**THE TEXAS STAR**

**Vol. 29, No. 1 January 2021**

Neva Fairchild, Editor

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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.]

**From Your President**

by Peggy Garrett

Happy New Year, Everyone!

After a year of gloom and doom, I am hopeful that the new year will bring light, peace, and joy to all of you. For so many people, not being able to get together over the holidays left them feeling more alone than ever. Hopefully, the Zoom activities provided by ACB and many other organizations will continue to make a difference and keep us connected!

Even though I have not been to an in-person meeting for quite some time, I have spent countless hours on conference calls, in planning sessions, making presentations, facilitating sessions, learning about new apps and technology, and so much more! The duties and responsibilities that come with the several hats I wear for ACBT have not allowed me to slow down. Even though travel time hasn't been an issue for the past nine months, sometimes, it seems as if I am busier than when most meetings I attended were in person, and I was traveling to and from them on a regular basis.

ACBT Continues to be at the table representing blind Texans through our participation in Alliance of and for Blind Texans (AVIT), Register, Educate, Vote-Use your Power (REVUP), Coalition of Texans with Disabilities (CTD), Alliance on Aging with Vision Loss (AAVL), and through local chapter members advocating for transportation issues, serving on Commissions for People with disabilities, and sharing information with the general public on blindness.

Thanks to each of you who continue to "Connect, communicate and collaborate" to improve the quality of life for people who are blind or visually impaired. Your diligence is greatly appreciated. Let's keep striving to achieve a better tomorrow today!

**From Your First Vice President**

By Michael Garrett

What a year we had in 2020, probably the most memorable in our lives. So, as the door closes and the windows are shuttered on last year, we are opening wide the doors and peering in the windows of a brand new year. New challenges? Bring them on! New opportunities? We are eager to explore them! New hope? Our expectations are high!

As Chair of your Membership Committee, the members and I have made a concerted effort to bring ACBT together even though we must be apart. By sponsoring community calls and working collaboratively with the Member Morale Committee, we sought to keep our members informed, entertained, and enlightened about the obstacles and opportunities that we, as blind or visually impaired Texans, face.

In 2021, we plan to continue this effort. We hope to hit the ground running, bolting out the door with what we believe will be an entertaining yet informative call. The call is scheduled to take place on January 26th, 2021, and will feature guests with unique hobbies and occupations. It is entitled, "You Do What?" To find out what they do, you need to join us and, by all means, invite someone to attend with you. Let's make it a party! Stay tuned for more information about this and other activities that the Membership committee plans to unveil this year.

The door to 2021 is open! The curtain is lifted, and it looks brighter already!

ACBT: Advancing the Cause of Blind Texans.

**From Your Second Vice President**

By Kevin Ratliff

Happy New Year, ACBT Members, from your Fundraising Committee. We have put 2020 behind us and look forward to a better, more productive, prosperous year ahead. The Fundraising Committee will kick off the year with a fun event with lots of prizes that you won't want to miss. We call it the "Knock Knock Deals Game." This is a "Let's Make a Deal" style game, with an ACBT Twist. The complete rules and instructions will be posted to the ACBT email list, and upon request, a document can be emailed to you. The date of the event is February 6th, 2021, on the Zoom Platform. Join this exciting event for a chance to win some great prizes like Smart-Home products, gift cards, Jewelry, Valentine-themed gift packages, and more! Registration for the game is open now, and there are only a few slots available, so reserve your spot today.

Please remember to choose ACBT through the Amazon Smile program when you shop on amazon.com. The AmazonSmile program allows you to buy the items that you want and a percentage of your purchase will be donated to ACBT. Just click on the special American Council of the Blind, Inc. link below; Shop on the site as you normally would; Complete the checkout process, and Amazon will handle the rest.

[www.smile.amazon.com/ch/76-0154367](http://www.smile.amazon.com/ch/76-0154367)

Happy shopping!

**From Your Secretary**

by Mary Alice Gary

Happy New Year to All! I would like to wish everyone a safe, prosperous, happy, and healthy 2021. Remember always to keep your eye on the future. Who wants to look back at 2020?

In December, the ACBT Board met to approve the 2021 Budget and has decided to hold the 2021 Spring Board Meeting virtually. It has not yet been determined whether to have a virtual or face-to-face Conference/Convention in 2021. All updates and announcements will be posted on the ACBT Groups List.

Holding virtual Zoom meetings, chats, classes, etc., has become the new norm, and I have learned that you can still meet people and make new friends virtually. I've taken up Crafting (which I didn't know I could do, learned "Tips and Tricks for around the house, exercised with new friends doing Yoga, both (chair and full body), and taken part in Resistance classes. Not to mention, lots of informative calls held about Apps, Technology, Shopping, or chatting about a book. This barely touches on all the available topics through the ACB Community. Several ACBT Committees have Been holding various calls throughout the past year and will continue to do the same in 2021. To find out "What's Happening" and receive announcements regarding upcoming ACBT events, subscribe by sending an email to this link: ACBT+subscribe@groups.io (that's the plus symbol after the ACBT). With the new list, you can reply to the sender or everyone. ACB National conducts at least a dozen events throughout each day. Some can be heard on the various ACB Radio channels, and you can even ask Alexa to "Open ACB radio." You may also wish to subscribe to the ACB Community Events Group List to receive daily emails listing all the happenings for that day. To subscribe to the ACB list, just email your request to Community@acb.org. The daily list includes all the topics, times, links, and call-in information to participate in any calls. You don't necessarily need a computer or the Zoom App. Stay in Touch, and join both. I have!

**From Your Treasurer**

by Sheila Derrick

Chapter Leaders, it is time to prepare your membership lists for delivery to me by February 15th, 2021 (or as soon as possible for those Chapters with meetings on the 3rd Saturday) along with your member dues. Please, help by sending ONLY information for members who have paid their dues for 2021. We encourage all members with email access to request publications by email to conserve ACBT funds and paper.

For each member, I need full name, address, home and cell phone numbers, email address, vision status (blind/visually impaired or fully sighted), Texas Star format (email, large print, or audio CD only), and ACB Braille Forum format (email, Braille, large print, or NLS Daisy player cartridge). Membership lists can be sent on paper or electronically in a word document or an excel spreadsheet.

This Year, ACBT is requesting demographic information on our members for grant writing and other funding applications. The additional statistics needed are AGE RANGE: 13 to 20, 21 to 40, 41 to 59, and 60 +, GENDER: male, female or other, and ETHNICITY: Caucasian (white), African-American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian-American, or other.

Dues are as follows: chapter members $7.00, Special Interest Affiliate members $2.00, at-large members $10.00, Junior members $3.00, ACB Life member $2.00, ACBT Life member $5.00, and Life member of both $0.00. Please remember to include life members on your list even though you may not submit any dues for them.

Mail dues and membership lists to Sheila Derrick, 309 Paloverde Lane, Ft. Worth, TX 76112-1122. Send electronic files to sjderrick212@hotmail.com and call me at 817 507-3964 with questions.

**Get Accessibility Help by Phone**

by Jan Gray

If you need help with Apple, Microsoft, Amazon or Walmart products or websites, call their accessibility lines.

Here is the accessibility phone number for Apple: 800-694-7466. I found the operators to be very polite and they tried really hard to solve the problem.

Microsoft has an accessibility line, and they will try to solve your problems with windows or office. Call 800-936-5900.

Amazon’s disability line representatives are helpful, courteous, and very willing to go the extra mile. They will put the item in your cart, read descriptions or help you find something. The number is 888-283-1678.

Finally, if you have trouble ordering on www.walmart.com, they have an accessibility number. It is 800-924-9206. They are very courteous and extremely helpful.

**Braille Revival League of Texas (BRLT)**

by Michael Garrett

Did you get any braille Christmas cards this year? Isn't it amazing what you can do with Braille? Making cards, labeling food, appliances, or even identifying clothes, are just a few of the many things braille can be used for. The use of Braille has also been ushered into the Science, , Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) disciplines, which has expanded job opportunities for individuals who are blind.

Access Technology (AT() is opening up new opportunities for us to explore and thrive as we matriculate through this fast-moving economy and in the world at large. If you'd like to know more about what's going on in the world of Braille, join us at the Braille Revival League of Texas.

Email Michael Garrett at:

Megarrett4443@sbcglobal.net

Read More Braille!

**Library Users of America-Texas (LUAT)**

By Gayle Metoyer

Greetings LUAT members and friends.

Happy New Year! Even though 2020 is over, and because we are still dealing with the Pandemic, you are probably looking for something to do that is new and different. One thing you might want to do is to join Library Users of Texas. We held our virtual meeting last August and had quite a few new voices on the line. We would love for you to join us this year. We are not sure if we will meet in person or virtually this year for our conference/convention, but we can still chat during the year. If you are interested in joining our list, please send a blank email to: luatx+subscribe@groups.io and follow along. Leave the subject area blank an you will receive a message confirming that you want to join. Also, if you would like to become a member , you can send your dues to the following address:

LUA Texas

7806 Chaseway Dr.

Missouri City, TX 77489

Attn: Michael Garrett

We will share book discussions during the year. I hope y’all are reading lots of good books. Stay safe and healthy!

**Together, Apart**

 by Eleanor Coldwell

I have not touched, held hands, hugged, or kissed my grandchildren for ten months. How can this be? One pair of grandchildren live in my own town, and another pair live a short flight away. And yet, we still have to abide by the safety rules that promise to keep us healthy and well until the COVID-19 Pandemic can be brought under control. Until then, I have had to struggle to find creative ways to retain a presence in our grandchildren's lives. It has been a little bit easier with the in-town children, but the out of town ones have proven to be more of a challenge. They range in age from 2 to 8 years of age. I hope that some of the ideas below will help you if you find yourself in this same dilemma.

 My in-town children have joined us for picnics of all kinds. We always wear masks and eat out of individually wrapped foods in containers that can be thrown away. We have had public park picnics, and when the parks were shut down, we had back yard picnics, patio picnics, driveway picnics, and even garage picnics, always making sure we maintained a safe distance and that we were out in fresh air. We also sponsored what the grandkids called "Movie Picnic Nights" this summer. We would set up our big screen TV outside, play a fun movie such as Disney's Lady and the Tramp, and eat our special picnic food while sitting in lawn chairs or on a blanket on the ground. On Halloween, I created a mini-fall carnival, which consisted of a shooting gallery, a ring toss game, a fishing pond game, a ball pitching game.  All the activities were outdoors, of course, but we all got to wear our costumes and have fun together.

Thanksgiving was a Grab and Go affair, where the parents drove up with the children so we could wish them a happy holiday while they stayed in the car. We handed out the turkey dinners, called out how much we loved them, and they drove off.

It is a different story for our out-of-towners. I write weekly letters to my eight-year-old. They are filled with jokes, tongue twisters, riddles, or song lyrics, and he writes back. He is a proficient Zoom host, so we take advantage of that. For my little one, I video myself reciting nursery rhymes, or singing songs, or pretending stuffed animals are talking to her.  I will occasionally mail them a small surprise such as a book or a small toy. I traditionally buy them a Christmas pop-up book to add to their collection, which I hope they will keep and treasure forever.

All-in-all, it has been fun and exhausting, but my arms are still empty, and they ache. They ache not from old age or arthritis but from having gone for so long without holding each one of my grandchildren tightly, kissing their beautiful faces, and whispering, "I love you" in their ears. I hope that 2021 will bring us the relief we need to let down our guard and allow us to reshape our lives into the way they were before March of 2020. May we all have a new year filled with the blessings of family and friends.

**Advocacy Services/Legislation Committee Report**

by Kenneth Semien, Sr.

The Texas Legislature convenes on the second Tuesday of January during odd-numbered years. Therefore the 87th Texas Legislature convened on January 12th, 2021. With COVID-19 remaining a major concern, most activities are expected to occur with virtual meetings and hearings. Communication with lawmakers will also be conducted by phone and email. Visits to local offices may take place when possible. Things will look different this session with access and funding issues. However, we will move forward with presenting our three legislative priorities as directed by these resolutions, ACBT adopted:

American Council of the Blind of Texas (ACBT) 2021 Legislative Priorities:

* Requiring equal access to Absentee Balloting in the state of Texas (Resolution 2018-01)
* Fund Additional Positions within the Texas Workforce Commission's Older Blind Independent Living Program

(Resolution 2020-01)

* Expand services within the Texas Workforce Commission's Older Blind Independent Living Program

(Resolution 2020-02)

Communication has begun with the Legislative Director of the office of Representative John Bucy in regard to a second attempt to obtain support for equal access to the Absentee Ballot. During the last session, the Chair of the House Committee on Elections, Representative Stephanie Klick, chose not to bring HB3354 up for a committee vote as she determined that it would be best to conduct research on this matter as she stated that fraud would be a major concern.

All resolutions have been forwarded to House and Senate members regarding funding additional positions within the Texas Workforce Commission's Older Blind Independent Living Program and expanding services within the Texas Workforce Commission's Older Blind Independent Living Program.

We will continue to advocate for enhancements to programs and services related to education, employment, healthcare, housing, transportation, equal access to websites, and more.

Non-committee members are invited to join the ACBT Advocacy Corps.

To align our work with the mission statement of the American Council of the Blind of Texas (ACBT), it is imperative that we extend an invitation to all interested members to join our efforts during the 2021 legislative session

Feel free to dial 409-866-5838 with comments or questions and send an email to semien.k@att.net

Committee Members:

Chair, Kenneth Semien, Sr.

Chris Allen, Dallas Area Council

Melanie Brunson, Alamo Council

Will Burley, Austin Council

Kyle Delk, Beaumont Area Council

Michael Garrett, Houston Council

Betty Huffman, Austin Council

Jason Jones, Houston Council

**Auction Committee Report**

by Sara Freeman Smith

A new committee dedicated to managing the auction at the annual Texas Conference/Convention was created last fall. The Co-Chairs: Gayle Metoyer & Sara Freeman Smith met for the first time with the committee members in December to begin planning for the auction to be held on Saturday, August 28th, during the Texas Conference/Convention, to be held from August27-29 2021. The Committee will be contacting each chapter & affiliate in January to remind everyone to mark their calendars for deadlines and coordinate auction items to be donated. The Committee encourages everyone to begin planning and soliciting early donations within their local community. The Committee has set a deadline of July 15th, 2021, for confirmation of item 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 description and approximate value. We look forward to having some great items and lots of fun this year as we welcome not only Texas members but also ACB members from across the US to participate in the auction.

If you have any questions, please contact either Gayle by email at metoyer903@comcast.net or by cell at 281-794-2012 or Sara by email at sarafreemansmith@aol.com or by cell at 713-882-3000.

**ACBT 2021 Conference/Convention**

by Peggy Garrett

The theme for the 2021 ACBT Conference/Convention is "Creating & Embracing Change." The Conference/Convention Committee has begun planning the 43rd annual event. While the dates are scheduled for August 26-29, it has not yet been determined whether the event will be in-person or virtual. We are still moving forward with plans for an in-person event at this time.

The ACB Board will be making a decision on whether the Conference/Convention will be in-person or virtual by the end of March. The decision will be based on feedback from the membership and what is determined to be in the best interest of all attendees, including members, presenters, exhibitors, and volunteers. So, stay tuned for updates.

Either way, the Committee is planning a variety of sessions designed to provide education, technology updates, adjusting to blindness in various stages of life, Braille program, advocacy program, leadership seminar, guide dog program, and tours (either in-person or virtual). Of course, there will be an exhibit hall with something for everyone!

So, mark your calendars to reserve the dates and meet us there!

**Sponsor Health & Wellness forum:**

**Sometimes, you need to put yourself first**
by Superior HealthPlan

Self-care. That term has been around for decades, but it's recently become a household phrase as COVID-19 sparked a worldwide pandemic that continues today. But what does it mean, and how can you make sure self-care is part of your daily life?

Simply put, self-care is what people do for themselves to improve or maintain their health. It can encompass a variety of factors, including hygiene, nutrition, physical activity, and even living conditions or cultural beliefs.

The first step in practicing self-care is recognizing how stress affects you. Often, increased stress or anxiety can lead to headaches, low energy, insomnia, or difficulty eating. From social distancing while in public to increased isolation due to working from home, the Pandemic has expanded sources of stress or caused at least some level of anxiety for everyone.

After identifying what causes stress for you, finding ways to cope with it is the next step.

Daily exercise or meditation are proven self-care options that can help you feel happier and more relaxed. Finding a new hobby, such as playing an instrument or picking up an old hobby, is another way to practice self-care. Taking a shower every day and getting dressed in the morning can make a big difference. You can also use technology to stay connected to loved ones, attend doctor's appointments or find resources that help you manage stress.

No matter what steps you take to practice self-care, the most important thing is to make sure that you put yourself and your own mental health first, even if just for a little bit each and every day.

**Constitution and Bylaws + Resolutions Committee Reports**

**Will We Be Able to Conduct ACBT Business in 2021?**

By Kenneth Semien, Sr.

As the COVID-19 Pandemic entered the arena in 2020, the ACBT Board of Directors was suddenly faced with the challenge of considering if it would be appropriate to have the annual conference/convention in person or gather virtually on the Zoom meetings platform. In addition, once it was determined that it would be best to hold the event virtually, we were then prompted to consider if and how we would conduct business in a virtual setting.

Initially, we assumed that ACBT could not hold the scheduled election of officers, entertain making any amendments to our constitution and bylaws or adopt any resolutions in 2020 because ACB (our national organization) shared that they could not conduct business because their constitution and bylaws do not include language that supports conducting business in a virtual setting, as required by the DC code for nonprofit, incorporated organizations.

The ACBT constitution and bylaws committee was charged with reviewing the current language in our constitution and bylaws, along with identifying the required language needed to be in compliance with the Texas Business Organizations Code for nonprofit corporations. We didn't have the appropriate language in our constitution and bylaws. Therefore, we extracted language from the Texas Business Organizations Code for nonprofit Corporations and are preparing a proposed amendment to our bylaws that will be presented during an upcoming specially called membership meeting or the upcoming conference/convention. We have also agreed to seek recommendations of voting methods in case it becomes necessary to hold the next conference/convention virtually. As ACBT members are aware, we did not hold scheduled elections in 2020 or entertain any proposed amendments to the constitution and bylaws. However, the ACBT Board of Directors was able to review and consider the adoption of resolutions during the Pre-conference board meeting held on Thursday, August 27th, 2020, and the board is authorized to review and consider adoption of resolutions in between conferences on a continuous basis, as the need arises. ACBT officers agreed to remain in place until an election is held. The constitution and bylaws committee is planning to meet in January for further consideration of proposing possible ways we can conduct business in 2021. Stay tuned to future issues of the Texas Star. Submit proposed amendments to the constitution and bylaws and resolutions for future consideration to semien.k@att.net, and feel free to contact me by dialing (409) 866-5838.

Constitution and Bylaws Committee Members:

Chair, Kenneth Semien, Sr., Beaumont Area Council

Melanie Brunson, Alamo Council

Sheila Derrick, Fort Worth Council

Neil Finley, Member At Large

Mary Alice Gary, Alamo Council

Michael Garrett, Houston Council

Chris Prentice, Austin Council

Resolutions Committee Members:

Chair, Kenneth Semien, Sr., Beaumont Area Council

Melanie Brunson, Alamo Council

Michael Garrett, Houston Council

Jason Jones, Houston Council

Chris Prentice, Austin Council

LouAnn Williams, Alamo Council

Member Morale Committee Report

**Keys to Good Health: New Year, New You!**

By Kenneth Semien, Sr.

You hear lots of advice from many sources about what it takes to live well and keep your body in good working order. Sorting out what that means for you may seem like an overwhelming task. Let's break it down into a few simple, easy-to-remember ways for adults to stay on a healthy path.

Expand your palate's palette.

Dietary guidelines recommend that half of what's on your plate at any meal be vegetables or fruits. But it's also important to mix things up. While all fruits and veggies are healthy, they don't all have the same nutrients. Give yourself the widest range of benefits by eating different-colored produce throughout the day.

Less sugar, more water.

It's a good idea to avoid added sugar in whatever you eat, yet soda, sports drinks, and energy drinks may be a bigger source than you realize. Some studies show that just a soft drink or two a day makes you 26% more likely to get type 2 diabetes. Sugary drinks have also been tied to heart attacks, gout, and obesity. Stay hydrated with water or, if you miss the fizz and taste, naturally flavored seltzer.

Move more, sit less.

That is the physical activity guidelines in a nutshell. While at least 150 minutes a week of moderate exercise is ideal, experts say that any movement is better than nothing. So make it a point to stand up more often and stretch, as well as explore new pastimes that will help put you in motion.

Get enough rest.

Sleep is often low on the list in our nonstop society, but it's a must for good health. Chronic sleep deprivation raises the odds of heart disease, diabetes, stroke, obesity, and many other sicknesses. Getting your ZZZs also helps keep you safe: If you don't usually wake up feeling refreshed, try slipping into bed 15 minutes earlier every week until you do.

Check-in with your doctor.

While there's no one-size-fits-all time frame for seeing your primary care doctor (anywhere from annually to every three years might be OK), don't go AWOL. Regular visits can help you catch problems early when they're easier to treat and often cure. Stay on top of tests like cholesterol checks, mammograms, and prostate cancer screenings.

Take baby steps.

It's tempting to overhaul your entire lifestyle at once. But tackling too many health goals at once often backfires because change can be hard. To better your odds of getting -- and staying -- healthier, make a series of small changes and work your way up to a bigger end game. For instance, if you'd like to eat a more nutritious diet, focus on breakfast. Once you get used to that, think about how to improve your lunch menu.

Source: WebMD

Member Morale Committee Members:

Chair, Kenneth Semien, Sr. – Beaumont Area Council

Ted Harper, Dallas Area Council

Cynthia Julun, Beaumont Area Council

Lori Naiman, Member At Large

Gayle Metoyer, Houston Council

Miguel Palomar, El Paso Council

Chris Prentice, Austin Council

Be encouraged. Be safe. Be Healthy.

**Nominating Committee Report**

by Michael Garrett

It's time to start thinking about the nominating process for the Year 2021. We had an unusual year in 2020. With the virtual convention, We were unsure of how much business we could conduct legally in a virtual setting. So we chose not to hold elections last year. At present, we are proceeding as though we will have an in-person convention in 2021. However, the ACBT Board will make its final decision by the end of March. In the meantime, whether we meet virtually or in person, your Constitution and Bylaws Committee is working on provisions that should allow us to hold elections this year.

That being said, think about whether you or someone you know would like to step up and take on a leadership position in ACBT. There will be two board positions up for election. Both current members have served their full terms. Since we didn't have elections in 2020, all officer slots are up for election and will be reelected in 2022 to keep us on target. The Second Vice-President's position has been filled for its full term and will be open this year.

You may submit your own or the name of someone else as a candidate for an office. If you would like to recommend someone for an officer or board position, please make sure that person is qualified and willing to run. All people seeking to run for a position on the ACBT Board must submit a biographical sketch. Of course, nominations can be made from the floor; and again, the person nominated must be qualified and willing to serve and fulfill the duties of that office. Also, he or she must have a current bio that can be read in the presence of conference attendees during the election process. The bio should consist of a brief introductory paragraph that states the office to which you are seeking election, followed by answers to the questions which have been prepared by the Nominating Committee. Please limit your bio and question responses to two pages in Arial font, 16 -point. It is also imperative that each candidate be familiar with the duties of the office being sought, as stated in the ACBT Constitution and Bylaws.

Below are the questions to be completed and submitted to the Nominating Committee:

* What are your reasons for seeking this office?
* What experience and expertise can you contribute to this office and ACBT?
* What actions would you take in assisting ACBT in fulfilling its mission and achieving its goals?
* Fundraising is vital to keeping any nonprofit organization alive. Therefore, name two possible fundraising events and tell how you would personally contribute to the success of these events.
* When do you feel that it is necessary for change to take place in an organization's practices and procedures?
* What do you see as the biggest challenges facing ACBT over the next two to three years, and how would you help ACBT manage these challenges?

All candidate bios and answers must be submitted no later than May 31st, 2021, via email, or postmarked by May 31st, 2021 if sent by regular mail. All submissions must be typewritten; no handwriting allowed. Please send all candidate submissions to megarrett4443@sbcglobal.net or mail them to

Michael Garrett

Nominating Committee Chairman

7806 Chaseway Drive

Missouri City, TX 77489

Please keep in mind we must elect officers and board members who are willing to work diligently for the American Council of the Blind of Texas, making it a stronger and more effective organization and helping us fulfill our motto:

**Three Ways Mindfulness Can Benefit Everyone**

by Chris Allen

Mindfulness is a scientifically based discipline focusing on taking care of both the mind and the body using a variety of meditation exercises.

First, mindfulness can help us reduce stress and anxiety through the use of focused meditations, such as a sitting meditation concentrating on your breathing and a body scan where you lie down and focus on each part of your body and what sensations you are noticing. When we are suffering from severe stress, the body produces the hormone Cortisol in order to protect itself, but too much Cortisol is detrimental to our health.

Second, mindfulness can help us break self-destructive patterns of behavior. We tend to ruminate on the past, thinking about the mistakes we have made and beating ourselves up about what we should have done differently. The reverse is also true that often we worry about the future, which we have no control over. Mindfulness teaches us to focus on the present. We can't control things that happen to us, but we can control how we respond to them.

Third, mindfulness teaches us that we do not have to be a slave to our thoughts. Instead of fighting against some of our thoughts, mindfulness teaches us to invite them in and make them our friends.

**Public Relations Committee Report- ACBT: "Better Than Ever"**

by Kenneth Semien, Sr.

In 2021, we will strategically broaden our horizons through innovative methods as we connect with Texans who are blind or visually impaired, with an emphasis on those who are 40 and younger and those who are new to vision loss. As we move forward into the new year, the public relations committee will make special efforts to broadcast the message and endeavors of the American Council of the Blind of Texas (ACBT) on social media by building partnerships with schools, colleges, universities, and more. Invitations are being extended to organizations and agencies to join us in planning collaborative activities in which we share common interests and are able to experience mutual benefit. We will introduce ACBT to some and expand our reach to others while sharing newly designed Braille and large print flyers and contact cards, as well as participate in a variety of virtual events. Mark your calendar for our 43rd annual ACBT Conference/Convention that is currently scheduled for August 26-29, 2021, at the Omni Austin Hotel, 4140 Governors Row, Austin, Texas. Note that our event may be held virtually if COVID-19 persists. Inquire about our scholarship program as you seek to support students who are blind or visually impaired who are continuing to achieve their academic goals. Yes. ACBT will be better than ever this year. Contact us with your thoughts and ideas as to how we can work together for a better Texas by dialing 409-866-5838 or send an email to semien.k@att.net. Visit us at [www.acbtexas.org](http://www.acbtexas.org) to access current events and notices.

Public Relations Committee Members:

Chair, Kenneth Semien, Sr., Beaumont Area Council

Foster Brown, Houston Council

Will Burly, Austin Council

Jan Gray, Fort Worth Council

Sara Freeman-Smith, Houston Council

Transportation Committee Report

**Beyond Masks and Sanitizer: Riding Safely in the New Year**

by Paula Muysenberg

When we talk about safety these days, most of us think of wearing a mask, washing hands regularly, and staying home much of the time. But when you need to use a cab, rideshare, or special transit, it's wise to keep some additional safety tips in mind.

Always make sure you're getting into the right vehicle. If the driver doesn't call your name when he or she pulls up, ask, "Who are you here to pick up?"

I've found that some drivers don't catch my question right away, perhaps because of traffic noise or because they're focused on directing me to the passenger door. If your driver doesn't respond, try rephrasing the question slightly (for example, "Who are you picking up?"). While we can remain pleasant and courteous, it's best not to get into a vehicle until you're certain it's the right one.

Early in your ride, clarify your destination. Make sure the address your driver has down is where you actually want to go. Once, when trying to order a Lyft ride home, I pulled up the wrong address. I didn't realize what I had done until we arrived and my driver told me where we were. He graciously took me home, and I tipped him handsomely in the app. But I could have saved us both some trouble by checking with him at the start of the ride.

Even if you've already discussed your destination, it's a good idea to verify your location when you arrive. Ask the driver to read both the street name and the address. Riders have occasionally found themselves at the correct house or building number but on the wrong street. For business destinations, ask your driver to read the sign at the entrance. That can help you avoid being let out not only at the wrong entrance but perhaps well down the block from your intended destination.

The ACBT Transportation Committee wishes everyone good health, smooth travels, and a much happier year in 2021.

**Alamo Council Update**

by Mary Alice Gary

Happy New Year to All! 😊 Wow! What a year 2020 was! Personally, 2020 couldn't end fast enough for me! How about y'all? Did any of you want that year to stick around? On a positive note, there's a vaccine, elections are over, and we have learned how to Zoom, virtually, that is. I've made many new friends Zooming around San Antonio. Now, in 2021 here we are with a new appreciation for our families, friends, and just life in general.

Every December, the Alamo Council participates in a Christmas Giving Program for visually impaired students who attend the San Antonio Independent School District. Twenty-one students benefited from this year's giving. Gifts ranged from basic clothing items, radios, cassette and CD players, headphones, and even multi-sensory toys. Thank you, Lou Ann, for working with the School District and doing all the shopping for the students. Your hard work is greatly appreciated.

The Alamo Council ended the year with a virtual Christmas party in place of our meeting. We caught up with everyone who attended and just enjoyed the time spent with friends. To add to the season, our Fiesta Medals were transformed into ornaments for those wanting to purchase one to decorate their tree. Anyone looking for more information about the Alamo Council of the Blind can reach us in the following ways: website [www.acbsatx.org](http://www.acbsatx.org), emailed to info.acbsatx@gmail.com, or by phone at 210-492-4420.

Until next time, stay happy, healthy, and safe.

**Austin Council Update**

By Stephen Kerr

Happy New Year from Austin! As difficult as this year has been for most of us, the Austin chapter worked together and persevered through the pandemic that caused us to meet virtually since February.

Even the coronavirus couldn't prevent the chapter from hosting its annual Christmas party in early December. Through the magic of Zoom, we gathered to the sounds of Christmas music playing softly in the background, a Best COVID Mask contest, Holiday Jeopardy Game, door prizes, and a Get to Know You segment where everyone shared a fun fact about themselves. The party was a smashing success. A big thanks to the Member Morale Committee for their hard work in planning this event.

Since we were unable to hold chapter elections in November, Dennis Sims will remain president for another term, and Steven Salas will continue as vice president. Stephen Kerr has stepped down as secretary, so Paul Hunt was appointed to fulfill his position until elections are held. Margarine Beaman will continue her long and faithful service as treasurer.

It is our hope that 2021 will be a better year for all of you. Stay safe and well, and we hope to see everyone in person sooner rather than later. But, until then, we shall keep moving forward.

**Dallas Area Council Update**

by Ted Harper

As we start our new year together, let us take a moment to celebrate our challenges and accomplishments during 2020.

Did you ever think you'd actually learn to use Zoom? The thought of learning this skill brought a little bead of sweat to my brow. However, slowly we all learned together, and now we aren't sweating it.

The entire organization had to rethink how we did things. Thanks for the unwavering leadership from both the state and national. We learned how to work through the challenges. Some methods, like fundraising, still need more thought.

Our White Cane Day was held virtually as well. The Dallas ACB chapter always provides 25 canes to Envision Dallas, formerly the Dallas Lighthouse, for those who need to replace a damaged or worn out cane. Our outreach committee chair, Mary Witherspoon, and other committee members created a flyer that was given to Envision Dallas to accompany the white cane. The recipient will know that Dallas ACB made the replacement cane possible. The flyer is designed to increase the organization's visibility in our area. So many folks receive their vision loss diagnosis and feel adrift. The hope is, folks just like them can help them learn what's available in our area…and maybe they will become a member.

Also, during October, the chapter amended its bylaws in order to protect our nonprofit standing, or so we thought. It turns out it was the constitution that needed to be changed to reflect a homogeneous statement from national, state, and all the chapters that have nonprofit status. During our November meeting ACBT president, Peggy Garrett, made herself available to explain what was needed and how the process worked. There's still work to be done. Look at the bright side; we amended a dusty set of bylaws that had not been updated for years.

Let's talk about prescriptions. We all know Envision America provides a free device that reads prescription labels. We also know that many pharmacies don't realize their corporate office offers labeling service to its customers. The number is 800 890 1180. Call them to find out the 4-1-1 and any new updates, so you can help lead your pharmacist through the process. Envision America has been helping the blind community with talking prescription devices for many years, but many pharmacies are still in "the dark."

My sincere thanks to our chapter secretary, Carol White, for always encouraging me to submit an article for the Texas Star. She actually wrote the bulk of the article…I just spiffed it up.

**El Paso Council Update**

By Eleanor Coldwell

The El Paso Council of the Blind held their Zoom Christmas party on December 5th. We had fun playing games such as Christmas Trivia, Christmas carols, fill in the blanks, and sharing favorite Christmas memories.

We also delivered holiday meals to 12 needy families of blind children.

We worked closely with the El Paso County Elections Office Administrator to ensure that BVI voters would have a smooth and easy voting experience that was independent and private.

We helped design a signature guide that fits over the iPad where voters need to choose their party and write their signatures. Our Elections Administrator seeks our input after each election to make sure the voting process is handled correctly for us.

We continue with our Zoom meetings and will not hold officer elections until next year.

Two of our members are representing the El Paso Council of the Blind as they work with the city of El Paso to make sure that all Amber Alerts are accessible on television.

**Fort Worth Council Update**

by Jan Gray

The fort worth Council has been meeting virtually since the pandemic began. We have participated in virtual tours at the kimbell art museum. We are keeping in contact with each other to ensure no one is in need" or having issues.

For Christmas this year, instead of meeting at a restaurant" we decided to make Christmas baskets for those in our chapter who are living in assisted living centers or who have no close relatives in the area. We delivered them on December 15th. We have been closely watching how the Pandemic is progressing so we can plan our first face to face meeting. I leave you with this thought: you don't have to be perfect; having a bad day is OK; small steps are progress.

**Houston Council Update**

by Michael Garrett

 In spite of the obstacles we faced in 2020, the Houston Council of the Blind remained vibrant and continued to serve as an integral part of the Houston disability movement. During the last quarter of the year, we continued to have a place at the table for some key disability events in the greater Houston area. We participated in our local transportation Community Leaders Call; we were among several co-sponsors of White Cane Safety Day Houston, which was held virtually; and a number of our members participated in the FFB Virtual Vision Walk. We also co-sponsored a workshop entitled "tips for Medicare Enrollment for 2021". Our major service project for the year was again the Ronald McDonald House. We held our annual Christmas celebration, which was followed by an auction. At this event, our member of the year was named. She is none other than Miss Nelly Martinez. Congratulations, Nelly, for all of your enthusiastic, hard work!

We look forward to not only meeting the challenges but also having fun in 2021.

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:**

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**First Vice President - Membership Chair:**

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**Second Vice President - Fundraising Chair:**

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Local Chapter: Austin Council

**Treasurer - Finance & Budget Chair:**

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**Secretary:**

Mary Alice Gary
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Local Chapter: Alamo Council

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

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**Board Member:**
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Local Chapter: Fort Worth Council

**Board Member:**
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Local Chapter: Houston Council

**American Council of the Blind of Texas, Inc. (ACBT)**

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

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Transforming the health of the community, one person at a time.

* Cigna (Star Sponsor)

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

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