**THE WHITE CANE BULLETIN**

**Florida Council of The Blind, Inc.**



## January - February 2017

Articles for the White Cane Bulletin must be submitted to Greg Lindberg no later than the 15th of the month before it is published. Greg’s email is: glindberg@gmail.com

If you do not have access to a computer and email please find someone in your chapter to help you. We want to hear from anyone who wants to contribute to our newsletter, so if you can not find a way to submit your article, call Greg and he will be glad to assist you.

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Those much-needed contributions, which are Tax-deductible, can be sent to the Florida Council of the Blind treasurer, Linda Jacobson, at 2915 Circle Ridge Drive, Orange Park, FL 32065.

To remember the Florida Council of the Blind in your Last Will and Testament, you may include a special paragraph for that purpose in your Will or Trust. If your wishes are complex, please contact the FCB at 800-267-4448.

The FCB is a 501(c)(3) organization.

For other ways to support the Florida Council of the Blind, visit our Fundraising page found at [www.fcb.org](http://www.fcb.org).

ARE YOU MOVING? – Sally Benjamin

If you are moving please notify me of your new address so you will continue to receive your White Cane Bulletin. Also if you know of anyone interested in joining FCB and who would like to receive the White Cane Bulletin and the Braille Forum please contact me at: (850) 877-1512 or E-mail: salbenjamin@comcast.net

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

President’s Message by James Kracht ………………….5

2017 FCB Convention Update by James Kracht………..10
2017 FCB Convention Auction by Leslie Spoone…….…11
2017 FCB State & Chapter Awards by Sheila Young.….12
2017 FCB Scholarships by Sheila Young………….…….14
The FCB 6th Annual Blind Fishing Tournament

by Mike Ulrich……………………………………………….18
As I See It by Ellen Hillstrom …………………...………...24
The “Happy Hooker” – Wanda Stokley in the Spotlight

by Sila Miller……………………………………………...…25

10 Reasons For Taking Up The White Cane

by Will Grignon……………………………………………..37
Don’t Touch That Dial: It’s Time For “Blind and Beyond”

by Greg Lindberg…………………………………….…….44
Winners of the Top Dog 2017 Disney Raffle

by Kathleen Trutchel……………………………………….50

GOCB Update by Martha James………………………....50
Sarasota Council of the Blind Updates

by Karen Christie…………………………………………...51
Millennial Mania by Greg Lindberg……………………….53
FCB Officers, 2016 – 2018………………………………..54
Chapter and Special Affiliate Officer Liaisons………… 55
Handy Telephone Number References………………….58

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**President’s Message**

By James Kracht

Will Our Press Ever Stop Letting Us Down?

Be it the news media with its partisan, non-neutral news coverage, a newspaper story, or an informational e-mail, it is guaranteed that in this day and age of enhanced media and public information coverage, we still can't count on accurate, impartial, informative, non-sensational, or "politically correct" journalism. It was 49 years ago when I was 17. A group in a blindness rehab training program went to the state capitol to support pending legislation benefiting the blind. What followed was a newspaper story discussing our trip to the capitol and the summer program. I was horrified that the newspaper reported, "We were learning to cook on real stoves." One might ask, as I did, what other kinds of stoves were there, and why would we not learn to cook on them? Thus began my lifelong distrust of the media. I regularly observed how words, ideas, thoughts, and accomplishments can be and too often are twisted, cajoled, and changed so that they tell a bigger, more impressive, sensational, and therefore, a more newsworthy story.

After reading the ACB and FCB listserv posts of last week, nothing has changed. The producers of "60 Minutes" and its anchor, Anderson Cooper, have chosen to singlehandedly minimize the positive role and importance of the nation's 26-year-old Americans with Disabilities Act. Their story potentially jeopardizes this country's perceptions and future responses and commitments to this civil rights legislation. It is disappointing, outrageous, wholly negative, and irresponsible news reporting. I said to a friend yesterday that I really didn't think of the news media as so political or sensational when I was younger. But has the news media changed, or has our perception and expectation of more honesty and integrity in news reporting changed?

Having read the numerous posts of shock, dismay, displeasure, and horror with the December 4th "60 Minutes" story, I can take away some hope. It reminded me of the letter that I never wrote – but wanted to write – when I was unilaterally classified as 4F because, “What could an 18-year-old blind kid do to help in Vietnam?” Hats off and congratulations to the student affiliate of the American Council of the Blind for writing in protest of the “60 Minutes” story. This segment highlighted the drive-by lawsuits that we all hate rather than focusing on the successes and accomplishments of the ADA.

As the Affiliate's President, Minh Ha, and First Vice-President, Sarah Whiles, wrote in their letter to CBS and Anderson Cooper on behalf of the ACB Students affiliate:

"In a time when all Americans' civil rights are being called into question, you carelessly opted to capitalize on the climate of fear to cast doubt on a law that has been instrumental in creating equal access for persons with disabilities in this country. While it is unfortunately true that many Americans take advantage of the legal system for monetary gain, and persons with disabilities are no exception, the instances of frivolous lawsuits are far fewer than those of actual, legitimate accessibility violations. There is no formal enforcement mechanism for businesses to comply with the ADA, as there is with health and safety regulations. Therefore, filing accessibility violation complaints is how most disabled Americans are able to gain equal access to education, employment, and public services. Most of these claims arise from instances of genuine and unlawful discrimination, but, instead of explaining this concerning reality, you painted the picture that disability rights attorneys and disabled Americans turn a profit by inconveniencing small businesses."

Yes – it’s very sad that this letter had to be written. But, our youngest ACB members are already out advocating – and advocating with impressively strong and powerful words. This is most commendable.

ACB'S own comments on this CBS story included:

"CBS failed in its responsibility of providing fair and accurate journalistic integrity when it refused to air any of the positive gains that have been pioneered through the judicial branch of our government. Such unbalanced coverage has the potential for serious negative implications, reframing the way Americans view the ADA at a time when fundamental civil rights are at risk of being attacked. Just within the blindness community, we have made significant strides through legal action that would have no standing if not for the ADA. The courts have played a major role in removing mountains that have stood in the way of fair and equal opportunity." "The ADA remains the greatest civil rights legislation since the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and its protections should not be compromised by poor and weak journalism."

These well-stated condemnations of the disingenuous journalism by "60 Minutes" make me, as the president and a member of FCB, proud of all our advocating members who speak out against that which is wrong. Thank you. Be it cooking on real stoves, or fighting a major TV network about the substantial role the ADA has played in advancing the lives and civil rights of disabled Americans, we must continue our advocacy efforts, the press be damned.

On a related note, December 20, 2016 marks the effective date of regulations calling for accessible cable set-top boxes, finally insuring blind people have access to and the ability to independently control their cable TV systems. At last month's Board meeting, our members were urged to reach out to their cable providers and inquire about the status of the soon-to-be-delivered accessible set-top cable boxes. I refrained from calling my two cable providers until this morning, December 12, 2016, fearing I would not like the result. Both companies had absolutely no idea of the regulations, the requirements, or their company’s intention or expected actions toward compliance. So, our advocacy efforts will continue. We it FCB and ACB will fight on. We have rights, and they must be protected.

During the first week of December, I received a telephone call from a local CBS news reporter who is advocating for the cause of a young blind man who, after being picked up by the police, was dropped off 20 minutes later in a field. In spite of him making his blindness known to the officers, and in spite of his not having either a cane or enough vision to find his way out of the field and back home, he was left to fend for himself rather than given a ride back to where they originally picked him up – or to his home. The Reporter was incensed that the state attorney declined to prosecute the offending officers, but is hopeful that the Police Department's internal affairs Section will take disciplinary action against the officers.

The insensitivity and inhumanity of such conduct by these police officers is abhorrent. That I, as an advocate and leader in the blindness community have been called upon to speak out against such unacceptable conduct, is well illustrative of another sad story of a societal wrong that must be addressed and corrected. Through thorough and responsive reporting from a dedicated reporter, maybe this time, the press will get it right, tell the right story, and make a meaningful difference.

My message, with all of this, is that in spite of our frustrations and setbacks, we must continue to advocate. We can't lay down now. The ADA has made a significant difference in our lives and our civil rights as disabled Americans, but we all know that there is still far more to do. And only if we continue to speak out, advocate, educate, inform, and push for change will successful acceptance and change take place.

My family and I send good wishes to each of you and your families for a happy holiday season and a healthy and happy 2017. Thank you for giving me the continued privilege and opportunity to work with you all in furthering the mission of the Florida Council of the Blind.

Respectfully

James Kracht, FCB President

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**2017 FCB Convention Update**
By James Kracht

After many hours of sweat, tears, and hard work, I am pleased to at last report that we have finalized arrangements with both the Orlando and Jacksonville hotels pertaining to the date and location of the 2017 Florida Council of the Blind Convention. We have reached a mutual understanding with the management of the International Palms Resort in Orlando and will not be meeting there in May of 2017. Unfortunately, the hotel will be closed in January through September or October of 2017 for renovations. We are sorry that we cannot meet in Orlando this coming year, but we will look forward to seeing the newly renovated property in Orlando at our fall 2018 Board meeting, and we will host our convention there in 2019.

Our 2017 FCB Convention will again be held in Jacksonville at the Lexington Riverwalk Hotel and Conference Center, which is located at 1515 Prudential Drive, Jacksonville, Florida 32207. The phone number is 904-396-5100. The convention dates will fall on the first weekend in June, which is June 1 through June 4, 2017. I am pleased to report that the hotel property's renovations have been completed.

Room rates for convention attendees will be $85 per night, plus tax. This rate will entitle two guests per room to a complementary daily breakfast. We are pleased to be welcomed back to the newly renovated Lexington Hotel and Conference Center and hope to see you all there in June.

The new convention information will be posted on the FCB website shortly.

Thank you all for your patience, understanding, and cooperation. I regret any inconvenience that these convention changes for 2017 may have caused, but the changes are from circumstances beyond any control of FCB. Mikey Wiseman, our outstanding hotel coordinator, has done a remarkably great and efficient job in making the necessary arrangements to accomplish these changes. Thank you, Mikey.

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**Wine, Dine, and Shop at the 2017 FCB Convention Auction**

By Leslie Spoone

The fourth annual silent auction will be held on Saturday, June 3 at 6 p.m. at the FCB state convention in Jacksonville, Florida. The auction will have many wonderful items, including bottles of wine, restaurant gift cards, jewelry, and special surprises. This year, the auction committee is working hard to make this year’s auction the best ever. We want to publish all auction items on FCB.org, the FCB listserv, and on e-mail lists 15 days before the auction. So, could each chapter please send us the description of your auction item by April 30? This will give the committee time to prepare the lists of auction items and share all of the wonderful contributions for are auction bidders. Each item will be numbered ahead of time for easy viewing and bidding.

Please contact Leslie Spoone at 407-678-4163, or you can e-mail her at lesliespoone@cfl.rr.com. Thank you in advance for all of your wonderful donations to FCB.

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**2017 FCB State & Chapter Awards**
By Sheila Young

Dear FCB members and friends,
Have you ever been thanked – or recognized – for something that you have done for others? How did it make you feel?

If you say “really proud” or “happy” to that question, then please read on.

This year, the FCB Awards Committee is desirous of honoring all members that deserve recognition for their devotion to improving the lives of those in the blind and visually impaired community.

Our committee is dedicated to keeping submissions confidential, and the recipients will be announced at our state convention, which will be held in May or June of 2017.

Please take a look at our awards listed on the [fcb.org](http://www.fcb.org) web site, and consider a submission honoring those who take time out of their day – whether it is a member, organization, or a person in the community – who blesses your life with their service to us.

The committee accepts all submissions, and the absolute deadline for entry is March 1st, 2017.

If you wish to submit a letter for an award, please email it to sheilayoung125@att.net. If you have any questions regarding our awards or system, please feel free to contact one of our committee members.

Thank you for taking time to honor the people who assist in making life better for us!

Sheila Young
Awards Chairperson
Sheilayoung125@att.net
407-425-9200 (home)
321-663-8893 (cell)

Jason Goldfield
Jgoldfiel73@comcast.net
561-337-8891

Shelley Sawyer
Seabelle031@gmail.com
850-765-9111

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**2017 FCB Scholarships**
By Sheila Young

The Florida Council of the Blind (FCB) Scholarship Program consists of awards totaling $4,000, which are offered to exemplary students who are enrolled in academic, professional, or technical education beyond the high school level.

The scholarship opportunities are as follows:

* Gayle M. Krause-Edwards Scholarship: $1,500.00– Available to an eligible applicant who is enrolled full-time, and has completed one semester of college, in a course of study which will increase advancement potential in his/her chosen field
* Teresa Blessing Scholarship: $1,000.00– Offered to an outstanding full-time college student
* Timothy Turpin Scholarship: $1,000.00– Offered to a high school student, graduating and exhibiting academic and leadership excellence planning to attend college full-time
* Bobbie Probst Scholarship: $500.00– Awarded to an eligible applicant who is enrolled part-time in a college or university, or a student enrolled in a technical institute.

Applicants must have at least a 3.0 grade-point average (GPA) with the exception of the Gayle M. Krause-Edwards Scholarship.

The prestigious Gayle M. Krause-Edwards scholarship requires a 3.2 GPA and completion of one semester in a college or university. This scholarship is awarded to a student exhibiting outstanding academic and leadership achievements.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL SCHOLARSHIPS:

1. Applicant must be legally blind. Specifically, the applicant must have vision in the better eye of no more than 20/200 with corrective lenses OR may have vision greater than 20/200 in the better eye, but with a restricted field of vision of no more than 20 degrees.

2. Applicant must be a current resident of the State of Florida. However, the college or university doesn't have to be in Florida.

3. Applicant must have a high school diploma or a high school equivalency diploma. (High school students who are graduating this term may also apply.)
4. Applicant must be enrolled in an accredited college, university, or technical institute or be accepted for enrollment. A letter of acceptance is required.

5. Applicant must be seeking a college degree or technical certificate.

6. Applicants who are full-time must carry at least 12 credit hours per semester/quarter to be eligible for the full-time scholarships. Those who are part-time must carry a minimum of 6 credit hours per semester/quarter to be eligible for the $500.00 scholarship.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS WHICH MUST ACCOMPANY THIS

APPLICATION INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

1. An explanatory or descriptive statement regarding vocational objectives and outlook for employment in a chosen field. Please include any awards or scholarships received or that are pending. Part-time students must include an explanation for part-time status (e.g., employed student, family responsibilities, etc).

2. Two letters of recommendation.

3. Sealed official transcript from school currently or most recently attended.

4. Letter of acceptance from accredited college or university.

5. Certification of visual status (detailed physician’s eye report) MUST be mailed by certifying entity.

Certification of visual status and transcript(s) MUST be postmarked no later than March 15, 2017.

Please forward Certification of visual status and transcript(s) to:

Florida Council of the Blind
c/o Sheila Young

2304 Amherst Ave.

Orlando, FL 32804

Please e-mail application packet, all recommendation letters, and supporting documents electronically to: Sheilayoung125@att.net.

All applications and documents must be received no later than March 15, 2017.

The Education and Leadership Committee will review all applications and select the four winners. Recipients will be notified prior to the annual state convention, and the winners will be announced during the Awards Ceremony in May or June of 2017. All scholarship winners will be invited to attend the annual convention and will be given hotel accommodations for one night for two persons and two tickets to the Awards banquet. Additional banquet tickets may be purchased by the scholarship recipients.

The Florida Council of the Blind will pay transportation costs by train or bus. Prior approval for travel by plane is required. Mileage by automobile to the convention will be reimbursed on the following basis: $0.445 per mile.

For more information about our Scholarship program, you may contact Sheila Young at sheilayoung125@att.net or by phone at 407-425-9200.

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**The FCB 6th Annual Blind Fishing Tournament**
By Mike Ulrich

The Florida Council of the Blind is proud to announce the sixth annual Blind Fishing Tournament to be held on Saturday, March 11, 2017. It is based out of the Cape Coral Yacht Club at 5819 Driftwood Parkway. Cape Coral Florida 33904. This is the 6th year for this unique fishing tournament!

The Cape Coral Yacht Club’s Beach Pavilion is the place where we will declare the winners, present the prizes, and where all participants will sit down to a good old-fashioned Florida cookout after the boats come in. We’ll also have music, raffles, and a whole bunch of “Fish Tales,” too. You know, “the big one that got away!” Story of my life. LOL!

This year’s tournament promises to be a great one. There will be up to 30-plus three-person teams – provided we can come up with enough Volunteer Captains this time around. Each team consists of a volunteer sighted captain (with boat), a sighted mate to assist the angler, and of course, the Blind angler.

For 2017, we’re hoping to attract many blind anglers from all across Florida!

It will be an inshore slam with the biggest single legal keeper fish caught in each species by each team’s blind angler – Snook, Redfish, and Sea Trout! Total bag weight! All teams will leave in their boats from the Yacht Club at 8:00 AM. They will fish the official tournament fishing grounds until 2:00 p.m. when they must arrive back at the docks. In the event of a tie, the first boat in wins. The fish from each team will be measured and weighed with the results recorded.

The FCB is hoping to set the total number of teams at 30-plus. So, we might need up to 30-plus blind anglers. But if we end up not getting enough Volunteer Captains, we’ll have to limit the amount of blind anglers. We should get a better handle on this as time goes by.

Last year’s 1st-Place Blind Angler was Bob Smith of Naples, Florida with a 7-pound, 14-ounce Snook and a 1-pound, 12-ounce Sea Trout! Bob was very happy to win a $500 Bass Pro Shops gift card. He also took home other great prizes – a Quantum 7-foot single piece Medium/Heavy action spinning rod with Shimano 4000 reel loaded with 10-pound braid (donated from Captain Rob’s Bait & Tackle!), a deep-sea fishing trip for one on the Great Getaway out of Ft. Myers Beach, a Baker stainless steel hook remover pliers, a pack of Mirror Lure plastic lures, a DOA Lures official Swag Bag, and a bunch of Miscellaneous tackle from Fishing Tackle Outlet. Finally he received a way cool 2-foot trophy with a very lifelike Snook on top, which was donated by Crown Trophy of Cape Coral!

Cool, right? Now this is what it’s all about – helping blind folks get out on the water and fish. Even if you don’t get a bite, it is truly worth the feeling of empowerment that you will catch during this great experience.

I am now just getting a lot of things together for this year’s tournament. I am quite hopeful that we will gain some major sponsorships. I would ask anyone that if you can help me in attracting any sponsors for this unique fishing tournament to please contact me.

I would also now like to invite any blind fisher-people who think they would like to compete in this tournament to please contact me for more info or to ask any questions. All of my contact info is listed at the bottom of this article.

So, here are the tournament particulars:

1. Blind angler registration will officially open Monday February 6, 2017.
2. Note: I will give last year’s tournament’s blind anglers about a one-week head start notice to register. This notice will go out to those blind anglers who fished in the last tournament some time around February 1, 2017. Hey, it’s only fair! Right?
3. I hope this year to once again get the Talking Book Library of Florida to send out a print mailer announcing the opening of Blind Angler registration. It should be in everyone’s mailbox well before the Monday, February 6 official registration opening date. Keep an eye out for it.
4. I will then post an additional official Blind angler registration-opening notice on the FCB list-serve on Monday, February 15, 2016.
5. The cost to enter this blind fishing tournament is $25 for the blind angler. If you bring your own sighted mate to assist you, they will also be charged the $25 entry fee. If you do not have your own sighted mate, one will be provided for you free of charge.
6. When you mail in your check for the $25 entry fee, it must be made out to FCB and received by February 24, 2017. If you think your timing will be tight, please call or e-mail me with your registration confirmation and your t-shirt size. Please include your name, address, cell phone number, and t-Shirt size as all team participants will receive a free tournament t-Shirt! Please mail all checks to:

FCB C/O Mike Ulrich

4642 Coronado Pkwy. A-101

Cape Coral, Fl. 33904

1. All team participants will need a State of Florida saltwater fishing license. If you are 65 and over, you do not need a fishing license. If you are under 65, you will need a State of Florida saltwater fishing license. If you are blind, you can obtain a free Florida disabled fishing license. But this takes time. There are several forms needed to get one. I also can direct you to a link to go online and apply for one. Just contact me for more info.

Or you can simply purchase a saltwater fishing license at one of your local area providers, such as a Wal-Mart’s sporting goods department, or your local bait and tackle shop.

1. All blind anglers are allowed – and encouraged – to fish with their own equipment. But if you do not own your own rod, reel, and tackle, this will be provided by your volunteer captain.
2. As in the last year’s tournament, I will most likely provide some live shrimp for every team again this year if possible.
3. All team members are encouraged to bring with them on the boats sunscreen, a hat, or some kind of sun protection. You should also bring some kind of breakfast food or snacks as you won’t be eating until we all sit down for the cookout at 3 p.m. So, be prepared.
4. I will once again most likely provide free coffee and doughnuts on the morning of the tournament. Keep your fingers crossed!

If anyone has any questions, please contact me:

Mike Ulrich
Home phone: 239-540-7431
Cell phone: 239-565-5845
E-mail: mulrich@centurylink.net

Now, here’s the part where I would usually tell you how being able to go out and fish by myself has given me back a part of my sighted life I thought not possible. How going out fishing has given me a great feeling of independence. How I still have my Bass Pro Shops pull-behind fishing cart. How it is always loaded with 3 rods, a gaff, my tackle bag, my 5-gallon live bait bucket with aerator, my cooler with enough food and drink for the day, and that I either pull it, or load it up on the para transit bus and go fishing by myself! But most of you have already heard all that, but have you actually tried to do that? How many of you blind folks just want to go fishing?

Well, there’s absolutely no excuse now! If you really want to go fishing, then give me a call, and I’ll give you all the info on this tournament. Now, I won’t guarantee that you’ll catch fish (this is why they call it fishing, ain’t it? But I will absolutely hands down guarantee you will have a great time!

See you out on the water!.........Mike

Michael D. Ulrich

Just an ordinary average blind guy!

Fundraising Committee Member

Florida Council of the Blind

“Providing Insight for Blindness”

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**As I See It

By Ellen Hillstrom

R. Dupont, Venice Gondolier, Sunday, Nov. 1, 2016**Our Venice Chapter of the Blind White Cane Safety Day celebration in October highlighted our recognition of Sarasota County law enforcement, presenting our plaque to Sheriff Tom Knight, keynote speaker. The message read:

"The officers of the Sarasota County Sheriff's Department play an essential role in safeguarding the rights and freedoms of the citizens of Sarasota County. They are an integral part of our society, and by their loyal devotion to their responsibilities to our community, they have established a deserved reputation for preserving the security of all its residents in a fair and impartial manner.

In light of recent negativity directed to law enforcement nationally, there is a need to show our law enforcement officers that we recognize the difficulties of the career they have chosen, and offer our encouragement and appreciation of their dedication and willingness to undertake the demanding, challenging, and often dangerous profession.

For many officers, law enforcement is not an occupation but a vocation. They are the guardians of our way of life and they deserve our support and appreciation.

Signed by the Venice Chapter, Florida Council of the Blind"

During this holiday season, we with limited vision may not be able to "see something, say something," but we will be sensitive to report disturbances that come to our attention. We are encouraged to call 911.

By the time you read this, the political uproar will be over, and I pray that all crowds will settle down and enjoy what this community is really all about - caring and sharing our good fortunes to live in our little corner of the world.

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Ellen Hillstrom is president of the Venice Chapter, Florida Council of the Blind and may be contacted at Ellen91@contacdt.net.

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**The “Happy Hooker” – Wanda Stokley in the Spotlight**

By Sila Miller

“I was born in Arcadia in DeSoto County Florida. It was a cow town and even now, it’s still a cow town,” begins Wanda in her “just state the facts Ma’am” manner. “My mother worked as a personal care attendant at a mental health care institution, and my daddy was an auto mechanic. When I was about six years old, they took me to the eye doctor because I’d get really close to the page when I’d color. They determined that I was near-sighted. And so I sat in the front of the classroom and got some glasses, and it didn’t really help any.”

Born June 4, 1954 to Leon and Fanny Lucille (Lucy) Strickland, Wanda Lucille and her older brother, Henry, were carefree and innocent children until one tragic event changed their lives forever. In June of 1965, just after Wanda’s 12th birthday, the family was shattered by Leon’s tragic and unexpected death. Henry, just two years older than Wanda, took a job at a local grocery store to help provide for the family and mowed lawns during the summer season. Being head of the household and solely responsible for her children wasn’t easy for Lucy, who also didn’t know how to drive. Between disability income for Wanda, Leon’s very modest military stipend, and Henry’s contribution, the struggling family made it, albeit on a shoestring.

Then, as it often does, life brought yet more unwelcome change to the Strickland family. “In November of that year, I noticed a significant change in my vision, so Mother got a ride and took me to the eye physician,” continues Wanda. “There were two doctors in the same office. They did tests, and neither of them could find anything, so they sent me to a neurologist. He performed tests and couldn’t find anything, either, so he referred me to a neuro surgeon—this was all in Sarasota, in the adjacent county. The surgeon did further testing with contrast dye and determined that I had a malignant tumor that was wrapped around the optic chiasm.”

The optic chiasm is an X-shaped structure formed at the point below the brain where the two optic nerves cross over each other. “In December of 1965, they shaved my head and split me from ear to ear, across the top of my head,” Wanda unemotionally states. “The tumor apparently was around too many blood vessels, and they were afraid to do anything, so they just sewed me back up and then did the follow-up radiation treatment. They only gave me two years to live, which I did not know until I was an adult. Then a year and a day later, they went back in—did the same procedure, but there was just so much scar tissue, they decided to leave it as it was.”

Wanda’s follow-up treatment for this malignant tumor consisted of five minutes of cobalt radiation, five days a week for a month. Church family and friends helped with transportation and medical expenses, and somehow, all the devastated family’s needs were met.

“I was on limited activity,” recalls Wanda. “I’d go to school in the morning, come home, have lunch, take a nap, and then go back to school. So, after a two-week stay in the hospital following the brain surgery, I immediately began to learn Braille. There was a lady in the county who was blind, Ms. Northrup, who was teaching me Braille. She’d follow along, reading upside down. My goal was to read fast enough that she couldn’t keep up with me,” chuckles Wanda.

During the summers of 1968 and ‘69, Wanda attended a summer program at the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind (FSDB) in St. Augustine that the family had heard of through Jim Dameron, Wanda’s Division of Blind Services (DBS) counselor. “Aside from Ms. Northrup, it was my first exposure to people with a visual impairment,” Wanda says. “I found it very rewarding that I could help people who did not have the vision that I had. At that time, I probably had between 20/600 and 20/800—wasn’t very much for some folks, but it was marvelous compared to what I have now,” she scoffs.

Not surprisingly, for someone who’d endured all that Wanda had, she became a rebellious and troubled teen. It was a rocky road for Lucy and her teenage daughter. Lucy was the overly protective mother of a daughter with a death sentence, while Wanda just wanted to be “normal.” To escape the ties that bound too tight, Wanda insisted on attending school away from home and enrolled at FSDB fulltime for the next two years, only coming home to complete her senior year where she graduated with honors in 1972 from DeSoto High School.

Following graduation, Wanda moved to Cocoa with her high school sweetheart where, as she puts it, “I sowed my wild oats.” The couple lived in Cocoa for a year and then relocated to Tallahassee where Wanda enrolled at Florida State University (FSU). She soon decided to drop out as there were too many classes that she didn’t want to take. Opting out of college and a failing relationship, she decided to go to work. “I was employed at what was a bank at one time, performing a medical service where people would call in and ask questions, and I would put in the tape that would answer their specific medical questions,” explains Wanda.

When I asked for the story of how she met her late husband and best friend, Lindsay Lee Stokley, Wanda laughed and began, “Well, I was not looking for a man at the time—I had no use for the male species, as a matter of fact! He was driving for the city transit system and was from Tallahassee. The second night that I rode the bus, he informed me that I needed to give him my telephone number and not to give him the wrong one or he would not let me off the bus! It just kinda went from there. He would always tell people that he picked me up on the street corner. It was actually the middle of the block,” she chuckles. “Just a few weeks after we’d started dating, he took me to eat with his parents, and his daddy told him not to let his shirt touch his back until he married me because I was a good woman.” Lindsay had been a long-distance truck driver prior to working for Taltran, the city’s transit provider. Not long after he and Wanda got together, he went back to trucking. “My wedding was small,” remembers Wanda. “I worked at Good Will industries at the time, so my bouquet and dress came from Good Will. Lindsay had a run out to Texas, so I went along, and that’s where we had our honeymoon. I had better vision back then, so I could really appreciate the scenery. I also went with him to Fresno, California and Tucson, Arizona where we visited my brother. There were canyons full of that which were like lakes with cactus names and huge beautiful cactus—15 to 20 foot tall, blooming up the side of the canyon. It was Labor Day weekend and like being in Florida because there were so many boats.”

“In 1976, thru my DBS counselor, I was employed at Good Will Industries,” Wanda discloses. “I was the first visually impaired person they’d ever employed. I started out answering the phone and scheduling the trucks for donation pickups. Since I was showing work skills that were above and beyond—I am one of those kinds of people that likes to do the very best—I then became their receptionist. I worked with the Public Relations and Personnel Departments and the Board of Directors. I was employed there for 10 years. Then one of the Board members who knew me found out that I was looking for another job. His spouse actually worked for DBS, so my counselor, Van Folgham, assisted me in getting a position with DBS in 1986.”

In the early ‘80s, Lindsay’s brother, Don, who was deaf, was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy (MD) following an episode where he was unable to get out of the bathtub without assistance. MD is a group of more than 30 genetic diseases characterized by progressive weakness and degeneration of the skeletal muscles that control movement. Because of its hereditary nature, doctors encouraged Lindsay’s family to submit to diagnostic testing. Sadly, Lindsay received the devastating news that he had Limb-girdle (LGMD) at the young age of 35. LGMD affects voluntary muscles, mainly those around the hips and shoulders. The shoulder girdle is the bony structure that surrounds the shoulder area, and the pelvic girdle is the bony structure surrounding the hips. Collectively, these are called the limb girdles. “He fought very hard to remain active,” reflects Wanda. “But when his physician wouldn’t renew his Department of Transportation certification, he was forced to retire and became a house spouse.”

Wanda’s 31-year-plus tenure with DBS began as a receptionist at their Tallahassee District Office. She then moved to the FSU branch and provided support for the counselor managing the Transition Program / College Student caseload. “We were housed in the same offices as Disabled Student Services, thanks to a ‘gentleman’s agreement’ between Bernard F. Sliger, FSU’s 10th president and Donald H. Wedewer, the DBS Director at that time. We paid for our own phone and office equipment, such as fax/copier and the like. I really enjoyed working one-on-one with the students,” continues Wanda, nostalgia in her voice.

“We did authorizations to pay for tuition, books, and supplies for people who were eligible for those services. We also provided additional financial support for those who qualified for that. I processed the timesheets for readers and tutors, because, back then, textbooks were not electronic—this was before our big boom in technology, so we used a lot of reader service. At that time, we paid FSU for the reader services, and eventually DBS paid the readers directly. There are very few readers now—we may have a few tutors – but the students’ textbooks are now either online or in electronic format. The client would come in to pick up their maintenance check, and that was a time to visit with them and help them. Over the course of the years that I’ve been there—working on 31 now—there have been ten counselors. And, the first question the students would always ask when a new counselor was coming is, ‘Are they visually impaired?’ I think many times, the students would share things with me that they would not share with their counselor, and if it was not extremely serious, then I would give them advice. I think that they appreciated that—they could speak to somebody that was also visually impaired who was a little bit older, and could give them advice but not tell them what to do. I miss that now—I haven’t done that in probably 10 or 12 years. I do some on the phone, but it’s not the same. Now it’s more paperwork,” sighs Wanda. “When FSU expanded and they erected the University Center at the stadium, there was a designated area for disabled students planned, but it was not ready or acceptable at the time that they opened up the center, and so other offices took their place. For an extended period of time, they were housed in a different location. When they finally constructed another building on campus that was going to house Disabled Student Services—I think due to the change of presidents and the passage of time, there just wasn’t room for us.”

So, it was back to the District Office for Wanda, where in addition to her duties with the college caseload, she helped the Children’s Counselor for a while, due to a staff shortage. “Over the years, my job description and title changed,” reflects Wanda. “The position began as a Word Processor, and now it’s called a Rehabilitation Technician, but I basically do the same thing. It’s funny with all the technology now, there’s still quite a lot to do, though recently we’ve began no longer keeping paper copies in the client’s file—we’re scanning. When I first went to DBS, we did authorizations on multiple pages with carbon paper,” she continues. “At that time, I could see well enough to do corrections. I had a CCTV (close circuit television) and an external camera that was mounted over my typewriter so I could see what I was doing. And now we have the split screens and so forth. We went from the multiple copies to the first stage of the computer, and we’re now on, I think, the third database program for Client Services. It was a learning experience over the years—combining a CCTV and vision with speech output as my vision deteriorated. I still use a vision enhancement program on my computer and have my screen split because I can still see enough that I like to see where I am on the screen, but, I depend primarily on the speech software.”

With age, Wanda began noticing unwelcome changes in her vision. Tests revealed that the tumor, perilously close to the pituitary gland hadn’t grown, and doctors speculated that the changes were stress-related. More time passed, and Wanda’s vision continued to decrease. An MRI (magnetic resonance imaging scan that can produce detailed pictures of parts of the body, including the brain) was performed and showed that indeed, the tumor was completely gone. However, due to the inability to control exactly where the radiation was directed back in the mid-‘60s, the resulting damage to the surrounding tissue was slowly eradicating Wanda’s vision. “At that time, I just had tunnel vision—could only see right in front of me, and now I have one eye that has almost no vision and am down to a smaller tunnel of vision,” explains Wanda. ”So I’m constantly bumping my head and getting knots on my head. I guess they’re called knowledge bumps,” she quips, with a self-deprecating chuckle. “I keep a soft gel ice pack in my freezer at home and work so when I bump my head, I can immediately go and get the ice and put on it before it has a chance to enlarge and become noticeable. I am prepared to possibly lose what vision I have left. I believe I can deal with that because of the experiences I’ve had with the multitude of blind and visually impaired people in my life over the past 31 years, including the school in St. Augustine. I feel like the Lord made me this way for a reason,” continues Wanda, sincerity resounding in her voice. “It’s nobody’s fault, and I don’t have a chip on my shoulder. My mission in life was to help somebody else, and I’ve done that many, many times. And my reason for having the job I had and not really seeking higher positions was because then I would not have had the more intimate contact with people with visual disabilities.”

As Lindsay’s condition progressed, he began to fall frequently, resulting in some serious injuries. His six-foot, six-inch size was against him, and he had many stays in rehab centers. Wanda was forced to travel and spend more time alone. It was during one of these times when Lindsay was approached by a friend and relinquished his steadfast stance on getting another dog. “We had a pre-nuptial agreement of sorts that we would always have a dog,” says Wanda. “To me, a house was not a home unless you had a dog. We had several, and the last one we had for 16 years was like a child to us. When Kodi Lee passed away, Lindsay confessed that he was not ready to get attached to another dog. So I got my ‘doggie fix’ from coworkers who had service dogs. Of course, my vision was deteriorating, and there was a member of our community who had recently gotten a guide dog from a school that did not have a residential program. A very good friend of mine visited my husband in rehab, and they talked about all this. Later that night, I went to see him, and he confessed that it was unfair to me, and did I think that I would like to have a pet or a guide dog? I immediately told him that I wanted a guide dog because when they were not working, they were pets. So, there began my application and so forth for my first dog, Yazley, who miraculously, due to her intelligence, knew that Lindsay had special needs. She knew not to get too close to him when walking so she wouldn’t bump him. She was also willing to do things for him—like we taught her to get his shoes from one room and bring them to the other where he was. If he dropped the remote to the TV, she’d pick it up for him and several other things. She got under his bed when he was in ICU and didn’t bother a single cord or wire. If I had not had her when he passed, I don’t know what I would have done,” Wanda says, tears clogging her voice. “Through his rehab and then before he passed in ICU and then in Hospice—besides my Lord, and my friends, and her, I was able to manage and cope and go through the grieving process. I still get emotional sometimes,” she apologetically says. “In six days, it’ll be nine years. But we were united as one! We were friends, and we were able to help one another to do what one of us could not do alone. I now have my second guide dog, Cinder Ella. I feel like I can accommodate myself as far as mobility and independence at home.”

Wanda’s involvement with FCB began on the local level. She served as Secretary for the Tallahassee Council of the Blind and has just completed her second term as chapter president. She’s also chaired the Education and Leadership committee and currently chairs the Employment committee. She also serves on the Convention committee as its Exhibits Coordinator and absolutely loves that role. “It’s broadened my horizon as far as education and advocacy and things that are available. I’m able to share that information with others,” explains Wanda.

Among Wanda’s heroes is a coworker at FSU, Jeff Douglas, who broke his neck in college on the trampoline. “He’s in a wheelchair and very limited as to what he can do,” says Wanda. “I think about Jeff and the times that he told Lindsay when it was time for him to use a walking cane for stability, that he would have the courage and knowledge to know that he needed it and not to let ego get in the way. My mother was very independent after my daddy died. She passed away in October of 2014. We reconciled our early differences, and I cherished our adult relationship. Our personalities were very different—Mother was reserved while I am touchy and a hugger. I’m blessed that I have friends who are willing to share with me and help me when needed so that I can continue to grow and remain as independent as possible and still maintain a lifestyle that I feel is fulfilling.”

Wanda enjoys crocheting, reading, walking, and listening to gospel music. “I love pulling weeds in the yard and listening to the birds. That’s a great stress-reliever,” she confides. “I have flowers for the hummingbirds and butterflies, and I like doing things that are environmentally friendly for those creatures. On May 31, 2021, I will officially be retired from the state. I would like to visit nursing homes and rehab facilities with my service dog to brighten the residents’ day because I know that sometimes just the presence of a dog can lift people’s spirits—they have this intuition—they know when people are in need.”

I’d say that Wanda has, and is fulfilling her life’s mission. From helping her husband maintain his dignity throughout his MD-stricken last days, to assisting her single-parent stepdaughter in supporting her family, to talking with countless students and clients of DBS, to gifting those of us lucky ones with her special brand of love, this world is a better place with Wanda Lucille Strickland Stokley in it. Thank you, “Happy Hooker,” for candidly sharing your life story with us, for crocheting, praying, offering encouragement, advocating, and so much more! Wanda welcomes contact and can be reached by email at wandastokley@centurylink.net or by phone at 850 309-0821.

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**10 Reasons For Taking Up The White Cane**
By Will Grignon, SWFCB

Blind? Going blind? Fighting taking up and using the white cane? Especially in public? You are not alone. Almost every person who faces blindness fights the white cane. Sometimes for years. Sometimes to their frequent humiliation, multiple injuries, or worse – they fight it because the white cane is like a white flag – a surrender to the night of blindness. Even worse for many, the white cane is like a big neon sign announcing, “WARNING – HERE COMES A BLIND PERSON!”

For the most part, sooner or later, everyone comes to terms with the white cane in their own way and at their own pace, but self-delusions, familial coddling, bureaucratic indifference, and/or everyone pretending a blind person doesn’t need a white cane only prolongs the misery of the in-between-twilight time – that less-than-optimal, more-than-dangerous, half-in-the-ebbing-light-half-in-the-encroaching-night of fading edges, looming presences, sharp corners, and jolting voids

There is no cryptic incantation that will guarantee that your journey into proficient blindness will be shorter or easier, and there is no magic wand that will make you see again or even make your life as a blind person free from pitfalls and/or pratfalls. But I offer these top 10 Reasons For Taking Up The White Cane in hopes that they will at least joggle you into some constructive thinking and, perhaps, cajole you into at least working out your blindness destiny with less fear, more determination, and, perchance, a modicum of humor.

10. You are going to use the cane eventually.

Unless you plan to never leave your bedroom, always cling to the arm of a sighted guide, and perpetually venture forth in a hesitant slip-and-shuffle-grope-and-creep, you will need to become moderately proficient in what the Blind Industry calls Orientation and Mobility – orientation being the ability to determine your surroundings, and mobility being your ability to navigate those surroundings. You can procrastinate and prevaricate until paralysis overwhelms you and weeks, months, and years of frustration, self-reproach, and rising panic go by before you begrudgingly accept your fate, or you can accept the inevitable and get on with the business of life as a person with vision loss.

9. Accepting the cane will accelerate your acceptance/reconciliation with your blindness.

The Blind Industry recognizes that losing one’s vision usually involves the five stages of death and dying. Hey, nobody said going blind would be a barrel of laughs. Anyway, as you are probably aware, these stages are: Denial (Going blind? Who, me? No way!), Anger (Rats, I’m going blind! This really sucks! Life is so freakin’ unfair!), Bargaining (If only… Maybe there’s a cure, a new technology, a miracle…?), Depression (OK, I’m blind and I will be for the rest of my life, and my life will suck forever…), and Acceptance (OK, so what, I’m a person who happens to be blind; it’s not what I wanted and it’s not always fun, but it’s something I have to deal with, something I can do a lot about, and something that should not and will not prevent me from being the best I can be and from living the best life I can live…).

8. The cane is a white badge of courage.

Hmmm…you are probably thinking I am scrambling to actually come up with ten reasons for taking up the white cane, but I assure you this is a legitimate reason. There are thousands of persons with vision loss who, for one reason or another, refuse to properly use the white cane as part of a general refusal to confront their condition of vision loss and challenge themselves to get out there, take chances, make mistakes, and grow. Instead, these people buy into the age-old lie that persons with vision loss are somehow deficient, should not expect much, and should be satisfied with the crumbs that a sighted world may or may not choose to toss to them. These people do not really take up the white cane. Oh, they might have a white cane and they might take a few lessons, but the white cane usually stays at home or stays firmly tucked in a bag as these people totter about the world on the arm of a sighted person, going where they are told to go, sitting where they are told to sit, and living a life they are told to accept. On the other hand, those who actually take up the white cane strike out on their own, find their way to where they want to go, and make their own lives, which might not be perfect (which of our lives is?). But it is a life marked by learning, trying, and doing – a life in which the white cane is symbolic of a choice to engage life and to venture forth in spite of vision loss and the physical and attitudinal barriers that will be encountered. With the cane, you will be an ambassador from the world of vision loss, an educator bringing enlightenment to a visually-oriented darkling world, and a role model to other persons with vision loss who will see you trying and doing and say, “Hey, if that putz can do it…” And so, the white cane is truly a kind of badge of courage.

7. The cane is a tool.

Okay, okay, uncomfortable with the whole “white badge of courage” thing? Not ready to take on the world as an ambassador from the blind community and/or a role model to other blind people. Fine. Then think of the white cane as a tool. Nothing more and nothing less. As a tool, it is no different than a pencil or a flashlight. As a tool, it is designed to do a specific job – help you navigate in the world. As a tool, it requires some training to learn its ways and means. And, as a tool, it only works if you actually use it and use it in the way it was designed to be used!

6. The cane can be a way of summoning guardian angels.

Now, let’s put you in an unfamiliar location with your cane. You tap around, but you just can’t figure out where the heck you’ve gotten yourself into. A kindly soul passes nearby, sees your cane and your perplexed expression, approaches you, and asks, “Hi, can I help you?” I call these people guardian angels, and my life has been blessed with more guardian angels than I can count, and they usually pop up in the most unlikely situations!

5. The cane gives you mobility, freedom, and confidence.

Aren’t you tired of sitting on your big, fat… um… er… chair? Aren’t you bone weary of waiting around for sighted people to decide when and where you are going? Aren’t you fed up with being the lump in the corner, the piece of baggage in the back seat, the “poor blind guy” holed up in an ever-shrinking routine of talking books, wonky adaptive technologies, and monthly government checks? Will the white cane transport you to exotic locations where you will meet super-cool people and do really neat stuff? Maybe. Will it make you the most interesting person in the world? Probably not. Will it impart super-powers that will allow you to defeat uber-villains and rescue damsels in distress? Please! What it will do is get you out of your rut, get you into the world, and get you, your family, your friends, and the world to see you in a different way.

4. Not taking up the cane because your family, friends, coworkers are embarrassed is not, I repeat, not a good reason to fight the cane.

One of the most pernicious aspects of an existence characterized by blindness is the low, and in some cases, no expectations of those around you. I call this the Soft Gray Nothing. This is where you sink amidst your family’s silent desperation as they have no idea how to best help you and quietly write off your future to one of unemployment, loneliness, boredom, and insignificance. And it’s not only family – friends, teachers, and, yes, even DBS counselors conspire to hem you round with cautionary exhortations and delimiting aspirations. Perhaps you might want to consider a ruthless self-assessment, a methodical self-reeducation, and a patient but firm evolution of yourself, your world, and the people in that world as they grow to accommodate the growing person you are becoming – with one big part of this personal evolution being… yes… you’ve guessed it… taking up that darned white cane and learning how to use it as part of you becoming a competent and confident person with vision loss.

3. You are a danger to yourself.

If it isn’t clear by now, let us spell it out – not using a cane puts you in danger of getting lost and suffering collisions, falls, injuries, and worse…

2. You are a danger to others.

Don’t care about your own safety, health, and/or existence? Then remember that your caneless bumbling, fumbling, and stumbling about endangers pedestrians, drivers, children, and small animals, who, because you don’t signify your visual condition with the white cane, will assume a wholly different set of facts about your capabilities and anticipate a wholly different set of actions and reactions from you. In short, when the world expects you to zig and you zag… well, you can do the math…

1. Because you are not fooling anyone!

You stumble down the street or lurch into a display of adult undergarments or step on your friend’s wheezing three-legged dachshund… and you think no one notices? Come on, really? Here’s the cold hard truth – they do notice. And here’s an even colder harder truth – they won’t immediately think you are visually impaired. The coldest hardest truth is that many will think you are drunk, high on drugs, possessed by a vindictive alien named Bruce, or a combination of all three. Hmmm, letting them know you’re blind by your use of the white cane isn’t sounding so bad just about now, is it? Come on, be honest with yourself. Are you telling us you’d rather have the world think you are drunk, high, and/or possessed by a vindictive alien named Bruce than know you are blind? Fair enough. You are not alone.

And there you have it – 10 reasons to take up the white cane. One more thing – taking up the white cane is a VERY PERSONAL JOURNEY (those last three words are in all caps for those of you using a screen reader). It’s as though there is an internal switch from “no freakin’ way I’m using that bleeping cane” to “OK, OK, it’s time…” I hope that these 10 Reasons might nudge that switch a little closer to the “yes” position. Finally, I assure you that there is nothing in this piece that I haven’t experienced. I was an angry guy with vision loss who fought the white cane for years. My switch clicked over during a span of a couple of years (with the help of a very determined sighted companion who did not want to be saddled with a hapless, helpless, hopeless partner). May you find encouragement from those around you, and may you swallow your pride, embrace a rational approach, and step out into the world with a competent and confident swing of that white cane!
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**Don’t Touch That Dial: It’s Time For “Blind and Beyond”**
By Greg Lindberg

Michael and Lynne Golder remember standing in line at a local food bank in the Orlando area. This was just two years after owning a highly successful, multimillion-dollar company in the garment industry that had an international reach. Now, after going through a whirlwind rollercoaster ride over the past 8 years, the two work in radio and proudly co-host the “Blind and Beyond Radio Show.”

“The show serves as a bridge between the sighted community and the visually impaired and blind community,” Michael explains. “We want people to know that there is more to life than blindness. That’s why we always play the song ‘Ain’t No Stopping Us Now.’”

The couple of 29 years brought the weekly, nonprofit broadcast to the airwaves on Sunday, April 3, 2016. They had previously hosted a similar syndicated show for just over two years called “Blind Matters.” The current incarnation of the program airs live out of a studio in Ocoee, Florida, a small town on the outskirts of Orlando. It runs Sunday evenings from 7 to 9 p.m. Eastern Time on 1680 WOKB-AM. It can also be heard online at [www.wokbradio.com](http://www.wokbradio.com), on the *Tune In Radio* mobile application for smartphones, and on the WOKB mobile app. In addition, a phone line is set up to listen to the show at 518-712-0057. Free podcasts are also available at [www.blindandbeyondradioshow.org](http://www.blindandbeyondradioshow.org). Last, but certainly not least, you can call into the show live at 407-894-1680 to add your two cents about any relevant topic on your mind.

When tuning in, you will hear a variety of content. From interviews with movers and shakers in the blind community, to inspirational quotes and poems, to trivia, the word “beyond” is important to remember because of the unique mix the show has to offer.

“It’s all about the word *mindset*,” Michael says. “I speak passionately from my heart that blind people can do anything. The only question is if they hold themselves back. You have to be a risk taker. If you fall down, you have to get up. If you are passionate, focused, and persistent, you should never be held back.”

In addition to the Golders, producer Chris Shaw, who sits behind the glass, is the true heartbeat of the program from a technical standpoint. You’ll also hear an array of guest co-hosts each week, including FCB members like Sheila Young, Gary Sinclair, and Charles Brooks.

After suddenly losing a good amount of his sight while on a sales trip in 2008, ophthalmologists at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute in Miami diagnosed Michael with Idiopathic Central Serous Retinopathy, a condition linked to emotional stress and increased eye pressure from elevated Cortisol levels. However, he has received lots of varying opinions on the ultimate cause of his vision loss and has undergone a few procedures.

At 74, Michael has a reputation for his affection for ‘50s and ‘60s music, particularly hits by Ricky Nelson, Bobby Darin, and Paul Anka. So, if you listen to “Blind and Beyond,” there’s a good chance you will hear a song from this era when he asks listeners to identify an artist during a “name that tune” trivia segment.

“When I was a kid, my parents owned the first record distributor for Motown music,” Michael recalls. “My father’s business partner was Jocko Henderson, a well-known syndicated black DJ. At age 14, I got involved in the record business as a salesman. I also danced many times on *American Bandstand* where they nicknamed me ‘rubber legs.’”

Michael and Lynne, who both originally hail from New York, joined the Greater Orlando Council of the Blind in early 2012 and have been members ever since.

“It’s a really nice group,” Michael says. “We are very proud members and try to get to the meetings when we can.”

Along with “Blind and Beyond,” the couple also does full-time sales work for some radio stations in Orlando. Michael is Vice President of Advertising for WOKB and Brazil Radio AM and FM. Along with taking her husband all around central Florida to meet with potential on-air advertisers, Lynne writes and records the commercials for the stations.

“Lynne takes me to all types of businesses – stores, restaurants, car dealers, and even martial arts centers. I go in and try to sell advertising spots on our stations. I enjoy the competitive edge and challenges to this work. I’m a Type A personality, and I always like talking to people.”

Michael previously owned a men’s clothing company for over four decades where Lynne also worked as the head designer. He directly attributes his sight loss to the loss of a business he had put so much time and energy into.

“Right after I went blind, I met with a potential business partner. He immediately said, ‘Michael, you’re blind. Why would I want to go into business with you?’ He asked how many buttons were on his shirt. When I said three, which was correct, he said it was a lucky guess. So, this wound up being the end of our business, and I was on the hook for millions.”

Fortunately, as luck would have it, his wife was looking out for him – in more ways than one – and spotted a small job posting that would lead to a future successful career for the couple.

“So one day, Lynne saw an ad in the paper for a radio station looking for a salesperson. She drove me there on gas that we couldn’t even afford. The station manager, Carl Tutera, said he didn’t care about my visual impairment and decided to give me a shot because as long as I had a mouth, I could do the job.”

Michael would later get an hour-long show on The Big 810 AM in Orlando. This was the birth of “Blind Matters” in April 2012. This show would eventually expand to three hours and several major markets around the country. It was Budweiser that served as its original sponsor.

Lynne spends many hours each week researching potential guests, content, and advertisers for the broadcasts. And Sunday night certainly comes around quickly each week.

“My favorite thing is planning the show each week and seeing it come to life,” Lynne says. “I tell Michael that it’s like passing an exam. It’s similar to working in the garment industry when I would imagine a piece of clothing and then see it manufactured. But the minute I walk out that door on Sunday night at 9:30, I’m already planning the next show in my head.”

Lynne, 65, says the loss of Michael’s vision and the involvement in two radio shows about blindness have both been big eye-openers for her.

“Meeting blind people has changed my life,” she says. “We did not know one single visually impaired person before. I now think twice about things much more than I used to, and I try to accommodate people. For example, when working on the website for our show, I always take into account the fact that everything has to be accessible.”

When asked about the future of “Blind and Beyond,” Michael speaks with excitement in his voice.

“I want this show to become bigger and get into more cities. I also want more people to get involved with the show to help spread our positive message all across the country.”

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**Winners of the Top Dog 2017 Disney Raffle**

By Kathleen Trutchel

Guide Dog Users of Florida sold raffle tickets as a fundraiser for Top Dog 2017. There were two winners, and each winner received two one-day Disney passes, which can be used at all four of the theme parks. The passes are good for two years. The lucky winners were Doug Hall and Michael Wasilko. Congratulations, and have fun at Disney World!

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**GOCB Update – January-February 2017**
By Martha James

The members of the GOCB wish all of you a very Happy New Year as we start 2017. Because of some scheduling issues, the membership decided to hold its annual election in January. Here is the slate of officers for the upcoming election:

President: Charles Brooks
1st Vice President: Dan Spoone
2nd Vice President: Martha James
Recording Secretary: Mattie Hickson
Treasurer: Sheila Young
Membership Secretary: Tanya Cleven

Good luck to all officers!

Thanks so much to all who have joined our organization and those who continue to support our efforts. Our annual jewelry party was held on December 10 at the home of Gary Sinclair. We would like to thank him for opening his home for this wonderful event. Thanks to Paul and Patty Odham for bringing such a great selection of jewelry.

To wrap up the year, our chapter held our Christmas luncheon on December 3 at the home of Gary Sinclair. Thanks to all our members and friends who joined us at these events.

There is plenty of work ahead for our chapter in the coming year as we prepare for the annual trivia night held on April 22. We invite anyone interested in participating to join us for a fun night.

In addition, for those with computer access, GOCB is on both Facebook and Twitter. You can find us on Facebook by typing “GOCB” and follow us on Twitter@GOCB\_FL. GOCB invites all readers of this newsletter to “like” and “follow” us on these social networks, respectively.

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**Sarasota Council of the Blind Updates**
By Karen Christie

Our Sarasota council’s November meeting was held on Monday the 14th at Der Dutchman restaurant. President Rick Wilkinson gave a report from the annual FCB board meeting and told us that it was almost time for our annual raffle. Ginny Rempelakis, our membership secretary, reminded our group that $15 dues needed to be turned in to her by the 15th of November.

Additionally, since this was November’s business meeting, it was time to elect new officers for next year. The 2017 officers are as follows:

President – Randy Reed
Vice President - Melissa Weis
Second Vice President – Ruth Book
Recording Secretary – Irene Carnahan
Membership Secretary – Virginia Rempelakis
Treasurer – position still open

Once regular meetings resume in January in our council, they will be held on the second Saturday of the month from 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at IHOP restaurant. It was decided that a change in day and venue would make it easier for members who are employed to attend and take a more active role in council functions.

We were also informed that our council’s Christmas party would be held once again at Lakehouse West on December 12. The Lakehouse West is an assisted living facility where Second Vice President Ruth Book resides. She and the staff members do a wonderful job with the cheery decorations. They provide scrumptious meal choices and always see to it that we all have a wonderful time celebrating the holiday season.

Today is December 12, and as I write this, I’m finding it so hard to believe that this was our last meeting of 2016. As the saying goes, I don’t know where all the time went!

We enjoyed a wonderful Christmas party at the Lakehouse West, while dining on a delicious meal of lobster bisque, green salad topped with chicken, and a luscious flourless chocolate torte to top it off! Everyone enjoyed the opportunity to talk and laugh with friends to celebrate our last meeting of this year.

There will be much to do in 2017, and until we meet on January 14, our council would like to wish everyone a healthy and happy holiday season. See you next year!

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**Millennial Mania**
By Greg Lindberg

Attention all millennials and young people reading this newsletter. The White Cane Bulletin wants to hear from you!

Did you recently learn to use a white cane for the first time? Are you thinking about getting a guide dog? Have you ever played beep baseball or goal ball? Did you just download a handy iPhone app that helps you navigate your neighborhood?

We want to hear your stories and give you a voice in the blind and visually impaired community. We would also like your feedback on the White Cane Bulletin and if there is anything in particular you would like to read about in this newsletter.

If you’re in grade school, college, or are a young adult, feel free to send in your stories or ideas to Greg Lindberg at glindberg@gmail.com. Tell us what you’re up to and what your goals are as a young visually impaired person. We look forward to hearing about “what’s up” in your world!

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**FCB OFFICERS, 2016 – 2018**President, James Kracht

9901 SW 138th Street, Miami, FL 33176

jkk48@bellsouth.net (305) 251-6983 or 407-378-3477

1st Vice-President, Dan Spoone

3924 Lake Mirage Blvd., Orlando, FL 32817

danspoone@cfl.rr.com (407) 678-0075

2nd Vice President, Doug Hall

1405 Edgewater Road, Daytona Beach, FL 32114-5859

dhall318@cfl.rr.com (386) 255-0377

Treasurer, Linda Jacobson

2915 Circle Ridge Dr., Orange Park, FL 32065

lfjacobson@gmail.com (904) 272-8405

Membership Secretary, Sally Benjamin

1531 Dempsey Mayo Road, Tallahassee, FL 32308

salbenjamin@comcast.net 850-877-1512

Recording Secretary, Debbie Drylie

1544 Walnut Creek Dr., Flemming Island, FL 32003

debbiedrylie@gmail.com (904) 228-7102

Immediate Past President, Paul Edwards

20330 N.E. 20th Ct., Miami, FL 33179

edwards.paul955@gmail.com (305) 692-9206

Editor of White Cane Bulletin, Greg Lindberg

3145 Meadow View Ln., Palm Harbor, FL  34683

glindberg@gmail.com (727) 543-9807

\*\*\*

**Chapter and Special Affiliate Officer Liaisons**

"Please contact your officer liaison if we can be of assistance or if you need anything from the Executive Committee."

Broward- Paul Edwards

edwards.paul955@gmail.com

(305) 692-9206

Clay- Dan Spoone

danspoone@cfl.rr.com

(407) 678-0075

Greater Miami- Debbie Drylie

debbiedrylie@gmail.com

(904) 228-7102

Greater Orlando- Doug Hall

dhall318@cfl.rr.com

(386) 255-0377

Halifax- Linda Jacobson

lfjacobson@gmail.com

(904) 272-8405

Jacksonville- Linda Jacobson

lfjacobson@gmail.com

(904) 272-8405

Manatee- Dan Spoone

danspoone@cfl.rr.com

(407) 678-0075

Miami Beach- Paul Edwards

edwards.paul955@gmail.com
(305) 692-9206

Miami Metro- Paul Edwards

edwards.paul@gmail.com
(305) 692-9206

Palm Beach- Jim Kracht

jkk48@bellsouth.net

(305) 251-6983 or 407-378-3477

Pensacola- Sally Benjamin

salbenjamin@comcast.net

850-877-1512

Pinellas- Doug Hall

dhall318@cfl.rr.com

(386) 255-0377

Sarasota- Dan Spoone

danspoone@cfl.rr.com

(407) 678-0075

Southwest- Sally Benjamin

salbenjamin@comcast.net

850-877-1512

Tallahassee- Debbie Drylie

debbiedrylie@gmail.com

(904) 228-7102

Tampa- Sally Benjamin

salbenjamin@comcast.net

850-877-1512

Venice- Dan Spoone

danspoone@cfl.rr.com

(407) 678-0075

BRLF- Dan Spoone

danspoone@cfl.rr.com

(407) 678-0075

CCTB- Debbie Drylie

debbiedrylie@gmail.com

(904) 228-7102

FCCLV- Doug Hall

dhall318@cfl.rr.com

(386) 255-0377

GDUF- Linda Jacobson

lfjacobson@gmail.com

(904) 272-8405

RSVF- Jim Kracht

jkk48@bellsouth.net

(305) 251-6983 or 407-378-3477

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**Handy Telephone Number References**

Project Insight: (800) 267-4448

Bureau of Braille & Talking Book Library: (800) 226-6075

Division of Blind Services, State Office: (800) 342-1828

American Council of The Blind: (800) 424-8666

 (Available 3:00 to 5:30 P.M. EST Monday-Friday only)

ACB Legislative Hotline: (800) 424-8666

 (Available evenings 8:00 P.M. to 12:00 Midnight EST

 and weekends 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. only)

AT&T Disability Services: (800)872-3883

 Press 00 and speak with your long distance carrier,

 or Florida only: (800)982-2891

BellSouth Disability Services: (800)982-2891

 (From anywhere)

Social Security: (800) 772-1213

 (24-hour voice and touch tone accessible

- THE END-

FLORIDA COUNCIL OF THE BLIND FREE MATTER

1531 Dempsey Mayo Road FOR THE BLIND

Tallahassee, FL 32308 MAY BE OPENED