## Diagram Description automatically generatedIn the center of the circle is a pencil drawing in gray tones. It is a palm of an open right hand gently cradling a Georgia peach. A slender green leaf gracefully hangs down from the top of the peach, originating from a short brown stem on the left side and draping over the thumb. The peach radiates warm hue colors like the warmth of the sun, with vibrant orange and yellow tones. In the center of the peach, bold uppercase letters GCB stand out in black, accompanied by corresponding Braille dots positioned directly below the three letters.

## The GCB DIGEST

## A publication of the Georgia Council of the Blind

An affiliate of the American Council of the Blind,

An organization promoting a hand-up and not a handout.

Winter 2024

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From Your Editor:

Hello, GCB family. We thank each one who has submitted articles in this issue of our magazine. If you have any change of address, telephone number, email address or desire change of format, please inform our GCB treasurer.

Thanks to the GCB Digest Committee who has made our GCB Digest such a considerable success, each member who sent articles, and those who made suggestions. I want to thank our President Cecily Laney Nipper, for her presidential message with information about momentous events, legislation, and projects.

Note: The GCB Digest is on NFB Newsline and on the Georgia Radio Reading Service, GARRS.

Connect with us on social media! To find it, search on Instagram for gacounciloftheblind. That represents ‘GA Council of the Blind’ without spaces and in all lower-case letters. Also, on Facebook Georgia Council of the Blind

## Attention:

ACB Braille Forum Cartridge Subscribers

More than half of our cartridge subscribers have not returned any of them in more than a year. If you are one of them, please note that we must receive the unreturned cartridges ASAP to enable us to send new ones. The cartridges are just like the books you borrow from your NLS library – they must be returned. Look through your homes, find the cartridges, flip over the cards on the mailing boxes, and put them out for the next mail pickup. The same applies for GCB cartridges.

GCB Presidential Message:

By Cecily Laney Nipper

This winter is a perfect time to pause and reflect on lessons learned and opportunities that await us. At our recent conference and convention, we joined together in Augusta, Georgia to share in fun and fellowship. Some folks joined us for their first ever state convention; welcoming them was an immense pleasure, and I hope they enjoyed it as much as we enjoyed having them.

On Thursday, the canal cruise was thrilling to everyone who attended as Julianna Shurtleff and company welcomed our large group. The highlight of the event included Bingo night Thursday, where Tiyah FM Longmire won a hat trick of prizes, which she shared with others. Many thanks to the motorcycle club who joined us as our volunteers on that night.

Education was the word of the day on Friday – in the exhibit hall where we featured new vendors, in the breakout session, which included a fascinating technology panel about apps that help us in our daily lives as blind and visually impaired people, and sessions by our two special interest affiliates including aging well with vision loss and thriving as a guide dog user.

The culmination of Friday was our exhilarating banquet featuring a delicious meal by Ron and Ann Worley and their family members, of whom there were many, including two of Ron’s adorable grandkids. And let us not forget the cheesecake! Something I will carry with me from that night is Dexter Durante’s story of endurance and hope coming from a difficult background and making his life into what it is today despite circumstances.

As official events go, Saturday’s Annual Membership Business Meeting was a success. Among other things, the membership voted on a change to our constitution, which I think will improve efficiency in the collection of dues by affiliates by requiring dues to be turned in to the state prior to December 31 for the following year. I thank Marj Schneider and the constitutional committee for drafting these changes. This vote represented our first record vote utilizing both Zoom and our in-person index cards and voting box, and it was incredibly smooth, with a unanimous “yes” vote to the changes. Democracy at work! Many of our own family members and friends volunteered during the weekend and made it all work. Several challenges awaited us at this convention, including having two locations at play, the hotel, and the conference center, and we met those challenges with the help of our volunteers. Throughout the convention, the host committee was there making things work from food to welcome bags to door prizes. Thank you!

At the close of the convention after the board meeting, the Braille projects committee presented essays, some of which are included in the pages of this Digest, by the winners of the Braille creative writing contest. Hearing the dots come off the page in the form of winners, from a twelve-year-old to an adult, who expressed themselves through the medium of Braille was a perfect ending to our convention.

Did we learn some lessons? Yes, and I know that we will use what we learned to make next year’s convention even better. Thank you for attending the convention in person or via Zoom, and for those of you who did not get that opportunity, I hope you are able to be in attendance next year.

The next legislative session is right around the corner. Blind Day at the Capitol is scheduled for February and will be a joint effort between the Georgia Council of the Blind and the National Federation of the Blind of Georgia as we look toward the reintroduction of a bill advancing Braille for Georgia students who are blind or visually impaired, and a bill introducing a Commission for the Blind to meet the demand for rehabilitation services, which are severely lacking at the moment. Join us in our legislative efforts this year and let us provide that hand up for blind Georgians.

GCB Member Spotlight: Jamaica Miller, Suzanne Schilling, and Sophia Curtis

Jamaica Miller

Let us celebrate our member, Jamaica Miller, who received national recognition recently on the ACB Voices blog.

<https://acbvoices.wordpress.com/2023/09/05/member-on-the-mic-jamica-miller/>

MEMBER ON THE MIC: JAMAICA MILLER

[September 5, 2023](https://acbvoices.wordpress.com/2023/09/05/member-on-the-mic-jamica-miller/), [Katie Frederick](https://acbvoices.wordpress.com/author/acbohio/) [Community](https://acbvoices.wordpress.com/category/community/), [Member on the Mic](https://acbvoices.wordpress.com/category/member-on-the-mic/) [One comment](https://acbvoices.wordpress.com/2023/09/05/member-on-the-mic-jamica-miller/#comments)

Meet Jamaica Miller from Athens, GA. Jamaica, who was born blind, has thrived in the ACB Community. She is a member of several ACB affiliates, including ACB Families, and the Georgia Council of the Blind. Service to others is so motivating to Jamaica. She has served on several boards, and as an officer in the Georgia Council, and she is the person that GCB members count on for outstanding door prizes at their conventions.

Jamaica is looking forward to attending the ACB Conference and Convention in 2024 when the convention will be in Jacksonville, Florida, which is within driving distance for her.

All of us who must depend on others for reliable transportation can identify with Jamaica’s unmet career goal, which was to be a bus driver! Not being able to achieve that goal, Jamaica did the next best thing: She founded an organization which provides drivers for people with disabilities! Listen to Jamaica as she talks about the not-for-profit organization which she founded a couple of years before the pandemic arrived. Her immediate goal is to expand the area where Wheels of Hope offers drivers’ services.

So many of us in ACB have come to enjoy knowing Jamaica via community calls and during ACB Zoom meetings. We know that you, like we on the Board of Publications, will enjoy getting to know her better in this month’s Member on the Mic ACB Voices Blog. Use the Link at the top of this email to access the Blog transcript and listen to Jamaica in her own words.

A person sitting at a desk typing on a keyboard

Description automatically generated Image of Jamaica Miller at her desk.

Suzanne Schilling

Suzanne Schilling is a member of the Greater Hall County Area Chapter of the Visually Impaired. With the help of her guide dog, Ida, Suzanne is not letting any grass grow under her feet! 2023 has proven to be a year of adventures. Suzanne returned home to Gainesville after completing a six-month work assignment in Yellowstone National Park. From April 1 to mid-October, she worked as a “dorm mother” in one of the employee housing facilities. She maintained the laundry and bathroom facilities, and she prepped rooms for incoming employees during the popular tourist season. In exchange, Suzanne earned an hourly wage plus room and board with meals. “This is a wonderful way to see parks in the US that I could not visit on my own,” Suzanne stated, “and I meet people from all walks of life.” Suzanne was recruited by Xanterra Parks and Resorts immediately following graduation from Georgia State University in 1991. “Xanterra goes to many colleges and recruits’ people,” she said. College students are not the only desirable workers with Xanterra. Suzanne also worked with international students, couples, retirees, a double amputee, deaf, blind/visually impaired people as well as developmentally disabled individuals. Positions people fill include accounting, comptroller, auditors, front desk, retail, housekeeping, food and beverage, kitchen, etc. Xanterra utilizes learning and development professionals who come in and train new hires. Part-time and short-term jobs are also available through a program called Helping Hands. Based in Colorado, Xanterra Parks and Resorts (now called Xanterra Travel Collection®) is a park and resort management company that partners with the National Park Service to provide lodging and other tourism services inside National Parks. Current concessions contracts in the national parks include Glacier National Park, Grand Canyon National Park (South Rim), Mount Rushmore National Memorial, Rocky Mountain National Park, Yellowstone National Park, and Zion National Park. Suzanne found her position at [www.yellowstonejobs.com](http://www.yellowstonejobs.com) and has just completed her twenty-third season working at Yellowstone. “What better way is there to work and travel?” she said, “I am going to keep doing as much as I can for as long as I can. And with my guide dog, Ida, I now have the confidence and freedom to do more than I ever could before.”

The adventure continues. Suzanne and Ida just finished their very first cruise. From November 27 through December 1, they traveled to the Bahamas aboard the Royal Caribbean Cruise ship christened “Allure of the Sea”, a sixteen-deck ship of the line rated as the fifth largest in the world. “It was as large as a hotel,” Suzanne explained, “and it never felt like it was moving.” A friend accompanied them, but Suzanne learned that, if she and Ida had been alone, a crew member would be assigned to accompany them wherever they desired to go. The only snafu Suzanne encountered was the paperwork gaining permission to take Ida onto Bahamian soil. Ida remained aboard the ship when they visited Nassau and Coco Cay, but she had the bed all to herself. Suzanne said, “Everyone treated us like royalty. They called me by name and Ida as well. My waiter read the menu to me at every meal; he even told me where each food item was located on my plate.” Suzanne said the cruise was a wonderful experience for her and Ida, although Ida was extremely glad to get back onto the ground and grass when they docked in Orlando, Florida. “This was my first cruise, but I hope to do it again one day…maybe Mexico.” Suzanne recommends that anyone try a cruise.

A person sitting in a chair with a dog

Description automatically generated Image of Suzanne Schilling sitting at a table with her Guide Dog Ida

Sophia Curtis

Let us get to know the newest at large member of the GCB, Sophia Curtis, who won the 2023 Braille adult poetry contest.

Sophia, what first interested you in the American Council of the Blind?  
In 2022, my friends who were attending the national convention asked me to join so I could meet them in some sessions. It was somewhere I could receive current information, meet new people, and I had a wonderful time, so I was eager to become a member. This year, I was particularly interested in Dr Joel Snyder’s audio description project, as I have a passion for audio description.

When did you join the GCB?  
In 2023, I joined the GCB with other friends like Bernice Drothler.

Since you were born sighted, how, and when did you become initially blind?   
In 2013, I experienced blurred vision, swelling, intense eye pain, bloodshot eyes, and additional physical symptoms, including stomach pain, swollen joints, and hair loss. Despite feeling extremely ill, the doctors initially struggled to determine the cause. Eventually, it was uncovered that my then-husband, who was an alcoholic, had been slowly poisoning my food with antifreeze, a chemical designed to go in automobile engines. This has left me severely disabled, as a full-time wheelchair user. I am blind by daylight and have low vision in one eye in the darkness of night.

How did you survive that incredible poisoning?

In the face of an unimaginable ordeal, I summoned the strength driven by sheer determination to protect our four incredibly young children. We sought refuge in a woman’s shelter, where we found both protection and assistance. Due to the severity, we had to be relocated to another part of the country, leave our friends and family behind, and begin rebuilding our shattered lives.

To provide invaluable aid, my parents moved to live near us, which gave us a tremendous amount of help and support. Despite numerous struggles and ongoing challenges, my unwavering faith in God became an anchor, guiding me through my journey of recovery. Through prayers and moments of reflection, I unearthed a God-given resilience I never knew I possessed. My survival stands as a testament to the power of inner strength, and an unwavering belief that, even in the darkest moments, a brighter future awaits on the other side of adversity.

With your new blindness and limitations, what new tools did you use to move on with life?

Embracing this new chapter in my life, marked by blindness and its accompanying limitations, I embarked on a journey of adaptation, seeking tools that would empower me to navigate daily challenges. I learned to touch type so that I could engage with technology independently. I also learned Braille, as I really missed reading books, this enhanced my ability to interact with the written word. Combining both, I discovered a Mantis Q40 which has a Braille display and a qwerty keyboard, allowing me to use my laptop efficiently. I then discovered Voiceover and this technology helped me to engage audibly within the digital world. Now I can use my phone effectively and communicate again. This is where my love of audio description started as I wanted to know if what is being described is what is visually on the screen and when there is no description, what it should have. Understanding the importance of the various tools I use and how they all provide accessibility in diverse ways, I discovered that embracing these technologies for me was not just a choice but a necessity. They transform daily challenges into manageable tasks, enabling me to move forward with a renewed sense of independence and purpose. One of the most significant lessons I learned was the importance of avoiding frustration within myself when faced with challenges. I adopted the mindset of viewing obstacles as opportunities to find creative solutions. I realized that I needed to cultivate patience within myself and understand that overcoming hurdles takes time and perseverance.

How many children do you have and what is your method of home-schooling them?

Raising four children who are now teenagers involves maintaining a structured daily education with lessons aligned with the national curriculum. My children are proficient readers and adept at interpreting diagrams and will read aloud the material. When encountering unfamiliar words or topics, we engage in collaborative research fostering their ability to locate accurate information. Beyond imparting subject-specific knowledge, a significant aspect of my role is teaching them how to learn independently, so they have the tools and skills to learn any career of their choosing. An advantage of not being visually involved in their work is the opportunity to guide them in self-correction rather than correcting their work directly. This enables them to understand and learn from their mistakes. The emphasis on active listening contributes to their overall learning experience. For example, when engaging in construction projects and scientific experiments we follow the rule ‘measure twice and cut once’ and we apply the same rule to tasks, ‘understand twice and execute once’. This helps them gain confidence in the skills they are performing. While I am their primary academic teacher, they also benefit from the expertise of sighted teachers for lessons such as art and design, and field trips. Witnessing their remarkable learning journey and watching them grow is a source of immense joy and being able to be an integral part of it is truly rewarding.

What positive thoughts would you tell others who are newly blind and go through major life difficulties?

Initially, for me, it felt as if my world fell apart, basic tasks felt too difficult and challenging. However, I soon realized the importance of perceptiveness, shifting my attitude of frustration of what I could no longer do, to that of embracing the understanding of what I can do, and that I just need to adapt and learn the ways that work for me. My biggest source of comfort especially during my darkest days, is that of the power of prayer when knowing that I am not alone, by reflecting on verses such as Isaiah 41:10, 13 (KJV) “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee.”  
Knowing how much God helped me endure and strengthened me in times of need, proved that he held my right hand, and that really helped me to know with God in my life I could face any challenge and live for the brighter future to come.

A person smiling at the camera

Description automatically generated Image of Sophia Curtis

GCB Scholarship Recipient Update from Addison Orr:

By Addison Orr

I wanted to update you all on my first semester at Berry College. I took a full load of classes and even started working at the South Rome Early Learning Center. I took a World History course, Christian Ethics, Psychology, Introduction to Berry College, and a Writing class this semester. My job at the Preschool is a teacher’s assistant for a classroom full of energetic three-year-olds. I absolutely love working with children, and the teacher I work with is always helpful. Some of my duties are preparing lunch trays, playing with the children on the playground, and cleaning up in the afternoons to get the room ready for the next day. One of the highlights working there this semester was going on a field trip to visit a farm back in the fall with the students.

Moving away from home, managing classes, study time, and a job has been an adjustment, but I am happy to report that I made all A’s and one B this semester. I will be taking two education classes next semester as well as Theater and English. I am looking forward to another successful semester here at Berry College. I am so thankful for your support and investment in my education to become an elementary school teacher.

A person with long hair wearing a pearl necklace

Description automatically generated Image of Addison Orr

GCB Chapter News:

Athens Chapter:

The Athens Chapter reported that we held our elections in October, and we have new officers for the Athens Chapter. The officers are Jerrie Toney as President; Jamaica Miller as Vice-President; Roberta Howes as Secretary; and Marlene Koncewicz as Treasurer. We met and decided we are going to meet on Zoom for our meetings. We had our Christmas luncheon on December 10, 2023, at the Hilltop Grill.

For more information about the Athens Chapter please contact Jerrie Toney at (706) 461-1013 or via email at [jerriemt2@gmail.com](mailto:jerriemt2@gmail.com).

Augusta Chapter:

The Augusta Chapter in-person meetings are held in the odd months on the second Saturday of the month at Walton Options which is located at 948 Walton Way, Augusta, Georgia from 10:00 AM until 12:00 PM.

During the even months, we meet at local restaurants or plan other activities such as a summer get-together or a community service project.

For more information about The Augusta Chapter please contact Ron Worley at 706-726-9438, or via email at [ron65@knology.net](mailto:ron65@knology.net).

East Georgia Chapter:

The East Georgia Chapter reported that at our August meeting, we welcomed guest speaker, Stephanie Jones, VP of Marketing for Menus 4 ALL, Inc. to present on their Android and iPhone app for one million accessible restaurant menu options in the United States and Canada. We shared where we have found Braille menus. In October we held our elections and played Braille Bingo. We held our November meeting virtually. A few members discussed their experiences at the 2023, GCB Conference and Convention. In December we held our annual holiday party. There was a great turnout with food, songs, and fellowship. We collected toys for the Newton County Sheriff’s Guardian Angel Program. Thanks to everyone who participated!

Connect with us: Follow us on Facebook at East Georgia Chapter of the Georgia Council of the Blind; Instagram eastgachapter.

The East Georgia Chapter in-person meetings are held at the Conyers Presbyterian Church and via Zoom on the 2nd Saturday of every month at 10:00 AM. For more information about the East Georgia Chapter, please contact Cecily Laney Nipper, at 470-218-7885, or via email at [roses828@comcast.net](mailto:roses828@comcast.net)

Greater Hall Chapter:

The Greater Hall County Chapter reported that at our September meeting, Cecily Laney Nipper, GCB President, was our guest speaker. She shared details of her life journey as a woman with vision loss. Cecily also shared her hopes for the direction of GCB. It was a pleasure getting acquainted with Cecily and her parents, Reverend and Mrs. Nipper. At our October meeting, board members Bob McGarry and Jeremy Adams were our speakers. Bob shared his experience with the Green Mountain smoker grill that is accessible and operated through the features of his smartphone. Jeremy shared the benefits and features of his Apple smartwatch. The meeting was an informative technology discussion. At our November meeting, our guest speaker was Abby Pledger, Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist working with the Center for the Visually Impaired of Atlanta. Abby shared examples of the training she provides to CVI clients. She also emphasized how CVI works to make services available to people across all income levels. For December, we enjoyed a Christmas luncheon at Cheddars Scratch Kitchen in Gainesville. The door prize of a VisAbility Store talking clock thermometer was won by Mike Hall. Tasty food, fellowship, and Christmas carols were enjoyed by all.

Jean Ann Miller reported that she received the second injection of the drug Syfovre in September. This new drug is used to treat dry macular degeneration. Jean Ann said that Medicare approved the payment codes, and her injections were billed through Medicare. Her ophthalmologist seems encouraged, and he plans to administer a third injection in January 2024. Jean Ann reports no continuing loss of existing vision. While she has not noticed any improvement in her vision yet, she remains hopeful.

Cane Crusaders, a new group in the northeast Georgia area, held its first Blindness Awareness Day in Clarkesville on Saturday, December 9. Jeremy Adams represented our chapter with an information table at the event which was organized to reach area VI children. Organizers reported a successful day with approximately one hundred attendees including presenters. Jeremy gave out Braille books to kids and GCB flyers to families. We hope to build a connection with the group as it grows.

Our officers remain the same for 2024, Dianne Roberts, President; Judy Presley, Vice-President; Sue Hesketh, Secretary; Roy Carder, Treasurer; Board Members Bob McGarry, Mike Hall, and Jeremy Adams.

The Greater Hall County Chapter meets on the second Saturday of each month, from 10:30 AM to 12:00 PM, at Smoky Springs Retirement Residences, 940 South Enota Drive, Gainesville, Georgia. For more information, contact Dianne Roberts at [harveyroberts2@att.net](mailto:harveyroberts2@att.net), or at 770-932-1112.

Northwest Georgia Chapter:

The Northwest Chapter reported that in December for their Christmas meeting, they went to the Choo Choo Restaurant. The following members are pictured below in this order: on the left side of the picture are Charles Stubblefield, Ron Burgess, Debbie Young, Marsha Farrow, Misty Cochran, and Cortney Cockran. On the right side of the picture are Fred McDade, Robert Sprayberry Angela Zimmerman, and Sharon Nichols.

A group of people sitting at a table

Description automatically generated

The Northwest Georgia Chapter is still meeting on the second Tuesday of the month at the Bank of Lafayette community room which is located at 104 North Main Street in Lafayette, Georgia at 1:00 PM.

For more information about the Northwest Chapter, please contact Sharon Nichols at 423-255-4551, or via email at [sharonnichols347@icloud.com](mailto:sharonnichols347@icloud.com).

Rome Floyd County Chapter:

The Rome Floyd County Chapter meets on Zoom, on the first Monday of every month at 7:00 PM. For more information about the Rome Floyd County Chapter, please contact Amanda Wilson at 770-547-4700, or via email at [moonrocks@bellsouth.net](mailto:moonrocks@bellsouth.net).

Savannah Chapter:

The Savannah Chapter meets by telephone conference call on the third Thursday of each month at 7:30 PM.

For more information about The Savannah Chapter, please contact Marj Schneider at 912-352-1415, or via email at [marjschneider@bellsouth.net](mailto:marjschneider@bellsouth.net).

South Metro Chapter:

The South Metro Chapter is still meeting at the Piccadilly which is located at 2000 Crescent Center Blvd. in Tucker, Georgia, on the second Tuesday each month from 4:00 PM until 6:00 PM.

For more information about The South Metro Chapter, please contact Brent Reynolds at 404-814-0768, or via email [jbr53@samobile.net](mailto:jbr53@samobile.net).

GCB Special Affiliate News:

Georgia Guide Dog Users:

For more information about The Georgia Guide Dog Users group, please contact Marj Schneider, at 912-352-1415 or via email at [marjschneider@bellsouth.net](mailto:marjschneider@bellsouth.net).

Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss:

For more information, about The Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss special affiliate group please contact Alice Ritchhart at 912-996-4213, or via email at [alice.ritchhart@comcast.net](mailto:alice.ritchhart@comcast.net).

GCB Braille Projects Committee:

At the 2023 GCB Convention, The Braille Projects Committee featured a Braille essay writing contest. This contest was open to all people who are blind or visually impaired. Contestants were given several topic options. They could write an essay or poem about Braille, or a summer vacation or they could write a short story. And of course, the submissions had to be written in Braille. Five people sent in entries. Three qualified according to contest rules. Those of us on the committee decided that since it was our first contest all three would win gift cards. Their work will appear in the Digest following this article. Two students, Caleigh Caston age 12, and Christopher Morgan age 15 from Douglasville, Georgia, as did an adult, Sophia Curtis from the U.K. These entries were read at the convention. After they were read, we heard from Cecily Laney Nipper and Alice Ritchhart about their experiences with Braille. Many thanks go out to my fellow committee members Cecily Laney Nipper, Deborah Lovell, Marj Schneider, and Sharon Nichols for helping to bring the program together. For more information about the GCB Braille Projects Committee please contact Phil Jones at 770-713-3306, or via email at [Brilman1952@gmail.com](mailto:Brilman1952@gmail.com).

Braille

By Christopher Morgan

The vital force Blind people all over the world depend on Braille to understand the world. It gives us a way to read and write. As a bonus, it allows us to read in the dark and prevents unwanted people peeking at our test answers. It has inspired an internationally recognized competition, which allows blind and visually impaired youth from around the world to connect through this unique code. Braille is what keeps blind people like me going and is the most important thing we have. School is inevitable, and blind and visually impaired people are not exempt. Braille has allowed me to prosper in school. From learning sight words in kindergarten to reading 2.4 million words in my fifth-grade year, Braille has been there. In all my years of school, I have always been an honor roll student, no exceptions. I currently have an unweighted GPA of 4.0 And Braille is still my primary tool in school. Best of all, I do not have to worry about anyone stealing my amazing test answers because to everyone else, Braille is the equivalent to hieroglyphs. Braille has also connected me with many other blind and visually impaired kids from around the country. In Kindergarten, I did my first ever Braille challenge, in which I cried the whole time and got no work done. Three years later, I won first place in my category at regionals and made it to Nationals. Every year since, I have qualified for nationals in Los Angeles, where I meet new friends that are like me from around the U and Canada. Braille Challenge is something I look forward to every year because everywhere else I am the odd one out. I am the blind kid with the long stick. However, at Braille Challenge, I am just like everyone else, just a normal person. As mentioned before, I love to read. I always carry around one book with me. For the longest time, these were the huge hard-copy Braille books, which so many people thought was the Bible. Those books came in many volumes and hundreds of pages. Nowadays, I have graduated from the old hard-copy Braille books and have upgraded to an electronic Braille reading device. This device is larger than a phone but smaller than an iPad. It allows me to download books and can hold hundreds at a time. Braille is one of the most important tools I have in my life. It has helped me succeed in school. It has also allowed me to meet many other people just like me with a passion for Braille literacy. Braille is very important for people with visual impairments and will continue to change lives, one finger at a time.

Magical Vacation

By Caleigh Caston'

By I sit in the car, the cool summer wind blowing across my face Blossoms and trees, with curving green leaves fly passed, as fast as lightning along our sides Roads zig and zag, pulling us forward, Up and down the roller coaster goes Birds chirp harmoniously along with the banging chorus of cars cruising by What a beautiful day it is in the Sunshine State, tall grasses on either side, a welcoming gate, opened wide, a dazzling blue sky and no cloud dares to dampen this Wonderful place, And there it is, tall and fair, the steep stairs that lead us to a mini island, that always have me smiling, Hi-ho, here we go to the beautiful place, on a beautiful day in the Sunshine state. The weather is crisp, warm and breezy as we climb, not one that is easy, But once at the top, we stop and step in to sinking warmth of the sand Step by step the closer we get, climb by climb the more excited am I The prints that we leave from moving feet On a white blanket that stretches wide across, around umbrellas giving shade, covering people with glasses of lemonade. What a sight it is to see, sparkles that cascade around us, the ocean that was in the distance now closer than ever, shimmering under the glorious golden rays of the daytime star that we call the sun The diamond blue depth of the water that conceals the secrets below The hidden surprises that lurk beneath the waves that shift and ripple, leaping and frolicking with the sand Underwater plants wave hello from the shore before being washed away again, just as a wind with scents of salt water and wet beach dirt, a hypnotizing candle burn Finally I halt, we’re at the sea shore, an inch more and I can feel the cool water on my feet. The waves slash and slosh away anything it brought, then saunter’s back into the distance as I watch, a smile on the waters play, on a beautiful day, in a place, in the Sunshine State my face, as the sunshine stayed.

Braille Poem

By Sophia Curtis

When into darkness I fell, to all my books it was a final farewell. No more reading, really hurt me now that words I could no longer see. At a loss as to what comes next, I really missed reading large bold text. So, on a new journey ready to embark, with Braille as dots, it left me a mark. No need to see or to use my eyes, with my fingertips I can become wise. Learn the code and feel the page, learn contractions stage by stage. As my fingers dance over the dots, suddenly words I am reading, there are lots. Unraveling a pattern that stories derive, suddenly my books become so alive. Braille is not just letters sitting on a page, it is a way to connect, a means to engage. Braille parades what is unseen, Worlds collide what exists between. A journey of feeling, a heartfelt connection, Braille weaves a tapestry of art and expression. Over paper, my fingertips glide, no longer from me can the words hide. To read and to write with so much choice, Able to express my voice and rejoice. In the dark it lights up the way, Portraying images forever to stay. As I pick up speed and set a new pace, A wondrous code of raised embrace. With touch, it weaves connections strong, Reading as sweet as a soft bird’s song. With Braille books, I find a bright new trail, to immerse myself and pages inhale. No more darkness is there for me, as Braille books enable me to see. Empowering me as I read what is written, my world of stories in dots, are rewritten. As I examine each dot and explore, I cannot wait to head over to the Braille bookstore. A realm of discovery as I quicken my pace, if only you could see my bright beaming face. I am so delighted that I learned to read Braille, living happily ever after is now my fairy tale.

GCB Community Phone Calls:

The Georgia Council of the Blind is holding community phone calls. The phone number for all the GCB community calls is 1-605-562-0400, and the access code is 780-5751, followed by the pound sign. If you cannot get in, then use the alternative phone number. It is 1-717-275-8940 and the access code is 7805751, followed by the pound sign.

Here is the schedule for GCB community phone calls.

Praise and Prayer:

Mike Hall will lead us in praise and prayer on the third Tuesday of the month at 7:00 PM.

GCB Book Club:

Deborah Lovell and Judy Presley

Our GCB book club has read a variety of books including fiction, nonfiction, as well as biographies. Sometimes when you read a delightful book, you feel like you just must share it with others. This is what makes book clubs so much fun. That is why we encourage our members to suggest their favorite books and would love to have other book lovers out there to join us. We meet on the last Thursday of each month at 7:30 PM, on Zoom.

GCB Peach Talk:

From the Membership and Project Committee:

The membership committee holds an ACB community Zoom call which meets on the third Thursday from 7:00 PM until 8:00 PM.

We tell lots of funny stories on this call. The last one was about our favorite state or national conferences and conventions.

GCB In Memory Of:

Louise Hall, Mike Hall’s mother

Mrs. Louise Hall, 89, of Flowery Branch, passed away Monday, October 2, 2023, at Northeast Georgia Medical Center Gainesville. Her funeral service was held at 11:00 AM, on Thursday, October 5, 2023, in the Chapel of Memorial Park Funeral Home. Rev. Larry Cox was the officiator. The family received friends at Memorial Park Funeral Home on Wednesday, October 4, 2023, from 6:00 PM until 8:00 PM. Her interment was held in Oconee Memorial Park, Seneca, SC. She was born on August 2, 1934, in Salem, SC. She was the daughter of the late William F. and Ruby Bryant Wilson. She was retired from the Georgia Forestry where she was a dispatcher. Mrs. Hall was a member of Cornerstone Ministries.

In addition to her parents, Mrs. Hall was preceded in death by her husband, William Hall. Mrs. Hall is survived by her son, Mike Hall of Flowery Branch; son, Stan, and Ruby Hall of Gainesville; sister, Juanita Deal of Seneca, SC; grandson, Dan, and Amanda Hall of Lula; great-granddaughter, Avery Hall of Lula, and several other loving relatives.

Memorial Park Funeral Home, 2030 Memorial Park Road, Gainesville, GA 30504 oversees arrangements. Send online condolences to [www.memorialparkfuneralhomes.com](http://www.memorialparkfuneralhomes.com)

Geraldine Eps

It is always difficult to say goodbye to someone we love and cherish. Family and friends said goodbye to their beloved Geraldine Moon Epps of Broxton, Georgia, who passed away at the age of 89, on August 16, 2023.

Geraldine Eps was born on November 1, 1933, and passed away on August 16, 2023. She was predeceased by her parents, Morgan Sidney Moon, and Addie Mae Todd Moon. She is survived by her daughters, Rita Scheu, and Kathy Boes; her siblings, Bennie Lee Moon, Alvin "A. J." Moon, Shirley Simmons, Lurlyne Morris, Kathryn Smith, Pauline Spann of Broxton, GA, Kay Grantham of Broxton, GA, Donald Moon and Dale Moon of West Green, GA; her grandchildren, Addie Davidson, Amber Zietz Corrin Scheu, and Bryan Scheu; her great grandchild Delilah Davidson; and her sons-in-law, Edward Scheu of Covington, GA, and Billy Boes. She is also survived by numerous nieces, nephews, and cousins.

Barbara Ann Moore Brooks

Barbara Ann Moore Brooks passed away on September 11, 2023. She was born in Washington, D.C. on June 10, 1930, to Frank & Beulah Moore. She was raised in Blacksburg, Virginia before the family moved to Richmond, Virginia where she attended John Marshall High School. Barbara had a love for all types of art, bird watching, trying new cuisines, and puzzles and word searches on her tablet. Barbara was preceded in death by her husband of 37 years, Carl E. Brooks, and her parents. She is survived by her sister, Betty Durovich, her three daughters, Beverly Brooks, Linda Cox, and Janet Hardin [Neal], her grandchildren, Shannon Brooks [Jessica], Kyle Brooks, Carle Wahyudi [Eri], PC Ganger [Lauren] and her great-grandchildren, Tristan Brooks, Taya Roebuck, Avery Brooks, and Ada Ganger and several nieces and nephews. There is no service planned currently. In lieu of flowers, a donation made to the Chattahoochee Handweavers Guild in honor of Barbara would be appreciated. Donations can be made here: <https://chgweavers.org/donate>. Condolences may be sent or viewed at [www.wagesfuneralhome.com](http://www.wagesfuneralhome.com/). Tom M. Wages Funeral Service, A Family Company, 3705 Highway 78 West, Snellville, GA 30039 (770-979-3200) has been entrusted with the arrangements.

GCB Cow Patty Raffle Update:

A huge thank you to all who participated in our Cow Patty Raffle! The winner was Diane Whalers, number 245. If you have not had a chance to check out the video on our Facebook page, please do so and for a description, see the information below:

GCB 2023 Cow Patty Raffle

Thank you to all those who participated! And a huge shoutout to [Ithica Beef](https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064569053709&__cft__%5b0%5d=AZV3MqZQCNyiIETIyjuVLFKlx47oyfR3ES9rJ0ZG_zt4WQYbSQ8qOZ3aapVrBLm7vvpZNZKfxTsNQ127e4qo9cLDjuhqA3rIUSANSKCZxEG2LPvXzb5iQ8q9DrqrI-SnlU30iQOtv-T3RK0GBWr0FjgmOiNmsPaY7ZNW2CrJqeYA1VVC0D__xiOMiwtGz_xxYVc&__tn__=-%5dK-R), a small family farm in Villa Rica, GA. Thank y’all for opening the pasture gates to us and donating your cow’s services for our drawing.

Video Description:

A field of cows walk around a corral.

Numbers are inside a corral.

The video shows the pieces of paper being placed around the corral. There are four cows heading towards the corral where they have food and water. The cows go for the food first. We see the cows eating and finally one cow drops their patty!

The cows begin to leave the corral as the winning number is announced.

Thanks for supporting GCB. Thanks, Ithica Beef!

GCB Conference and Convention Overview:

Set Your Sights Higher with GCB!

The Georgia Council of the Blind Annual Conference and Convention was held from Thursday, November 2, 2023 - Saturday, November 4, 2023, in Augusta, Georgia.

Welcome to Augusta! It would fill these pages to thank everyone who has worked hard to make this conference possible. First, I would like to recognize our host chapter, the Augusta Chapter, their president, Ron Worley, and Deborah Lovell, for their contributions to the local coordination of this conference and for the many jobs they did. Next, I would like to thank my convention committee co-chair, Jamaica Miller, especially for her work with the site visits and behind the scenes while the groundwork was being laid for this conference. Lastly, I’ll list the committee members and thank them for their respective parts, without which we would not have the whole which is this convention: Alice Ritchhart, Amanda Wilson, Janet Parmerter, Marsha Farrow, Ron Worley, Deborah Lovell, Judy Presley, Jamaica Miller, Jennifer Bray, Jerrie Toney, Steve Longmire, Phil Jones, Betsy Grenevitch, Danielle McIntyre.

On Thursday, November 2, 2023, we started with our registration where we greeted each other, got our goodie bags, and our name tags. Then, we departed to go on a delightful, narrated half-hour boat tour of the Augusta Canal. The boat trip was so relaxing!

We enjoyed a Bingo game sponsored by the Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss affiliate where we had great snacks. We enjoyed playing Bingo, eating snacks, and winning gift cards.

On Friday, November 3, 2023, GCB members staying at the Comfort Suites enjoyed a complimentary hot breakfast. Then, we listened to the Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss business meeting and icebreaker. We played hot potato where when you had the hot potato in your hand you had to tell something about yourself. Then we listened to Steve Longmire, our Technology committee chairperson, and many of our technology members talk about different apps on the iPhone and the Android phone. The session consisted of the GCB Technology Committee demonstrating various phone apps. Steve Longmire demonstrated and discussed the Look Out app on the Android platform. Jerrie Toney demonstrated and discussed the Bard and Dice World game apps. Amanda Wilson discussed and demonstrated the Super Sense app. Ron Worley demonstrated and discussed the step navigation app called Clew Maps, changes to Siri in iOS 17 and using the Be My AI feature of the Be My Eyes app. Then, many of us went out to lunch or we ate leftovers from the Bingo night snacks. We then enjoyed visiting the different exhibitors’ tables.

Here are the exhibitors and their contact information.

Vanda Pharmaceutical, Vicki Preddy, MSN, RN, Cell: 202-578-9060, Email: [Vicki.preddy@vandapharma.comm](mailto:Vicki.preddy@vandapharma.comm)

LEOTO, Inc., Phone: 404-242-8077, Email: [esmith@LEOTO.org](mailto:esmith@LEOTO.orgg)

Georgia Library Service, GLS, Toll Free Phone: 1-800-248-6701

Georgia Radio Reading Service, GARRS, Phone: 404-685-2820, Toll Free phone: 1-800-672-6173

Multiple Choices Center for Independent Living, Phone: 706-850-4025, Toll free phone: 1-877-549-1020

Walton Options, Phone/TTY: 706-724-6262, Toll Free Phone: 1-877-821-8400

Augusta Blind Rehabilitation Center, Phone: 706-733-0188

JW.org, Phone: 470-406-8733

After lunch, a representative from the Georgia Library Services joined us to share what will be new at the Georgia Library next year. Jamaica Miller facilitated this panel. Following that, The Georgia Guide Dog Users held their program. After this, we attended our annual GCB Banquet, where we enjoyed delicious food prepared by Ron and Ann Worley!. Our banquet speaker was Dexter Thomas Durante. He is married to Deidres Higgins-Durante and is the proud parent of five children and two grandchildren. Retired after 20 years of service as an Army Master Sergeant, Dexter is a person with a vision impairment, who has been living with total vision loss since August 17th, 2007. He earned a bachelor’s degree from Park University and a Dual Masters in Rehab Counseling and Blind Rehab Teaching from Western Michigan University. Currently, Dexter works at the Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center in Augusta, Georgia, as a Blind Rehabilitation Specialist. Dexter is certified in Vision Rehab Therapy and Assistive Technology; he shared some colorful stories of his life.

We then had a chance to view the silent auction baskets. They included the following:

America in our Hearts donated by Marsha Farrow and Blind Girl Designs, Blind Girl Designs Red Bag with the Braille alphabet in a white heart shape on the front of the bag, yard flag depicting a red truck with three dogs in the bed of the truck with an American flag, angel Christmas ornament and the angel is holding a folded American flag, beverage cup with the words fear not on the background of the outline of the American flag, American flag pillow.

Kitchen basket donated by Cecily Laney Nipper, Cecily Nipper, Sr., and Blind Girl Designs, Blind Girl Designs black and white apron with white writing “We see with our hearts”, mini-Dash waffle maker, three packs of waffle mix and recipe, talking kitchen thermometer, set of silicone kitchen tools, handmade dishcloths by Jennifer Bray and red oven mitts from Deborah Lovell.

In Your Home basket donated by Debbie Young and the Literacy Project, Echo dot, mini dehumidifier, jumbo clock with time plus temperature readout.

Christmas Hostess basket donated by Debbie Young, (Everything is Christmas-related) Nativity scene, table runner, small pillow with Christmas saying, snowy star decoration, candle, notepad, 2 kitchen towels, 2 pot holders, plates and napkins, small tin, and salt and pepper shakers, teapot night light, stocking shaped wall hanging, Santa hat, travel cup with hot chocolate; books: The Original Guide to Christmas in the South, Simplify Your Christmas.

Assorted baked goods from the kitchen of Kathy Morris

Champagne Toast Bath Gift Set donated by Marj Schneider, pamper yourself with the fragrances of bubbly champagne, sparkling berries, and juicy tangerine, all captured in a trio of gentle foaming hand soap with essential oils, luxurious shower gel and ultra-hydration body cream with shea butter.

Beach basket donated by Alice Ritchhart, the basket starts with a beach cooler, which holds a beach towel, beach ball, sunscreen, sunglasses, and water bottle.

Snowman basket donated by Debbie Young, (Everything is snowman or winter related) animated snow scene that plays deck the halls, runner with 4 placemats, travel cup, 2 cups with winter scenes, four matching napkin holders and hot chocolate packages, blue teapot and cup, blue candle, pot holder, spoon rest, 2 kitchen towels, kitchen timer, cardinal on snowy tree trunk, wooden sign with truck that reads “warm wishes”, book “snowmen at night”, small tin with candy.

Glimmering in your home items donated by Janet and Keith Parmerter. Antique large cut glass three-toed footed sawtooth centerpiece (star pattern) bowl, 8-inch cut glass pitcher (star pattern).

Children’s Book basket donated by Debbie Young, Children’s books and corresponding stuffed animal toys: Good Night Gorilla with small gorilla, Make Way for Ducklings with small duckling, The Tale of Peter Rabbit with stuffed Peter Rabbit, Curious George Takes a Train with small monkey, Skippy John Jones with stuffed cat, Lovable Lyle with small crocodile, Bounce Around Tigger with small tiger, The Little Engine That Could with sign “You Can if You Think You Can”, Three Little Golden Books Classic Collection with small puppy.

On Saturday, November 4, 2023, GCB members staying at the Comfort Suites enjoyed a complimentary hot breakfast. Then, we held our GCB annual Business membership meeting. We listened to the Color Guard present the flags and we said the Pledge of Allegiance. We recognized the members who had passed away since our meeting last year. They include Donald Linnartz; Timothy Barrett; John M. Sims; Karen Hughes; Annette Rhinehart Saffles, (Debbie Young’s sister); Laverne Smith King; Roger Glenn Keeney; Barbara Graham; Andrew Pregenzer; Reverend Matthew McGowan; Geraldine Epps; Louise Hall and Barbara Brooks.

The invocation was given to bless our meeting. Cecily Laney Nipper, GCB President called the GCB Annual Business Membership Meeting to order. Kathy Morris, the GCB Secretary conducted the roll call. Cecily Laney Nipper presented the President’s report reviewing the accomplishments of GCB since last year. Kathy Morris, the GCB secretary gave the secretary’s report. The minutes from last year’s business meeting are below this section. Marsha Farrow, the GCB Treasurer gave the treasury report. Jerrie Toney, the Finance Committee Chairperson gave the finance report. She told us about the GCB budget; the cow Patty Raffle report and results; and the Duxbury expenses. Marj Schneider conducted the constitutional amendment voting instructions for all GCB members either in person or those who were on Zoom. She instructed us to turn in your record vote to our impartial vote counters, Michelle Grenevitch and Gwendolyn Barron by putting your card in the box or texting or calling them. The amendments are below this section. Alice Ritchhart the Legislative Chairperson gave us an update about all the hard work that her committee had done this past year. Alice Ritchhart read the resolution that had been submitted to her for review.

We then heard updates from our special interest Affiliate Groups. Alice Ritchhart gave the Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss. She updated us on what their group had been doing this past year. They meet on the third Monday of every month on Zoom. For more information about the Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss special interest affiliate group please contact Alice Ritchhart at 912-996-4213, or via email at alice.ritchhart@comcast.net. The Georgia Guide Dog Users special interest affiliate group update was given by Marj Schneider. She updated us on what their group had been doing this past year. They meet every quarter, and they have monthly phone calls. For more information about the Georgia Guide Dog Users special interest affiliate group please contact Marj Schneider at 912-352-1415 or via email [marjschneider@bellsouth.net](mailto:marjschneider@bellsouth.net). Following the business meeting, we heard from speakers including Shirley Robinson, and Ashley Santiago of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency.

A group of people sitting around tables

Description automatically generated

Image of GCB members at the 2023 Conference and Convention Banquet Night

Georgia Council of the Blind Annual Membership Business Meeting Minutes

November 12, 2022

The Boy Scout Troop 85 from Fairmont, Georgia, presented flags.

Fred McDade gave the invocation.

The meeting was called to order at 9:11 AM by President Cecily Laney Nipper.

The sponsors of the conference were announced. Our Diamond Sponsor was Vanda Pharmaceuticals. Vickie Preddy, Nurse Educator, presented information on non-24. She stated, “Reach out to me in 2023.” Her telephone number is: 202-578-9060. We also had a Double Diamond Sponsor, Dr. Myra Shivers, and Diamond sponsor Helen Presbyterian Women.

 President’s Report - Cecily Laney Nipper highlighted the important issues we will face and how we need to meet those challenges through outreach and advocacy. The fight continues for accessible voting, commission for the blind, people in need.

GCB Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss is the newest affiliate. She thanked those who formed GCB AAVL for their hard work. The book club and technology are community calls that are still going on. There were over 40 people registered for the conference. Thank you to the hotel and Clarence Brown Center for all they have done. We have a first-timer, Joan Guy. She is glad to be a GCB member. Joan is from Chattanooga. She was a medical transcriptionist for 20 years and was a foster grandparent until 2014. Joan is still working.

Treasurer’s report - Marsha Farrow

Al and Cora Camp scholarship - moving $300 into fund. Current amount $402.50. This paid for the first-timer’s scholarship for Joan. Long term investment and CD combined -$19,928.43. Way Financial - Stock market has been fluctuating. In 8/22, we had $68,370.43, in 9/22, $66,358.57 and in 10/22 $66,740.57. Deborah Lovell made a motion to file the treasurer’s report for audit. It was seconded by Phil Jones and the motion carried.

Secretary’s report, Kathy Morris:

Kathy Morris, Secretary read the minutes from November 13, 2021. Deborah Lovell made a motion to accept the minutes as read. The motion seconded by Jamaica Miller and the motion carried.

Roll Call

In Person: Cecily Laney Nipper, Alice Ritchhart, Marsha Farrow, Kathy Morris, Deborah Lovell, Shirley Robinson, Marleen Koncewicz, Jamaica Miller, Jerrie Toney, Steve Longmire, Angela Zimmerman, Sharon Nichols, Fred McDade, Charles Stubblefield, Phil Jones, Elaine Paccione, Muhamed Javed, Leah Streams, Amanda Wilson, Joan Guy, Wendy Simone, Ann Martin, Keith Morris, DJ McIntyre and Daniel and Rachel, Cecily Nipper, Sr., Robert Martin, Debbie Young, Chris Holbrook, and Todd Turanski. On Zoom: Linda Williams, Betsy Grenevitch, Mike Hall, Debbie McDonald and Marj Schneider.

Legislative Update - DJ McIntyre:

Senate bill 208 got from the floor to the House but did not get out. Plans are to introduce a new bill. DJ has created a Georgia commission for the blind blog which has the history of what has happened and why bill is needed. DJ, Betsy, and Cecily have gone down to the Capitol multiple times in the last 2 years. We need to get the word out as to why the bill is important. If you need to reach out to DJ, her email address is dgrenevitch@me.com and phone number is 678-343-7550.

Alice Ritchhart stated that the Georgia Vision Alliance, GVA, will have a meeting at Walton Options in Augusta, GA on December 3.

Resolutions - Alice Ritchhart

Resolutions, Alice Ritchhart:

Resolution #1 Absentee ballots. Jamaica Miller read it. Marsha Farrow made a motion, and it was seconded by DJ McIntyre. Correction to the date of November 12, 2022. The motion carried.

Resolution #2 Bronze Braille flag to honor Fred McDade to be placed in the Georgia Capitol. This resolution Was read by Todd Turanski. Cecily Nipper, Sr., made a motion to accept this resolution and it was seconded by Deborah Lovell. The motion carried.

Resolution #3 Commending Courtyard by Marriott. This resolution was read by DJ McIntyre. Phill Jones made a motion to accept it and Jamaica Miller seconded it and the motion carried.

Resolution #4 Commending the Clarence Brown Conference Center. Cecily Sr made a motion to accept this resolution and it was seconded by DJ McIntyre, and the Motion carried.

Old Business

Technology Committee – Steve Longmire

Steve gave an update on the GCB app and Apple Pay. Steve thanked his wife, Tiyah, and Jerrie Toney for their help. New payment options are now available. He invited members to participate on the technology committee as he needs members to evaluate these apps.

Guide Dog update - Marj Schneider

GGDU had a meeting yesterday with a speaker from K-9 Battle Buddies, an organization that trains service dogs for veterans with PTSD and traumatic brain injury.

Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss, Alice Ritchhart:

Alice is overly excited by the turn out for the two events that were held at the conference. They will be starting and working on projects for older individuals who are losing their sight and what resources are out there for them. They have quarterly conference calls and they have named them Thriving After 55. The 3rd Monday in January will be the next call. A police officer will speak concerning how to be safe while traveling active.

New business, Leah Streams:

Leah Streams wants to start a segment for blind thespians in Georgia. Her cell phone number is 706-676-5518 or her email address is leahstreams04@gmail.com.

Phil Jones made a motion and was seconded by Ann Martin to adjourn the GCB business meeting. The Meeting was adjourned at 10:55. AM.

Speakers -

Shirley Robinson Project Independence Blind Services

This is for people who are fifty-five, and older and have experienced vision loss and need help to stay in their home.

Cecily Laney Nipper thanked all the sponsors. She also recognized Penny Moss, guest from Alabama, from Peach Talk.

Donna Brown, ACB Board member talked about how to be a part of the organization. She encouraged us to be more involved.

Her four points of her discussion are PART. P is for Passion because everyone is enthusiastic about something. A is for Advocacy. We are all advocates. R is for resources. We can all be a resource to someone at some time. T is for Teaching. The are many ways to teach others. If you have further questions for Donna Brown, please contact her at 304-940-0292 or via email at donnambrown59@gmail.com.

Lunch break

The invocation was given by Amanda Wilson. The speaker was Matt Simpson, who is a Paralympian. He stated he worked and made his weakness become a strength. He stated that Goalball was a place where he could be blind, and it did not matter. Through that, he found that in other aspects, being blind did not matter, either. He stated that you should change what you can change. He suggested that you take on what you can fix and leave everything else alone.

Awards were given out to the following members.

The Gerald Pye Service Award was awarded to Deborah Lovell. The President’s Diamond Award was awarded to Amanda Wilson and Marsha Farrow. The Spirit of Innovation Award was awarded to DJ McIntyre. The June Willis Guiding Eyes award was awarded to - Cecily Nipper, Sr. The Walter R. McDonald Award was awarded to Cecily Laney Nipper.

Door prizes were awarded and the 50/50 raffle was awarded to Jerrie Toney, who donated it to the Senior Fund.

respectfully submitted, Kathy Morris, Secretary

Georgia Council of the Blind, Proposed Amendments to the Constitution 2023

Current Language

 Article IV: Local Chapters

B. On or before October 15 of each calendar year, the local chapter treasurer shall collect chapter dues, and by November 15, a membership list, prepared together by both the chapter treasurer and secretary, shall be sent to the GCB treasurer along with the payment of dues. A copy of that membership list should also be sent to both the GCB secretary and the editor of \_The \_GCB \_Digest. The membership list shall include names, addresses, telephone numbers, email addresses, preferred format of each member, whether member is legally blind or fully sighted, and the designated officers and directors of that local chapter.

Proposed language

Article IV: Local Chapters

B. Before the end of each calendar year, the local chapter treasurer shall collect chapter dues, and by December 31, a membership list, prepared.

by both the chapter treasurer and secretary, shall have been sent to the GCB treasurer along with the payment of dues. A copy of that membership list

should also be sent to both the GCB secretary and the editor of \_The \_GCB \_Digest. The membership list shall include names, addresses, telephone numbers,

email addresses, preferred format of each member, whether member is legally blind or fully sighted, and the designated officers and directors of that local chapter.

Current language

Article X: Fiscal Year

The fiscal year of GCB shall be the calendar year from January 1, through December 31, with dues being collected and paid to the GCB treasurer on or before the prior November 15, as provided under Article V, Paragraph D of the Bylaws. Although anyone may join GCB after January and throughout the year, March 15 is the final date for ACB to determine the number of affiliate votes at the national convention for that year.

Proposed language

Article X: Fiscal Year

The fiscal year of GCB shall be the calendar year from January 1, through December 31, with dues being collected and paid to the GCB treasurer before December 31 each year, as provided under Article V, Paragraph D of the Bylaws. Although anyone may join GCB after January and throughout the year, March 15 is the final date for ACB to determine the number of affiliate votes at the national convention for that year.

After this we held our annual GCB service awards luncheon where we Participated in recognizing our award winners. Amanda Wilson was awarded the Walter R. McDonald service award; Todd Turansky was awarded the June Willis Guiding Eye service award; and Shelby Noeth was awarded the Rhoda Walker Ann Simms service award. This was followed by a spirited game of trivia.

Braille Projects Committee:

This fall, the GCB Braille Projects committee held a Braille creative writing contest inviting participants to write a 300 to 500-word essay on one of several topics. During this program, the winning essays were read, and some awardees will join us on Zoom to accept their awards. The GCB Closing Board Meeting was held to discuss the time and date of the next board meeting.

Five Tips for Accessing Supportive Mental Health Services:

I am Kassie Love, a Marriage and Family Therapist who works providing therapy services to individuals, couples, and families. To learn more about me and my services, visit my website at http://kassielove.com.

You can also reach me by phone at 404-445-8579 or by email at kassieleelove@gmail.com.

I wanted to take an opportunity to introduce myself, to share knowledge and resources about mental health and how these resources can be made accessible to anyone. Sometimes, accessing mental health services can be made complicated by having a visual impairment or blindness. A variety of factors, such as transportation to therapy offices, cost of services, and mobility can prevent or hinder access to mental health.

Fortunately, the growing popularity of virtual mental health services has eliminated many of these barriers for those with and without visual impairments. As someone who is low vision and legally blind myself, I began utilizing virtual services for my own mental health many years ago. Using a phone in the privacy of my bedroom, versus hiring childcare and paying for transportation to a therapy appointment, was a game changer. Suddenly, the services I needed were so easily accessible, which made them feel even more supportive.

Having a master’s degree in public health, being a therapist was not my first career choice. The natural calling to be a therapist came when I helped a family member cope through postpartum depression and anxiety. I then realized that some part of me had always been an emotional support to others. I soon enrolled in a Marriage and Family Therapy program to begin my career in mental health. While being a graduate student once again, this time with three young children and married, was not always simple, attending an online program did make the process much more manageable. Indeed, the very same video technology that connected me with mental health services also supported my access to obtaining an education and training in providing those services to others.

Today, I work virtually providing video and even phone therapy sessions to my clients. So many clients, with or without visual impairments, find the ease of accessing therapy through phone or video to be both simple and supportive. Additionally, there are a few other suggestions for anyone attempting to access mental health services virtually, that may help reduce any barriers. Below, I list out a few tips that can help in making therapy services more accessible:

1. Ask about the accessibility of the portal a therapy office uses.

Therapy offices use secure software to help collect client information, credit card information, and keep client records. One piece of software that is known for its great screen reader accessibility is called Simple Practice. Fortunately, it is also a popular client portal software among clinicians. In fact, I use Simple Practice software with my own clients.

2. Ask about discounted rates or affordable options. If cost is a concern, simply ask the therapist if they can offer a reduced fee. Many therapists, including myself, have a certain number of reduced fee sessions offered to clients.

3. Ask about phone sessions. If connecting to video feels like too much work for each session, ask the therapist if they can simply call you for appointments. I do offer phone-only sessions when appropriate for clients.

4. Ask about group therapy resources. When cost is a concern or barrier for accessing services, group therapy services can often be more cost effective than individual sessions. For many of my clients, I utilize individual sessions in conjunction with group sessions to help reduce the cost while supporting the client’s goals.

5. Ask about Family Therapy sessions. As a therapist, I offer both individual and family therapy sessions. One of the reasons I am so passionate about family therapy is the ability to help the entire family unit create change together. Often, family therapy sessions, when appropriate, can help many family members receive support during the same therapy sessions. Family therapy is very effective in helping to resolve family conflict, or simply to offer extra support.

If you have any questions about the content above or would like to connect further, you can contact me at the information below:

[kassieleelove@gmail.com](mailto:kassieleelove@gmail.com)

<http://kassielove.com>

404-445-8579

Apply for a GCB Scholarship:

by Marj Schneider

Each year the Georgia Council of the Blind awards several scholarships of up to $1000 through the Al and Cora Camp Memorial Scholarship Fund, to support blind and visually impaired students in their academic pursuits.

Scholarships will once again be awarded by GCB in the spring of 2024. Please share this information with high school and college students who are blind or visually impaired throughout the State of Georgia and encourage them to visit the GCB website for the scholarship application and guidelines. Applications are due by March 1, 2024.

GCB also offers its members the opportunity to apply for a leadership scholarship. This scholarship provides financial support to GCB members who want to attend seminars or other training opportunities to develop their leadership skills. Updated guidelines and procedures to apply for the leadership scholarship are available on the GCB website. Applications for leadership scholarships can be submitted at any time.

American Council of the Blind Announcement for 2024:

The American Council of the Blind Conference and Convention will be held from Friday, July 5, through Friday, July 12, 2024, at the Hyatt Regency Riverfront Hotel located at 225 E Coastline Drive in Jacksonville, Florida. The opening general session will be on Saturday evening, July 6th. Our banquet will be held on Thursday night, July 11. The exhibition hall will open on Saturday, July 6, and close on Wednesday, July 10th. We will have day-long tours both Fridays, July 5 and 12 with many other tours throughout convention week. Special-interest affiliates, committees, and our business partners will hold sessions throughout the convention. For any convention-related questions, please contact Janet Dickelman, convention chair, at (651) 428-5059 or via e-mail at [janet.dickelman@gmail.com](mailto:janet.dickelman@gmail.com).

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