**THE TEXAS STAR**

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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.]

**Points from the President**

By Cris Prentice

Welcome to Fall, ACBT members and friends! As the seasons begin to change, we begin another year in the life of ACBT. Thanks to many of you, we had a great conference in Houston. Special thanks go out to Peggy Garrett and her Planning team as well as to Jan Gray and her fundraising team. The conference had many excellent programs and tours. Our activities that raised funds were a great deal of fun as well. I must also extend my thanks to Ava, Gene and Lou Ann for their work in our exhibit hall. Overall, it was a great weekend in Houston.

It is time now to look forward to the coming year. I am in the last stages of setting our committees for the new year. If you desire to serve on one of our committees, please let me know as soon as you read this article.

Tell your friends about ACBT whenever you get a chance. If you meet a blind or visually impaired person in your daily activities, tell them about ACBT and what ACBT can do for them and what they can do for ACBT.

**First Vice President’s Report: Membership News**

By Kenneth Semien Sr.

I greet you with a heightened level of gratitude and an eagerness to serve as First Vice President of the American Council of the Blind of Texas for the 2024-2026 term. I look forward to meeting and communicating with each of you and responding to questions you may have.

As your recently elected First Vice President and Membership Chair, I am seeking to identify areas in which we can grow and enhance the member experience, therefore it will be my pleasure to receive input from every interested member as they share what their experience has been and learn of how they feel we can best make positive changes. Submit your ideas into the ACBT Member Suggestion Box by sending an email message with “Idea for Suggestion Box” in the subject line to semien.k@outlook.com.

To begin, here are a few things that I will strive to implement during my term:

* Gathering a diverse membership committee consisting of members representing the demographics of our organization
* Holding quarterly New Member Orientation Session
* Placing an emphasis on engaging members of all ages and backgrounds
* Strengthening support for Chapter & Special Interest Affiliates
* Collaborating with board members and other committee chairs for greater involvement and innovation
* Growing the ACBT Members Choice Referral Program
* Establishing two New Chapters
* Standing up one New Special-Interest Affiliate
* Hosting tailored Education & Training Sessions

“Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much” – Helen Keller

If you are excited about what we can achieve together as an organization, make contact by dialing 409-866-5838 or send an email to:

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

**Rocking and Rolling with the Second Vice President**

By Jan Gray

Once again, conference has ended and hopefully everyone has gotten back to their normal routine, and are anxiously awaiting next year’s conference. First, I must thank all who attended, or participated in our raffles, the Escape room, or the Carnival. You helped to make it all very successful and that was our goal to raise funds for ACBT, and have fun doing so. Here are the final numbers: The raffle brought in $1690, The Carnival brought in $1425, and the Escape room brought in $1025. Again a huge thanks to all of the fund raising committee for their hard work and cooperation in spite of a few glitches we encountered. The fund raising committee is made up of an amazing group of people. We have already begun to toss around ideas for the 2025 Conference fund raisers, so if you have any ideas, let me know. Also, if you have an idea about what you would like to see in our raffle, let us know that as well. We will listen to all suggestions and take them under serious consideration. We are working diligently to make our fund raisers innovative, unique, and interesting for all who participate. Stay tuned, as we have some interesting info coming in the next few months!

**Secretary Secrets**

By Mary Alice Gary

Let’s begin by welcoming our newly elected Officers President Chris Prentice, 1st Vice President Kenneth Semien, 2nd Vice President Jan Gray, Secretary Mary Alice Gary, Treasurer Sheila Derrick and two Directors Alfredo Perez (El Paso) and Diana Ashton (At Large). Congratulations to all. I personally want to thank everyone who attended the Annual Business Meeting on Sunday to cast their votes. Thank you for your support.

What a great job Houston did with hosting the Conference/Convention. The US Treasury tour was awesome. They even gave us money as a souvenir! Can you believe that? Well, it was shredded, but it was really money before that! Who knows, I may have a million bucks in that little plastic bag I took home. And those workshops touched on so many topics, Tech Tips, Line Dancing, and Advocacy, not to mention the Exhibitors and entertainment that was offered. See you all in El Paso in 2025.

Don’t forget to sign up for the ACBT Groups List. It will keep you in the know for upcoming events and news about our various Chapters. Just send 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 can get the 4-1-1 delivered directly to your Inbox. Don’t like crowds? Join the ACB Community calendar and receive all types of information about calls ranging from crafts, cooking, tech tips, books, spiritual and just about every topic that comes to mind. Just send an email 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.

Remember, Keep Smiling! 😊

**Tales from the Treasurer**

By Sheila Derrick

Well, believe it or not, it’s time to start thinking about 2025. After our conference/convention in Houston, we need to continue

the momentum begun after the pandemic to expand our presence in our communities. Many of the new faces we met last year in San Antonio joined us again for education, friendship and fun.

I want to thank all of you who supported ACBT with your generous donations to our fundraising activities, the virtual and silent auctions, the raffle, the carnival and our Escape Room. We will have some new surprises for you next year in El Paso.

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 2024 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 20, 2025. 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, but NOT Braille) 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; (817) 507-3964; [sjderrick212@hotmail.com](mailto:sjderrick212@hotmail.com)

**Harvest Facts You Didn’t Know**

By Jan Gray

While researching for another topic, I came across an article that caught my interest. Did you know that maize, a cousin to the corn we eat came from South America about 7000 years ago? It was grown in the same fields as the common beans. The maize provided a stalk for the beans to climb and the beans provided nitrogen that the maize needs. Together the two crops provided a protein rich diet for natives from South America to North America. They grew pumpkins, squash, and gourds alongside the beans and maize. The leaves of the squash, pumpkins, and gourds suppressed the weeds and provided moisture retention that the maize and beans needed for growth. About 8000 years ago the potato was grown in terraces on the Andes. The starchy tuber is almost a perfect plant as it is only lacking Vitamin A And D, but it contains substantial amounts of protein. It was a staple in the diet of the Incas. Potatoes had to acclimate to the soils and climate of Europe and eventually became a staple of the peasants. Potatoes are now the Fourth largest agricultural crop in the world. Around 5000 years ago the sweet potato originated in Central America. Tomatoes were a staple in the diets of the Aztec Empire. But did not catch on in Europe for a while and tomato sauce did not appear in Italian food until the late 19th century. Chili peppers date back about 6500 years and were called chilis until Columbus gave them the name of peppers as they reminded him of black pepper. Peanuts were native to Brazil and were carried to Africa by Portuguese slave traders. Thanks to those natives of the Americas and their innovative farming practices the whole world has benefited.

The explorers came to the new world seeking gold and monetary treasures. What they did not realize was the greatest treasure was right in front of them. The food and seeds they found and took back with them that have been nourishing the world for thousands of years. Culinary treasures that have outlasted gold.

**Advocacy Report**

By Kenneth Semien Sr.

The Advocacy/Legislation Committee is happy to report that we received rave reviews from those who participated in our session during the 46th annual ACBT Conference/Convention entitled, “Celebrating the Impact of Advocacy.” Three members of the ACB Board of Directors graced the stage for a time of sharing success stories, testimonials, and lessons learned while advocating for positive change and equal access.

Kenneth Semien Sr., Facilitator and ACB Board Member was joined by committee member, Michael E. Garrett who also serves as the ACB Treasurer, and longtime advocate and ACB Secretary, Denise Colley. The room was filled with energy from advocates who were led to think about all their personal advocacy efforts as we prepared to share a list of successful outcomes.

We began by defining what advocacy is, then audience participants chimed in with their ideas of what advocacy means to them. Advocacy involves promoting the interests or cause of someone or a group of people. Michael included thoughts on various types of advocacy, such as self-advocacy (speaking up for oneself) and systems advocacy (changing policies, laws or rules that impact how someone lives their life). Denise shared an update on advocacy efforts from ACB. Successes in advocacy ranged from Pedestrian Safety, accessibility in a local Library system, education, employment, healthcare, housing, transportation, equal access to the absentee ballot, Kiosk in your doctor’s office and lab, fraud related to service animals, access to facilities, exercise equipment, websites and applications, funding for special programs and services, along with medical equipment, and more.,

We concluded with lessons learned while advocating, such as ask for two things and you are likely to receive at least one of them; If you don’t ask you don’t receive; If you don’t succeed the first time, ask again, and if finances are being requested, work to identify where funds may be available.

Committee members are Mary Witherspoon of Dallas Area Council, Melanie Brunson of Alamo Council, Michael and Peggy Garrett of Houston Council, and Kenneth Semien, Sr. of Beaumont Area Council.

Call us by dialing 409-866-5838 or send email to:

semien.k@outlook.com

**Auction Committee Update**

By Sara Freeman Smith

A super-size Texas thank you to everyone that participated in our two Auction fundraisers in August. We held our Virtual Auction using Zoom on Sunday, august 19prior to the start of the State Conference & Convention. It was our large one with more than 30 items, with participants from Texas and other states. We then held a small Silent Auction prior to the Saturday evening banquet on August 24. Thanks again to all the generous donors and bidders for making this year’s auction very successful, given our current economy & inflation! We raised a total of $3,135.00! These proceeds will help fund many of our programs especially Scholarships.

Thanks also to our Auction Committee, webmaster Floyd Daigle and our volunteers especially Laura & Mo for all their time and hard work on making it a success behind the scenes! We look forward to seeing you and having a successful auction in El Paso next august!

**Conference/Convention Review**

By Peggy Garrett

The 46th annual conference/Convention of the American Council of the Blind of Texas was held in Houston at the Marriott Westchase Hotel from August 22 to August 25. The event was well attended with more than 200 people participating including members, volunteers, 27 vendors and other interested individuals!

The annual luncheon highlighted the three ACBT members who serve as officers and Board representatives at the ACB national level: Denise Colley, ACB Treasurer, Michael Garrett, ACB Treasurer and Kenneth Semien Sr., a member of the ACB Board. The banquet featured Tricia Waechter of Blind Girl Designs who shared her inspiring story of transitioning from the sighted world to becoming a world known fashion designer!

The highlight of the Sunday morning awards breakfast was presenting scholarships, Member of the Year Award and the Ed and Linda Bradley First Timers Award.

All winners were present for breakfast and expressed their gratitude for their scholarships and awards.

Also present for breakfast was Juanita Barker, Director of the Office of Blind Services for Texas Workforce Commission, who provided an agency update.

The breakfast was followed by the annual business meeting including the election of officers and Directors and other organizational business.

Thanks to all who helped to make the 2024 Conference/Convention a success.

As this was my last Conference/Convention as Coordinator, I want to thank everyone who has supported me for the past 12 years in this position. Alfredo Perez, a member of the El Paso Chapter, is the new Coordinator. I wish him all the best in the position and will be assisting him as he begins planning the next event. the 47th annual Conference/Convention is scheduled to be held in El Paso on August 21-24, 2025. We hope to greet you there for another great event!

**Out in the Far Western Town of El Paso...**

By Eleanor Coldwell

I thought I'd dedicate this space to letting you in on some facts about El Paso, since our 2025 Conference/Convention is going to be held there. So, just how far west is El Paso? If you were to sit on a bench in our downtown plaza, you would be 10 minutes from Mexico and about 20 minutes from the state of New Mexico. El Paso is known as The Sun City, due to its abundance of sunny days, averaging 306 days of sun per year. It is also known as an International city due to our proximity to Mexico and the International bridges. Over 50,000 cars and commercial trucks drive across on a daily basis. Many of these are students who attend our schools, colleges and universities. White collar and blue collar workers in El Paso, and El Pasoans who work in Juarez, Mexico also travel across daily. You will not see lush trees and greenery, and you won't feel heavy humidity here. We are a part of the Chihuahuan Desert, receiving only about an average of 10 inches of rain per year. Home owners in El Paso are encouraged to use Xeriscaping in their yards, which can be beautiful with native plants. we are at the tail end of the Rocky Mountain range which we call the franklin Mountains. Our city wraps itself around either side of the mountain so that we have West, Central, Northeast and East sections of town. Our mountain is the largest landmark in the city. On a nightly basis a star is lit on the mountain. This star can be lit in honor or in memory as requested by individuals. In October, it was lit in honor of National White cane Day, compliments of the El Paso Council of the Blind. This effort was headed by our treasurer, Kathy Perez.

**Member Morale**

By Jan Gray

It was the Privilege of the Member Morale Committee to select the winners of the Who’s Who Among Blind Texans award for an ACBT Member. This year that award went to Larry Thacker, a member of the Dallas Chapter of ACBT. Congratulations Larry! The winner of the nonmember Who’s Who Among Blind Texans award was Ron Graham the director of HAVIN (Houston Area Visually Impaired Network). Ron received his award at our award breakfast at the Conference in Houston. The Winners of the Ed and Linda Bradley First Timer Awards this year Were Hilda Alaniz from Dallas, and Kenneth Clark from Beaumont. Congratulations to you both and we hope you were encouraged and enlightened by the conference. We will meet in October, and we hope if you have someone in your chapter that qualifies for the Ed and Linda Bradley First Timer Award, or a nomination for the Who’s Who Among Blind Texans award that you will submit it to the Member Morale committee. Great Things are ahead for the coming year so watch your e-mail.

**From the Scholarship Committee**

By Michael Garrett

The ACBT Scholarship Committee was pleased to present three scholarships to worthy students this year. For the 2024-2025 academic year, the recipients were:

Suzette May: She hails from Waco, Texas. In the upcoming school year, she will be an undergraduate student at Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona. She is pursuing a degree in Disability Studies and a minor in Nonprofit management. She is an entrepreneur, community leader, advocate, speaker, wife and mother.

Kamran Vora: He hails from Plano, Texas. Kamran is pursuing a degree in Medicine. He will be a third year medical student at the Texas A&M School of Medicine. This is actually a change of career path for Kamran after previously receiving a law degree.

Natalie Rankin: A repeat scholarship winner, Natalie hails from San Antonio. She is a graduate student at St. Mary’s University. Natalie is pursuing a degree in Cyber Security.

She is a creative innovator. While designing tools to enable her to have access to her computer, the applications she came up with actually were usable for her classmates. Her heart is drawn to helping people.

Congratulations to these three tremendous individuals. ACBT wishes them all the best and much success.

**Texas’ Lighthouse Series – Featuring Vibrant Works**

By Mary Witherspoon

Vibrant Works, formerly known as San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind, has been empowering people with vision loss since 1933. Today, it is a robust provider of independent living skills training for all ages and stages of vision loss. The Career Guidance Program supports individuals as they explore occupations, determine aptitudes and skill levels for new roles and develop a career plan while learning about suitable job accommodations. Tiffany Walker, Vice President of Services, says “We have a laser focus on workforce development. Our strategic plan is to have diverse employment opportunities for the blind. That means career training needs to be accessible for people using assistive technology.” Vibrant Works is pursuing a pilot partnership with a cyber-security training firm to ensure their two week curriculum is accessible to screen-reader users. Follow up support with job search is provided.

One in four seniors will fall each year, having a serious impact on their health and reducing their ability to remain independent. On May 21, Vibrant Works was named one of six nation-wide grantees of falls prevention grants from the Administration for Community Living (ACL). Fall Prevention classes for older adults will begin Fall of 2024 at the San Antonio location, in partnership with the Middle Rio Grande and Golden Crescent Area Agencies on Aging. Vibrant Works will help ACL modify training materials to be inclusive of BVI seniors. Visit <https://vibrantworks.org> to learn more. Interested in joining the Vibrant Works Team? Check out open positions at [Job Opportunities (paycomonline.net)](https://www.paycomonline.net/v4/ats/web.php/jobs?clientkey=40AE52AF946E26002385F94DB3E37778&session_nonce=ec99c56b1732e2d87d78f9bebb7c9ed5).

**Braille revival League of Texas**

By Neva Fairchild

BRLT had an exhibit at the 2024 ACBT Conference/Convention for the first time in many years. We held a drawing to win a $90 box of Legos with braille and a very determined Ava Caruth won the set! We played a braille game with stickers that had a fruit or vegetable name in braille. Each recipient had to decode the braille with the help of a braille alphabet card and if their fruit or vegetable name was called out at the Saturday evening banquet, they won a tactile and braille American flag from Kansas Braille Transcription Institute, that included the Pledge of Allegiance in the white stripes. We had fun talking with everyone about how helpful braille can be in everyday life with activities like reading a calendar, playing cards and exploring a tactile map. BRLT believes that braille is essential for anyone at any age who cannot use print effectively.

We are excited to participate in “Why Braille Matters” on January 4, 2025, with BRL. Watch the listserv for joining details. BRLT is excited to partner with the Dallas Public Library to offer a series of one hour lectures at 3 PM about braille on each Friday in January, 2025 in order to raise awareness and demonstrate the usefulness of braille. Your questions about braille are welcome at [nevafairchild@verizon.net](mailto:nevafairchild@verizon.net) or 972-897-4171.

**Library Users of America-Texas**

By Gayle Metoyer

I hope you are planning to read some good books throughout the rest of this year.

We held our annual business meeting during the ACBT Conference/Convention in Houston in August. Our attendance was less than we hoped it would be, but we did get a couple of new members. Jacqueline Owusu from Texas Talking Books gave us updates from our state library as well as the National Library Services(NLS). Since we did not have many members in attendance, we did not hold the election of officers. We will be contacting members for a Zoom call later this year to take care of that matter. Please make sure that you join the call and share the info with other readers that you know.

If you need to pay your dues, You can still do so. Our annual dues are $15.00. You can mail your check to:

LUAT

Michael Garrett

7806 Chaseway Drive

Missouri City, TX 77489

Happy reding!

**Alamo Council Update**

By Lou Ann Williams

2024 is quickly coming to an end and I’m just now getting used to writing 2024! Is it really fall? Here in the Alamo City, it is still hot and dry. Maybe by the time this is being read it will not be in the 90’s and we will have received some much-needed rain.

The 2024 conference is behind us, and I hope everyone learned something new, had a great time meeting new friends and visiting old ones. I wish to thank everyone who came by the Alamo Council table and contributed to our drawings.

The Alamo Council was able to award two scholarships during our September meeting. In September the nominating committee was organized, and they are busy working to compile a slate of officers for 2025. Our elections will take place during our November meeting.

The Alamo Council was one of the sponsors for the San Antonio October 15, White Cane Awareness Day event. One of our members, and a scholarship winner, Natalie Rankin, was one of the motivational speakers.

Our chapter is planning an exciting fund raiser. Watch for the next Texas Star to find out more.

**Austin Council Update**

By Marcus Manning

Cheers from the Austin Chapter! Although the summer heat still remains, the days and dates continue to climb. We meet every 3rd Saturday at the Conley-Guerrero Senior Activity Center. We have started to discuss our chapter Christmas party, and we are still planning our chapter domino tournament.

Both of these events, I have here to fore eagerly anticipated. But, last meeting, amplified my excitement about the present Austin chapter and the future. We asked for volunteers to host the Austin ACB table at White Cane Day and 4 new members in their twenties stepped forward stating that they wanted to serve as table hosts. As they passed out information and Austin ACBT SWAG, I know that they enjoyed themselves and learned more about our chapter through sharing Austin ACBT with other people who are blind and who have low vision. These young blind people inspired me so much my spirits were lifted just thinking about the time we all share at our chapter meetings. As a Matter of fact, they taught us a new phrase, they use the term “Visually empowered”.

Happy Disability awareness month to all of you!

**Beaumont Council Update**

By Cythia Julun

We have been diligently working on increasing our membership. In August we had an open house meeting. This event was opened to agencies, the community, family, friends, and people who are blind or have low vision. During this event individuals were given the opportunity to learn about us and the support we provide to those who have vision loss. To assist us with obtaining new members within the surrounding area we began the development of our website. We also participated in a community event in September, entitled Bring a Friend to the Doctor. Our topic for the September meeting was the difference between communication and language. Communication is defined as the imparting of or exchange of information or news. Language is defined as the method of human communication either spoken or written. Effective communication is very important. According to Albert Mehrabian 55 percent of communication is non-verbal, 38 percent is vocal (tone and inflection), and 7 percent is words. People who are blind are not always privy to the 55 percent of the communication process because they can not readily see body language or gestures. The five C’s of effective communication are be clear, correct, complete, concise, and compassionate. Afterwards, we played a very boisterous game of anagram using the words communication and languages. Remember, when communicating with someone else verbally or in writing ensure that you use effective communication skills.

**Dallas Area Council Update**

By Mary Witherspoon

Dallas is proud of our member and chapter treasurer Larry Thacker Junior who received the Who’s Who Among Blind Texans Award at the ACBT conference in August. Larry works with computers as a developer, is the pastor at Bartimaeus Baptist Temple and has authored “Accessible Success: A Book for the Rest of Us.” DACB President Ted Harper says that Larry “demonstrates by example that blindness doesn’t mean one is incapable. You can achieve success in everything you want to achieve.” At the conference, Ted recognized Larry’s ongoing support of the local blind and visually impaired (BVI) community in Dallas and at large. Also attending the state conference was Hilda Alaniz who was an ACBT First Timer’ Award recipient. Ted Harper and Neva Fairchild both attended and worked on events.

Ten North Texas ACB members are on the ACB Host Committee for the 2025 National Convention to be held in Dallas. Six DACB members are part of the local host team. Ana Russo, Hilda Alaniz, Linda Riddle, Mary Witherspoon, Neva Fairchild, and Ted Harper are in host mode along with Fort Worth members to offer Texas sized fun! Plan to be in Dallas July 4 to 11, 2025!

Dallas held two White Cane Day events on October 15. The Dallas Chapter of NFB hosted its first ever event at the Nasher Sculpture Center. The Envision Dallas White Cane Day event was held at their new facility, located at 1801 Valley View Lane in Farmers Branch. Chris Allen, DACB First Vice President, spoke at the event as DACB has once again funded the white cane replacement program at Envision Dallas. The fund assists those in financial need to replace damaged white canes to ensure their safe mobility. Follow us at dallasacb.org to stay connected!

**El Paso Council Update**

By Eleanor Coldwell

EPCB hit the ground running after the ACBT Conference in Houston by participating in the Area Agency on aging, "Aging to Perfection Expo" which was attended by 1,997 people. Our booth's theme was, "How does Your Garden Grow?" It indicated that our lives can still be beautiful even after vision loss. Several people filled out our sign-in sheet and we are calling them to offer our help. The following Saturday we gathered for a hot dog dinner, pop corn, and an audio described movie at Alfredo and Kathy Perez's home. This month we were invited by TWC, the Veterans VIST, and Adaptive Cyclers Plus to participate in a tandem bicycle ride to celebrate White Cane Day. On the 15th we set up an information booth at one of our malls, walked the mall with our white canes and gathered for lunch. Taking a page from the Beaumont Council, we voted as a group to meet on the 28th to vote early in our National election and enjoy a lunch date. Arrangements have already been made with the El Paso Elections Office to have more than one accessible voting machine available for us to use. We are very proud of our own Alfredo Perez, who was named ACBT's Conference Coordinator. He is already preparing for next year's conference in El Paso. another one of our members, Kathy Perez will be assisting Sheila Derek, ACBT's treasurer. EPCB is truly excited and looking forward to hosting all of you at our 2025 Conference. We promise you a fun and unforgettable convention experience!

**Fort Worth Council Update**

By Jan Gray

The Fort Worth Council had the pleasure of having a representative from Via Tram to come to our meeting and give us updates on how their system works. They also brought one of their new vans to let us check it out. Our next meeting is in October, and we will be making plans for a fund raiser and planning our Christmas party. Several of our members will be finishing up their classes at Chris Cole, and we will be glad to have them back in Fort Worth.

**Houston Happenings**

By Michael Garrett

There is always something happening in Houston. The Houston Council of the Blind tries to be in the midst of it all.

We took a break from our monthly meetings in July as several of our members attended the ACB National Convention. However, during that month, several of our members were affected by hurricane Beryl. We reached out to see if all were okay and to offer a helping hand. Several of our members were asked to beta test a new voice activated system being introduced by our paratransit provider.

In August we resumed our normal activities. A number of our members worked diligently to ensure that the ACBT Convention would be a successful event for attendees. Guest speakers at our meeting were representatives from STAP (Specialized Telecommunications Assistance Program).

In September, we were full throttle ahead preparing for the upcoming Houston Community White Cane Safety Day Celebration. We participated in the Kick-off for the Disability Awareness month. Our fundraiser for the month was a Parade of Salads with entertainment by several members. September was also picnic month at HCB. We feasted on smoked hotdogs, and we held our scholarship awards ceremony.

We continue to recruit new members, and we are now up to 102 on the roll.

HCB: Helping, Caring, Building.

**American Council of the Blind of Texas**

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

Chris D. Prentice (2024-2026, Second Term)

(806) 283-8227  
cprentice61@att.net    
Local Chapter: Austin Council  
  
**First Vice President - Membership Chair:**

Kenneth Semien, Sr. (2024-2026, First Term)

409-866-5838

semien.k@outlook.com

Local Chapter: Beaumont Council

**Second Vice President - Fundraising Chair:**

Jan Gray (2024-2026, Second Term)

(817) 232-4295

Jan.gray1950@gmail.com

Local Chapter: Fort Worth Council   
  
**Treasurer - Finance & Budget Chair:**

Sheila Derrick (2024-2026, 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:**    
Lou Ann Williams - Director (2021-2025, Second Term)   
(210) 884-7778  
la.lozano.williams@gmail.com    
Local Chapter: Alamo Council

**Board Member:**    
Alfredo Perez, Director (2023 Appointed, First Term)

Perezalfredo1530@gmail.com

Local Chapter: El Paso Council

**Board Member:**

Daina Ashton, Director

Member at Large

**Board Member:**

Kevin Ratliff, Director

Local Chapter: Austin Council