

# THE TEXAS STAR

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Neva Fairchild, Editor

**April 2024**

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[Note: Articles printed in The Texas Star are submitted by the subscribers and are not necessarily reflective of the membership as a whole. The articles express only the opinion of the author.]

## **Presidential Points**

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By Chris Prentice

Greetings again, members and friends of ACBT. Spring has sprung and it is time to enhance our focus toward our 2024 Conference and Convention coming up in August. There is much to be done between now and then, including preparing for elections and considering any changes to our Constitution and Bylaws. These are important parts of our work together as an affiliate of ACB and as a viable Texas nonprofit organization. These items require work from all of us as members of ACBT. I hope I can count on each of you to do your part to be active and involved.

Issues for people who are blind or have low vision in Texas continue to arise. We must be vigilant of such issues and be prepared to address them and to discuss them with one another. I regularly receive telephone calls and emails from folks seeking resources to assist folks who have lost or are currently losing their vision. All of us should be able to direct these folks to TWC-VR and OIB programs housed in the Texas Workforce Commission. We must encourage current customers of those services to self-advocate whenever things are not going as they desire in their provision of services.

Our Spring board meeting will occur at the Conference hotel in Houston on Saturday, April 27. This is an in-person meeting. Our meetings are open to the public for any member or guest to sit in and listen. It is not a time for argument or discussion unless you are invited to comment at the meeting. I hope this season of newness and freshness gives you renewed energy and renewed encouragement to be a bigger part of ACBT. With more hands, the work goes much faster.

## **First Vice President's Report**

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By Michael Garrett

It has been said that membership organizations are a dying breed. As a result, some organizations are experiencing losses in their membership count. A number of organizations are taking more of a business approach to getting their message out and making themselves visible. However, we still believe there are benefits to belonging to a membership organization. Especially those

of us who belong to ACBT. You'll see in the "Tails from the Treasurer's" report that we actually certified 292 members which is slightly up from last year.

When you come together for a common cause, as we do, we tend to find a lot of similarities and support among our members. That support is priceless when you are facing a new future with uncharted courses. Those of us who have been blind or low vision for many years are probably well adjusted. That experience can be invaluable to someone who is in the initial stages of experiencing vision loss. So, when you can, reach out to others who may need your expertise. A friendly word, a helpful hint or a word of encouragement might be just the thing that inspires a person to keep on living life instead of giving up.

So, 292 certified members for 2024 represents a slight improvement, going against the trend of some organizations. Don't minimize that growth. Instead, let's see if we can build on it. Obviously, some chapters are really talking up their activities and bringing in new members. As more people begin to experience vision loss, we can be there for them and continue to work toward fulfilling our motto: ACBT: Advancing the Cause of Blind Texans.

## **Rockin' and Rollin' with the 2<sup>nd</sup> VP**

By Jan Gray

Hello everyone! Hope this finds you wondering just what we are going to do at Conference this year. Well, I am going to enlighten you. This year we are offering two packages for our raffle. That's right, for your \$10 donation, you have a chance at two great packages, a cleaning package that will include a robotic vacuum, and more and a smart package that I will elaborate on a little later, so watch your e-mails. We have decided to offer the "Escape Room" again. However, it will be the same theme, so if you did not get a chance to participate last year, this is your chance to use your brain to solve a mystery. We have had so many great compliments about the Carnival in the Dark that we are putting together another, with a few surprises. Just in case you are wondering, we will have more back scratchers! We are busy acquiring more prizes and new games as well.

The fund-raising committee is really excited about this one and guess what, it will be held from 8 pm. To 11 pm, which will give you an extra hour to enjoy. If you have any suggestions or comments, please feel free to email [jan.gray1950@gmail.com](mailto:jan.gray1950@gmail.com) soon.

## **Secretary Secrets**

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by Mary Alice Gary

Aren't you glad Spring is here? Are you beginning to smell those wonderful blooming flowers? Can you hear the birds singing their songs in the early mornings? Grap a cup of your favorite morning beverage, stroll out to the patio, prop up your feet, relax and enjoy nature at it's best! Life is grand. Oh, yeah, don't forget the Kleenex and allergy meds before you go. Otherwise, you May be too stuffed up to enjoy Mother Nature.

The Annual ACBT Spring Board Meeting will be held on April 27, 2024, in Houston at the Marriott Westchase and begins promptly at 8:30 AM. All ACBT Board Members are encouraged to attend in person. The Houston Marriott Westchase is also the location for the 2024 Annual

Conference/Convention beginning August 22 thru 25, 2024. Elections for the ACBT Officer positions will occur during the Sunday morning Business Meeting. Interested parties wishing to seek an Officer position should contact Nominating Chair Michael Garrett. Watch for more updates on the ACBT Groups List.

Not getting all the info about ACBT? Then sign up for the ACBT Groups List. Well just follow these few steps and you'll be done. Send an email to: [ACBT+subscribe@groups.io](mailto:ACBT+subscribe@groups.io), (that's the plus symbol after the ACBT). The announcements will arrive directly in your Inbox! All ACBT happenings, Committee events and activities are announced here. It will only take a few seconds. Remember, Keep Smiling!

## **Tales from the Treasurer**

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By Sheila Derrick

Hope this finds everyone enjoying a glorious spring. I want to thank all the treasurers and membership chairs who worked hard to send their accurate

and timely membership lists to me. An extra big thanks to the chapters and special interest affiliates whose lists and dues arrived ahead of the deadline. Please, remember, new and late renewing members cannot be sent to ACB until after May 1, 2024.

Members added to ACB between May 1<sup>st</sup> and May 25<sup>th</sup> will not be counted toward the ACBT members when votes are allocated for the national convention. If a member added during that time attends the ACB national convention, then they may cast one individual vote. No new member additions can be made to ACB membership from May 25, 2024, until the end of the 2024 convention. Changes to existing members will be processed during that time. ACBT membership reopened April 1, 2024. ACB certification was completed on March 31<sup>st</sup> and 292 members were certified in Texas. In 2023 we submitted 276 for March certification and ended the year with 311 members. This is the second year that we have enjoyed a slow but steady increase in membership. The effects of the pandemic are fading.

I encourage everyone to read our Second VP's article in this issue. She has information on ACBT's "fun" fundraising projects planned for our annual conference/convention this August in Houston. There will be both virtual and silent auctions this year in conjunction with this event.

The auctions are our single largest fund-raising event, and everyone's participation is appreciated. Watch for more information in the next edition of the Texas Star.

SEE YOU IN Houston!!!!

## **Proposed amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws**

By Peggy Garrett

### **Article 3, Section C, Item 3**

Current language:

Any member of another state affiliate cannot be a voting member of the ACBT.

## Proposed Language:

Any member of another state affiliate cannot be a voting member of ACBT unless said member resides in the state of Texas.

## **Amendment to Constitution Article IV**

### Current Language:

L. An officer or director may be removed from office for failure to perform the duties of office, failure to comply with the ACBT Code of Conduct or Confidentiality policy, or other misconduct. Such removal requires that the Board of Directors follow the procedures set forth in the ACBT Bylaws for conducting an investigation and hearing. A two-thirds vote of the Board of Directors is required for removal.

### **Proposed BYLAW AMENDMENT:**

Proposed for addition at the end of Bylaw V, Duties of Officers, as Paragraph I

In addition to the above duties, all officers, directors, chapter, and affiliate representatives are expected to abide by the policies adopted by the membership of ACBT, or its Board of Directors, including but not limited to Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest policies. The Board of Directors is authorized to investigate any charges of misconduct or failure to perform the duties of office made against an officer, director, chapter representative, or affiliate representative, using the following procedures:

1) to be considered any charges of misconduct or malfeasance must be put in writing and sent to the ACBT president. If the accused is an officer or director, the letter must be signed by a minimum of five other Board members. If the accused is a chapter or affiliate representative, the letter must be signed by a minimum of three members of the chapter or affiliate board, including the president.

2) Upon receipt of the letter containing charges, the ACBT president will conduct an investigation. The president may appoint an ad hoc committee of up to five Board members to assist with the investigation.

- 3) If it is determined that the charges have merit, the ACBT Board will hold a hearing, in executive session, either at the next regularly scheduled Board meeting, or at a specially called Board meeting, whichever can occur earliest.
- 4) During the hearing, the president will report the findings of the investigation and give the accused an opportunity to answer the charges.
- 5) A two-thirds vote is required to remove an officer, director, chapter representative, or affiliate representative from office. The accused retains the right to vote on the question of removal.

End of proposed amendments.

Please review these proposed amendments prior to the business meeting at the annual conference/convention in Houston on August 25, 2024. If you have questions, you may contact the Committee Chairperson, Peggy Garrett at 832-242-4941.

Constitution and Bylaws Committee Members:

Peggy r. Garrett, Chair  
Melanie Brunson  
Michael Garrett  
Kenneth Semien Sr.  
Sheila Derrick  
Mary Alice Gary  
Chris Prentice

## **WHAT IS THE SKIP PROGRAM?**

By Larry Johnson

The Texas Workforce Commission recently launched its Senior Keys to Independence (SKIP) Program” which is a 4-day small group immersion training program in independent living skills, conducted in an apartment-style setting for older Texans who are newly experiencing vision loss. Specialized

training includes: Home Management, Meal Preparation, Personal Care, Mobility Training, Assistive Technology, Recreation and Leisure. Currently the SKIP trainings sessions are being offered monthly only in San Antonio and Dallas with up to 8 participants in each class.

Insufficient funding and staffing of the OIB (Older Individuals who are Blind) programs make it impossible for the Texas Workforce Commission, (the agency charged with this responsibility) to serve the nearly 400,000 older Texans who currently experience vision loss. Securing targeted state funding for additional SKIP Regional Vision Loss Group Training Centers in other cities throughout the state could offer the chance to complement the OIB program by providing independent living skills training to a larger number of older Texans recently experiencing vision loss.

## **Advocacy Committee Report**

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By Kenneth Semien, Sr.

The American Council of the Blind of Texas (ACBT) Advocacy Services/Legislation Committee is working on your behalf, and we encourage you to get involved in our advocacy efforts. We can achieve better outcomes with your support.

Since my last writing, some of us participated in the American Council of the Blind (ACB) DC Leadership Conference during early March. In addition to connecting with the offices of members of Congress in-person and virtually to share personal stories and provide examples of why legislators should strongly consider and support our legislative agenda, we were able to join in on the Legislative Seminar to witness impactful presentations from agencies and organizations in relation to the ACB Legislative Imperatives, which are as follows:

- The Websites and Software Applications Accessibility Act
- Communications, Video, and Technology Accessibility Act
- Medical Device Nonvisual Accessibility Act
- The Medicare and Medicaid Dental, Vision, and Hearing Benefits Act.

Due to the efforts of members from around the nation, we were able to influence legislators to sponsor and cosponsor bills in support of greater access for people who are blind or have low vision.



You are invited to request background information on any of the above imperatives.

On the state level, we met in January to determine the ACB of Texas 2024 Advocacy and Legislative Priorities, and they are as follows:

Advocacy related issues include:

- Request that eye care Professionals provide client referrals to ACBT for support. (The idea is that each of us can speak to our respective eye doctors concerning patients they treat that would benefit from support, resources, and information). Let your doctor know that we are here and ready to assist. Individuals who are new to vision loss need us to be there for them.
- Improve Ride share Experiences (Uber and Lyft) for Texans with Disabilities. (Report poor service experience to Uber, Lyft and any other ride share service we use when traveling, then report repeated issues to the United States Department of Justice).

Legislative Priorities include:

- Fraud Prevention Regulations Related to Service Dogs
- Equal Access to the Absentee Ballot
- Increase Funding for TWC Older Individuals Who are Blind (OIB) Program
- Enhance services for TWC Older Individuals who are blind (OIB) Program. (Increase number of SKIP training centers).

Advocacy efforts continue, although the next Texas legislative session won't begin until January of 2025. It is imperative that we place an emphasis on continuing to build relationships with our legislators. If you need support to identify who represents you within the Texas Legislature, let us know. Be sure to read the Texas Star article submitted by Mary Witherspoon on the East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind.

Currently, the Advocacy Services/Legislation Committee consists of Melanie Brunson of the Alamo Council, Mary Witherspoon of the Dallas Area Council, Michael & Peggy Garrett of the Houston Council, and Kenneth Semien, Sr. of

the Beaumont Area Council, [semien.k@outlook.com](mailto:semien.k@outlook.com) Desk: 409-866-5838,  
Mobile: 409-201-3040.

## **Auction Committee Update**

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By Sara Freeman Smith

The State Conference Auction Committee is off & running! All we need is your donation! The 46<sup>th</sup> annual state Conference & convention will be held in person in Houston, Texas at the Marriott Westchase Hotel from August 22 – 25, 2024. We are off to a great start with some generous donations already submitted and are now actively soliciting donations from our chapters, affiliates, members, supporters, and businesses. Thank you for making last year's virtual and silent auctions very successful! This year's auctions will employ the same process.

The primary auction will be held virtually on Sunday, August 18 at 6pm CDT using the Zoom platform. A smaller group of auction items will be available for a Silent Auction held Saturday evening, August 24 at the hotel.

Look for emails in April to the Chapter leaders, affiliates and vendors requesting donations for the auction. Don't wait until the last minute. Since our main auction will be virtual again, it will be just like last year with an auctioneer and a detailed description of the items up for bid.

The committee encourages everyone to begin planning and soliciting early for donations within their local communities. The committee has set a deadline of Friday, July 19, 2024, for confirmation of your donation with full details and/or receipt of all items. Only handmade, new or items in their original packaging will be accepted for the auction along with their approximate value. Since the primary auction is virtual, with only a few items on display at the hotel for the Silent Auction, many donations may be kept by the donor until awarded to the highest bidder & can then be sent directly to the winner. We look forward to having some great items and lots of fun this year as we welcome ACB members from across the US to the auction on Sunday, August 18. If you have any questions, please contact the Co-Chairs Gayle at [metoyer903@comcast.net](mailto:metoyer903@comcast.net) or 281-794-2012 or Sara at [sarafreemansmith@gmail.com](mailto:sarafreemansmith@gmail.com) or 713-882-3000.

## **ACBT: Building Bridges in the Bayou City**

By Peggy Garrett

The ACBT 46th annual Conference/Convention is being held in Houston at the Marriott Westchase Hotel located at 2900 Briarpark Drive, Houston, Texas 77042 August 22-25. The room rate is \$109.00 plus 17.9% tax=\$128.51 for one or two people. There is a \$10.00 charge for one or two additional people. A free breakfast is included for two people per room.

The Conference/Convention registration fee is \$125.00. This includes three meals, the annual luncheon on Saturday, the Banquet on Saturday evening, and the Awards Breakfast on Sunday morning as well as all sessions and of course the exhibit hall! Pre-registration will open in June and the deadline to receive the “early bird” rate is August 5. Registrations received after that, and on-site registration will be \$135.00.

Please remember that onsite registration cannot guarantee meals as the final meal order will have already have been determined.

Stay tuned for updates and information on sessions and tours as the Planning Committee finalizes the program and exhibitors!

If you have questions or need additional information, contact Peggy Garrett, Conference/Convention Coordinator at [prcgarrett@sbcglobal.net](mailto:prcgarrett@sbcglobal.net) or 832-242-4941.

## **Member Morale Committee Update**

by Jan Gray

The Member Morale Committee has been hard at work to offer interesting topics via Zoom to all members. In February, we had members of the US Blind Golfers Association. Boy, did they have some good stories! In April, we will have someone from the Blind Athletes Association.

Be sure to attend our workshop at the ACBT Conference. The title is, “Expanding New Horizons.” It will be interactive, and Neva Fairchild, Chris

Allen, and Jan Gray will moderate the discussion. We hope you will attend and enjoy the workshop while you learn something new! Keep your eyes open and watch for more info as time gets closer.

The Member morale Committee also has the task of selecting the First timer's Award, and the Who's Who among Blind Texans award. We will be sending out the qualifications early in April, so be thinking about any nominations you might want to make.

## **From the Nominating Committee**

By Michael Garrett

Elections for the ACBT Board will take place at the annual convention to be held in Houston from August 22 thru 25, 2024. This being an even numbered year, all officer positions are up for election. The First Vice President has termed out and that position will be open.

With this in mind, it presents a great opportunity for you or someone you know to step forward and take on a leadership position in ACBT. You may submit your name or the name of someone else for an officer position. If you submit the name of someone else, please be sure that person is qualified and willing to serve. Each candidate seeking an officer position must submit a short biographical sketch. Of course, nominations can come from the floor, but each candidate must be qualified and able to fulfill the office being sought. In addition, candidates from the floor must also have a short bio which can be read before the assembly during the elections process.

The candidate's bio should consist of a brief opening paragraph stating the particular office being sought and answers to the questions which have been prepared by the Nominating Committee. Please limit your responses to no more than two pages Arial font, 16 point. It is imperative that each candidate be familiar with the office being sought as clearly stated in the ACBT Constitution and Bylaws. Below are the questions that must be completed and submitted to the Nominating Committee.

1. What are your reasons for seeking this office?
2. What experience and expertise do you bring to this office and to ACBT?

3. What actions would you take to help ACBT fulfill its mission and achieve its goals?
4. Fundraising is critical to assure any nonprofit organization stays alive. Therefore, name two fundraising ideas and tell how you would help make them a success for ACBT.
5. When do you believe it is necessary for an organization to change its practices, policies, and procedures?
6. What do you see as the major challenges for ACBT over the next 3 years and how would you help manage them?

All Candidate bios and answers must be submitted electronically by email by May 31, 2024.

Send responses to Michael Garrett, Nominating Committee Chairman at: [megarrett4443@sbcglobal.net](mailto:megarrett4443@sbcglobal.net) before the deadline.

Remember, we must elect officers whose experience, knowledge and dedication will make ACBT an even more recognized entity in the blindness community with a welcoming and diverse membership and a willingness to help us fulfill our motto: ACBT: Advancing the Cause of Blind Texans.

### **Texas Lighthouse Series: Featuring East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind (ETLB)**

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By Mary Witherspoon for the ACBT Advocacy Services / Legislation Committee

Based in Tyler, ETLB employs about 70 people, half who are BVI. Manufacturing jobs are in-line with the US AbilityOne Program. Along with local adjustment to blindness training, ETLB has many unique programs open to students across Texas, not just the Tyler area. Each June, "Camp Lighthouse" gives BVI high school students six days of fun social and educational activities on the University of Texas at Tyler's campus. For high school graduates heading to college, the annual College Prep Program is a five-week on-campus experience with transition support. Students earn three credit hours at Tyler Junior College (TJC).

Over 600 area nursing students have enjoyed Vision Awareness Training providing guidance for supporting BVI patients. ETLB has an expansive,

nationwide virtual Assistive Technology curriculum. The Microsoft Office Beginner to Intermediate (MOBI) program is a fast-paced two-week course to master navigational skills, features, and commands in Microsoft Office Suite and Google Chrome. Completion of MOBI sets learners up for the advanced ProMOTE course, an intense four-week program preparing learners for competitive, upwardly mobile, computer-based careers. It simulates a modern, 8 to 5 PM remote-work environment with timed assignments in multiple, simultaneous office applications and web conferencing programs.

Since approved instructors in Texas are vital, the Assistive Technology Instructor Program (ATIP) expands on professional skills and teaching capabilities. Starting in April, ATIP can be part of a TWC VR Services Individualized Plan for Employment. Please visit the ETLB website at [www.easttexaslighthouse.org/our-services/](http://www.easttexaslighthouse.org/our-services/) to learn more.

## **Braille Revival League of Texas**

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By Neva Fairchild

A new report shows there are 10,930 children in K through 12 who are blind or have low vision in Texas. Out of those, 847 are learning braille. This number is almost double what the report indicated last year, not necessarily because more children are being taught braille, but because the survey questions were clarified, so that we may have a clearer picture than we have had in the past. Still, this number is appallingly low. BRLT is working hard to increase this number. Children who cannot read print, even large print, at a rate to achieve comprehension, need the opportunity to learn braille to achieve their maximum potential, not only in school but in their careers when school is over.

Older people losing vision later in life can continue enjoyable pursuits like playing cards with friends, labeling pantry and hobby items and jotting down a phone number to call later, if they learn just the 26 letters of the alphabet and a few symbols like the number sign, a dash or a period. If you want more information about learning braille yourself, or want to encourage someone you know, and need information about resources, call Neva Fairchild at 972-897-4171.

Join us to promote braille in your community. Send \$15 to:

BRLT  
1406 Wilshire Blvd.  
Austin, TX 78722

## **Library Users of America-Texas**

By Gayle Metoyer

Greetings LUAT members and friends:

Happy Spring! Wherever you are, I hope that you are enjoying the Spring weather. It is also that time of year to promote librarians and library services. National Library Week was April 7 to 13 this year. April is a good time to find out what services your local library offers and to take full advantage of the Texas talking Book Program. Even though the week will probably be over by the time you read this article, keep in mind that library services are always there for you.

Please check out your local library to see what services they may offer. Some local libraries have book clubs, offer computer services, and even audio books.

Of course, you can always contact the Texas Talking Book Program offered by the National Library Services at 800-252-9605 for all of your reading and disability information needs.

Happy Reading!!

## **AH, SUGAR, SUGAR!**

By Jan Gray

Recently I came across some fun facts about sugar. Here goes! Sugar is the oldest commodity to be traded, having been recorded as far back as 2000 B.C. The oldest sugar cane refinery in the U.S. was established in Louisiana in 1795. Florida is the largest sugar cane producer in the U.S. and Texas is

number 4. The world's largest sugar cane producer is Brazil, and the U.S. is number 5. Sugar cane is part of the grass family and grows to be 20 ft. tall. The sugar content of a cane is between 12 and 15%. Sugar cane is not naturally white, and so to take out the discoloration and make it white, it is filtered through animal bone char to make the crystals white. Refiners use 99% of the sugar cane for not only sugar but other products to include: ethanol, molasses, rum, alcohol, animal feed. Approximately 40 to 45% of the sugar produced in the U.S. is from sugar cane.

The first sugar beets were grown in France and Germany in the 1700's and it was a German chemist who developed the process to refine the sugar. Sugar Beets are a root vegetable and grow to be approximately 2 pounds. They have green leafy tops, which can be eaten in salads, or fed to cattle and sheep. Sugar beets are grown in cooler states and processed in the fall. They have a sugar content of 12 to 21%. They are naturally white and therefore the crystals are white after being dried and spun. The oldest sugar factory in the U.S. was established in 1890 in Grand Island Nebraska.

Russia is the world's largest sugar beet producer, and the U.S. is #3. Sugar beets account for about 55 to 60% of the sugar produced in the US. Byproducts of sugar beets are animal feed, ethanol, molasses, and pulp, used to feed cattle, and alcohol for spirits. Just like sugar cane 99% of the beet is used to make something. I personally cannot tell any difference in the taste of the two sugars, but some chefs say that they cook differently. In the 1800's it is said the average American consumed 4 lbs. of sugar per year. Today it is estimated that we consume 152 lbs. per year, which is 6 cups of sugar per week. Think about that alarming fact the next time you reach for that second piece of birthday cake!

## **Spring Has Sprung in Austin, and So Has ACBT!**

By Marcus Manning

Greetings, ACBT family! Spring has sprung here in Austin, and we're blooming with excitement. While the weather might be unpredictable, one thing's for sure: the Austin chapter is buzzing with activity!

We've been busy organizing ourselves into standard and subcommittees, making sure everything runs smoothly. And the best part? Our membership is



growing like crazy! It's been fantastic getting to know each other and dive deeper into what makes ACBT so special.

On the 13th of April, we proudly sponsored and participated in the Foundation Fighting Blindness VisionWalk. This incredible organization raises funds to support research on cures for various inherited retinal eye conditions. It's a cause close to our hearts, and we were proud to lend a hand in our comfy walking shoes!

Speaking of getting together, don't forget about our chapter meetings! We meet every 3rd Saturday of the month from 10:30 am to 12:00 pm at the Conley-Guerrero Senior Activity Center. Come join us for lively discussions, friendly faces, and all things ACBT!

## **Beaumont Area Council Update**

By Cynthia Julun

Happy Spring from the Beaumont Area Council of the Blind. We have been working on increasing our membership. Discussing taking advantage of the freedom to vote and having the equipment and right to do so independently. We also talked about how as we age it is important to get up and get moving to maintain our physical, mental, and emotional health. This topic included the benefits of chair exercise. However, prior to choosing an exercise regimen one should consult their physician. chair exercising can improve conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and anxiety. It can also assist with improving circulation, flexibility, blood flow, and strengthening muscles. As well as keeping joints active and lubricated. When deciding to participate in this type of exercise, be sure to have a sturdy chair to help to prevent falls. Overall, exercising can improve our quality of life.

In March we had the honor of having two guest speakers. One spoke about Medicaid and what benefits it can offer some individuals. We were also informed about the difference between Medicare and Medicare dual plans. The second speaker provided remarks regarding Non-Twenty-Four. We were given an update on the non-24 research being conducted. This condition is not common among individuals who are not visually impaired. However, sighted people can suffer from a similar condition. Once again, in order to improve or have a good quality of life get up and get moving. You don't have to do it

alone. Grab a friend and get on the dance floor, walk around the garden, or go bike riding. Most of all encourage one another!

## **Dallas Area Council Update**

By Mary Witherspoon

Advocacy in Action describes DACB's current projects! Plans are coming together for a fun filled Hawaiian Luau fundraiser auction for the chapter's scholarship fund. On Saturday May 18, you will find members at the Olive Garden on Technology BLVD wearing their Hawaiian shirts, leis and maybe a grass skirt or two while making wild bids on items of immense value. Ha, ha, ha! Hilda Alaniz is chairing the event. Come join us as we make growing advocacy for a blind college student fun.

On a more serious advocacy effort, for the past year, members who will see their eye doctor in the coming months have picked up a packet of brochures at the chapter meetings. The packet includes 3 TWC older individuals who are blind program brochures, 3 TWC Rehabilitation Services Brochures and a DACB brochure. Members can hand this packet directly to their doctor or office staff to educate them about DACB as well as the state rehabilitation programs available to people 14 and older. With this project, DACB hopes our own eye doctors can then give patients the contact information to begin their journey adapting to life with a visual impairment. That journey could include visiting a chapter meeting! To stay informed, please check our website at [www.dallasacb.org](http://www.dallasacb.org) anytime.

## **El Paso Council Update**

By Eleanor Coldwell

President Gema Cenicerros has established a new routine for our Council. Meetings are still on the 3rd Saturdays, from 10:00 to 12:00. But now, we break for lunch after each meeting, then we reconvene to listen to the day's guest speaker. In March, our guest was psychologist, Ms. Perla Aranda, who spoke to us regarding anxiety and depression. We learned several coping skills and shared some of our own. April's guest will speak about Diabetes. May's topic will concern becoming a Hospice volunteer. We are gearing up our

plans to bring awareness regarding BVI skills to the public through brochures and fliers distributed at markets and church events.

Immediate Past President, Alfredo Perez and Treasurer Kathy Perez have designed our beautiful brochures and have given each member our own name tag to wear when we represent our council. On the back of each name tag is a QR code which will take the reader directly to our EPCB Facebook page.

## **HOWDY FROM THE FORT WORTH CHAPTER**

By Jan Gray

The Fort Worth Chapter has been meeting in person and reacquainting ourselves with each other. We have several new members and we have been doing a lot of question-and-answer sessions. We participated in an Easter Egg Hunt for children who are Blind or have low vision in March. We provided a craft with door hangers and tactile stickers. A great time was had by all. In April we will have a speaker on fraud prevention. We have our annual scholarship search, and we are planning a picnic before it gets too hot.

## **Houston Happenings**

By Michael Garrett

The Houston Council of the Blind (HCB) continues its quest to be visible in the community and informative to our members. During the first quarter of 2024, we held our monthly meetings in person on each third Saturday of the month. Activities and guests included: a Community Outreach Coordinator from 211 who spoke to us on cold weather preparedness. He told us about cold weather risks and disaster preparedness resources. Another guest represented Smart Cremations and shared with us the pros and cons about cremation. We also welcomed a presentation by the Education and Training Manager from the Lighthouse of Houston who spoke on the new education and training opportunities at the Lighthouse.

We continue to exhibit at events in and around the Houston area. We had a table at an Empowerment seminar which brought together a number of organizations dealing with the intersection of disability, ethnicity, and poverty.

We were also represented at the HAVIN (Houston Area Visually Impaired Network) 2024 Expo.

HCB is excited to welcome members and friends to the 2024 ACBT Conference and Convention in Houston this August. Preparations are ongoing and the hope is that each attendee will be positively impacted by this experience. We are also beginning to plan for this year's Houston Community White Cane Safety Day celebration.

We continue to receive a number of calls to our office from people needing information and referral. We've actually gained a few new members as a result of those calls. It's all related to us trying to live up to our motto:  
HCB: Helping, Caring, Building

## **American Council of the Blind of Texas**

The ACBT Board of Directors is comprised of 5 elected Officers, 4 Directors, an Immediate Past President, and an appointed representative from each Chapter and Special Interest Affiliate. The appointed representatives are selected by their respective Chapters or Special Interest Affiliates. Directors are elected for staggered 4-year terms. Below is a listing of all the state officers and elected board members along with their contact information.

### **ACBT State Officers:**

#### **President:**

Chris D. Prentice (2022-2024, First Term)  
(806) 283-8227  
cprentice61@att.net  
Local Chapter: Austin Council

#### **First Vice President - Membership Chair:**

Michael E. Garrett (2022-2024, Third Term)  
(281) 438-9665  
megarrett4443@sbcglobal.net  
Local Chapter: Houston Council

#### **Second Vice President - Fundraising Chair:**

Jan Gray (2022-2024, First Term)  
(817) 232-4295  
Jan.gray1950@gmail.com  
Local Chapter: Fort Worth Council

#### **Treasurer - Finance & Budget Chair:**

Sheila Derrick (2022-2024, No Term Limits)  
(817) 507-3964  
sjderrick212@hotmail.com  
Local Chapter: Fort Worth Council

**Secretary:**

Mary Alice Gary (2022-2024, No Term Limits)  
(915) 269-2119  
ma-gary@att.net  
Local Chapter: Alamo Council

**Immediate Past President - Constitution & Bylaws Chair:**

Peggy R. Garrett (2022-2024)  
(281) 438-9665  
prcgarrett@sbcglobal.net  
Local Chapter: Houston Council

**ACBT State Directors:****Board Member:**

Louann Williams - Director (2021-2025, Second Term)  
(210) 884-7778  
la.lozano.williams@gmail.com  
Local Chapter: Alamo Council

**Board Member:**

Alfredo Perez, Director (2023 Appointed, First Term)  
Local Chapter: El Paso Council