magic to me, but, apparently, calling the national number, 410-659-9314 will get you to the extensions, where you can leave a message. Beth Braun’s listing, 2369, will get you to President Riccobono. Please do not call him unless it is a real emergency. Call Richard or other Ohio leaders first.

We should all be reaching out to members who may be stranded in their homes and to people who are suddenly thrown into unfamiliar situations because of vision loss. Transportation may be a problem for those who need food or medical help. We need to keep our ears open to see how we can help.

I urge you to keep up with your email and to ask for help when you have or hear about problems. A new webpage should be opening on our national website, nfb.org, about COVID-19. Lots of resources will be listed there.

I don’t think that anyone knows at this moment whether or not we will conduct a national convention this summer. Houston is currently closed down, and we simply cannot predict whether or not the pandemic will have progressed far enough to allow people to travel to Houston. I hope that people will continue to plan to be at the convention. That is what I am planning to do, but we will have to stay flexible.

I apologize if some of the content of this newsletter is out of date. Life will get back to normal. Please stay safe and do what you can to help others.

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# **From the President’s Desk by Richard Payne**

While there is plenty of uncertainty in our world, I am encouraged by the resolve and dedication of the entire NFB-O family. I am also inspired by the genuine kindness and hard work by our team that you may not hear from, but, nevertheless, they keep the wheels of the NFB-O moving. It gives me hope to see us all coming together in this crucial moment. It is also assuring to witness our governor and his team in a collaborative effort, having Ohioans in their best interest to keep us safe and healthy.

Incidentally, I am very aware of the commitment of many, but still I ponder about the number of members who continue to fill disconnected from our movement. Though the leadership accepts the responsibility to increase our efforts to find ways to deal with this issue as it pertains to filling the void of physical communication, there is a duty that must be claimed by one and all to continue the work of the Federation. We cannot stop fighting for equality, justice to remove barriers that have limited the opportunities for the blind. There is much work to be done, so all hands must be on deck.

Therefore, we will continue to find ways to communicate without gathering in a group setting, but my personal plea is that, if you wish to use the talent that you have in other means, then reach out to me directly. There are many ways to tap into one’s abilities. Maybe you have an idea that you have considered. Reach out to your chapter president or me, and let’s talk.

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950’s and 1960’s came about out of the need and desire for equality and freedom for African Americans and other people of color. Nearly one hundred years after slavery was abolished, there were widespread segregation, discrimination, disenfranchisement, and racially motivated violence that permeated all personal and structural aspects of life for black people. I am reminded of the statement by this former National President of the NFB:

It has been said that all knowledge consists of definition and classification, and even definition may be just another way of classifying. History, for example, can be classified (or divided) into ancient, medieval, and modern; secular and ecclesiastical; American, English, European, African, Asian, and Latin American; political, economic, and social. And there are hundreds of other ways of doing it.

The blind of the nation have felt the full ramifications of discrimination and injustice. We have been denied access to equal education, denied jobs, had to fight, and even develop rehabilitation centers. The National Federation of the Blind continues to build the large movement that all of us have come to know as the National Federation of the Blind.

However, civil rights issues such as the perpetually limited accessible materials in our nation’s schools and in the blind community--to name just a couple--remain and need ongoing work.

The reality is that nobody can live our lives for us, that we must do it for ourselves, that we cannot do it in isolation, but must find a way to welcome our sighted brothers and sisters as friends, that we must also find a way to persuade our sighted colleagues to welcome us, that equality carries with it a certain standard we must be prepared to meet, and that in the process of all of this effort we must speak and act for ourselves in an organized body which has the power and strength to gain for us the goals we seek.

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# **Editor’s Musings by Barbara Pierce**

During the Washington Seminar Theresa McKinney, Lucas Cassi, and I were sitting around a conference table with one of Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur’s aides. We had given her the folder full of information from the National Federation of the Blind and discussed all three legislative issues for 2020. The aide said more or less out of the blue, “Let me get this straight. All three of you and the other Ohioans who are here today are just citizens. You are here not because you are being paid, is that right?” We must have looked startled. I assured her that we were all volunteers who believe in the importance of the bills we had been talking about. I said that the NFB did not have the funds to pay all the people she was seeing on the Hill that day. She lit up at this news. Her comment was telling. She said, “That’s the way this process is supposed to work. I am really happy that you are just citizens who care.”

I have thought about that interchange a number of times since I got home. The Washington Seminar is an exhausting effort. It is demanding, and it requires lots of follow-through. I occasionally wonder momentarily why we bother. The comment of this aide reminds me of the reasons why. The political process in a democracy is messy and often discouraging. But how else are we to make the progress we need to?

Many years ago I was having a discussion with my member of Congress. He came from Oberlin, and I knew him in town. I cannot remember for the life of me what the issue was, but it was something that we had been asking for support on for several years. This guy had never come through for us as a cosponsor. But I was back again, and I was talking with him face to face. Suddenly he gave up. He more or less told me that I had worn him down. He was tired of fighting me on the issue, so he would cosponsor our bill. This was the clearest example I know about of one person changing the mind of a member of Congress.

There is another kind of pressure that Eric Duffy, Ohio’s Legislative Director, keeps urging on us. This is statewide or districtwide pressure on members of Congress. This is what we are trying to do when we try to organize calling or writing campaigns on a single issue. Sadly, affiliate members have not been responsive to these requests. The states that have persuaded their members to call or email their Senators and members of Congress are consistently the ones who have lots of cosponsors on our bills. Ohio has to find a way to do better with this effort.

Chapter presidents, you should begin by making the contacts yourselves. I happen to know that Sherry Ruth, president of the Lorain County chapter, is pretty good about quietly doing this. Members of the Legislative Committee and the state Board of Directors are other obvious groups who should take these requests seriously and make the contacts. We would have a start on this project if the folks in these three groups would act. Once they form the habit of responding to these requests, they can urge other members to do the job as well. They can honestly say how easy it is and help those who are hesitant.

We usually send around a sample message that you can use when making your call or writing your message. If you don’t have the phone number of your member, you can call 202-224-3121. This is the Capitol switchboard number, and the operator can connect you to any Senate or House office. If you want to send an email, we try to circulate the name of the Senate aide for the bill we are working on. The email address is first name, \_, last name, @, Senator’s name. senate.gov. So Portman’s email address for this year looks like this: seth\_gold@portman.senate.gov. This is because we met Seth, and he clearly wants to be our contact on all issues this year. For the House, if you know the name of your member of Congress’s aide, the email address goes first.last@mail.house.gov.

If you call the office, you don’t have to worry about giving an aide’s name. You can introduce yourself as a constituent and tell the receptionist your message. Try to have the bill number. If enough of us call, they will learn soon enough what you are talking about. We try to get someone to call early on to lay out the argument. This makes it easier for you to deliver your message of support for an issue.

Marcy Kaptur’s aide reminds us that we are participating in the very essence of democracy when we go to Washington and when we contact offices to communicate to our elected representatives our views on the issues we care about and about which we know important information. It is nothing short of your duty to take the time to contact your Congressional Representative and our Senators when we are pressing to get cosponsors for our legislative agenda. If being a member of the Federation is important to you, this is one important way to demonstrate your commitment. We are counting on you.

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# **2020 NFB Legislative Agenda by Barbara Pierce**

As you know, each year the NFB prepares a set of fact sheets to present to every member of Congress and Senator, all 535 of them. This means that every member of the Ohio Congressional delegation and both Senators have this document in hand. The cover page is a legislative agenda followed by three fact sheets, one for each bill we wanted to discuss with them this year. We usually reprint the three fact sheets in the newsletter without the footnotes. This year I have decided to reprint the covering legislative agenda only. It provides a quick summary of each bill. This should be suitable for you to cut and paste into an email to your member of Congress. If you want to read the entire set of fact sheets, you can find them on the NFB website, or you could email a request to Eric Duffy or me, and we will send you the entire document. I hope that this agenda will be helpful and useful to you.

**Legislative Agenda**

Legislative Agenda of Blind Americans: Priorities for the 116th Congress, Second Session

The National Federation of the Blind is a community of members and friends who believe in the hopes and dreams of the nation’s blind. Every day we work together to help blind people live the lives we want.

## The Access Technology Affordability Act (ATAA) (H.R. 2086/S. 815)

The cost of critically needed access technology is out of reach for most blind Americans. By providing a refundable tax credit for qualifying purchases, Congress will stimulate individual procurement of this technology and promote affordability of these tools. Learn more about the Access Technology Affordability Act (ATAA) (H.R. 2086/S. 815).

## The Greater Access and Independence through Nonvisual Access Technology (GAIN) Act (H.R. 3929)

Advanced digital interfaces create barriers that prevent blind people from independently operating essential devices that enhance quality of life. Congress must end the digital divide that threatens the independence of blind Americans by developing minimum accessibility requirements for such devices. Learn more about the Greater Access and Independence through Nonvisual Access Technology (GAIN) Act (H.R. 3929).

## The Accessible Instructional Materials in Higher Education (AIM HIGH) Act (H.R. 5312/S. 3095)

Until a market-driven solution for accessible instructional materials is achieved, blind college students will be denied access to critical course content. The AIM HIGH Act will remove these barriers to equality in the classroom by creating a set of guidelines that clearly define accessible instructional materials. Learn more about the Accessible Instructional Materials in Higher Education (AIM HIGH) Act (H.R. 5312/S. 3095).

THESE PRIORITIES WILL REMOVE OBSTACLES TO EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND INDEPENDENT LIVING. WE URGE CONGRESS TO SUPPORT OUR LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES.

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# **I Want to Swim with the Dolphins by Eric Duffy**

Editor’s note: At last fall’s convention, many of us heard Andra Stover talk about getting to the national convention last summer. She had clearly absorbed the NFB attitude that, if you want to get there badly enough, you will find a way of doing so. In the following article Eric Duffy provides chapter 2 in this real-life textbook on “live the life you want.” Here is his story:

While at the Jernigan Institute for the 2019 Bell Academy training, my friend Raul and I were talking about various travel experiences each of us has had, and he told me how much he and his wife enjoy going on cruises. I had heard about cruise experiences from other friends over the years, but I said that such an adventure was out of my price range. Raul of course said, “No, it’s really not that expensive. You put down a small payment in the beginning, and you can pay it off over a period of eight or nine months.” Then I said I couldn’t imagine just hanging out on a ship for five days. Of course, Raul explained that on two of those days we would have the opportunity to take shore excursions. He talked about how good the food and the service were on ship, and soon I was convinced. We agreed that he and Stacie and Shelley and I would book the same cruise.

I made the deposit and slowly began to pay for the cost of the cabin. By October it was paid for. I then ordered our plane tickets to fly to New Orleans, because our ship was leaving from the port of New Orleans on January 13, 2020. Having never been on a cruise before, I really didn’t know what to expect. I was happy to be taking a trip; anyone who knows me knows I love travel and adventure. I was ready for a vacation, but I really didn’t know just what an adventure I was in for.

It wasn’t until I went online and began learning about the ship and the shore excursions that I really began to get excited about the whole thing. Online I could explore the ship and learn about what was on each deck. Then I looked at the shore excursions. There were two packages enabling one to swim with dolphins. Swimming with dolphins is something I’ve wanted to do ever since I can remember. Dolphins are majestic beings. I love the way they feel and the sounds they make. They are gentle creatures, and I was very excited about the chance to swim with them. I looked at the cost, however, and I almost passed up the opportunity. I knew that this was already going to be an expensive trip, and I wasn’t eager to add an additional expense. But I thought this might be my only cruise, and therefore my best opportunity to swim with the dolphins. I decided to buy the package.

We determined that we didn’t need passports for the cruise because the trip began and ended in the United States. We would, however, need a valid state ID and a birth certificate. No problem. We had both. My state of Ohio compliant ID is in my wallet, and I knew where my birth certificate was.

We were scheduled to fly into New Orleans on my birthday and spend the next couple of days there with our friends before boarding the ship. This was a great way to celebrate a birthday for me. New Orleans is one of my favorite cities, and I have family living close enough for a visit. It was late Friday night, as I was preparing to fly early the next morning, that I first realized that I could not put my hands on my birth certificate as I thought I could. I began looking in every possible place I could think to look. As the time for our flight drew closer, I began to lose hope. Carnival Cruise Lines was closed so that I could not ask them for advice. This is how my adventure began.

When our Lyft driver came to take us to the airport, I knew I was leaving without my birth certificate, but what I did not know was that I was leaving without my luggage as well. Shelley rolled both of our bags outside, and, as I came out of the door, I heard suitcase wheels and the footsteps of Shelley and the driver going to the car. What I did not know until we got to the airport was that I had heard only the wheels of one suitcase going into the car. The missing suitcase was mine. What was I to do? Of course, I had no choice but to go back and get my suitcase sitting on the porch. I got back in the car and left Shelley to check in for the flight. Before leaving, I said there was no way I was going to make the flight. Both Shelley and the driver said I could do it. I did not.

Shelley and I were on two different planes flying into two different cities before going on to New Orleans. I saw this as a lucky break. I thought there was at least some possibility that I could work out some kind of deal with Carnival in which I would agree not to get off the ship until we arrived back in New Orleans and no one would be the wiser about the missing birth certificate. As soon as I arrived in Nashville, I called Carnival. I explained the problem and asked If I agreed to give up my dolphin swim and remain on the ship at all times, could I board the ship? The answer came without hesitation and was very clear. It went like this: “Sir, without your birth certificate you won’t even get on the ship.”

“Isn’t there anything I can do?” I asked.

“Get another birth certificate or give up the cruise,” was the answer I got. The Carnival agent said that this was not their rule but a customs policy. She gave me more hope. I thought I could figure out something with Customs when I got to New Orleans.

It turned out that my bag didn’t make it onto the plane with me. When I got to New Orleans, it was not at all clear where my suitcase was. They told me that It would be available for pick-up around 4:00 PM. This of course was after a great deal of searching on the computer. They said that I could come back to get it or pay what I considered an exorbitant fee to have it delivered to our hotel. I said that I would come back for it.

Although Shelley left Columbus before I did, I got to New Orleans before she did. This gave me time to consider my options before catching up with everyone else. She and I got a Lyft to the hotel to find that our friends had arrived shortly before we did. We had a very nice lunch, but I said not a word about my dilemma. I did not want the barrage of questions that I anticipated. Later that evening we went to Bourbon Street and had a great time. Our travel agent George used to live in the city and knew his way around. So there were five blind people navigating Bourbon Street together. We listened to music, had drinks, pizza, and beignets from the world-famous Cafe du Monde. We did not make it to the airport in time to get my suitcase. Another lucky break for me, because by that time I was pretty sure about what I was going to have to do.

The next morning George’s daughter agreed to drive me to the airport to get my suitcase. Just before leaving, I told everyone about my problem.” What are you going to do? Can’t you send someone to your house to find your birth certificate and get it down here on time?” Of course the answer to both questions was no. If I had known where to tell someone to find my birth certificate, I would have it with me. There was no way for someone else to have gotten it after I left, because it was the weekend. Even if there had been a way to get it, it could not have been sent to me on time because of the weekend. I said I was going to send the suitcase back to the hotel and that Shelley and our friends should board the ship without me. I said I was going back to Columbus to get my birth certificate and that I would see them on board.

I had one more trick up my sleeve. I walked in to the office of Global Entry at the Louis Armstrong International Airport in New Orleans. I thought these are the people who can help me. I explained the problem, but the conversation was no more satisfying than the one with Carnival had been. My suitcase went back to the hotel without me.

I was back in Columbus by 6:00 Sunday evening. As much as I like to travel, I am always glad to get back home. But I was not ready to be back home quite that soon. Since I was back home, however, I called my friend Cassie and asked her to come by and help me cover all of the bases and search all of the places I had already been through to see if we could find the birth certificate. Of course we did not find it. I was at the Department of Health before they opened Monday morning. I got the birth certificate and made it to the airport with more than enough time to catch a 9:35 AM flight. All was well with the world. My flight to DC left on time, landed on time, and got into New Orleans a little early. At least it touched down early.

Here is where life got interesting. I figured that, if all went well, I could get to the port before the doors closed. But another plane was using our gate. A planeload of people was getting off the plane in front of us. Then they had to move that plane, move ours up, and get the jet bridge in place. I was still in my seat impatiently waiting to get off the plane. My phone rang. It was Carnival Cruise. They said they wanted me to be able to get on to the ship. I thanked them. I assured them that I wanted to get on the ship but that I was still on the plane and asked how much time I had. They said ten minutes. Again I tried. I explained what I had to do and asked if there wasn’t something they could do to help me. They said no. The ship has to leave on time! I said that I understood, and the Carnival representative said she was sorry. I called Shelley and told her I wasn’t going to make it. I said the cabin was already paid for and that she should go without me. She agreed. I asked her to find a way to leave my suitcase so that I could pick it up. Silently I said good-bye to the dolphins.

As I walked up the jetway, I was contemplating my next move. I said I wasn’t going to get to go on the cruise that we had planned for almost a year. I wasn’t going to get to swim with the dolphins. Just what was I going to do? Well there was always Bourbon Street. It just so happens that the college football national championship game was being played at the Super Dome later that night. I wasn’t sure exactly what that meant for me, but I knew there had to be another adventure ahead of me. I had hardly stepped into the airport when the Carnival representative called me back. She said that they were waiting for ten more people to make it from the airport and that I should get there as fast as I could. I wanted to surprise everyone and just show up on the ship. But I had to call Shelley so that she wouldn’t try to leave my suitcase behind. On the way to the port, I silently told the dolphins that I was coming to swim with them.

As we had traveled home from Bourbon street late Saturday night, our friend Stacie asked a great question. She said, “I know you all don’t know me very well, but, if the strongest hurricane is a category five, what category of hurricane am I?” Without much hesitation I said cat four. Raul agreed. After boarding the ship, I got my sign-and-sail card. I connected to the ship’s WiFi, and went to our cabin. Shelley said she would give me my card and help me get connected to the WiFi. I said both things were already done. She said, “But how did you do that?”

I said, “I get things done.” After going through the events of the day with Raul and Stacie, I said, “Now that’s a cat five!” They had to agree, although Stacie wasn’t totally happy about being classified as a cat four. The nickname stuck.

From the time we boarded the ship to the very end of the cruise, the service was amazing. Our food was brought to our table in our assigned dining room. This was not because we were blind, but because this is how it is done for everyone. We could have as much as we wanted of anything that was on the menu at each meal. If something was served that was not to our liking, it was replaced without question. The food was delicious. I even tried ox tongue.

There was always something to do on board the ship. There were music, karaoke, and lots of games. You could learn about acupuncture, get a massage, and many other things I am sure I am forgetting.

When we came back to our cabin in the evenings, we would find an animal towel. As our cabins were cleaned, the crew folded a towel to make a different animal each night. We would always try to guess what animal it was, but we were usually wrong. But don’t worry, on the last day of the cruise they offered a class on how to make animal towels. Shelley planned to go but didn’t make it.

On Tuesday afternoon I stopped by the shore excursion desk to be sure that I had my ticket for the dolphin swim. The woman with whom I spoke asked me if I was going by myself. I told her that I was. She said that she would have to call the tour operator because they had never had someone who couldn’t see anything at all do the dolphin swim alone before. I told her to contact them and get back to me. I did not tell the dolphins good-bye. Later that afternoon Marie called me in my cabin. She said that the tour operator said there was no problem with my coming on the excursion but that I should know that there were lots of ramps and steps and that there wouldn’t be anyone to help me. I told Marie that I knew how to deal with ramps and steps. I said I would be ready to go the next day, and that was the end of the conversation. There was no confrontation. They did not tell me I couldn’t go. Later that evening we were talking with other passengers on the ship.

A man came by and told me his name was Miguel and that he would be my guide for the dolphin excursion the next day. I thanked him, and we made plans about when and where to meet the next morning. I wondered how this came about. Who decided that I would have a guide? Would they have told me that I couldn’t go if I refused Miguel’s assistance? But then I very quickly decided none of that mattered. I wasn’t going to refuse Miguel’s assistance. I decided that this was going to be an educational opportunity for me and one for Miguel as well. I silently told the dolphins I was going to come and swim with them tomorrow. I am glad I didn’t refuse the assistance, because, when I later talked to a friend who had swum with the dolphins, she said that she had a frustrating experience. She said she didn’t know when to reach out to touch them, and she was eventually told to swim to the side of the tank and that a dolphin would come by to give her a kiss.

Miguel and I met early the next morning. I asked him if he had ever gotten to swim with the dolphins before. He said no but that he had wanted to do it for a very long time. He said that he was happy to be able to go with me. All passengers who participated in this experience were transported from the dock to the dolphin sanctuary by taxi. Another gentleman joined Miguel and me in our taxi and told us about the dolphins and the company he worked for. He said that they had a total of twenty-seven dolphins on the island at the time. The two youngest dolphins were two months and seven months old. He told us how the program started and described things as we were passing them. That morning I quickly learned more about dolphins and Cozumel, Mexico. This was an experience the other participants didn’t get.

We were told that we would be in the water with the dolphins for about forty-five minutes. We would get to pet them, hug them, kiss them, and swim with them. As we got closer to the water, I silently told the dolphins I was coming to swim with them. The water was surprisingly cool but not cold. Even cold water wouldn’t have bothered me that day. The first thing we got to do was pet the dolphins. There were two of them with my group. We hugged them by putting one hand on the top of their necks and one underneath palm up. The dolphins then rolled over so we could rub their bellies. Next those who were brave enough literally got a kiss on the lips. I got the kiss. We then got a kiss on the cheek. Finally it was time for the swim. When it was my turn, I stepped off the platform and gave my dolphin the signal as instructed. When told to do so, I took a fin in each hand and held on. I got a little drink of the water in the habitat on that ride, but it was worth it. I have always heard about how intelligent dolphins are. I wondered if the dolphins would react to me any differently because of my blindness. I didn’t say anything about this to the people around me. However, one of the guys commented that the dolphins slowed down when swimming past me.

Our dolphin expert told us that dolphins can be identified by the ridges on their fins. He said it is just like finger prints for people. He showed me how to do it. I had an amazing time with the dolphins. I silently told them good-bye and that I would be back to swim with them again.

That was not the end of the excursion. The package included all the food and drinks one could handle. It was a good buffet of what seemed to be genuine Mexican food. Yes there was tequila too.

The next day we went to the island of Progresso. We visited some shops that were close to the dock and ate at a nearby Mexican place. The food and drinks were good, and I brought back some hot sauce.

The atmosphere aboard ship was great. People didn’t seem to be in a hurry. Strangers just stopped and talked to strangers. We met people from around the country. We met people who were on their first cruise and people who were on number six or seven. Now I understand all of the excitement around taking a cruise.

I am encouraging my friends to get on board. Richard Payne says he is afraid of the water. I told him that he has to live the life he wants, and he says that is exactly why he’s staying on land. I certainly hope to take another cruise and swim with the dolphins again. Besides, I told them I would be back.

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# **National Federation of the Blind Jernigan Institute Barney Street Wing Remodel 2019**

Editor’s note: The following article is an edited version of a document prepared by the national office to describe the newly remodeled Barney Street wing of the NFB Jernigan Institute. Read it carefully to get an understanding of the renovated area at the Jernigan Institute.

**Overview**

In 1981 sleeping rooms were first built into the National Center for the Blind (now the NFB Jernigan Institute) complex. Those rooms allowed for seminars and training events to be held at the building in a cost-effective manner. Over the years the scope of our training programs has expanded, expectations for space have changed, and increasingly more attention has been paid to making our physical space match our brand values. As a result the National Federation of the Blind worked with the Jacobus tenBroek Memorial Fund to begin envisioning the future of the National Federation of the Blind Jernigan Institute property. Phase one of the tenBroek Fund’s work was to perform a full examination of the use of the space at the property and work to streamline the use and reduce unwanted clutter. The second phase was to develop a new visitor space intended to enhance the event experience of the dining room at the northwest corner of the building and provide sleeping and casual spaces that bring a sense of home within the property.

This remodeling project—costing more than $4 million—is the most extensive project undertaken at the property since the new construction on the southwest corner of the property (ground broke for that project in October 2001). As a result of the continued leadership of the Jacobus tenBroek Memorial Fund board and its commitment to use every dollar wisely, once again this project has been conducted without any debt financing. With strong fiscal management and support from partner organizations like the National Federation of the Blind and the American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults (two of the primary tenants of the building), investments in the property in South Baltimore continue to ensure that this one-of-a-kind property serves as a base for advancing the full participation of the blind in society on terms of equality. This remodeled space, like other parts of the building, has been built to last to serve our needs into the future, to be the pride of blind people who share ownership in the property, and to welcome our sighted visitors who experience it.

**Space Overview**

You can think of the Barney Street wing of the fourth floor as having four sections:

Dining room

Foyer space and living room

Casual space, including the fitness room

Sleeping rooms

The wing is named after Barney Street, which borders the property on the north side. From west (Byrd Street) to east (Johnson Street) the entire wing of the original building (circa early 1900s) is 21,000 square feet. Farthest to the west is an outdoor deck that was added in the early 2000s when the new building was built. (The wing is 23,600 square feet with the deck.) To the east of the deck is the dining room, which measures forty-nine by fifty-seven feet. Immediately south of the dining room is the kitchen. Immediately to the east of the dining room is the living room and foyer space. At the north end of this space overlooking Barney Street is the Diane and Ray McGeorge Living Room. South of the living room but contiguous to it is the foyer. The foyer allows you to continue east into the casual spaces, which are divided from the foyer by a set of glass doors. Wrapping around the north and far east sides of the casual spaces are the twenty-one bedrooms. These rooms overlook Barney Street (to the north) and Johnson Street (to the east).

**Dining Room**

Upgrades to the dining room space are intended to improve the functionality of the space and to create a more open atmosphere. Most notably the doors have been removed from the room, and two entrances now lead into the dining room through its east wall. The entrance to the south—accessible from the foyer—is the entrance that previous visitors will be familiar with using. Another entrance at the north end of the east wall leads from the living room space into the dining room. The serving line that has been at the south side of the dining room has been moved north about four feet and refaced. The counter now extends all of the way to the east wall of the room. A wall that used to be the west end of the serving line has been removed along with the refrigerator that was there. This reduces the noise in the room and makes the serving area longer. Behind the serving counter, large cabinets have been installed. Along the west wall of the dining room running from the south to the middle of the room, where double doors lead to the outdoor deck, a new drink station has been installed. Between the two entrances on the east wall there are two new stations for dishes and garbage. The new additions to the room are faced with a glossy white finish to add some contrast to the space and to connect it with the adjacent spaces in the wing. A new HVAC system and ceiling round out the changes to the dining room. The piano, which used to be in the northwest corner of the room, has been moved to the living room, opening up some space for functions in the dining room.

**Foyer**

The foyer is the first space that most visitors will encounter when coming into this wing of the building. The double doors that lead to the foyer are accessible from the north end of the Jernigan Institute building. These doors are at the end of a hallway that runs roughly from the center of Members Hall north to the Barney Street wing. Stepping through the doors into the foyer, you are looking north. You are greeted with a transition from the carpet of the meeting and office space to a luxury vinyl tile that runs through the remodeled spaces. Immediately to your right is a utility closet. The foyer is open and bright and has thirteen-foot ceilings. The space includes white painted walls, light oak-colored floors, and natural light that comes from three brand new windows in the living room at the far north end. No walls separate the foyer from the living room. The space does include three of the building’s original columns that have been painted to match each space. The columns run in a line from south to north, and they are eighteen feet east of the west wall of the space. Visually your attention is drawn to a forty-eight-inch diameter fireplace that sits on a seven-foot square base that is approximately twenty-five feet north and a few feet east of the doors to enter the foyer.

Stepping a few feet into the space and taking a right turn around the corner of the utility closet, you now have a long wall to your right (south). If you were to look at the ceiling, you would notice a steel beam running about twelve feet to the north along the ceiling. This beam was used in the building when it was a light manufacturing facility. A piece of the beam used to stick out into the courtyard, but that external piece was removed in 2002 to make room for the new building. This piece of the beam had been hidden in the ceiling, and we chose to leave it exposed (although with new paint) as a symbol of the history of the building. If it looks like it does not serve any purpose in this space, well, it doesn’t. It is just a symbol of where the building has been.

In front of you (to the east about fifteen feet) are two glass doors that will take you east into the casual space. The keycard reader is on the wall to the right of the doors about four feet back from the door. If you went about half of the way east to the glass doors and turned left (to the north) you would find two single restrooms immediately in front of you. These are the closest restrooms to the dining room. Now, let’s go back to when you turned the corner of the utility closet and had the wall on your right side. Turn to face the wall on your right (south).

**The Kindling Point Sustained**

This wall includes a large piece of art measuring eight feet by nine feet. Touch it; that is why it is there. This art celebrates the patterns of thought that have been cultivated within the organized blind movement. The art also pays tribute to the Federation’s longest serving President, Dr. Marc Maurer, by incorporating lines of his 1991 banquet address, “Reflecting the Flame.” The art also honors the stability of the National Federation of the Blind Jernigan Institute property while acknowledging that the goal is to influence the surrounding community, state, nation, and world by sharing our pattern of thought. Marc Maurer’s leadership in expanding our property and the reach of our organization are symbolized in this art that includes readable Braille. The appearance of the piece gives the impression of logs in a fire. The way we sustain our organization is by constantly building leaders, and we hope this art and the space around it inspire the development of a new core of long-time leaders of our movement.

Here is how the artist commissioned to create this piece, Kenn Kotara, described *The Kindling Point Sustained*:

The large piece is made up of five separate panels that hang together as one. Each of the wooden-framed panels is covered with thin sheets of clear-coated copper. The horizontal panel at the bottom suggests a log while the four irregularly-shaped vertical pieces invoke the impression of flames. A map of Baltimore is the background of the entire piece. Each street on the map is made up of a line of Braille from Marc Maurer’s speech, “Reflecting the Flame.” Verdigris surfaces may interfere with the readability in certain areas due to build-up of patina, a tactile experience that will change over time as more fingertips read the Braille. The location of the NFB offices and the title of the speech are in the lower right of the piece.

**The Fireplace**

When facing the art on the south wall, if you turn back to the north and walk forward, you will find carpet. When you reach the south edge of the carpet, if you were to follow the carpet east, you would find the corner of a wall that borders the east side of the foyer and runs north to serve as the eastern border for the living room. If you followed the corner of that wall to the east, you would be back at the entrances to the restrooms. If you were to follow the south edge of the carpet to the west, you would find one of the columns (this is the southernmost exposed column in this space). This column creates a natural corner for the west end of the carpet. This carpeted area includes seating for relaxing and socializing. At the north end of this carpeted space is the wood-burning fireplace. The fireplace sits on a seven-foot square platform that has Pennsylvania blue stone in it. This stone was taken out of the house that Dr. Jernigan owned in West Baltimore for many decades. The stone was removed during a remodeling project at the house and has been waiting patiently for a place where a touch of Dr. Jernigan was needed. As the leading civil rights leader of the blind of the twentieth century, Kenneth Jernigan gave us strength and a foundation to build upon. When you sit on this base and feel the stone, think of the teaching that Dr. Jernigan gave to us. He recognized that civil rights movements were not adequately sustained because they did not cultivate the next generation of leaders. He taught us to plan for the future and to provide a base for our next leaders to stand upon.

The fireplace in the center of this base is our active contribution to reflecting the flame together. The fireplace is comprised of a metal pendant that hangs from the ceiling and a glass enclosure that sits immediately on top of the base. Here fires can be burned while Federationists sit on all sides sharing stories and building relationships.

**NFB Logo Art**

On the wall to the east of the carpet in the foyer is a mosaic of the National Federation of the Blind logo, including our symbol, our name, and our tagline. This mosaic was made by Mary Degnan, a deafblind artist. Here is a full description of the mosaic:

A three-foot square mosaic features our orange, green, and blue logo, accented with white glass rods used for the canes. The symbol is set against a black stained-glass background that acts as a shimmering lake of color as the light reflects the iridescence of the dark glass. The name of the organization is three feet by four feet and has the same iridescent, black stained-glass background while the letters are done in a matte soft white for optimum contrast and visibility. The italicized tagline “Live the Life You Want” is done in mirror shards.

**Living Room**

The Diane and Ray McGeorge Living Room is named for the dynamic couple who established and grew the Colorado Center for the Blind. Through the personal commitment of these two loving mentors and tough advocates, the lives of thousands of blind people have been influenced. The living room is the space north of the foyer. There is no clear transition between the two spaces. However, the furniture cluster in the living room sits on a separate square of carpet from the fireplace space, and this area is intended to feel a little more like home than the grand openness of the foyer. The walls, millwork, and nine-foot-six-inch ceiling are black in color, known as Cyberspace, to suggest a more intimate environment. The north wall of the living room has three brand new windows—these three window openings had been boarded up since we secured the property in 1978. In the northeast corner of the space is the piano that was previously located in the dining room. On the west wall, between the two openings to the dining room, is a large countertop space with a tiled wall behind it. On the east wall is shelving for Braille books and other artifacts of the organized blind movement. On the east wall between the foyer, where the mosaic is, and the living room space, where the shelving is found, is an emergency exit door.

**Fountain**

In the middle of the living room shelving is an open space where a fountain gently fills the space with the sound of running water. This fountain symbolizes the fountain that was in the backyard of Diane and Ray McGeorge’s home. Many Federationists sat out on the McGeorge deck and received the teaching and mentoring of these two leaders while listening to their fountain. By including a fountain in this space, we hope that another generation of leaders will share in intergenerational conversations with this backdrop.

Calder Brannock, the artist from the District of Columbia who created it, describes the fountain this way:

This triangular boulder, measuring fifty inches tall, gained its reddish hue from the iron in the riverbed from which it was pulled, and its surface was smoothed for centuries by the flowing water. Placed upright over a basin, the stone will continue to shift and develop as water again flows across it in its new home. The artist spent weeks visiting quarries to find the perfect piece of Maryland sandstone. The stone is raised off the floor of the fountain’s basin by twelve inches, making the whole structure five feet tall. The stone is cut with a flat base for stability and drilled so the tube for the water travels up the center of the stone. The pump for the fountain is submerged in the water, limiting or eliminating its noise. The basin is filled half way with water to amplify the noise and catch any splashes. The fountain fits into the surrounding bookshelves and disappears into the room’s architecture.

**Casual Space**

When you come east through the foyer, you find two glass doors. When you go through those doors, you are transitioning from the foyer to the sleeping room and casual spaces. Immediately in front of you is a tiled wall. This is the back side of the entertainment wall for the family room. If you turned left (north) and followed this short hallway, you would come to carpet that designates the corridor for the sleeping rooms. If you turn right (south) and make your way around the wall in front of you, you will enter the open family room space.

**Family Room**

This large open space provides a relaxing space for Federationists to gather in a more casual setting. At the south end of this space is a brick wall that was exposed as part of the remodeling. The exposed brick wall runs seventy feet long. From west to east along this brick wall you will find a utility closet, the Barney Street elevator (which allows you to access the Courtyard rooms), and a restroom. At the far west end of the corridor that runs along the brick wall is a storage closet, and at the far east end is the west entrance to the fitness room.

The center of the family room includes fourteen-foot ceilings, an entertainment wall with seating on a carpeted area, and a number of tables and chairs. There are two exposed columns in this space. The family room has a natural transition to the east to a kitchen and counter space. The entire family room and kitchen space is nearly 2,200 square feet. At the north end of the family/kitchen space is the carpeted corridor for the sleeping rooms. The family room/kitchen space is separated from the corridor by vertical metal panels that have a series of holes punched out. These holes are in sets of six to match oversized Braille cells. Hundreds of racquetballs are available for visitors to insert into the holes to make Braille messages in the space. There are a number of breaks between the panels so that the sleeping room corridor can be accessed from this space.

**Kitchen**

The kitchen space is intended to be a space that can be used to do training or can be used by visitors during their stay. The west side of the kitchen space features a seventeen-foot long high-top counter that runs from north to south. The counter accommodates seating sixteen people on stools. The countertop is equipped with electrical service. Above the countertop are pendant lights hanging from the ceiling. The east side of the kitchen includes appliances, a sink, and cabinets. A Keurig coffee maker is available on this counter.

**Fitness Room**

At the far south end of the kitchen wall (east side of the family room/kitchen space) is one entrance to the fitness room. If you enter the fitness room at this point, you are facing east. If you travel straight ahead, you will come to the other entrance for the fitness room. Along the wall on your right side you will find some storage spaces for visitors to keep things while they are using the fitness room. During the remodeling we discovered a rainbow painted on the masonry wall which is now covered by the new drywall. An envelope containing a letter in Braille and print has been affixed to the masonry wall to be discovered many decades from now when the wall is redone. The letter was written by Mark Riccobono, who served as President of the National Federation of the Blind and President of the Jacobus tenBroek Memorial Fund during the time of the remodeling project.

Immediately on your left are two single-use shower rooms separated by a water fountain (which includes a spout for filling water bottles). To the east of the shower rooms, the fitness area opens into a thirty by forty-foot fitness area, including a variety of pieces of exercise equipment. The floor in this space is a dense rubber flooring typically found in spaces like this.

If you exit the fitness room through the door at the east end, you come to a carpeted corridor. Following the carpet in front of you will lead you to the sleeping rooms (room 20 is in front of you). Immediately to your left is an entrance to the Hang Out (this room does not have a door). Immediately to your right is a set of double doors that leads you into the Johnson Street wing offices. If you go through those doors and follow the wall around to the left and go to the end of the hall, you will find the emergency exit to the Johnson Street stairwell (this doorway was for many years the primary entrance to our offices). The Johnson Street stairwell leads to an exit onto Johnson Street accessible by taking the stairs or elevator to the second floor.

**Hang Out**

This brightly decorated room measures twenty-five by nineteen feet and is intended to be a quieter space for working or, well, just hanging out. In contrast to the family room and kitchen spaces, which are very public and open, the hang out is intended to be a smaller, quieter, public space. Along the west wall of the room are a long desk space and cabinetry. Come here to sit with your laptop, use the Braille embosser, or take a phone call. Also along this wall is an amateur radio station. This station was designed by the National Federation of the Blind Amateur Radio Division. It has been dedicated to Rachel Olivero (AD9O), who served as president of the division as well as being the Federation’s director of organizational technology until her death in February 2019. While Rachel was only thirty-six years old at the time of her death, her love for and impact on the members of the organized blind movement were significant. Her dream to have this station helped bring it into reality. The east side of this room includes a variety of comfortable seating and eclectic lighting. The walls of the room include felt panels to give it a bright look and absorb sound.

**Sleeping Rooms**

Surrounding the casual areas is a carpeted hallway that runs along the north and east sides with a small wraparound at the south leading to the east entrance to the fitness room. There are twenty-one sleeping rooms along the north and east walls. The rooms begin with number one at the far west end of the north wall, and the numbers increase to the east and continue to the south along the east wall. For reference, when you come into the casual space from the foyer and turn to the north you are walking towards room 2. When you come to the carpet, you would turn left to get to room number 1 and right to get to the higher number rooms. Rooms 1 to 14 run along the north. They all include an entry space with a couch that converts to a full-size bed, and, past the bathroom, to twin-size beds. Rooms 16 to 20 are found along the east wall, and these smaller rooms include two beds. Rooms 6 and 12 are the largest rooms and are ADA-accessible. Rooms 5 and 6 are designed to be hypoallergenic. Room 15 is a two-bedroom suite with a shared bathroom. This room includes 15A and 15B to designate the two separate bedrooms. Every room includes at least one large window measuring roughly six feet square. The rooms have been designed to minimize noise. The hallway walls in the sleeping room area are painted a sandy color called Intellectual Gray while the walls around the doors are light blue (AquaSphere). The changes in hallway colors are demarcated by a “reveal,” a metal floor-to-ceiling accent molding. The sleeping room doors and frames are a bright cobalt blue (Oceanside). Rooms include motion-sensing LED lights with push button controls and climate control panels. The goal is eventually to give each sleeping room a theme related to the history and advancement of the organized blind movement.

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# **A Mountain, a Waterfall, a Cracked Pool, and a Christmas Tree Color Wheel by Ray McGeorge**

Editor's Note: I was looking around in my computer to find something that I could reuse in this newsletter. I found the following story that Ray McGeorge wrote for me when I was putting together a small book for seniors losing vision. The idea was to compile pieces written by blind seniors designed to inspire those losing vision to work to stay active and figure out how to do the things they wanted to do. Here is Ray’s story of constructing a back-yard fountain. I chose this piece because of the reference to this fountain in the previous article, which mentions the fountain that has been incorporated into the McGeorge Living Room in the newly remodeled Barney Street wing of the Jernigan Institute. Here is Ray’s story. It begins with the headnote that I wrote for the original story:

Ray McGeorge is the first vice president of the National Organization of the Senior Blind. He has been a leader in the National Federation of the Blind for several decades. He is also one of those guys we would all love to have living near us; he does plumbing, electrical work, and machine design and building. He is also an amateur architect:

More than four decades ago, my wife Diane and I were visiting her family. One member had a patio. When I stepped out the door, I could hear the sound of water and a motor. I was told that the motor was powering a pump that forced water up so that it could then fall into the pool below. I got down on my hands and knees and examined the pool and the rocks which served as a backdrop for the waterfall. I really liked the whole setup except for one thing.

I am convinced that most sighted folks simply look at things without noticing many of the sounds in the environment. The pump on that patio was noisy. As a blind person I found that the noise detracted from the beauty of the falling water. I was beginning to form a plan in my mind. I really liked everything about that waterfall except that pump motor noise.

At this point I must mention that my wife and I own two apartments. We live in one of them; the other has been rented to the same woman for many years. I found a big fish tank in our basement, so I asked our tenant whether the previous owners had had fish. She said they had and that they had also had several ponds in the backyard. She also told me that at some point they had filled the ponds in with dirt and old cement from the pond sides.

Since I had been thinking about how much I wanted a pool with a waterfall, I went out in the yard with a heavy, sharp tool and began to search for the sound of cement. It took a lot of heavy banging and clanging. The neighbors probably thought I had lost my mind, but I was not deterred. Finally I located a pond that was almost ten feet square and about two feet deep. It took a lot of work, but I dug out all the dirt and broken concrete. I decided to use debris to create the little mountain I wanted to build on two sides of the pool. In my mind I pictured the peak of the mountain at one corner. However, the building material I had at hand was insufficient for my purposes.

Let me digress for a minute to tell you about my next-door neighbors. They were young and managed the apartments in which they lived. But they had no yard. Diane and I began inviting them to bring over their food and share our patio at dinnertime. The couple became interested in my pool project, which was visible from where we sat.

They had an old truck. Being blind, I asked them for help with transportation. They said they would be glad to drive me to the nearby mountains so I could examine boulders to use to form the base of my mountain. I found some as big as three feet in diameter; it took two of us to lift them into the truck. I also made sure that the boulders were interesting colors.

Since the peak of my mountain was to be in one corner, I wanted the mountain rounded, jetting out into the pool. My neighbors helped me place the rocks where I wanted them. This was a long, backbreaking project, but we all survived with our backs still functioning.

As a machinist by trade, I already had some of the skills I needed. One of my neighbors was a steam fitter. He became very interested in the project and donated a lot of one-inch pipe, which I badly needed. I was not rich in those days. However, I still had to purchase a goodly amount of plastic pipe to carry the water across the yard and into the basement to an old coal bin. I wanted that noisy pump far from my waterfall. I had to drill two holes through my house foundation, one to take the water from the pool, the other to pump it back out for the waterfall--about one hundred feet.

Remember, the pipe for the waterfall was on the inside of the little mountain. At the very peak I worked on the pipe with a file until I had a fan-shaped opening for the waterfall. I worked on the opening until the waterfall was about three feet wide. I finally controlled the water flow so it made a gentle sound as the water hit the pool, but it took a lot of work. The first time I turned on the waterfall, the water shot out with such force that it watered the entire yard. After many adjustments and tests, I found the flow level I wanted. I was simply overjoyed when I walked over to my patio and could hear the water clearly but not the pump motor. Boy, was I happy!

After I had all the rocks, dirt, driftwood, and plants in place, I installed a thirty-inch-high chain-link fence. We had two young children, so I did not want any accidents with the pool. As the children grew, they learned to climb over the fence, but by then they understood water safety.

You may think this is the end of this story, but not yet. My wife and I are blind, but we entertain sighted guests on our patio during the summer, so one evening, when we were sitting out there with the water splashing, it occurred to me that lighting for the waterfall might be nice.

I hunted around and finally found a Christmas color wheel. I decided to build a small rock garden in the pool corner, diagonally across from the waterfall. I built a form to house the color wheel and then cemented rocks around it. For twenty seconds one sees blue, then green, and so on. Our guests say that they like the colored lights. To complete the job, I put two switches inside the patio door: one for the waterfall and the other for the lights. Then the job was complete. Well, almost. I did have to build a fence behind the mountain so that the shed could not be seem. I then painted it green and trained a pretty vine with red berries to cover the fence.

Imagine how much we enjoyed this backyard beauty for thirty years. But after three decades I began to notice that the waterfall was not flowing at full force. I knew that the problem was that plastic pipe was supposed to last only a couple of decades. So there I was, digging a trench instead of rocking in my retirement chair. I had never thought I would be working so hard, but what choice did I have?

I forgot to say that the pool was painted a pretty blue. Please notice that I used the verb “was,” for there is one more segment to this tale. When the water level in the pool began dropping, I knew what was wrong. The old pool was leaking. I refused to do any more work. I simply drained the pool and hired a company to come and apply a plastic layer to the interior.

The coming of the halfway mark of fall last weekend brought the end of listening to the waterfall for another year because the pipes must be drained for winter. We enjoyed our last supper on the patio listening to the music of the falling water. But, when spring comes around next year, we will have the joy of hearing our long-time project come to life once again. With my wife's and my NFB philosophy, we knew we could design, build, and ultimately enjoy bringing a mountain and a waterfall into our backyard. Perhaps the day will come when we cannot physically do the repairs needed. Then we will hire workers to do the job under our direction.

Yes, I do believe that at our house we have truly changed what it means to be blind. We recruited and organized sighted people to help with the driving, lifting, and so on, but we were the bosses, and the sighted were the helpers. Blind people love beauty, and we know how to create it.

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# **An Update from Florida by Deborah Kendrick**

Editor’s note: Deborah Kendrick is a longtime Ohioan who seems to be stranded in Florida. I still consider her as belonging to us. I recently asked her to tell her Ohio family about the two books she has just written. This is what she wrote:

It’s been a crazy couple of years for me – including five surgeries, four hospitals and two rehab centers—and still I have a broken leg. I walk with a walker and long for the day when I can again enjoy the freedom afforded by exploring with a long white cane. Aside from a broken leg, however, my life is filled with blessings and my heart is full of gratitude.

I am healthy. I have been living in the condo I bought five years ago as a vacation getaway, and I have almost more work than I can handle. Since 2014 I’ve been working for the National Library Service, providing tech support to patrons who use the BARD download service, which lays claim to half of my work life. For the other half I have a nonstop stream of articles to write.

Barbara asked me to write this article to tell you about the two books I have written recently, both published and sold by National Braille Press.

**Navigating Health Care When All They Can See Is That You Can’t**

When you are a writer, everything to do and feel and hear is fodder for eventual publication. With all of those hospitalizations and accompanying tests and procedures, I had a lot of time to think about how our blindness frequently gets in the way of our receiving the medical care we deserve. We are asked personal questions in the hearing of others and spoken to as if we were incapable of comprehension. We are sometimes given medical advice that is based more on our lack of eyesight than on the condition for which we are seeking treatment, and we are always asked “How much can you see?” From choosing a doctor to knowing when to call 9-1-1, from managing medications to packing for an overnight hospital stay, being prepared and knowing how best to advocate for ourselves can have a tremendous effect on the care we receive. Being informed and staying in control are key to the best possible outcome for both mental and physical well-being.

The book has chapters on finding a doctor, dealing with outpatient procedures, handling emergencies, what to do when you are the parent, grandparent, or significant other of the patient, and much more. This is not a book about Medicare, Obamacare, or insurance plans of any kind. Rather, it is a kind of practical and philosophical guide to prepare people who are blind or low vision for those inevitable moments of interacting with medical professionals. Sadly, the book is far more timely in light of this hideous pandemic than I could have imagined.

National Braille Press is a small nonprofit, so their books do not wind up on NLS BARD or Bookshare. They are all inexpensively priced and available in a variety of formats.

*Navigating Health Care When All They Can See Is That You Can’t* is available as a single hardcopy Braille volume, or as a downloadable file in Microsoft Word, Daisy, or .brf format. The cost is $12. If you would prefer that your file format of choice be mailed to you on a USB flash drive, the cost is $14. To order, visit www.nbp.org or call 800-548-7323.

**When Your Ears Can’t Help You See**

In my initial conversation with the editor at National Braille Press, I had two very specific books in mind. As soon as *Navigating Health Care* was finished, she wanted me to get to work on the other. It felt like something of a mission, actually, so eager have I been to share its contents with blind people everywhere.

Forty-eight million Americans have hearing impairments, and as many as 2.4 million of them are blind. We say there is nothing a blind person can’t do once alternate techniques have been learned, but what happens when your leading tool for those techniques, your hearing, is compromised as well? The answer, of course, is that there is always a work-around, always a solution.

*When Your Ears Can’t Help You See* is a book about strategies for coping with hearing loss when you are already blind or have low vision. It has chapters on hearing aids, hearing aid accessories, personal sound amplification products, teaching your audiologist the unique ways in which blind people depend upon hearing, and much more. It is a book that will bring you back into the conversation and will provide plenty of resources for connecting with others experiencing similar challenges.

As I write this, it is not even yet hot off the press. It was scheduled to go into production this past week, but at this writing, I can’t be sure when it will be released. When it is, it will be available as two hardcopy Braille volumes, one large print volume, or downloadable as Microsoft Word, Daisy, or .brf format. When it does become available, I will let everyone know. Meanwhile, I hope you will read *Navigating Health Care*, and know that I miss you all. Be well.

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# **Tom Anderson Dies: We Have Lost a Friend and a Former Affiliate Leader by Eric Duffy**

Editor’s note: It must have been the late seventies when Tom Anderson, who was working at the time for the Youngstown Society for the Blind, first seriously encountered the National Federation of the Blind and its philosophy. He had been an agency man, but these new ideas touched his heart and soul. Soon he had severed his relationship with the Society and found a job as a dispatcher. He became more and more committed to the NFB and what we stood for. Tom became president of the NFB of the Mahoning Valley, a post that he held faithfully for many years. Even when the chapter disbanded, we could always count on Tom to make calls to Congress and keep the NFB as a visible force standing for the rights of blind people in the Youngstown area.

Eric Duffy is a political junky. He had that in common with Tom Anderson, so it is not surprising that the two were friends. Here is what Eric has to say about our friend and brother in the movement:

It was 1985, and I was on Capitol Hill with the rest of the Ohio Delegation to the March on Washington as it was called in those days. At breakfast I was introduced to Tom Anderson. I was told that Tom was from Youngstown and that he chaired the Legislative Committee for the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio. I had been in the organization for just about a year at that time, so I was still learning about the organization. I wondered what qualified Tom to chair this committee. I didn’t have to wonder long.

He talked about the issues we were working on at the time. Of course he was going to get his man Jimbo on all of them. I soon learned that Jimbo was James Trafficant, Tom’s representative in the United States House of Representatives. I don’t believe Jimbo ever told Tom no.

Tom also knew his way around the Ohio State House. His friendship with Rep. Ron Gerberry led directly to Gerberry’s sponsoring our Braille bill that became law in 1993. But not only did Tom come to Columbus to work on legislation for the blind, he fought for other causes he supported--children, pregnant women, and minorities.

During my early years in the Federation, I enjoyed talking to Tom about the history of the organization, organizational politics, and state and national politics. Tom loved radio talk shows, and occasionally I would hear him call in to the Larry King show or some other nationally broadcast show.

Tom served as the second vice president of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio for many years. While in that position he chaired the Awards Committee. In those days the committee met in Columbus. Very often we met at my house. That meant that, when we were not working, the group sat around and talked politics, swapped Federation stories, and ate. Tom loved to eat as much as he loved to talk.

Like most of us Tom did most of his talking on the telephone. That meant that it often took a lot of effort and patience to reach Tom by phone. When call waiting became fashionable, I suggested to Tom that he get it. I remember very clearly that he said he thought it was rude and that he was not going to put someone on hold to answer another call. Tom never got call waiting. Tom used to call me after I moved to New Jersey and ask questions or talk about things happening in the Federation. Very often he would ask about things happening in the Ohio affiliate, and I would say, well that’s really a question for Richard. Tom would then say, I know, but I thought you would know the answer. So I answered as many of Tom’s questions as I could, and I found out the answers to the questions I didn’t have so that I could give them to Tom the next time he called. That’s how it was for a while. Then the calls seemed to slow down, but I believe I got a few even after moving to Baltimore. Then the calls stopped. I didn’t know why until I learned from Louise that Tom had Alzheimer’s. Tom died in November of 2019, but we didn’t find out until February of this year. Tom was once a leader in this affiliate, and, more than that, he will always be my friend.

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# **Buckeye Briefs**

On January 25 the Cuyahoga County Chapter held its elections, and the results are as follows:

President, Jim Weiss; vice president, Annette Anderson; treasurer, Jerry Purcell; and secretary, Ryan Sima. They will lead the chapter until January of 2021. Congratulations to those who were elected.

Also, the Cuyahoga County Chapter now has a Facebook page which can be located at: https://m.facebook.com/NationalFederationOfTheBlindCuyahogaCounty/, and you can follow them on Twitter at: https://twitter.com/NFB\_OH\_Cuyahoga/

At the NFB of Lorain County’s January meeting the following were elected to two-year terms: president, Sherry Ruth; vice president, Jeannie Citro; treasurer, Bob Pierce; and secretary, Barbara Pierce.

The NFB of Springfield invited an official from the Clark County Board of Elections to bring the ADA HAVA accessible voting machine to the March 14 meeting. Clark County uses the Clear Access machine. The machine offers a demo ballot for each of us to try.

We also plan to invite ophthalmologists and optometrists or their staff representatives from Greater Ohio Eye Surgeons and from Bloom Family Eye Surgeons to a future meeting to distribute resources, literature, and talking points in hopes of increased membership recruitment. Bloom Family Eye Surgeons specializes in work with the legally blind, particularly people with low vision.

# **Blind Merchants Say Good-bye to Brian White by Annette Lutz**

As many of you know, I have been a blind vendor in the Ohio Business Enterprise Program for quite some time. During my time as a vendor, I have been blessed to meet and work with many good people, but none of them stand out in my mind as an influence in our program like Brian White. Brian, or B.W. as he liked to be called, was a vendor in our program for over thirty years and ran many facilities during that time. But B.W.’s influence in this program didn’t stop there. He was an advocate, a teacher, and a friend to others in the program.

I first met Brian when I was in training to become a blind vendor. He came from Columbus to the Cleveland Sight Center to teach all of us trainees about vending and to share some of his experience. During our training he even opened his home to one of our trainees so that the trainee would have a place to stay while he was taking additional training back in Columbus. Over the years I had the opportunity to work with B.W. on the Ohio Vendors Representative Committee, where he was a solid and constant rep over his career. On the committee he spent countless hours advocating for blind vendors and worked very hard to make the BE Program a strong and stable employment option for the blind in Ohio.

One of the facilities that Brian was most proud of having operated was the Cafe and catering at the Ohio Statehouse. During his tenure there he got to know many members of the General Assembly personally and used these relationships to advocate for the blind of Ohio. Brian was a founding member of the Ohio Association of Blind Merchants, a division of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio, and was the division’s greatest contributor, financially supporting the division almost every year. Brian never said no. He was always available to do anything asked by his fellow vendors and the NFB. He was a frequent source of advice for our members and even contributed annually to the hospitality room and our state conventions.

On February 8 Brian lost his fight with lung cancer. He leaves behind a large family, many friends and colleagues, and most notably his loving wife Joannie, who herself has been a friend of the blind of Ohio. On February 13 many of us gathered at Miller’s Ale House in Columbus to say goodbye because Brian didn’t want a funeral, he wanted a party. We shared good food, a few beers, and plenty of wonderful stories and memories of our friend.

Goodbye B.W. There will never be another like you.

JW Smith says: I am pleased to share with you that my memoir entitled *From the Back of the Bus to the Front of the Classroom: My 30-Year Journey as a Black and Blind Professor* continues to do well. The print version sells for about $15 and can be purchased directly from the publisher (Monday Creek Publishing at https://mondaycreekpublishing.com/memoir) or on the Amazon (www.amazon.com) or Barnes and Noble (www.barnesandnoble.com) websites. I am also pleased to tell you that there is a Braille version of the book, and you can order it by contacting me directly at smithj@ohio.edu. In addition to a Braille hard copy of the book, for the same price I can make the BRF files available to you to read on your various devices. The Braille version sells for $20, and I believe that you will be quite pleased with the packaging and quality of the Braille. Finally, I am pleased to announce that I will begin recording the audio version of the book starting the week of April 6, and it should be available through our network libraries as well. I’m sure, though, that you will be able to purchase copies from me or the publisher, and the cost should not be much different from the other two versions. I want to thank you in advance for your support, and you will see that the National Federation of the Blind and the NFB of Ohio play a significant role in my personal and professional narrative.

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# **Activities Calendar**

March 31, Deadline national scholarship applications

April 15, Deadline Jernigan Fund applications

June 1, Deadline Ohio scholarship applications

July 14 to 19, 2020 NFB convention, Hilton Americas-Houston Hotel

July 26-31, Braille Enrichment for Learning and Literacy Academy, OSSB campus

October, Meet the Blind Month

October 15, White Cane Recognition Day

November 6-8, NFB of Ohio convention, Crown Plaza Hotel, Dayton