**THE WHITE CANE BULLETIN**

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



## July - August 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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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

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**President's Message**

By James Kracht

It is with excitement, enthusiasm, and renewed energy that I sit down to write this month's message. For those of you who were unable to attend our 64th annual FCB Convention, it could not have been any more of a success. The energy, the meaningful exchange of information, and the commitment and hard work from the Convention Committee, Executive Committee, and FCB leadership resulted in success. The programs, workshops and social events by sponsors and presenters made it a completely successful convention. So many people joined hands and more than did their part to make it all work. Thank you. I will confess though, that as great of an experience as it was, when it was over, I have never been so exhausted.

As many of you know, I am now busily preparing to leave for a 5-week trip to Europe on June 15th. It will be a wonderful experience. I know that in my absence, FCB will continue to move forward.

If there was an emerging spirit and theme from the convention, it is the continued need for advocacy – hard-fought storytelling advocacy from the grassroots up. Every one of us has work that we must and that we will do.

As I briefly mentioned at the convention, the 2017 session of the Florida legislature passed HB727 SB1398 which, at this writing, awaits signature or veto by our Florida governor. The bill is entitled "Accessibility of Places of Public Accommodation” and authorizes Qualified Experts to Advise & Provide certain Inspections for Places of Public Accommodation Relating to ADA. It also authorizes Certain Owners of Places of Public Accommodation to File a Certificate of Conformity or Remediation Plan with DBPR. It provides Requirements for Such Submission, requires Court to Consider Certain Information in Specified Actions, requires the Department to Develop and Maintain Website for Specified Purposes, and provides An Appropriation. Effective Date: July 1, 2017.

Does this sound like progress under the 1990 ADA, or does it sound like more and more obstacles, roadblocks, and delays in achieving actual access to Florida's public accommodations for individuals with disabilities? THIS bill is not progress. It is nothing for the disabled community to celebrate. Registering plans for achieving accessibility, developing and requiring certifications by a new group of unidentified experts, and involvement of the State of Florida in further delays in achieving access is definitely not progress. It slows down 27 years of hard-fought efforts for progress and the already obtained victories under the ADA of 1990. It appears to require more inspections, to impose continued delays by requiring registration, and certificates of compliance and administrative filings. These legislative requirements further delay judicial recovery and court-mandated remediation under the ADA.

We should have seen this legislation as no surprise. Overall societal, judicial and legislative response to the needs of individuals with disabilities seems to be a negative pushback and reaction to complaints and objections by the disabled under the ADA.

Last year, the producers of “60 Minutes” aired a segment focusing on inappropriate "drive-by" lawsuits filed under the ADA. Many of these lawsuits end in quick and relatively cheap settlements that reward the litigants and their lawyers, but they do nothing to further accessibility for the disabled community at large. Regrettably, there has been an emerging focus on these ill-founded lawsuits motivated by individual gain rather than focusing on the need for remedying actual discrimination and a true lack of accessibility. The “60 Minutes” segment responded to the ADA's requirements of access by focusing on these drive-by lawsuits rather than on obtained successes and the continuing need for accessible public accommodations. It totally ignored the use of structured negotiations, which has been successfully used to obtain accessible websites, audio description, prescription labeling, and ATM and POS machines. This is a sad commentary by our media, courts, and now the Florida Legislature. It is an example of the harm done by a lack of consensus in the disabled community: some striving to push ahead for the good of the community at large while others are striving to use existing laws and courts to further their own economic gain to the detriment of our disabled community.

There is significant ignorance and misunderstanding. There is a total lack of consensus on appropriate responses and approaches to end discrimination and achieve barrier removal and full access to public accommodations. It is outrageous and sad that this type of legislation could be adopted without any meaningful study or dialog with the disabled community, and without exploring the best practices to further access by the disabled community to public accommodations.

As advocates then, until the governor signs this law into effect, his office must be flooded with telephonic and email messages requesting the veto of HB 727, SB1398. Please call his office at 850-488-7146 or write and send a letter to:

Office of the Governor

The Florida Capitol

Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

or send an e-mail to rick.scott@eog.myflorida.com.

Then, if as I suspect, it becomes law, we must strongly object to and discourage those who continue to flood our courts with lawsuits aimed at raising a few dollars rather than serving to benefit accessibility for all individuals with disabilities. FCB must continue to choose its battles carefully – and should continue fighting for the good of the whole rather than choosing to initiate or resolve legal or administrative actions for the short-term financial gain of a few.

Reversing societal misconceptions and misperceptions has never been easy. Our legislators should be condemned for enacting legislation that hinders accessibility and promotes discrimination and further delays access to public accommodations by the disabled community.

Sincerely,

James Kracht, President, FCB

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**FCB Purpose**

Submitted by Linda Jacobson

From our Policy Manual

The following is a summary outlining the purpose of the Florida Council of the Blind. It was read by Linda Jacobson at the First Timers workshop at our FCB convention.

The purpose of the FCB is to strive for the betterment of the total community by:

A. Conducting a program of public education which promotes understanding among blind people, employers, state and local officials and the community

at large;

B. Providing a forum for the views of all blind individuals in the state;

C. Advocating for social, economic, and cultural opportunities for blind people;

D. Improving educational and rehabilitation facilities;

E. Broadening vocational opportunities;

F. Encouraging and assisting blind people, especially the newly blind, to develop their abilities and potentialities, and to assume their responsible place

in the community;

G. Cooperating with the public and private institutions and agencies of and for blind people;

H. Providing for the free exchange of ideas, opinions and information related to matters of concern to blind people through periodic publications.

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**2017 FCB Award Winners**

By Sheila Young

At this year’s state convention, the FCB Awards Committee was pleased and proud to recognize several valuable FCB members and community advocates. The Awards Committee members for this year were Sheila Young, Jason Goldfield, and Shelley Sawyer.

The committee would like to thank those people who took the time to nominate these well-qualified individuals. The 2017 award recipients certainly embody the spirit of the Florida Council of the Blind. In addition to fourteen Chapter and Special Interest Affiliate awards, submitted by appreciative affiliates, four state awards, all named in honor of former leaders and advocates for the independence of blind and visually impaired persons, and a special Presidential Award, were presented.

* The Dolly Gamble Award was received by James Kracht.
* The R. Henry P. Johnson Award was presented to Debbie Grubb.
* The W. A. Ouzts Award was presented to Nancy Burgess-Hall, and
* The Just Bill Award was received by John Richards.

President James Kracht presented his special President’s Award to his wife, Pat Kracht, for her countless hours of dedication to FCB.

The new chair, Jason Goldfield, along with Shelley Sawyer and the newest committee member, Cassandra Jessie, will now accept award nominations for the 2018 state convention. Those much-appreciated individuals will be honored at the 2018 convention.

Remember, the deadline to nominate people who deserve recognition will be announced by the committee. If you know of and appreciate someone who has provided outstanding service to people who are blind, please nominate him or her so we can all share in the recognition of that person at our next FCB awards banquet.

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**2017 Scholarship Recipients**
By Sheila Young, Education & Leadership Chair

On behalf of the Education and Leadership Committee and FCB, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate this year’s recipients of our scholarships, awarded at this years’ state convention.

The Gayle M. Krause-Edwards Scholarship was presented to Hilary Reed of Fort Ogden, FL.

The Teresa Blessing Scholarship was given to Valerie Nunez-Pizarro of Largo, FL.

The Timothy Turpin scholarship was presented to Ana Quijada-Lopez of Bradenton, FL.

The Bobbie Probst Scholarship was given to Krista Waters of Jacksonville, FL.

We were delighted that two of the recipients were able to attend the Awards and Scholarships dinner.

Again, congratulations to our winners this year! We hope that all of you will become an active part of our organization!

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**Donnagene Knutson**: **Sept. 30, 1923 - May 18, 2017**

Submitted by Mike Taylor


(Photo caption: The above photograph is a picture of Donnagene Knutson smiling.)

Donnagene Knutsen, 93, of Green Cove Springs, FL passed away on May 18, 2017. She was born September 30, 1923 in Braddock, Pennsylvania, to the late Timothy Theodore and Susan (Manglass) Dell. Donnagene came to Florida in 1950 from Michigan and married Winson L. Knutsen on October 4, 1950 in Green Cove Springs. She was a member of the Clay County Historical Society and started the Clay Council of the Blind and was our president from 1982 to 1999. Donnagene was of the Baptist faith and a member of Hickory Grove Baptist Church. She enjoyed spending time with her church family and will be deeply missed by all who knew and loved her. Mrs. Knutsen is predeceased by her husband, Winson and is survived by son, Floyd Knutsen of Green Cove Springs.

Funeral Services were held for Donnagene on May 26, 2017 at Hickory Grove Baptist Church in Green Cove Springs.  Barbara Brown, in her eulogy, remembered the early days of the Clay Council of the Blind. Members and friends of the Clay Chapter are grateful for Donnagene’s legacy.  The contributions of many people have gone into creating the Clay Council of the Blind, but it is not an over statement to say there would not be a Clay Council without the determined efforts of Donnagene Knutsen.  Donnagene got help from Doug Hall and Paul Edwards to form our Chapter in 1982.  From attending meetings of a very active Florida Council of the Blind, (FCB) she got ideas and encouragement from others involved in advocacy for the visually impaired.  Donnagene found others in Clay County that felt that visually impaired citizens needed and should have a voice in the development of a very rapidly growing community.

Donnagene led by example.  It would be a very rare occurrence when Donnagene wasn’t where she was supposed to be, when she was supposed to be.  Items didn’t get left behind or forgotten when Donnagene was involved.  Once Donnagene focused on a goal, she would see it through to completion.   However, Clay Chapter now has 35 years of being there for visually impaired individuals in Clay County seeking a forum for their concerns. Donnagene taught herself to read Braille with her left hand.  A Division of Blind Services, (DBS), home teacher dropped off a Beginning Braille book at a time when Donnagene’s right hand was blistered from teaching herself to cook.  The lady did not look for excuses or reasons to delay tasks or projects she felt needed to be done. Those who knew Donnagene, in the past 35 years, have known her unrelenting will as a wife, mother, and community leader.

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**Tallahassee Council of the Blind Picnic Invitation Poem**

September 9, 2017

By Sila Miller

Hey everybody, have you heard?

TCB is having a picnic soon is the word.

We’re inviting our FCB friends as special guests,

Rolling out the red carpet for you – doing our best!

It's going to be at William and Sally Benjamin's place,

Come with your appetite and swimsuit, a big smile on your face.

The date is September 9th, round 11:00 A.M.,

Round up your family and friends and bring them!

We're having lots of good food as we have had before,

A “Chinese Auction” to raise money for TCB and more!

Come relax, visit, eat and have a good time,

Splash in the pool and wave your “dollas” in the spirited auction if you've a mind.

We’re soliciting items for our unique and fast-paced “Chinese Auction/money making event,

Donations of electronics, gift certificates, home-baked goodies or collectibles

would be heaven-sent.

Bids only cost a “dolla” and the most persistent takes the deal,

The cut-throat competition, hilarity, and great fun is for real!

We’re placing the directions and contact information for you to see,

Don't miss it; there'll be plenty of memory-making glee!

Ok, enough of my silly little words and rimes,

Mark your calendar to join us for great times!

To RSVP or get directions, here’s whatcha do,

Call (850) 877-1512.

Can't wait to see you there!

For our out-of-town guests, Mahan Drive is the same as Highway 90 and can be accessed from I-10 by Exit #209. Going West on Highway 90 (approximately three miles) look for Dempsey Mayo Road on the right. There is a traffic light at the intersection. If you come to Buck Lake Road, which also has a traffic light, you’ve gone too far. Once on Dempsey Mayo Road, you will go down a fairly steep hill. At the bottom of the hill, there are two brick houses on the right (the second with white columns in front) that’s the one you’re looking for: 1531 Dempsey Mayo.

See you in September!

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**18th Annual Sunshine Invitational Blind Bowling Tournament**

By John Harden

The Daytona Beach Blind Bowlers would like to invite you to participate in the 18th annual Sunshine Invitational Blind Bowling Tournament (SIBB), which will be held in Daytona Beach, Florida. It will take place over Labor Day weekend – Friday, September 1st thru Sunday, September 3rd. To participate in the tournament, you do not have to be a member of any association. Plus, sighted family members and friends are welcome to bowl.

SIBB is designed to promote the blind bowling program by introducing new bowlers to its many benefits, while providing seasoned bowlers with competition that is challenging and fun.

The fun begins Friday night at 7 p.m., with a "meet and greet" hospitality get-together. The registration desk will be located there as well, and you will be able to pick up your schedule at this time. This will be an opportunity for you to make new bowling friends and reunite with old ones! As always, there will be plenty of cheer and plenty of food – and lots of good company, too. Don’t miss out on all the southern hospitality.

Saturday morning will be the team event, followed in the afternoon by a 9-Pin, No-Tap Tournament that will be a fundraiser for Southeastern Guide Dogs.

Sunday morning/afternoon, there will be two squads of singles/doubles if necessary. Please let us know if you have a time preference (morning or afternoon). On Sunday evening, we will open the hospitality room at 7 p.m.

Throughout the weekend in the hospitality room, we will display several “theme baskets” containing various items all related to a particular theme. You will be able to buy raffle tickets for any basket that you wish, and we will select the winners on Sunday evening. All proceeds from this raffle will help pay hospitality room expenses.

Reservations can be made at the Lexington Inn & Suites, which is located at 2323 S. Atlantic Avenue, Daytona Beach Shores, FL 32118. The Lexington Inn is on the beach, and a complimentary buffet breakfast is served daily. Rates are $84 per night plus 12.5% sales tax. For reservations, call (386) 255-0476. Reservations must be made by August 5, 2017. Be sure to let them know you are with the Sunshine Blind Bowlers Tournament to get the special rate. All rooms are furnished with a microwave, refrigerator, and balcony.

NINE-PIN, NO-TAP BOWLING EVENT: Can’t get enough bowling in during the tournament? Or maybe you just want a little warm-up practice a day early? We have the solution to your problem. The Daytona Beach blind bowlers will hold a 9-pin, no-tap event to benefit the Halifax Council of the Blind, an affiliate of the Florida Council of the Blind and the American Council of the Blind. This will take place on Friday afternoon, September 1st, at 1 p.m. at Bellair Lanes. Blind and sighted bowlers are welcome to participate. There will be cash prizes. The entry fee is $20, and this will include 3 games of 9-pin, no-tap bowling. Why not come join us for some good competitive bowling and fun while supporting a very worthwhile cause?

For further information about the tournament, or to register to bowl, you can contact John Harden at (386) 846-1325 or you can email Sandy McDaniel at sandymcdan01@yahoo.com before August 15th.

We hope you will be able to join us for a fun-filled Labor Day weekend in Daytona Beach. We are looking forward to seeing those of you who have joined us in past years and also welcoming new guests to Daytona Beach this year.

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**2017 FCB Convention Recap**
By Greg Lindberg

The 2017 FCB state convention was my second state convention. That means I’m now on a streak, having attended two in a row! I know I still have a long way to go to catch the likes of Carl McCoy and other long-timers, though.

Due to landing a new job, I was unable to arrive in Jacksonville until Friday afternoon. Fortunately, I still had plenty on the agenda for that evening and the rest of the weekend. Friday night’s awards banquet was inspiring, as always, to see several key players at the state and local level be honored for their service to visually impaired individuals who live in our state and beyond. I was also pleasantly surprised to see two USF students receive scholarships. Go Bulls! I’d like to offer my congratulations to all award and scholarship winners. A special shout-out goes to Pat Kracht, the wife of our council’s outstanding president. Her award was well deserved, and I know she has been quite an asset to our organization.

Saturday morning brought a fantastic workshop on mobile apps put on by the technology committee. I thoroughly enjoyed learning about the dozen or so mobile apps that the committee discussed. I especially liked the “Be My Eyes” demo. This free iPhone app connects users to a live volunteer somewhere in the world who can see through the user’s camera on an iPhone and then assist the user with any visual task. This app clearly demonstrates how far we’ve come with technology – and, more importantly, how fortunate we are as blind and visually impaired individuals to be living at a time when so many incredible resources are at our disposal. The same goes for Uber, Lyft, and other on-demand transportation systems out there these days.

Tony Stephens of ACB spoke both Saturday morning at the opening session and as the keynote speaker on Saturday night. I thought he was quite captivating and delivered two fantastic addresses. Maybe I’m a bit biased because I also took the journalism and writing path like he did, but he really hit home when he encouraged members to share their stories with others. I firmly believe that we all have unique stories about our life experiences. That’s why I love interviewing others and telling their stories with the world. This publication you’re reading now has given me a fantastic platform for storytelling and communicating important information. I’m quite grateful to serve as its editor.

As for the exhibit hall, I purchased a glow-in-the-dark white cane tip from one of the vendors. I also got a nice lowdown on ZoomText Fusion from the Freedom Scientific rep, and I had the chance to check out some of today’s latest and greatest accessible technology products. Again, blind and visually impaired individuals even 20 or 30 years ago would be blown away by what’s on the market today.

In closing, I can’t forget to offer my thanks to all of the volunteers who lent a helping hand at the convention. I also want to personally thank Jackson, Jim Kracht’s grandson, for his tremendous job in guiding me and many others around the Lexington Riverwalk Hotel. What a smart kid, and what an education he received by attending such a gathering and being so kind and helpful.

I look forward to a productive FCB board meeting this fall and another superb convention next May.

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**2017 GDUF Convention Meeting Recap**
By Tom Hanson

The Guide Dog Users of Florida (GDUF) held its annual meeting during the FCB convention. Highlights included electing a full slate of officers, who are: Tom Hanson, President; Sandra Anderson, Vice President; Kati Lear, Recording Secretary; Kathleen Trutschel, Treasurer; Lois Butterfield, Membership Secretary.

GDUF was excited to have its program streamed over ACB Radio. We want to thank everyone involved with this decision. A special thanks goes to John Richards, the technician who made streaming such a success.

The format for this year’s program was designed to feature the views of the membership, both those attending the convention and those listening on ACB Radio and calling in on several topics. The program topics were previously suggested by members and then ranked in order of preference. Tom Hanson moderated the program.

During the convention, GDUF also held a raffle as a fundraising project. Three fun prizes were offered, and the winners were announced Sunday morning at the business meeting. Mikey Wiseman won four Sea World tickets. Michelle Read won the four tickets to Aquatica, and Ann Francoletti was the winner of the Father’s Day Basket of Cheer.

If you are a guide dog user and currently not a member of GDUF, we would like to talk with you. We hope that you will consider joining us. For more information, you can contact Tom at badgertom1@verizon.net or Lois at lbutterfield5@cfl.rr.com.

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**GOCB Update**

By Martha James

The annual FCB state convention was held from June 1 through June 4 in Jacksonville. We don’t mind passing the baton for a year, and we are looking forward to next year’s convention, which we know will be great! Gary Sinclair attended as a first timer. On June 10, the chapter’s annual award and scholarship luncheon was held at Perkins. Mattie Hickson and Pam Sogge received chapter awards. Connie Greene from the VFW ladies Auxiliary received the community service award.

GOCB will hold its next business meeting on September 9th as the first Saturday is Labor Day weekend. However, we will get together over the summer socially. We have a cook out-pool party planned for August 5 at the home of Gary Sinclair. Thanks once again, Gary, for opening your lovely home to us.

If anyone would like additional information about our chapter, feel free to contact Sheila Young at 407-425-9200.

In addition, for those with computer access, GOCB is on Facebook. You can find us on Facebook by typing in “GOCB.”

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**My Journey Toward Independence**

By Roanna Bacchus

In today's society, individuals with disabilities face many setbacks and challenges. They are often discouraged when trying to lead independent and productive lives. Blind students are often asked to use technology that is accessible to the visually impaired population of the United States. As a recent college graduate, I have encountered many positive experiences throughout my college journey. These experiences have provided me with opportunities to advocate for myself and ask for things that I needed during my college career. This article will discuss some of those challenges and highlight my steps toward independence from my childhood in Boston to pursuing a bachelor's degree and being deterred by the Division of Blind Services who refused to pay for my courses at the Baccalaureate level.

I was born in the winter of nineteen ninety in Boston, Massachusetts at Boston City Hospital. I was born four months premature and weighed 1 pound, 9 ounces. I spent the first six months of my life in the hospital and received too much oxygen. My lungs were not developed properly, causing one of them to collapse. As a result, I was blind. As a toddler, I attended the Early Intervention program at the world-renowned Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, Massachusetts where Helen Keller also attended. The teachers from this program came to my parents’ house to teach me about the essential skills that I would need to succeed in life. I also attended a baby group at Perkins when I was little. After Early Intervention, I attended a preschool in Boston where I was exposed to an array of activities. They prepared me for the rest of my school journey, which will be discussed in the remainder of this article.

My quest for literacy began when I was five years old. I attended Lake Mary Elementary School in Central Florida where I began learning to read and write Braille. Braille is my primary medium of literary and written communication, which allows me to complete assignments and other job-related tasks. My teacher of the visually impaired (TVI) worked with me during the school day to learn both contracted and uncontracted Braille. In first grade, my vision teacher had me work with the Perkins Brailler on a daily basis. Eventually, my school sent me home with a Perkins Braille Writer so that I could complete my homework and bring it in the next day for transcription. In my third-grade year, I began reading books in Braille. After I finished the books in class, I was allowed to take them home for further reading. Each night, I studied my flash cards, which allowed me to effectively learn the contractions for certain words. Because my family members were sighted and I was not, they were not aware of the kinds of lives that blind people can live.

My parents and sisters migrated to the United States from the Caribbean islands of Trinidad and Tobago when I was two years old. I have always attended public schools and been mainstreamed into the regular classroom. My parents did not believe in sending me to a school for the blind because they held high expectations of me, and the school for the blind is far from our home. They expected me to do the same things that my sisters were doing when they were five years old. My mom has worked hard to assist me with the completion of assignments and other activities. She also made sure that I completed all of my household chores and checked to ensure that they were done correctly.

My independence journey took off in June of 2014 when I was first taking classes at the University of Central Florida. During my senior year in high school, my Teacher of the visually impaired worked hard to instill a sense of independence in me. I was only allowed to use sighted guides for the first few weeks of classes at the beginning of the school year. By February of that year, I was able to navigate to all of my classes independently. We also worked on heating up meals in the microwave and cutting bread, which satisfied my independent living skills. My mom provided us with the meals on a weekly basis and allowed me to make my own lunch at home. In the summer of 2010, I participated in the transition program for visually impaired teenagers. We were able to stay in the apartments located on the campus at the University of Central Florida for two weeks. While we were there, we learned about how to run a house and how to wash and dry our clothes. Each room in the apartment had a Resident Advisor and about five or six students that they were responsible to be with at all times.

In college, my Division of Blind Services counselor wanted to pay for my Associate of Arts degree in General Studies. Before I began college in the fall of 2011, both my high school and college counselors and DBS worked together to make sure that everything was in place for me to start college. My DBS counselor only wanted to focus on getting me a job after I graduated with my Associate of Arts degree. I was told that I could get a job at a call center or bag groceries instead of furthering my education.

After receiving my Associate of Arts degree, I decided to further my education and pursue a Bachelor's in Interdisciplinary Studies. Unfortunately, I was told that I did not need a Bachelor's degree in order to get a job. However, I pursued my degree with the help of my family and paid for my courses with financial aid funds.

This article discussed my journey toward independence. As a recent college graduate, I am charting a course toward gainful employment. I am looking for any job that will allow me to utilize my Braille reading and writing skills. I am going to be taking the course to become a certified Braille proofreader, which is offered by the NFB Jernigan Institute. My family members have always supported me in all of my endeavors. I hope that readers will see that anything is possible for a blind person.

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**Goldfield with a “Gold Heart” – Jason in the Spotlight**

By: Sila Miller

Jason Howard Goldfield was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on December 12, 1973 to Marvin and Linda Goldfield. He grew up in a Jewish home with an older brother, David. The Goldfield boys were both diagnosed with Leber’s Congenital Amaurosis (LCA), an inherited retinal degenerative disease. Symptoms include severe loss of vision at birth, roving eye movements, deep-set eyes, and sensitivity to bright light. By early adolescence, blood vessels often become narrow and constricted, and a variety of pigmentary (color) changes can occur in the retinal pigment epithelium (RPE), the supportive tissue underlying the retina. Some patients with LCA also experience central nervous system abnormalities. While retinas appear normal during routine eye exams, electroretinography (ERG) tests, which measure visual function, detect little if any activity in the retina. A low level of retinal activity measured by ERG indicates very little visual function. ERG tests are key to establishing a diagnosis of LCA. Clinical trials of gene replacement therapy for LCA caused by mutations in the RPE65 are now underway at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, Universities of Pennsylvania and Florida, and Moorfields Eye Hospital at the University College of London. Children and young adults who were nearly blind have had dramatic improvements in their vision after treatment. This is the same therapy that gave vision to 60 dogs, including the world-famous Lancelot, born blind from LCA. These studies provide great promise for eradicating LCA caused by RPE65, and eventually, LCA caused by other genetic variations.

Both Goldfield children attended the Overbrook School for the Blind in Philadelphia through their 8th-grade year. For a time, the school became mainstream, offering education to all children but has since reverted back to a residential school for children who are blind or deaf. Wanting a “normal” life for their boys, the Goldfield parents enrolled David and Jason into a local mainstream high school.

In February 1990, when Jason was 16, the family moved to Palm Beach, Florida to be near Linda’s parents. “I hadn’t made the transition into high school very well,” Jason admits. “I wasn’t very mature or responsible about it. So, moving down here was a great way of starting off fresh, and I realized that.”

In 1993, Jason graduated from Santaluces Community High School, and began attending Palm Beach Community College, since renamed Palm Beach State College. He majored in Computer information systems.

Despite Marvin and Linda’s efforts to give their sons a “normal” upbringing, there was one critically missing detail, basic home maintenance (cooking and cleaning). During the summers of 1993 and ‘94, Jason attended the Independent Living Program at the Rehab Center in Daytona. While there, he took a class at Daytona Community College and was able to have the course credit transferred back to his local college in Palm Beach.

Faith is a big part of Jason’s life. “While I was in Daytona, I met this woman, Betsy Wall,” Jason reminisces. “She started talking about church and asking me to go with her. She was a strong Christian lady who was not taking no for an answer! I wasn’t a “church person” at the time, but she just kept on asking and finally I said yes, just to get her off my back—kinda like Betty Dietz pushing me into going to an FCB meeting,” he chuckles. “So we go to church and as she’s dropping me off, she asks,” “You wanna go again next Sunday?” Jason declined politely and Betsy said, “Ok, I’ll see you next Sunday and take you out for lunch.” “So then I started going every week with her because there was “something going on” in that church. Now it’s almost time for me to leave the program and come home. They started talking about accepting Jesus and all that, and then they ask who wants to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior? Well, I raised my hand! I’m like, what’d ya do that for? I didn’t realize it at the time—course, now I know—it was like the best decision I ever made! So now, not only did I come home knowing how to be independent (could cook and clean and manage money and do all this stuff), but now I’m going to church and throwing my parents for a loop! I didn’t tell them about the church thing to start with because I knew that would really upset them, and it did. I knew I’d need to find a church that I’d be comfortable with. I bounced around quite a bit. Now we attend South Palm Community Church. We lost our building, so now we meet in a local high school auditorium. It’s really taught us, that the church is not about a building, it’s really the body of God, you know? As long as the body is together and honoring God, it doesn’t really matter where you meet. Our church’s motto says, “No Perfect People Allowed”. I said well, I know I’m in the right place, Shoot! We still celebrate the Jewish holidays,” concludes Jason. “I don’t like to think that I “converted”. I consider myself a “completed Jew” because Jesus was a Jew.”

When our conversation turned to love and relationships, Jason said, “Wanda Louise Morrison and I were high school sweethearts. I was originally dating her best friend, Allison. Allison actually introduced us. I remember, it was April Fool’s Day and I broke up with her. I did something really stupid, I gave Wanda a stuffed animal right in front of Allison and didn’t know that I single-handedly broke up a good friendship in the process,” Jason says, a bit of self-censure in his voice. Though Jason and Wanda’s love affair wasn’t constant following high school graduation, their friendship was, and they remained in touch, despite moves and other relationships. In November 2000, Wanda and Jason planned a weekend trip to Busch Gardens. Before they even left town, they were involved in a minor car accident. Thankfully, the accident didn’t result in any injuries but it sure caused a lot of honest communication and soul searching for the couple. “That was a real turning point for us”, reflects Jason. “We agreed, life is short and let’s get back together.” Wanda relocated back home and the couple moved in together in June of 2001. On May 22, 2004, Jason and Wanda were married with about 75 guests in attendance. “We compromised,” says Jason. “I wanted simple – Wanda wanted elaborate. We met in the middle—well, technically she still won,” he snickers. “I had a friend who was a member of the Moose Lodge and we were able to use their facility. We had a buffet luncheon and cash bar and it turned out nice.”

“In October 2000, I got—what I consider—my first real full-time job working at Office Depot in their corporate headquarters call center,” says Jason. “My Division of Blind Services counselor told me about a job fair that Office Depot was hosting. I wasn’t dressed appropriately—Jeans, t-shirt, and sneakers. I thought I’d just be dropping off my resume. They said,” “Just have a seat and wait for your interview.” “I said, Interview? What Interview? I turned to my counselor and asked, what’d you do? This is all a big setup! You’re setting me up to fail! Things just became like a blur after that. I must have done well in the interview, because they called me after a couple of days and said,” “We have a few more questions.” “I’m thinking, these people are half nuts! I don’t like the unexpected and thought I’d bombed. They ended up hiring me. So here I am, no experience in a call center but I figured, as long as you’re nice…Boy I was winging this! Instead of spending time training me, they let me sit with people and job shadow. Actually, I learned better that way—I’m a hands-on type of learner. I began in the Back-Order Section. We called to let customers know their backordered item was now in stock, verified if they still wanted it, and to get their address and payment info. Then that process was automated and they moved me to the general floor, taking orders. I worked there through September 2005, when they laid everyone off, shut down the call center, and outsourced the work. I got a short-term position after that in Inside Sales, but I knew it would be temporary,” concludes Jason. Ironically, Wanda now works at Office Depot in the Cash Applications Department. If payments are sent to the wrong place, her section investigates and correctly applies the payment.

For a while, Jason joined the ranks of the unemployed. Then, in March 2007 he got a position with the Florida Outreach Center for the Blind, where he continues to work. “I began in a secretarial position,” Jason says. “Then an Assistive Technology Instructor position came open and I was hired. I work part-time, teaching clients on a one-to-one basis. Depending on their need and skill, I teach computers with screen readers or magnification, iPhones and iPad, Mac computers, or Braille notetakers. It’s really nice because you build relationships working that way. We’re such a small operation there, I don’t think of it as a job, I think of it as a family. It’s like when things get hectic here at my house, I’ll joke, can I go to work to relax please? We have four employees and everyone is part-time.”

“Wanda has always known she wanted to adopt a child,” Jason begins. “I thought it would pass. I figured, I’ll just blow her off about that because I don’t want Kids. I’m fine with the way things are. We’re married now, I’m not living with my parents. I got a whole new life ahead of me and I don’t want kids!” However, Wanda’s dream wouldn’t be silenced and, in 2012, she and Jason began the adoption process. “We were interviewed, given tons of information, took classes, submitted to background and credit checks going back many years, they interviewed references, friends, and family, conducted home visits and inspections, we talked to case managers, social workers, and endured psychological evaluations—I really didn’t know what we were signing ourselves up for. I would never take it back now,” declares Jason. “But you become this huge open book. If you have anything to hide, it isn’t gonna work – they’ll find it out. Going through the process was a lot like giving birth,” he chuckles. “It took between nine and ten months.”

Initially, the couple wanted to adopt a young child and were matched with a little boy who was blind. Sadly, the child had other serious problems and things didn’t work out. Devastated and drained from putting so much emotional energy into that venture, Jason was ready to quit. Then, the couple got word of a “Spring Fling” at the local Children’s Home Society in West Palm Beach. “I really did not want to go,” Jason frankly declares. “But I figured I’d just sit there to please Wanda. So here I am, trying to talk to these kids in the mood that I’m in, and these kids really weren’t interested in us—you could tell. And then, it was almost at the end of the event, and this girl came up to me and we started talking. I remember one of her first questions to me was,” “Is that a seeing eye dog?” “I had Max with me at the time.” Pulling the Goldfields aside, the staff was almost discouraging regarding Jason and Wanda’s interactions with Raven (then Erica). “I guess they didn’t expect us to talk to Raven. She was the child that was least likely to be adopted by anyone,” Jason says, gravity in his voice. “Her case study would normally send people running for the hills because of her past,” he explains. Despite all this, Jason and Wanda began to seriously pursue adoption of Raven, 13 at the time. Roadblock after roadblock presented themselves, but the Goldfields just kept shoving them aside and pursuing the adoption of this child. “On February 21st, we celebrated our three-year anniversary of having Raven!” Jason proudly states.

During the adoption process, a child of a certain age is given a chance to legally change their name. Erica jumped at this opportunity, asserting, “I’m given a new chance with a new family, and I want a new life.” Enter “Miss Raven Alice Goldfield”!

“We’re Raven’s second adoptive family,” Jason somberly says. “She was adopted at six months and given back at age nine. Unfortunately, that’s a part of her life that she’ll never forget. But, as long as I’m breathing, I’ll never let that happen to her again! It has been a challenge,” honestly admits Jason. “Raven has thrown just about every obstacle at us to see if we’d give her up. Every time she’d do something, she’d say,” “Why don’t you just give up on me like all the others?” “We told her, Raven, no matter what you do, no matter how bad things get, we’re never going to give up on you. You don’t give up on your own.” “Would you adopt again?” I asked. Jason hesitates a beat and says, “A lot of things would have to change—we need another bedroom and Raven is insistent that the next child be a boy and younger.”

When Jason was young, he was quite allergic to dogs. “I’ve always been a really good cane traveler,” he reflects. “I hadn’t really ever considered using a guide dog.” However, as Jason’s vision diminished, he became apprehensive and reluctant to cross busy streets and believed a dog would be beneficial. In 2000, he went through the application process and found himself on a plane headed for New Jersey. “So, there I am, asking myself why are you going to get a dog? You don’t want or need a dog. But, my whole attitude changed when I met my first dog, Angus. I’ve had three dogs, all black labs, all male, and all totally different. There was Angus and Watson, both from The Seeing Eye, and now I have Max, from Southeastern. Unfortunately, I let all my cane travel skills lapse, and now I consider myself one of the world’s worse cane travelers,” he chuckles. As a guide dog user, it’s very important not to forget your cane skills. In September 2009, this was brought home to Jason with painful clarity. “My second dog, Watson passed away and I was between guides, and had decided I wasn’t going to attend that FCB board meeting. I was feeling sorry for myself. Sheila Young really pushed me. She said, “You better get your butt out there.” “I went and had so much support throughout that whole weekend,” Jason marvels.

Next began a chapter of Jason’s life that was fraught with fear, uncertainty, and anger. In January 2010, during the transition and bonding time with his new dog, Max, a time that should have been positive and happy, Jason learned that he had testicular cancer. “That certainly was not on my calendar. And now, with Wanda’s mom’s recent diagnosis, short battle, and passing away so quickly, it’s really bringing back a lot of memories from then. I went through a horrid, angry stage. I was not a nice person for a while. And, the one who took the brunt of it was Wanda. I realized it wasn’t her fault, but it sure as hell wasn’t mine and I took it out on her,” frankly admits Jason. Thankfully, the cancer was localized, caught quickly and the surgery was relatively painless. Jason underwent a month of radiation and semi-annual visits to his oncologist.

Through friends, Jason learned about the Braille Club, a social club that promotes recreational, social, and educational activities for blind and visually-impaired adults in the West Palm Beach area, <http://brailleclub.webs.com/> and began attending the meetings. It was there that he met another influential and persistent soul, Betty Dietz. Betty invited Jason to a local Florida Council meeting and kept on until Jason reluctantly agreed to attend. “I’m thinking, I wish this old lady would just leave me alone about FCB!“ chuckles Jason. “Here’s a whole group of people—only a few younger people—I wasn’t too keen on how things worked but I kept attending. While I was brand new, they approached me and asked me to try to start a college student’s affiliate and sponsored me to attend my first state convention held in Tallahassee in 1997. That’s where I first met a lot of important people who’ve really stuck with me.

“I really have to thank FCB for helping me develop my leadership skills and being able to speak publicly—I was basically forced to because I became President in such a short time, and I realized, oh crap! Now everyone’s depending on you to run this thing. And you really gotta organize and speak and tell people what needs to be done. And then I got involved with the technology committee and now I gotta get up at the FCB conventions and board meetings and talk in front of a bigger crowd,” Jason relates. “I’m one of these people I want to get the work done but I don’t need special recognition.”

From his “reluctant beginnings”, Jason has faithfully attended conventions and shared his knowledge and talent with FCB. He’s served several terms as President and Vice President for his local chapter, chairs the Technology Committee and will soon be Chairman of the Awards committee.

Jason welcomes contact and may be reached either by calling 561 707-4998 or by e-mailing him at jgoldfield73@comcast.net.

Wow, what an amazing human being, what an interesting story! It has been a true pleasure getting to know this “gold-hearted” gentleman. Thank you, Jason, for giving me your time during a really rough spell for your family. You were honest, accommodating, and patient with my delays and seemingly crazy/nosy questions. You are a “difference maker,” and FCB is richer for having you as part of our family!

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**Poetry Corner**
By Shelley Sawyer

Greetings Dear Reader,

This one truly speaks for itself. There is little I can add to the lessons this song teaches. When I heard it first about a year ago, it had a tremendous impact on me. I bought an album because this song was on it, and that is something I don’t typically do. I hope its words will never leave me and that I will always strive to live by them. As usual, the only real change I have made is to only have the refrain or chorus shown once. Enjoy, and I hope this message will speak to you as it has to me.

**"Humble And Kind**

Written by Lori McKenna

You know there's a light that glows by the front door,
Don't forget the key's under the mat;
When childhood stars shine,
Always stay humble and kind.

Go to church 'cause your mamma says to,
Visit grandpa every chance that you can;
It won't be wasted time,
Always stay humble and kind.

Don't expect a free ride from no one,
Don't hold a grudge or a chip and here's why;
Bitterness keeps you from flyin',
Always stay humble and kind.

Know the difference between sleeping with someone,
And sleeping with someone you love;
"I love you" ain't no pick-up line,
So always stay humble and kind.

Hold the door, say "please", say "thank you"
Don't steal, don't cheat, and don't lie,
I know you got mountains to climb,
But always stay humble and kind.

When those dreams you're dreamin' come to you,
When the work you put in is realized;
Let yourself feel the pride,
But always stay humble and kind.

When it's hot, eat a root beer popsicle,
Shut off the AC and roll the windows down;
Let that summer sun shine,
Always stay humble and kind.

Don't take for granted the love this life gives you,
When you get where you're going don't forget turn back around
And help the next one in line,
Always stay humble and kind.

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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

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