**THE TEXAS STAR**

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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 the President**

By Peggy Garrett

Happy Fall Everyone!

Yes, it is officially Fall, and cooler weather is on the way! Fall is a wonderful time of the year. Although I miss seeing the beauty of leaves in all their glorious colors; I still love the fall season. It is the gateway to Thanksgiving and to the most glorious time of the year, the Christmas season!

I distinctly remember writing the article for the October, 2020 newsletter and praying that the Corona Virus would end soon. Here we are a year later, still in the midst of the pandemic. It has been a year of uncertainty and upheaval for so many people whose lives have been changed forever due to the loss of loved ones, employment, and the lingering effects of Covid-19. Many of our members have experienced great losses and are struggling to adjust not only to their blindness, but to other major life changes. I send my condolences, thoughts, and prayers to each of you. Please know that you are not alone. Your ACBT family is here for you, eager to assist you through these difficult times!

Despite the pandemic, ACBT has been busy pursuing its mission and goals. We have continued advocating for issues that affect people who are blind or have low vision, including: voting rights, right to receive Medicare information in accessible formats, services for the older blind population, urging Medicaid to include dental care, vision, and eye health appropriations, and working with TWC to assist students as well as individuals seeking employment. ACBT will continue pursuing its vision, “Texans who are blind or visually impaired will have equal access to all of the resources that will allow them to lead productive and independent lives.”

As this is the last newsletter of 2021, I want to wish each of you a blessed Thanksgiving and Christmas season. May all of the love, joy and peace of the season be with you throughout the coming year!

**From the Membership Committee**

By Michael Garrett

Greetings ACBT members! By now, hopefully you’ve had time to reflect on our recently completed 2021 Conference/Convention. If you will recall, our theme this year was, “Courage to Create and Embrace Change”. Each session was designed to be informative, impactful and to provide you, our members, with tools to create and embrace change.

As individuals who are blind or visually impaired, we experience change frequently. It is especially noteworthy when the onset of vision loss occurs later in life. Change is an ever-evolving aspect of our lives. The question is, do we have the courage to create and embrace the right kind of changes for our lives? We face change every day, both externally and internally. Our communities are changing, our workplaces are changing, even our laws are changing. How must we respond? What actions must we take to keep up with the changes? If you remember, there were sessions meant to meet several aspects of everyday living including: the importance of braille, access to reading material, securing the right guide dog, independent living tips around the house, financial information and improving your presentation skills. Using information from these and other sessions can equip you to make a difference, not only in your personal life, but also in the lives of those you meet.

The hope is that we can all make changes that advance our lives. And, as our lives move forward, we add validity to the cause of achieving our goals. In so doing, we adhere to our motto:

ACBT: Advancing the Cause of Blind Texans.

**Secretary Secrets**

by Mary Alice Gary

First, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the membership for once again choosing me to serve as Secretary. I greatly appreciate the support I receive from all of you and look forward to working with my fellow ACBT Officers and Board members for another year.

What a Conference! There was so much to learn from the Sessions this year. There was a Toastmaster presentation, and I’m not talking about that little appliance in your kitchen either! Another session on Mentoring, explaining the how and why’s, along with who benefits. Great job Neva! And let’s not forget the awesome Auction and all the other presenters/ speakers. Great Job to all involved with the 2021 ACBT Conference/Convention!

Stay connected by subscribing to the ACBT Groups List by sending an email to: [ACBT+subscribe@groups.io](mailto:ACBT+subscribe@groups.io), (that’s the plus symbol after the ACBT). No more missing important dates or events because you won’t have to rely on someone else to get the 4-1-1. The announcements will arrive directly in your Inbox! All ACBT happenings, Committee events and activities are announced here.

Another list that might pique your interest is the ACB Community Calendar. You can participate in calls raging from socializing, exercising, learning new things, like crafting, assistive technology or playing an instrument, just to name a few. 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. Don’t want to sit at the computer or have the phone connected to your ear all day? Use your Alexa device to listen to most of the calls on ACB Radio, now ACB Media Network. Just ask Alexa to “Enable ACB Media”. She will prompt you to select stream 1 thru 10. You can check out what the new channels or streams are at: <https://www.acb.org/alexa-skill-update-6-28-21>.

**Tales from the Treasurer**

Sheila Derrick

I hope everyone is still basking in the glow of ACBT’s second and very successful virtual conference/convention. It was a memorable experience and one we hope to repeat in some form in the future. I want to thank all of you who supported the on-line auction, both with your donations and your winning bids. We raised $5,000. This was the best ever and many thanks to the newly created Auction Committee for doing such a great job. Also thanks once again to Larry and Linda for being our Door Prize champions. If you missed all the fun and excitement, there will be another opportunity in 2022.

It is now time to begin renewing ACBT memberships and bringing in those new ones. Dues are as follows: local chapters pay $7.00 per member and $3.00 for junior members aged 13-17, at-large members pay $10.00, and special interest affiliates with ACBT (LUA-T, BRLT, and GDUTX) pay $2.00 for each member.

Current 2021 membership rolls will be sent to each chapter treasurer via email in Excel spreadsheet form in December. If a different format is needed, please let me know. This should allow for easier changes and additions. Updated membership rolls must be returned by February 21, 2022. The following information is needed for each member: name, address, home and cell phone numbers, email address, Braille Forum format (large print, digital cartridge, Braille, or email), Texas Star format (large print, Audio CD, or email), and vision status (Blind/VI or fully sighted), and demographic information (age range, ethnicity, and gender). **Please note ACB has changed their vision status choices again and only Blind/VI and Fully Sighted are needed.**

If you have any questions, please contact me: Sheila Derrick, ACBT Treasurer, 309 Paloverde Ln., Fort Worth, TX 76112; sjderrick212@hotmail.com or (817) 507-3964.

**In Honor of Veterans' Day**

**By Eleanor Coldwell**

Originally known as Armistice Day, Veterans Day commemorates when hostilities ceased between the Allies and Germany during WWI on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, 1918. It is a day when Americans honor the men and women who served in the Armed Forces.

Some veterans are blinded while in action, and others lose their vision after leaving the military. Regardless, The Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) stands by to assist any veteran who is blind or visually impaired.

BVA services include conference calls for sharing information with each other, families, or caregivers. They also participate in activities such as museum tours, fishing trips, picnics, Veterans Day Parades, and White Cane Safety Day events. BVA has a Veterans Service Office as well, to inform Blinded Veterans, their families, and caregivers about the benefits they may be eligible for.

BVA was established on March 28, 1945 by approximately 100 blinded veterans in Connecticut. It now has offices in cities throughout the country. To find the BVA office near you: Go to BVA.org; Click on About Us; then on Our Team. The Regional Map will show you that there are BVA groups in Houston and South Texas.

If there is no BVA Group in your city, please call the VA Medical Center closest to you and ask to speak to their Visual Impairment Services Team (VIST) Coordinator.

“Blinded Veterans, their families and caregivers who are new to the world of vision loss are not alone. BVA wants to assist Blinded Veterans to become as productive as they wish in everyday life. We will support, assist and provide as much resource information as possible" – Kevin Jackson, BVA Region 6 Director. Telephone: (512) 431-8471 or (512) 394-0372 Email: kjackson@bva.org

**Advocacy on the Edge of Change**

by Kenneth Semien, Sr.

For the past several months, representatives from each of our 7 chapters and a member at large joined together to make contact with and ensure that services provided by the Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) within Texas include seniors with vision loss. As a newly appointed committee, the current Advocacy Services/Legislation Committee is gaining a new perspective and gearing up for a lineup of blindness related issues that we can address, following an active 2021 legislative session that extended to several additional special sessions called by Governor Abbott.

Although there will be a shift in our focus, we will continue to consider strategies to make accessibility a priority when it comes to the Absentee Ballot and placing an emphasis on the need for additional funding and enhancements to programs and services for older adults experiencing vision loss.

A portion of our efforts for the foreseeable future will be directed by recent resolutions adopted by the American Council of the Blind (ACB) Board of Directors that include, but are not limited to mandatory disability awareness training for healthcare workers; appointments to state rehabilitation councils and addressing allegations of sexual assault, harassment and abuse at blindness training centers and other rehabilitation programs, as well as reaching out to ACBT members to hear about what they feel is most important to advocate for in relation to Texans who are blind, have low vision or may have received a recent vision loss diagnosis. We welcome your input and questions. To share your thoughts and concerns, dial 409-866-5838 or send email to [semien.k@att.net](mailto:semien.k@att.net). Members of the committee are Mary Witherspoon of Dallas Area Council, Melanie Brunson of the Alamo Council, Betty Huffman and Will Burley of the Austin Council, Michael Garrett of the Houston Council, Kyle Delk and Kenneth Semien, Sr. of the Beaumont Area Council.

**ACBT 2021 Conference/Convention**

By President Peggy r. Garrett

The 43rd annual and second virtual ACBT Conference/Convention was held August 26-29. The success of the event is attributed in large part to the ACB Media staff who made it possible. Many thanks go to Rick Moran and all of the Zoom hosts who worked diligently to ensure that the event went smoothly! Thanks also to all presenters, sponsors/donors, and attendees!

The theme for 2021 “Courage to Create and Embrace Change”, expresses ACBT’s vision that people living with blindness have access to needed resources to provide equal opportunities to education, employment, healthcare, and opportunities to create more independence in all areas of their lives!

This was a historic year for ACBT as we amended our Constitution in keeping with Texas law that affect non-profits to allow ACBT to hold its business meeting and allow virtual voting. Elections were held and the following officers and directors were elected: President: Peggy r. Garrett, complete 2nd term; 1st VP Michael E. Garrett, Complete 2nd term; 2nd VP, Kevin Ratliff, Complete 3rd term; Secretary: Mary Alice Gary; Treasurer: Sheila Derrick; Director: LouAnn Williams, elected for 2nd 4-year term; and Director Steven Salas, Elected for 1st 4-year term.

While the two virtual Conference/Conventions have been successful, we are hoping that next year we will be in person again and that you all will meet us in Austin!

**Excerpts from the ACBT Conference/Convention**

by Kenneth Semien, Sr.

During the virtual 43rd ACBT Conference/Convention, held from August 26-29, 2021, proposed amendments posted in the July issue of the Texas Star were adopted. Obtain your copy of the amended ACBT Constitution and Bylaws by visiting the ACBT website at [www.acbtexas.org](http://www.acbtexas.org). For those who aren’t able to access the website, dial 409-866-5838 to discuss alternatives available to obtain your copy.

During the annual banquet on Saturday August 28, 2021, the Who’s Who Among Blind Texans Award was presented to Neva Fairchild and Dr. Karen Wolffe for exemplary service, leadership, and advocacy in Texas and beyond. These are phenomenal recipients of this award.

On Sunday August 29, 2021, resolutions were adopted to ensure that we express gratitude to all facilitators and presenters who shared their time, energy, and resources with attendees of the ACBT Conference/Convention.

We extended our appreciation to ACB Media Network for their professionalism and commitment to ensuring that interested parties could listen to sessions from their smart devices and participate on Zoom. Special thanks were given to Dan Spoone, President of the American Council of the Blind (ACB), for joining in on the Friday August 27, 2021 anniversary party to acknowledge 44 years since receiving our charter as an affiliate of ACB. We also thanked David Trott, ACB Treasurer for facilitating the leadership seminar and serving as our Keynote speaker during the annual banquet.

**Nominating Committee Report**

By Michael Garrett

After an historic elections process, held at our 2021 American Council of the Blind of Texas (ACBT) Conference/Convention, where we elected officers and board members virtually for the first time, it’s now time to begin looking forward to the 2022 elections. It’s not too early to begin thinking about who might want to serve ACBT in a leadership role. In order to keep us on schedule, all officer positions will be up for reelection in 2022.

As we draw closer to the next Conference/Convention, more details will follow. However, certain criteria will remain intact. The deadline for receiving nominations will be May 31, 2022. Each candidate must submit a short bio and answer the questions prepared by the Nominating Committee which will appear in the Texas Star.

Remember, we are looking for qualified, experienced, and dedicated candidates who know the organization and have the best interest of ACBT at heart.

Always keep our motto in mind:

ACBT: Advancing the Cause of Blind Texans!

**From the Public Relations Committee**

By Mary Witherspoon

The Public Relations Committee is Looking for Good News … Contacts!

When you read your local paper, in print or online, do you enjoy the special feature articles that focus on challenges a person, or a group of people face and how they stay determined to find a way to succeed? We want to share stories about people who are Blind or Visually Impaired in newspapers across Texas.

Your ACBT Public Relations Committee needs your help. Do you have a favorite features writer or columnist with the paper you read? We are looking for those reporters or editors who love to share stories about interesting people. Whether you read a large metropolitan newspaper or a local suburban newspaper, share your contacts with the ACBT Public Relations Committee. Identify the name of the reporter or editor, the department in which they work, the name of the newspaper and, hopefully, an email address or direct way to make contact.

If you have a suggestion for a topic regarding challenges and successes living life as a Blind or Visually Impaired person, share that too! Send your information to Public Relations Committee Chair Mary Witherspoon via email at [mmwitherspoon@att.net](mailto:mmwitherspoon@att.net). Hopefully, in 2022 you will be reading a featured story about truly interesting members of ACBT.

**Scholarship Committee Report**

By Stephen Kerr

Greetings from the Scholarship Committee!

Throughout the spring and early summer, we were hard at work preparing to award three scholarships to deserving blind or visually impaired students in higher education programs.

Once again, we had many qualified candidates, which always makes for some tough decisions. That’s a good problem to have, and we as a committee never take these decisions lightly.

We are excited to announce the following three winners for the 2021-22 school year:

## Qusay Hussein: ACBT Scholarship

Qusay was born in Iraq and lost his sight at age 17 from a suicide bombing. He moved to Jordan and received treatment from Doctors Without Borders before coming to the United States as a refugee.

Qusay graduated from Austin Community College with an associate’s degree. He received dual bachelor’s degrees in psychology and social work from the University of Texas. He is currently working on a master’s degree toward helping people who suffered traumatic events like he did.

## Caleb Edinger: DKM Memorial Scholarship

In high school, Caleb was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa, but that hasn’t slowed him down. A resident of Lake Jackson, Texas, Caleb was a member of his high school health science club and wrestling team. He also took a trip with his church youth group to India.

Caleb’s desire is to be an attorney, advocating for people with disabilities. He’s currently a sophomore at Sam Houston State, majoring in criminal justice with a minor in pre-law.

## Rene Carrasco: Carolyn Garrett Memorial Scholarship

A Houston area resident, Rene is returning to school later in life after starting a family. He is a father of four, and two of his children have disabilities.

The son of immigrant parents, Rene is the first in his family to graduate high school and attend college. He just started his junior year at the University of Houston, majoring in business management.

Rene’s ultimate goal is to advocate for inclusion of people with disabilities, particularly in the corporate world.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to congratulate these three winners, as well as everyone who applied for a scholarship. Each have demonstrated a desire to further the advancement of blind and visually impaired people, and we wish them all continued success.

I’d also like to thank my committee members for their dedication and hard work again this year: Michael Garrett, Mary Alice Gary, and Eleanor Coldwell. I’m excited to continue our work in the coming year.

**Get Movin’ with Transportation**

by Mary Alice Gary

Well, Autumn has arrived, and cooler weather should be just around the corner. Soon Leaf’s will be dropping from the trees, and ghosts, goblins and witches will be running about the neighborhoods. Okay, now-a-days it’s princesses, super-heroes, and villains. What was I thinking! And not too far behind is the festive Holiday Season. I’m sure you all can’t wait for that.

As you travel around for upcoming seasonal events, the Transportation Committee wishes you save and healthy travels, with these few suggestions in mind: 1) Remember to carry your sanitizer and wipes to use on your hands and cane, and a small plastic bag to place your used items in. 2) Wear a mask when in public areas for the safety of others, your family and yourself. 3) Try your best to social distance, when possible, not that that’s easy. 4) Carry disposable gloves for use on railings in stairways or door handles. 5) Finally, when arriving home wash hands thoroughly and don’t forget to wipe down your cane or harness handle for the next trip.

I would also like to announce and welcome Chris Allen, Conswella Bates, Cynthia Julun, Gayle Metoyer, and Ted Harper to the 2021-2022 Transportation Committee. Thank you for your dedication and willingness to serve on this ACBT Committee. I look forward to working with all of you.

Anyone with a question, comment or concern revolving around transportation, may contact any member of this Committee. The contact information for me, is: email, [ma-gary@att.net](mailto:ma-gary@att.net) or by phone at 915-269-2119.

Happy and Safe Travels!

**My Top Five favorite things about fall**

By Chris Allen

These are my Top Five Favorite things about fall:

#5 Fall means that my two favorite holidays Thanksgiving and Christmas are not far away.

#4 I love the fall because both my father and uncle have birthdays in September and October. They are 2 of my favorite people whose birthdays I never forget.

#3 I love the fall because flowers such as chrysanthemums and pansies begin to bloom and are beautiful to look at in their bountiful medley of colors.

It was a hard choice as to which of these was my number 1 favorite thing about fall. In 2nd place 1 of the best things about fall is that the summer is over! Fall signals cooler temperatures and weather conducive to being outdoors.

My number 1 favorite thing about fall is that it means football season is back in both college and the pros.

Hopefully, we can all agree, regardless of what your favorite things about Fall are, it is 1 of the very best times of year.

**What Adults Should Know about Vaccines**    
By Superior HealthPlan

By the time a child turns 10 years old, they have likely been vaccinated to prevent as many as 15 diseases. Vaccines are not just limited to children. Adults need vaccines, too. From flu to COVID-19 to tetanus, vaccines should be ongoing through an adult’s life.

So why get vaccinated?

To protect yourself. Vaccines not only lower your chance of getting a certain disease, but they also work with your body’s natural defenses to help you safely build immunity to disease.

Another [reason](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults/reasons-to-vaccinate.html) to stay on top of routine vaccines is to keep your loved ones and others protected against harmful diseases. Some people in your family or community may not be able to get certain vaccines due to their age or health conditions. They rely on you to help prevent the spread of disease. For example:

* Flu vaccine lowers your risk of flu-related heart attacks or other complications from existing health conditions like diabetes and chronic lung disease.
* The COVID-19 vaccine [can keep you from getting seriously ill](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/vaccine-benefits.html) even if you do get COVID-19.

The best way to manage vaccinations is to consult with your doctor or reference the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) vaccine schedules for [adults](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults/index.html) and [children](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents/schedules/reasons-follow-schedule.html).

No matter what steps you take to stay healthy, getting vaccinated is important to keep you and others safe.

If you have any questions about vaccines and their safety, please click [here](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents/FAQs.html).

**Alamo Council Update**

by Mary Alice Gary

By the time you read this article, Alamo will have participated in the San Antonio White Cane Awareness Day on October 15, 2021. A walking procession from San Fernando Cathedral to the steps of City Hall was completed, with Mayor Ron Nirenberg reading the Proclamation followed by some encouraging words for all in attendance.

As with most Chapters, Alamo is preparing for the upcoming Chapter elections in November. Currently, we are planning an in-person Christmas party, in hopes of gathering together this year. Gosh, how the year has flown by! I can’t believe we’re thinking about the Holiday’s already. I’m having trouble believing it’s already October! How about y’all? I’m not looking forward to the cold weather yet, that’s for sure! Not after last year’s freeze.

Stay safe and enjoy the upcoming season with your family and friends. We’ll chat again next year!

**Beaumont Council Update**

By Cynthia Julan

The Beaumont Area Council of the Blind, Inc. had the honor of having individuals from other chapters attend our September meeting to hear two guest speakers from the American Printing House for the Blind Connect Center. The presenters gave brief overviews of the services they provide for people who are blind or visually impaired. For example, a program known as Family Connect is offered to parents who have blind or visually impaired children. They provide a referral information line for individuals that are new to blindness or are losing their vision, and information on being a sighted guide. In addition, they have training on independent living skills, diabetes, and webinars on different topics. The American Printing House for the Blind also has a Career Connect program. This program assists with things such as resume preparation, being ready for an interview, and dressing for success. To obtain more information about the resources that they offer contact them at [www.aphconnectcenter.org](http://www.aphconnectcenter.org) or by calling 1-800-232-5463.

During our August meeting, the benefits of learning braille were discussed. Some examples were given to show how braille could be used to assist with helping someone to be more independent. Individuals seeking information regarding braille and its uses can contact the Hadley Institute for the blind and visually impaired at [www.hadley.edu](http://www.hadley.edu) or by calling 1-800-323-4238. We concluded the meeting by encouraging the members to continue practicing safety precautions during this pandemic. They were informed if they were feeling discouraged or depressed to talk to someone. “Find someone that you feel you can confide in.” This could be a friend, family member, your chapter president, or a professional.

**El Paso Council of the Blind**

The El Paso Council of the Blind held 2 fundraisers this summer and made $700 total. The first fundraiser was a silent auction held at members Cathy and Alfredo Perez's home, where we held our monthly meeting and summer cook-out. The second was organized by Member Blanca Cunningham at Raising Cane's Restaurant. Our October 15th White Cane Day was held on the University of Texas at El Paso campus. We walked around the campus with our canes, gathered outside for the gathering of the Colors, National Anthem, and Pledge of Allegiance. The Proclamation was read by a city representative, and then we moved indoors where we offered demonstrations, food, and drinks to our guests.

"Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of our light." -- Brene Brown

**Fort Worth Council**

By Jan Gray

The Fort Worth Chapter is moving forward with our spotlight on our members. Each month we spotlight a different member, and we are learning such interesting things about each other. In September we had a representative from Vanda who informed us about non-24. The Foundation Fighting Blindness presented a program at our meeting in October. November will be a book discussion from the book,” Identity Theft”. We are excited about the coming year and hope to make it our best ever!

**HOUSTON HAPPENINGS**

By Michael Garrett

In H-Town, we are still meeting virtually. But the work of the Houston Council of the Blind (HCB) goes on. In the midst of it all, we’ve lost several key, dedicated members and a number of our families have been affected by the coronavirus.

However, we have managed to accomplish some things. At our August meeting, we awarded two scholarships along with a one-year membership to the recipients. We stay in contact with the winners, and we are anticipating active participation from at least one of the students. We continue to bring in new members as we welcomed several new members over the summer and have others who have expressed interest in joining HCB.

We will be holding a new members orientation session to better acquaint our members about the organization and find out where they want to serve. We also participated in the planning for the 2021 Houston celebration of White Cane Safety Day. We continue to cultivate our longstanding relationship with the Lighthouse of Houston. We make a concerted effort to keep our fingers on the pulse of advocacy issues in the Houston area, especially transportation. Our next major fundraising event will be our HCB Christmas Auction, which will be held on Sunday, December 5, 2021. More details will follow. Y’all come!

HCB: Helping, Caring, Building!

**Floriography**

by Jan Gray

“Say it with flowers!” For years, I thought some advertising executive dreamed up that line. Boy, was I wrong! In the Ottoman and Persian Eras, they used flowers to communicate secret messages to their harems. European diplomats began writing back home about the practice and the next thing you know, floriography is flourishing in Europe. Floriography is the art of using flowers to communicate. In the Victorian Era, Nobles attempted to be more dignified, and less verbally expressive, so they used flowers to express those thoughts they did not verbalize. As a result, a myriad of street venders and shops began selling a variety of flowers. Here is an example of how it worked: A young man would take some flowers to the girl of his dreams and upon receiving them she would hold them to her heart if she felt the same. If friendship was all she felt, she would place them between her breasts. However, if she held them upside down by her side it meant “Hit the road Jack and don’t come back.” Wonder how that would work today? Recently, I purchased some petunias, and being the curious person I am, I looked them up. I learned that petunias are part of the night shade family of tomatoes, chili peppers, and tobacco. The name petunia comes from an aboriginal word which means “a tobacco that is not good to smoke”. I will never view them the same! There is a book on BARD titled “Legends and Lore of Texas Wildflowers” that can be downloaded that gives the meaning of over 50 flowers. By the way, petunias are not in it!

**The Braille Revival League of Texas**

By Michael Garrett

At this year’s annual meeting, held during the ACBT Conference/Convention, BRLT elected a new slate of officers and board members. They are Michael Garrett, President, Karen Eitel, Vice President, Sandhya Rao, Secretary, Margarine Beaman Treasurer, and board members Neva Fairchild, Olivia Chavez, and Karen Thomas. We thank all of them for agreeing to serve and promote the importance of braille in the lives of those who are blind or visually impaired.

The board had its initial meeting in September and has already charted a course of action. There are at least four projects in the works which could develop into more. The board has proposed to work on a celebration for Louis Braille’s birthday in 2022. We would also like to give a presentation related to the importance of braille (stay tuned for more information). In addition, we will likely offer a BRLT Scholarship to a deserving braille reader and we plan to resume our braille writing contest.

So, you can see that the BRLT board has hit the ground running. We hope to encourage everybody who can, to:

READ MORE BRAILLE!

**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:**

Peggy R. Garrett

(281) 438-9665  
prcgarrett@sbcglobal.net    
Local Chapter: Houston Council   
  
**First Vice President - Membership Chair:**

Michael E. Garrett   
(281) 438-9665  
megarrett4443@sbcglobal.net   
Local Chapter: Houston Council

**Second Vice President - Fundraising Chair:**

Kevin D. Ratliff  
(512) 826-1619  
kevin.ratliff512@gmail.com   
Local Chapter: Austin Council   
  
**Treasurer - Finance & Budget Chair:**

Sheila Derrick   
(817) 507-3964  
sjderrick212@hotmail.com   
Local Chapter: Fort Worth Council

**Secretary:**

Mary Alice Gary  
(915) 269-2119  
ma-gary@att.net   
Local Chapter: Alamo Council   
  
**Immediate Past President - Constitution & Bylaws Chair:**

Kenneth Semien, Sr.   
(409) 866-5838  
[semien.k@att.net](mailto:semien.k@att.net)  
Local Chapter: Beaumont Area Council 

**ACBT State Directors:**

**Board Member**:   
Chris D. Prentice - Director   
(806) 283-8227  
cprentice61@att.net    
Local Chapter: Austin Council   
  
**Board Member:**    
Louann Williams - Director   
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Local Chapter: Alamo Council

**Board Member:**    
Jan Gray

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Local Chapter: Fort Worth Council

**Board Member:**    
Foster Brown

(832) 469-1817

brownfoster@gmail.com

Local Chapter: Houston Council