

# THE TEXAS STAR

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Neva Fairchild, Editor

**July 2023**

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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

As I typed this column, the ACB national conference was about to be fully up and running. As you read this, it is time to register for the ACB of Texas annual conference in San Antonio, coming up August 24 – 27, 2023. There will be several totally new events and sessions at this conference. Please plan to attend and stay for the entire weekend. Attending will be a great move on your part.

We need more folks to step forward to be involved in our committees. ACBT is striving to make a better place for all Texans with visual impairments. That takes time and effort on the part of all of us, including the newest and oldest of our members and friends. If you are new to ACBT, join a committee and learn by getting your hands dirty. We can find tasks that you can do to benefit ACBT and all Texans with visual disabilities.

If you have any new ideas of tasks or projects that you believe ACBT should consider, please let me know or provide that information to your chapter representative to the ACBT Board or contact any other member of our Board.

I hope to see you in San Antonio in August! -

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

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By Michael Garrett

The Membership Committee invites you to “Ride the Wave of Accessibility” with us in San Antonio. This year’s convention promises to be filled with lots of inspirational, educational and entertaining events. You will be smoothly ferried along a scenic route beginning with a River Walk boat tour. The waves will gently carry you through the exhibitor’s cabin so that you can feast your senses on all of the trinkets and treasures there. Then you will be conveyed to a number of sessions designed to peak your interests. Stop off at the Hospitality cabin to get refreshed and then resume riding the

waves. More sessions, more exhibits, how about fencing or line dancing and oh yeah, there are some exciting activities planned for attendees.

But, in order to experience all of these things, you have to be there. As a member, you are entitled to all of it! Tell someone and bring someone! Come and join us or you'll miss the boat.

ACBT: Advancing the Cause of Blind Texans.

## **Second Vice President's Report**

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By Jan Gray

Is it Fund Raising or FUN Raising?

It is getting closer to Conference time, and I wonder, where has the time flown to. The fundraising committee has been working hard to make our fundraisers this year fun for everyone. First, I will tell you that the Drawing this year is for a Cosori Smart 8 function all in one, grill/air fryer, with a \$169 meat package from Omaha Steaks, a talking meat thermometer, and an Echo dot. The tickets are \$10 each. You do not have to be present to win, and you can buy your tickets on the conference web site. Next, the Friday night entertainment is a Carnival in the Dark, called so because if you have some vision, you will have to wear a blindfold to participate in the games. We will provide blindfolds and you don't have to keep them on all the time. There will be clowns, a Face painter, a Balloon Artist, and a glitter tattoo artist. This is my kind of tattoo because it only lasts for about a week! There are games with prizes, door prizes and surprises! The committee has been working hard to provide a good time for everyone. Friday and Saturday during the day we are hosting an accessible Escape room for those adventurist souls. It is also a fundraising event, the first in the state of Texas to our knowledge and we are so pleased to be the ones hosting it. Oh yes, I forgot to mention, the Carnival costs \$12 if you register ahead of time and \$15 at the door. The Escape room will cost \$25, and you must

register ahead of time for it. We are looking forward to seeing Everyone in San Antonio in August!

## **Secretary Secrets**

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by Mary Alice Gary

Hey y'all! It's already July and man "The Heat is on!" I hope everyone is staying cool. It's almost time for the 2023 ACBT Conference/Convention here in good old San Antonio! Yep, from August 24 through 27, 2023, ACBT will be gathering here for all kinds of fun. We get to learn how to Line dance and possibly how to fence (with swords). Want to find your way out of an Escape Room and have fun at a carnival, for an additional cost? No, I'm not kidding! You can choose one or all. It's up to you. You can pay and register for all events at the same time.

Keep updated on all the events happening this summer by subscribing to the ACBT Groups list by sending an email to link: [ACBT+subscribe@groups.io](mailto:ACBT+subscribe@groups.io) (that's the plus symbol after the ACBT). With the new list, you can actually reply just to the sender or everyone. To subscribe to the ACB Community Events Groups List, just email your request to [Community@acb.org](mailto:Community@acb.org). The daily list includes all the topics, times, links and call-in information to participate in any of the calls. Oh, and don't forget about using your Alexa device to listen to ACB Radio, now ACB Media Network. Just ask Alexa to "Enable ACB Media". She will prompt you to select stream 1-10.

Hope to see you in August!

## **Tales from the Treasurer**

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By Sheila Derrick

I hope everyone is planning to meet in San Antonio for the 45<sup>th</sup> ACBT Conference/Convention this August 24 – 27, 2023 at the DoubleTree by Hilton San Antonio Airport Hotel . Please read more in this issue of the Star about the workshops, social events, and 2 brand new entertainment choices plus our two auctions.

As our Business Meeting with elections will be only in-person this year, our usual rules for voter certification will apply. The deadline for the ACBT treasurer to receive member dues is 45 days prior to the conference/convention, which is July 10, 2023 this year. New or late renewing members whose dues are paid to the ACBT treasurer after that date will NOT be certified to cast a vote at the business meeting. New members may continue to be added throughout the summer and fall with this understanding.

For each new member I will need the following information: first and last name, street address, city, state, zip code, home and cell phone numbers, e-mail address, vision status (totally blind/ vision impaired or fully sighted) and their publication formats. The Texas Star is available by email, audio CD and large print. We do encourage all members with email access to please select the email format. The Braille Forum from ACB is available in Braille, cartridge for DAISY player, large print and email. Each of these newsletters is published quarterly. For statistical purposes only, ACB and ACBT are requesting the following demographics: age range, gender and ethnicity. This information is voluntary.

New member information and dues should be mailed to: Sheila Derrick, ACBT Treasurer, 309 Paloverde Lane, Fort Worth, TX 76112-1122. Dues to ACBT are \$7.00 for chapter members, \$3 for chapter junior members, \$10 for at-large members and \$2 for special interest affiliate members.

## **Advocacy Committee Report**

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By Kenneth Semien, Sr.

The 88<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature hit the ground running with numerous concerns and issues being raised as important to Texans. Members of the House and Senate were rather eager to submit bills prior to the opening of the session on January 10, 2023.

Disability rights organizations considered how to best collaborate to achieve legislative goals. As usual, the Coalition of Texans with Disabilities (CTD) in which ACBT is a member, began its weekly "Raise Your Voice" Advocate Connection Program sessions to present

progress reports on important bills being proposed. Members of ACBT actively participated in this meaningful program. Thanks to the dedicated advocacy team at CTD!

Interestingly, ACBT's 2023 legislative priorities were in the running for success during this legislative session by having at least one bill introduced for each of our priorities.

The 2023 ACBT Legislative Priorities are as follows:

- Fraud Prevention Related to Service Dogs
- HB 4164-An Act relating to the improper use and treatment of an assistance animal or service animal. – Introduced by Rep. Philip Cortez et al – increasing a criminal penalty from a maximum of \$300 to \$1,000. The Bill passed in the House with 130 in favor and 14 against. In the Senate, the bill passed with 29 in favor and 2 against. The Act takes effect on September 1, 2023. Special thanks to Pat Pound and Melanie Brunson, Members, Guide Dog Users of Texas.
- Equal Access to the Absentee Ballot
- HB 3159 Accessible Absentee Ballot System – Introduced by Rep. Jeff Leach (R) with support from Rep. John Bucy (D). The House passed the bill with 138 in favor and 3 against. The bill passed in the Senate with 29 in favor and 2 against. Texas Governor, Greg Abbott vetoed the bill due to language technicalities. Many thanks to Chase Bearden, Deputy Executive Director of CTD for his nonstop on the ground advocacy and negotiation efforts. Additional appreciation is extended to all who made phone calls, submitted written testimony and sent email messages.
- Increase Funding for TWC Older Individuals who are blind (OIB) Program
- SB 2223 OIB – Introduced by Senator Cesar Blanco (D) – Relating to establishing pilot programs to offer assistance for older adults diagnosed with severe vision loss. The bill wasn't successful at reaching the calendar for a committee hearing. What was really positive was that we were able to talk with office staff of 21 Senate

offices and educate them as to the huge need for more funding for the OIB program.

- Enhance services for TWC Older Individuals who are blind (OIB) Program.

Join in on our ongoing advocacy efforts as we seek to make a positive impact on the lives of Texans who are blind, have low vision or are deafblind. Many of our efforts impact the lives of Texans with various disabilities. We welcome your email, phone calls and ideas related to effective advocacy strategies.

Reach out to me by emailing [semien.k@outlook.com](mailto:semien.k@outlook.com) or by dialing 409-866-5838.

Committee members:

- Melanie Brunson
- Michael E. Garrett
- Peggy R. Garrett
- Mary Witherspoon

## **Auction Committee Update**

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by Sara Freeman Smith

Guess what time it is? It's time to get ready to get your "Super Shopping Groove" on for two fantastic Auctions in August! Yes, you heard about it and now it's here! Read on to get the details. Our big auction will be held virtually using the Zoom platform on Sunday, August 20th starting at 6:00 pm CDT, this is just before and leading into the week of the State Conference in San Antonio (8/25-27). You will need to register to participate in the virtual auction only & The deadline is Wednesday 8/16/23 at 7 PM. You will receive a Zoom link later after you register.

The second and smaller auction is in person and will be silent (no auctioneer) held on the evening of the banquet on Saturday evening August

26 beginning at 6:30 pm. All items will be displayed before & during the banquet. A Silent auction allows a person to record the bid and continue to outbid their competition until the auction closes and the winner is announced. It is very easy, walk up to the display tables, review the items, and provide your name & bid to the representative to track your bid. All winners will be notified at the end and will be required to pay that night like previous auctions. No registration is required since all bidders will attend the banquet.

We have some wonderful prizes that include retail gift cards, a Blind Shell Phone, a wine basket, Beats Studio Buds+ Noise cancelling wireless Ear buds, a \$250 Justin Boots gift certificate, a Bluetooth speaker, a hand knitted baby blanket, food goodies and much more!

Remember, a portion of the proceeds will go to our scholarship funds for students. Watch your emails for more info or visit our website ([www.acbtexas.org](http://www.acbtexas.org)) for more details in early August. Call Sara Freeman Smith at 713-882-3000 or Gayle Metoyer at 281-794-2012 with any questions.

## **“Ride the Waves to Better Accessibility with ACBT”**

By Peggy Garrett

We hope that you are finalizing your plans to attend the 45<sup>th</sup> annual Conference/Convention of the American Council of the Blind of Texas as this is an event that you will not want to miss!

In addition to the various sessions including advocacy updates, Guide Dog Users of Texas updates and a surprise for attendees to their session, Library Users of America’s business meeting and presentations from to Texas Talking Book narrators and of course the exhibit hall offering the latest in technology and some shopping, there will be an opportunity to get some exercise and learn some new dance steps while line dancing with Shelly and if you really want to try something new, there will also be the opportunity to learn “fencing”! Other special activities this year include the



first ever “Escape Room” designed for people who are blind in Texas and a carnival designed for people who are blind!

The best part of this is that everyone, blind or sighted, is invited to participate in all activities!

The Conference/Convention dates are August 24-27, 2023. The registration fee is \$65.00. The room rate is \$102.00 plus tax (\$120.46). You may make reservations online at [ACBT 2023 Convention](#) or by calling the hotel at (210) 3406060. Remember, if you are making your reservations by phone, you must tell them that you are with the American Council of the Blind of Texas in order to get the group room rate. The deadline to make reservations and get the group rate is July 23, 2023.

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

By Peggy Garrett

During the 2022 ACBT business meeting, Bylaws and amendments to the Constitution were referred to the Constitution and Bylaws Committee for review with the charge to bring proposals back to the 2023 business meeting.

Below are the proposed Constitution and Bylaws to be presented and voted on during the 2023 ACBT Business meeting on Sunday, August 27, 2023. They will be read for the first time on Saturday August 26 during the luncheon and read a second time for voting on Sunday morning.

### **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:

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 the office. The accused retains the right to vote on the question of removal.

End of proposed amendments.

Please review the proposed amendments prior to the business meeting. If you have questions, you may contact the Committee Chairperson, Peggy Garrett at 832-242-4941.

Constitution and Bylaw Committee Members:

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

## **Member Morale Committee**

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By Jan Gray

The Member Morale committee has continued to offer its' support call: What's on Your Mind, Let's Deal With it. Each month this call takes place on the fourth Thursday of the month. Our most popular call was held in May concerning a new traffic app called OKO. Thank you for all who participated. We will continue to seek new ideas for the call that will interest a variety of people. The second duty of the Member Morale Committee is to seek and select the candidates for the "Who's Who Among Blind Texans". One must be a member of ACBT, and one is a non-member of ACBT. Each year we are pleased to find those who have accomplished amazing things, proving again that blindness does not have to be a handicap. We have made our selections this year, but you will have to attend the awards breakfast on Sunday August 27, to hear those results. Our next job is to select the First Timer's Award. This award goes to people who have joined in the previous year before the award is offered and they must show a willingness to participate in local and or state committees and have made a difference by their participation. Each year it is a difficult and rewarding Task as we look at the candidates. We are looking for those people who have gone above and beyond what is required. This person cannot have attended an ACBT conference in person before receiving the award. It is our pleasure to also present these awards on Sunday August 27 as well. We hope to see all of you at that awards breakfast as well so that all of you can congratulate our winners personally.

## **Nominating Committee Report**

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By Michael Garrett

As we approach the 2023 ACBT Conference and Convention, elections will be an important part of the festivities. Hopefully we will have a huge turn out and everyone will participate. This is an important process and will determine the direction the organization will take in the future. The leaders you choose will represent the face of ACBT.

All candidates must be familiar with the duties of, and relating to, the office being sought, as stated in the ACBT Constitution and Bylaws. It is expected that each candidate has read the entire document which comprises the ACBT Constitution and Bylaws.

This being an odd numbered year, two board positions are up for election and, due to an appointment, the Second Vice President's position must be elected by the membership. The Nominating Committee presents the following slate of candidates.

- Second Vice President: Jan Gray, 1 year remaining, first term.
- Board of Director: Kathryn Dahlgren Perez, running for full term,
- Board of Director: Foster Brown, second term.

Of course, nominations can be made from the floor, but you must have talked to that person to be sure said person is willing to serve and fulfill the duties of the position being sought. Keep in mind that in order to adequately serve in an officer position, the person must have been an active participant in the affairs of ACBT and familiar with the policies, practices and procedures that govern our organization. In addition, the candidate must have a bio which can be read before the assembly during the elections process, and they may have up to two speakers on their behalf. The bio must be comprised of a brief paragraph telling the assembly who they are; then the office being sought and why they are running. Answers to the following questions must also be presented:

1. What are your reasons for seeking this office?
2. What experience and expertise can you contribute to this office and ACBT?
3. What actions will you take to assist ACBT in fulfilling its mission and achieving its goals?
4. Fundraising is fundamental to keeping any Non-Profit organization alive. Therefore, name two possible fundraising events and tell how you would personally contribute to their success.

5. When do you believe it is necessary for change to take place in an organization's policies and procedures?
6. What are the biggest challenges facing ACBT over the next 2 to 3 years and how would you help us overcome these challenges?

### **2023 Candidate Submissions:**

My name is Kathryn Dahlgren Perez, and I was asked to fulfill this position I greatly accepted. I came to ACBT through my husband he is the one with the vision impairment. Since joining the El Paso chapter in 2020 I have learned and grown in ways that I never imagined. I look forward to continue serving in any way possible.

1. I am seeking this office because: It is vitally necessary to have all of our chapters involved and in the know as much as possible so our main group can be stronger.
2. I have been treasurer of the El Paso Council for 2 years now and I head up some fundraising events here .
3. If elected to office I will be more active at the state level. I will also work on getting more of our membership involved at the state level.
4. The first event is the junior league of El Paso Christmas event in November we sell baked bread and infused oils and our Biscotti. To get there we have 5 markets through the year (I need 2more). The second activity is looking for opportunities to replace Amazon smiles that we were getting and I am learning about grants.
5. It is necessary to change practices and procedures when the existing ones no longer work to fulfill the needs of the organization.
6. I believe that the biggest challenges are younger membership and funding. The way I am already approaching these is by reaching out to as many blind and visually impaired people of all ages and their families as possible and by finding new ways to fundraise and as always by letting everyone know that we are out here and our one disability outweighs our many abilities.

My name is Foster Brown. I am legally blind since infancy. I was born and raised in California and became a resident of Texas in 2016. I am a husband, a father, an

uncle and so on. I am a spiritual man. Currently I am employed with the federal government as a tax advisory specialist.

I have been a member of ACB since 2005 and a life member of California Council of the Blind (CCB) since 2008. I attended an ACB legislative seminar winter 2008. While in California, I was president of a couple local CCB chapters, a treasurer for a few years and a member of the CCB board of directors for a 2-year term.

I joined the Houston Council of the Blind (HCB) at the beginning of 2018. I am now the treasurer of HCB. For ACBT, I currently hold a board of directors seat, am on the fundraising committee and am chair of the website committee, a subcommittee under the publication committee.

Advocating for the blind and visually impaired is a part of who I am. I thank God for those who forged the way before me. I am working to continue what they started and let the world know that the blind community has plenty to offer to the rest of the world.

I am seeking another term at this position to help grow our state organization's membership, and create more opportunities for blind and visually impaired persons.

1. From my bio you will see that I bring leadership experience. My communication skills (written and verbal) are good. I am very personable. I realize that sometimes compromise is required, but at other times one must stand firm which I will do either one depending on the situation. I am proficient with using technology (smartphones, tablets and computers).
2. A couple of actions that I took to help ACBT fulfill its mission and achieve its goals were working on the fundraising team the past few years. Chairing the website oversight committee. As chair we overhauled the website, maintained the site internally, taught committee members aspects of web design and worked with the organization to get the conference/convention registration and auction completed over the past few years.
3. One thought that comes to mind is to make a video about ACBT, what we do and asking people to make an annual pledge. We could publish it on social media, YouTube and public TV. If we could get 1,000 people to

pledge \$5 on a monthly basis (providing them with a bimonthly or quarterly e-newsletter). Another fundraiser would be annually publish a book of resources available for blind Texans and selling ad space in it to pay for the costs and raise some funds. We then could ask for \$10 donations from persons who would like to have it. I would buy one.

4. It is necessary for an organization to change its practices and procedures every 3 to 5 years. In order to do this the organization must be aware of changes within and without. It must not be afraid to try new/different things. Otherwise, the organization will fail to grow and morph into a flourishing entity.
5. One challenge I see is our aging membership. We need to focus our membership drive on recruiting and training young people to be active in growing and representing our organization. Some of this may be done by being more active on social media. Another part of it may be done by seeing what is trending with them and meeting them where they are.

My name is Janet Gray and I have been legally blind since age 13. I have a rare form of Retinitis pigmentosa. I am slowly losing more sight all the time. I grew up before the ADA and a lot of adaptive technology, and as a result, I learned that creativity was the ticket to success. I was an active member of the Denver USO Show Troope, and in 1974 I was selected to be on the planning council for the 1975 USO JH Conference held in Memphis Tennessee. I have served on the Board of Directors for the PTA when my kids were in school. I served on the Executive Committee for the Saginaw Train and Grain festival for 7 years and for another 2 years as a co-chair, consultant. While on this committee I managed 3 stages during a two day festival. I planned, secured and supervised the entertainment for the two days. There was approximately 10,000 to 20,000 people who attended each year. I have maintained my own business for the last 30 years as an entertainer. I joined ACBT in 2011 and since then I have served on the scholarship committee, public relations, newsletter, nominating committee, the auction committee, and I am currently the chair of the Member morale committee, and I have served since last November as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President. I am the President of the Greater Fort Worth area Council of the Blind.



1. I am going to answer questions 1 and 2 , together. When Chris appointed me, I wasn't sure that I could handle the job, but I have really enjoyed the challenge of this office and I would like to continue for at least 1 more year. Being self-employed, has made me more aware of evolving and changing to maintain and provide good entertainment for my clients. I also have skills acquired when I worked on both the Executive committee for the PTA and The Train and Grain festival. I have a thorough understanding of timelines and how important they are to productivity. I feel like I have worked well with my committee members and have encouraged all to participate and I have encouraged them to bring their ideas to the table. I think I can bring an enthusiasm and to whatever task I am asked to perform. I also believe in being innovative and creative in presenting new challenges for ACBT.
3. Each person on the Executive Board should be an example of what ACBT stands for. I would hope that my willingness to assume responsibility and see it through to completion would help ACBT to accomplish its tasks and achieve its goals.
4. This year we have taken on 2 different fundraisers that have not been previously tried. I am confident that both of these will turn out well. That being said, there are some small grants and a program at WalMart called the round up, that I would like to get started for ACBT. I wish I could be more specific, but conference always brings ideas to mind as I listen to people talk, and I hear of new things going on. If you don't try, you never know, but with that also goes a lot of research and planning. We can't jump into things without thinking them through.
5. There is not an organization around that has not had to evolve in some form or fashion. As people change and the world around us changes, we have to be willing to make some changes as well. When membership begins to falter, and people back off from participating, it is time to reevaluate the programs you have in place, and see if it is time to update and make them more appropriate for the current times. Sometimes it requires a major overhaul and other time, it may just need a small tweaking.
6. In the next three years, I foresee that our biggest problems will be getting and maintaining members and securing funding. In order to entice people to become members, we will have to provide programs that interest them and challenge them. As each area of Texas has different needs, it is difficult to be too specific. Funding is also a

problem. Since COVID, many businesses have tightened their belts and are no longer donating as much. We might have to enlist the assistance of a professional fund raiser to teach us how to find the funding we need. I forgot to mention that I served on the board of Directors from 2019 until last year.

## **The Braille Revival League of Texas**

By Michael Garrett

The Braille Revival League of Texas (BRLT) will come together again at this year's ACBT annual Conference and Convention. We are always looking for ways to promote the increased usage, production and reading of braille. Come and join us! We like to have fun; we like to entertain and you might learn something about braille or get a first hand view of a new product. You never know what new and exciting things you might find at BRLT. In the meantime,

READ MORE BRAILLE!

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

by Gayle Metoyer

Greetings ACBT and LUAT members:

As you probably know by now, the heat is on! What a great opportunity to stay inside with a cool beverage of your choice and read a good book. Whether you use BARD, Audible, or Bookshare, I am sure you can find something to read. A great idea for summer reading is a Summer Reading Program. Please check with your local library to see what they have for the summer. The libraries usually have these programs for both children and adults.

Are you planning to attend the ACBT Conference/Convention in San Antonio? If so, please plan to attend the LUAT annual business meeting which will be held on Saturday, August 26 at 9 a.m. We will have election of officers, collection of membership dues, and the program. The program will include Jacqueline Owuso from the Talking Book Program and updates from the National Library Services(NLS). We are also planning to have a narrator from the Talking Book Program as well. Please mark your calendars for this program. Members and friends are all invited. If you decide to join, the membership dues are \$15.00 per year. We are looking forward to your attendance and participation!

Happy reading!

## **Did You Know?**

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By Jan Gray

Since our Conference is being held in San Antonio this year, I thought you might enjoy knowing something about this unique city. Founded in 1718 as a Spanish outpost and mission, it became the first chartered civil settlement in what is now present day Texas. The oldest park in the state of Texas is in San Antonio and it is also the Second oldest park in the United States. The Alamo is the number one attraction in the state of Texas and San Antonio is the Number one city to visit in Texas and it ranks 17 in the U.S. The largest Mexican market outside of Mexico is located here. You can explore this three block outdoor market and . enjoy unique dining and shopping experiences. San Antonio has always been a leader and it has the distinction of having the first digital library in the U.S. The San Antonio Missions are listed among the 24 Heritage sights in the United States. The San Fernando Cathedral is the oldest in Texas and among the oldest in the U.S., dating back to 1738. Former President Dwight D. Eisenhower, then an Army Lieutenant, was the head coach at St. Louis College, now St. Mary's University in 1916.

San Antonio's Stock show and rodeo reuses the same 2160 tons of dirt each year. Now my favorite, San Antonio holds the record for the most Tamales; Gator Ade was invented by a San Antonio native, Church's Chicken started across from the Alamo in 1952, and I am immensely grateful that Fritos and Frito pies were originated here. To wind this up, did you know that it is technically illegal to flirt or respond to flirting using the eyes or hand movements? Have Fun in San Antonio!

## **Alamo Council Update**

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By Shelley McMullen

First, I hope you all are doing well and that you are staying cool.

In May we had a very successful fundraiser. The event was coordinated by member Linda O'Connell with the assistance of President Mary Alice Gary.

Mr. and Mrs. Peasie brought Tupperware products directly to chapter members and guests. The party took the place of our monthly business meeting in May. Our presenters spoke about the history of the Tupperware company . We listened to their overview during lunch. Afterward we played games and a few of us won Tupperware kitchen accessories. For example, the product I won was a plastic snack bowl set.

Some of us purchased additional products as well. I particularly liked the plastic vegetable storage bowls. Now I know that my salad materials will stay fresh in the refrigerator for a period of around 3 weeks. A nice Canister set, mixing bowls and other helpful kitchen organization items were also sold.

The fundraiser was continued virtually until May30. As a result of our efforts, we received 25% of the sales. We ended up with a grand total of \$370. We plan to make the Tupperware party an annual event.

Those of us who serve on the ACBT conference planning committee continue to enthusiastically plan for the up-coming ACBT conference/convention which will take place from August 24-27 . We are delighted to be hosting this year's conference. We look forward to seeing you then So come one come all!

## **Austin Council Update**

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by Marcus Manning

To all of you ACBT family members reading the Texas star, we are sending out our love on a summer breeze with news from our Austin chapter. Just like the ACB national annual convention, "the winds of change," we too are catching these winds and despite the challenging times giving or intellectual resources doing whatever we can pushing for change.

**C** in this change is our focus on children who are blind and low vision returning to school at the end of the summer. We are planning and going to implement an event to provide backpacks filled with assistive essential tools that blind and low vision learners 'need to actively participate in school.

**H** is for hybrid because we are still holding hybrid meetings keeping the lines open for all to attend from anywhere and everywhere. We are currently working to improve the quality of our hybrid meetings so that all in house participants can hear, speak to and be heard by all who are attending on line via zoom.

**A** is for the Austin Chapter scholarship committee accepting all applications at this time. We are excited to see new awesome blind and low vision applicants that we are eager to assist as they step forward to pursue knowledge and skill in their fields of interest.

**N** is for the network and networking that we are all doing. The transition meeting has occurred and Mike D our website developer and Web master is in the process of developing our Austin Chapter web site. Additionally, the

network buzz is building because we are inviting and welcoming more and more new awesome members every meeting.

**G** is for those of us who were going to the national convention and all of us who are getting ready for the ACBT convention at the end of August. All across this, the greatest organization of and for the advocacy and advancement for people who are blind or who have low vision, we are all so ready to gather with ACBT family, give of our own knowledge and experiences, listen learn and refuel to return to the hustle and bustle of our lives in the mainstream of society.

**E** we are open to evolve with this great state of ours to do all that we can bigger and better than ever before. As we enjoy this summer breeze with you all, we so much enjoy the fun, educational and enlightening times, but we are ever pondering how can we involve, support, engage, encourage and empower people who are blind who have low vision better than ever before.

## **Beaumont Council Update: Hydration and its Benefits!**

By Cynthia Julun

Some individuals look forward to the summer months. During this time people have family reunions, go to the beach, have picnics in the park, or just have a relaxing swim. All of these things can be fun; however, if an individual spends a certain amount of time in the heat or exercises for an hour or longer without proper hydration it could be dangerous. Often times, when a person is hot or thirsty they grab a soda, fruit drink, or energy drink, but sugary drinks can do more harm than good. When having fun in the sun or just to have a healthier lifestyle please consider drinking the correct amount of water on a daily basis. Water is an important element for one's survival. Below are twelve important benefits of consuming water regularly:

- ✓ Carry nutrients and oxygen to all the cells in the body.
- ✓ Helps to regulate the body's temperature.
- ✓ Aids in digestion.

- ✓ Removes impurities from the body.
- ✓ Assists with weight loss.
- ✓ Promotes healthy brain function.
- ✓ Protects the body's organs and tissue.
- ✓ Maintains electrolyte (sodium) balance in the body.
- ✓ boosts skin health
- ✓ Helps to maximize physical performance.
- ✓ Helps with having enough energy.
- ✓ Helps to stabilize the body's heartbeat.

Have a healthy and safe summer everyone.

## **Dallas Area Council Update**

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by Mary Witherspoon

Competition and fun describes the success of the DACB May 6 picnic and scholarship auction fundraiser! This reporter asked chapter officers to identify people who seemed the most excited about their winning auction item or items that seemed to have the fiercest bidding. States one unnamed source, "Don't say my name. I just kept raising the bids to spur others on! LOL. And sometimes I win the item". Another member says "I bid on several things that I didn't win. So, when I finally won an item, I guess I was just so excited to finally win!" 19 members and 5 guests bid on items such as an Echo, an iPhone charger, a Texas Parks t-shirt and cap combo and even a popcorn popper to name a few. Says member Ana Russo, "I just like bidding on things to help the chapter raise funds. And now my son has that popcorn popper I won!"

A special thank you to the Gamma Delta, Gamma Nu of the University of North Dallas for 6 volunteers for the day. Says chapter secretary Linda Riddle "Our volunteers carried out our plans so well. Everything went smoothly with food service and the auction with their help".

DACB now reports 29 members. Our June meeting program was an overview of the R.E.A.C.H. of Dallas, a social services program that provides information and referral services to people with disabilities including training on and technical assistance in complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). DACB learned how we can support this organization and when to refer acquaintances for service. Please check out the DACB calendar of events at [dallasacb.org](http://dallasacb.org) to learn about future meetings and activities. Come visit!

## **El Paso Council Update**

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By Eleanor Coldwell

The El Paso Council of the Blind teamed up for the second year with our area's Region 19 Education Service Center to help out with their camp for blind students. The last two weeks in June are reserved for 8 days of fun and frolic, where students ages 8 to 18 enjoy learning new skills and games they can enjoy through the years. Fishing, card games, cooking, bowling and woodwork are a sample of what might await them each day. EPCB developed a day of games for them to play. Treasurer Kathy Perez made bean bags for our Corn Hole game. A buzzer would sound when a bean bag hit its target. We were able to play other outdoor games. Coach Dan Guard taught the basics of blind in-line hockey which includes a goal making a constant sound and a beeping puck. The Volunteer Students practiced hitting the beeping puck into the goal. President Alfredo Perez grilled hot dogs and marked the containers of mustard, ketchup and relish with a series of rubber bands for the students to identify each one and create their own hot dogs. Secretary Gema Cenicerros and Board member Cindy Marrugo taught the students about guide dogs. The star of this show was Gema's new guide dog, Liberty, a beautiful, black Labrador. Volunteer and guest Randy Collins showed the students his talent of creating balloon sculptures. Each student walked away with a balloon sculpture of their own, such as a Viking helmet, a scepter with a heart, a teddy bear, unicorn or Pegasus, sword or fishing rod complete with a fish hanging off its line. Region 19 Director Richard Torres has encouraged us to become a regular



part of their summer camp each year, and our wheels are already turning as we plan our activities for June 2024.

We are also building our Braille program here under the direction of ms. Gema, our secretary. we are learning grade two Braille and we have a small Braille library. In our spare time we are working on white cane day as well as a possible conference here very soon.

## **What's Been Happening in Cowtown?**

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By Jan Gray

Greetings from Fort Worth and welcome to summer. The famous Texas heat has hit this region with a bang, but we've had a lot of rain so no drought yet. Hope everyone enjoyed a lovely April, May and June.

Our April meeting was actually the end of March when, on a lovely spring Saturday, we took a train ride to Grapevine. There we savored a lovely lunch at Chills restaurant and then crossed the street to explore by touch the larger-than-life statues donated by the GM Corporation of Sam Houston and the chiefs of the 9 tribes that signed the treaty with Texas to return to the area. We had a great time, and it was educational, too.

On the first Saturday of April, FW-ACB joined with the FW Lighthouse and other organizations to host an Easter Egg hunt for all blind/low vision children. Many came dressed in their Easter finery and were so cute. We had a craft table where door hangers could be decorated with all sorts of stickers. In case you've never experience it, a large clutch of beeping Easter eggs makes a LOT of noise, but that adds to the festivity.

Due to the ACBT Spring Board meeting and Mother's Day, our May meeting was moved to the third Saturday and we again met in-person at the NICA center where we hope to make our permanent home. We chose our scholarship winner, received information about both the ACB and ACBT

conventions, had a report on the Board meeting and an update on White Cane Day plans. We hope to have a picnic in July.

It feels so good for everyone to be out and about in person. Let's all be thankful for the end of the pandemic.

## **Houston Happenings**

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By Michael Garrett

In the midst of the sweltering heat, The Houston Council of the Blind (HCB) remains visible in the community. In collaboration with VIA (Visually Impaired Advocates), we sponsored a CPR certification session. We held a fundraising event at Café Express. We participated in the HAVIN Expo. In observance of Easter, we sponsored an Eggstravaganza for our members.

We acknowledged Mothers and Fathers respectively, for those observances. We recognized VT Seva, a volunteer group that works closely with us.

We continue to work with our local transportation agency and provide information and referral to a number of calls we receive at our office.

HCB: Helping, Caring Building!

## **The power of collective advocacy**

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By Chris Allen

Those of us who are advocates know the power of collective action versus one person acting alone to try to change something in their community. A great example of collective advocacy occurred earlier this year in Dallas.

Those of us who are fortunate enough to reside in the greater Dallas area have been lucky in that we have had access to several options to affordable transportation. Dallas Area Rapid Transit, or (DART.) Is the public transit entity that serves Dallas and 13 other cities in the surrounding area decided

to start a pilot program several years ago that offered rides on demand to paratransit customers. The program was called DART on demand. The requirements were simple. Customers needed to have a smart phone with the UBER app and an active account. DART then provides a voucher through the app that the customer can use to pay for a ride. The consumer pays the first \$3 and DART pays the difference up to \$35 per trip. The program had become very popular with people who relied on paratransit, but appreciated the flexibility of being able to get a ride when it was convenient for them.

In March of this year those of us who use the program were shocked when we received emails and letters informing us that DART on demand was going to be canceled in June of this year. We responded immediately by calling DART to voice our displeasure and find out why the program had been canceled. Within a week after so many people responded negatively to the change DART reverse course and sent out a notice that the program was going to continue.

The Dallas chapter of acbt invited the director of the paratransit program Chris Hawkins to come speak to us at our April meeting. Mr. Hawkins had just spoken to us in February and he had reassured us that the on-demand program was going to continue. Obviously we wanted to know what had changed. Before he started answering our questions, he said “we heard you.” Mr. Hawkins said there were 2 reasons why the program was going to be phased out. First, he said that UBER did not have ADA compliant vehicles in Dallas that were wheelchair accessible. Second, DART was spending more money than they anticipated to cover the cost for trip fares. Mr. Hawkins said that there would probably need to be an increase in the fee that the customer was responsible for. As of this moment the DART on demand program is still considered a pilot, but our collective action kept the program from being eliminated.

## **2023 Partners for Success Honor Society**

Honoring companies that have made a substantial contribution in support of ACBT achieving its annual goals and objectives.

### **Amerigroup (Excel Sponsor)**

Our affiliated health plans and our parent organization are leading a national effort to reduce social barriers, drive change and improve lives.

### **Vanda (Star Plus Sponsor)**

Non-24-Hour Sleep-Wake Disorder

### **Democracy Live (Star Sponsor)**

Leading the way in secure digital balloting. Providing remote accessible balloting technologies to over 20 million voters.

Contact Kenneth Semien, Sr. for additional information regarding our Partners for Success Initiative:

[semien.k@outlook.com](mailto:semien.k@outlook.com)

409-866-5838

## **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 Appointed (2022, 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:**

Foster Brown, Director (2019-2023, First Term)  
(832) 469-1817  
brownfoster@gmail.com  
Local Chapter: Houston Council

**Board Member:**

Catherine Perez, Director (2022 Appointed, First Term)  
(915) 224-9402  
Kperez@epcblind.org  
Local Chapter: El Paso Council

**Board Member:**

Steven Salas, Director (2021-2025, First Term)  
(210) 995-3021  
salasblack@gmail.com  
Local Chapter: Austin Council  
entirely.