

SPRING 2016

The Sounding Board

The Publication of the National Federation of the Blind of New Jersey

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Reports on this year's Washington Seminar

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Describes her passion for running

PAST SOUNDING BOARD EDITORS

*Describe how the magazine
changed their lives*

SUE TILLET

*Tells how she turned a problem thermostat
into a possible solution for the nation's blind*

SUMMER BELL ACADEMY INFO



Live the Life You Want

THE SOUNDING BOARD
Spring 2016

Katherine Gabry, Editor
Jerilyn Higgins, Mary Jo Partyka & Barbara Shalit, Co-editors

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JACOBUS TENBROEK LEGACY SOCIETY

Help build a future full of opportunity for the blind by becoming a member of the Jacobus tenBroek Legacy Society. Your legacy gift to the National Federation of the Blind can be made in the form of a will or a living trust, an income-generating gift, or by naming the NFB as a beneficiary of a retirement plan or life insurance policy. You can also become a member of the Jacobus tenBroek Legacy Society by making a legacy gift to your state affiliate. By committing to support an NFB affiliate, your gift will benefit both local and national programs, since all bequests made to affiliates are split evenly with the NFB national treasury. In addition to having the satisfaction of contributing to the future success of the NFB's mission, tenBroek Legacy Society members also receive a specially designed thank you gift and other benefits. For additional information, please contact Lou Ann Blake at the NFB Jernigan Institute by e-mail at lblake@nfb.org, or by telephone at 410-659-9314, extension 2221.

Mission Statement

The National Federation of the Blind of New Jersey, Inc. is an organization of blind and interested sighted people who plan and carry out programs; work to improve the quality of life of the blind; provide a means of collective action for parents of blind children; promote the vocational, cultural and social advancement of the blind; achieve the integration of the blind into society on a basis of equality with the sighted; and take action that will improve the overall condition and standard of living of the blind.

The National Federation of the Blind knows that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you or your future. Every day we raise the expectations of blind people because low expectations create obstacles between blind people and our dreams. You can live the life you want; blindness is not what holds you back.

The National Federation of the Blind Pledge

I pledge to participate actively in the efforts of the National Federation of the Blind to achieve equality, opportunity and security for the blind; to support the programs and policies of the Federation; and to abide by its constitution.

The Sounding Board

The Sounding Board is the magazine of the National Federation of the Blind of New Jersey. We publish *The Sounding Board* twice a year. Our hope is that through *The Sounding Board*, our members can keep current with local, state and national news and issues of concern. We also aspire to provide a source of hope, inspiration, pride and camaraderie through the personal stories in our publication.

Hundreds of readers receive our publication via e-mail and *Newsline*. We're pleased that the New Jersey Talking Book and Braille Center airs excerpts from *The Sounding Board* on AudioVision. *The Sounding Board* is also available for download in its entirety from our website at www.nfbnj.org. We encourage our readers to share *The Sounding Board* with family members, teachers, professionals, neighbors, friends and any other interested parties. We estimate our circulation to be in the thousands, as readers from across the country regularly report that *The Sounding Board* influences their lives. We hope you enjoy this issue.

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PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE

Greetings Fellow Federationists!

In spring, new growth abounds. Likewise, in the Federation, spring is a great time to grow the Federation by inviting others to chapter and division meetings, and to remember that the National Federation of the Blind knows that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you or your future. Every day we raise the expectations of blind people because low expectations create obstacles between blind people and our dreams. You can have the life you want; blindness is not what holds you back. Together with love, hope and determination, we transform dreams into reality.

Since the last issue of *The Sounding Board*, many personnel changes have taken place in the State Affiliate. **Lynn Reynolds**, a board member for 12 years, has resigned due to her move to Indiana. Lynn was vice president of the Central Jersey Chapter and was the affiliate's Legislative Coordinator. We wish Lynn well, and she will be missed. **Ryan Stevens** has stepped in to assume Lynn's role as Legislative Coordinator.

Elected to Lynn's board seat at the open meeting at the State Convention was **Mary Fernandez**. Mary has grown up in Federation philosophy, having served as a former Leadership, Education, Advocacy and Determination (LEAD) student. She also won both national and state scholarships, and currently works with the Family Resource Network as the employment coordinator for the Employment, Development, Guidance and Engagement (EDGE) program for high school students between the ages of 14 and 21. Welcome Mary!

Also at the State Convention, **Vee Gaspa** was elected president of the Students Division. Vee is a student at Seton Hall University, and we're pleased to have her on board.

On a sad note, NFBNJ treasurer and one of the founders of Parents of Blind Children – NJ, **Tom Ferry**, passed away March 31, after a long illness. Tom was a gentleman, respected by all, and he loved the Federation. Judy and I, along with many others, paid our respects to the Ferry family by attending the wake and funeral. Donations in Tom's memory can be made to NFBNJ and will be earmarked for a state scholarship.

Due to Tom's illness, in February, **Brian Mackey** was elected to the position of treasurer. Prior to this position, Brian served as the affiliate secretary for four years. We thank Brian for his effort, time and support as secretary, and look forward with confidence to his serving in his new role as treasurer.

Alice Eaddy, a state board member for five years, was elected secretary of the affiliate. Alice's involvement on both the national and state levels as president of the Deaf-Blind divisions, as well as her performance as secretary in other state divisions, convinced us all that Alice is the right person to be our new secretary.

Jane Degenshein was elected to assume the board seat vacated by Alice. Jane is the president of the Seniors and Technology divisions. In addition, she is the coordinator of NFBNJ's Newline and is co-chair with Brian Mackey on the White Cane Project.

We're also pleased to welcome **Barbara Shalit** as co-editor of *The Sounding Board*. As a retired Braille teacher from the New Jersey Commission for the Blind, Barbara has taught many of our members to read the Braille code. She is a longtime friend of the Federation and is also the teacher for our BELL Program.

Spring is also the time to think about conventions, both the National Convention of the National Federation of the Blind and the State Convention of the NFBNJ. The National Convention will be held Thursday, June 30 through Tuesday, July 5 at the Rosen Shingle Creek hotel in Orlando. Please visit the national website at www.nfb.org for updates, pre-registration procedures, the schedule of activities, costs for the hotel and much more. The State Convention – this will be our 40th! – *Raising Expectations*, will be held Thursday, November 10 through Sunday, November 13, 2016 at the Holiday Inn in Manahawkin. Please check www.nfbnj.org for updated information on pre-registration, procedures to reserve your room, activities and more.

Finally, I'm excited to let you know that the State Affiliate's website is being revamped. Brian Mackey has taken on this task, and our goal is to go live during the first week of May. The new site will feature videos, photographs and upcoming activities to promote our State Convention. If you have ideas or feedback for our webmaster, please contact him at bmackey88@gmail.com.

In this issue of *The Sounding Board*, our message is clear: Keep moving forward, and always with the spirit of the Federation in mind. Every one of us can make a difference. I hope you enjoy this issue, and please pass it on to others – family, neighbors, teachers, friends, whomever you can think of. Spreading our message of positive attitudes is what we continue to do best.

With best wishes,
Joe Ruffalo, President

**FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK:
MORE ALIKE THAN DIFFERENT
By Katherine Gabry**

I was confronted with the harsh reality of DeafBlindness when my son Jon was born 26 years ago. At that time, I knew nothing of the beautiful expressiveness of sign language and didn't have much reason to pay attention to the subtle meanings conveyed by touch. It was also true that I had a rather unusual fascination with – and admiration for – Helen Keller, from as far back as I can remember. This fascination may have served as my initial realization that my son would be able to do anything he wanted. We would have to get creative, but we would find a way.

As an infant, Jon was profoundly deaf and had no sight. Communication and language development were exceptional challenges, but I soon realized that he was paying attention as the floors vibrated from footsteps, or the opening door made a slight breeze, or a smell of perfume or cigarettes wafted through the air. Constant touches, feels, smells were the beginnings of his communication. We developed “home signs” – touch signals that had meaning to us; soon after, Jon and I began to learn the formal signs for things, movements, smells, tastes and feelings. Today, Jon is fluent in Tactile American Sign Language. It's his language, as much as spoken English is mine or the Irish brogue was my grandfather's.

People who are DeafBlind have varying levels of hearing and sight, and it's the way they communicate that can prove divisive in this very small population. Some use their voices, some use sign language, some use a combination of both. When we learned that Jon was profoundly deaf and blind, I understood that spoken language would, quite likely, never be an effective mode of communication for him. I was okay with that, and I did everything I could to ensure that he had a way to communicate. At the time, it never occurred to me that his using sign language would put him in a “them” or “us” camp.

Recently, someone who is DeafBlind and who uses spoken language told me that she doesn't consider those who use sign language to be her “peers.” As Jon's mother, I was deeply offended that she wouldn't consider Jon her “peer” simply because he used sign language. *If some people spoke French or Japanese, would they, too, not be considered peers?* I asked. She believes that those who use sign language have a totally different culture than those of us who speak, and never the twain shall mix or meet. Her attitude shocked and saddened me, for here in New Jersey, our DeafBlind community is comfortably melded and supportive of each other, regardless of communication method.

Was I overreacting? I've always believed that humans are more alike than different. We're all people first. I count among my peers people of all races, colors, creeds, sexual

orientation and disability. But the tenacity with which she asserted her position caused me to take more than a moment to reflect on this tenet by which I had come to live my life.

The “package” that covers the human spirit comes in all shapes and sizes: tall, short, pudgy or slim, zits, legs that don’t work, eyes that don’t see, ears that work or not. The spirit – the heart and mind – creates the qualities that define us as truly human – the ability to love, to hate, to struggle, to feel pain, to challenge, to find solutions. I dare say that each spirit has the same desires to feel wanted, needed, productive and loved, regardless of the package.

When we separate people by different-ness, it’s called discrimination. I can’t think of any time when discrimination is a good thing. The language we use to express ourselves should never define who we are fundamentally on the inside. Humans have the ability to think and feel, share and believe in each other. When each of us brings these gifts to the world, and these gifts are willingly accepted and appreciated by others, the world becomes a better place. And therefore, after consideration, I stand by my tenet: We *are* all more alike than different.

NFBNJ MEMBER RECOGNITION

John Cucco, former editor of *The Sounding Board*, is getting married August 27 in Rhode Island.

Serena Cucco, a certified social worker, joined CBVI’s Welcome and Evaluation Team as a full-time social worker in January. Congratulations, Serena!

Jon Gabry, former POBC kid and member of the Deaf-Blind Division, is graduating in May from Bergen Community College with honors. Jon will continue his education at New Jersey City University, pursuing a degree in art therapy.

Vee Gaspa and **Danielle Montour**, students at Seton Hall University and cancer survivors, participated in *Relay for Life*.

Linda Melendez, a new member in the Central Jersey Chapter, and Senior and Technology divisions, proudly completed her first half marathon.

Patrick Molloy, former POBC kid, is featured in a golf show about the Middle Atlantic Blind Golfers. Find it at www.insidegolf.net website and YouTube channel insidegolftv.

A huge thanks to all the New Jersey students who applied for a national scholarship. This year, 22 students applied – a new record. Good luck to all!

Jane Degenshein, NFBNJ Newsline coordinator, reports that 21 new subscribers have joined Newsline. Jane is aiming for 40 new subscribers to honor the affiliate's 40 anniversary.

THE 2016 WASHINGTON SEMINAR ISSUES

By Ryan Stevens

Greetings fellow New Jersey Federationists! Here is a summary of each of the legislative issues we presented to our members of Congress this year. There were four issues we needed to address – three for both the House of Representative and the Senate, and one solely for the Senate. Under normal circumstances, about 500 NFB members, including about a dozen of us from New Jersey, travel to Washington for these meetings. As you may be aware, however, this time everyone taking part had to overcome the difficulties created by the Blizzard of 2016 just to get there. Nonetheless, seven of us from NFBNJ and about 250 from around the country were able to make the trip. The four issues, outlined below, required – and were well worth – the effort.

#1. TIME Act – The first issue is the **Transitioning to Integrated and Meaningful Employment (TIME) Act**, which seeks to abolish subminimum wages paid to disabled workers. Currently, under Section 14c of the Fair Labor Standards Act, certain entities who employ people with disabilities, such as sheltered workshops, can obtain special wage certificates which allow them to pay those workers hourly rates significantly below the federal minimum wage. Some of these places pay as little as three cents per hour. Our legislation would phase out this practice over a 3-year period. The TIME Act bills are HR188 in the House and S2001 in the Senate. To date, no members of the New Jersey Congressional delegation have co-sponsored either of these bills.

#2. AIM HE – The next topic of conversation we had with our representatives is **Accessible Instructional Materials in Higher Education (AIM HE)**. Much of the materials used by university and college faculty to teach their courses is available to students only electronically or online, and a good portion of these tools are not accessible to blind and print disabled students. While the Americans with Disabilities Act and other laws mandate full accessibility in the classroom, there are no guidelines for institutions of higher education and manufacturers of these materials to follow to ensure compliance. AIM HE would establish these guidelines for users and creators of such software. It would also give legal protections to those who follow the guidelines. There is currently no bill in either the House or Senate.

#3. Space Available Program – The third item we discussed is the **Space Available Program** for military veterans. Under this program, active duty personnel, veterans who retired from active service after 20 years and Red Cross personnel are able to fly on military aircraft if there is space available. We are trying to get veterans who were discharged because of a 100 percent service disability added to those who can take

advantage of this program. The bills that would make this happen, if passed, are HR2264 and S2596. The congressmen from New Jersey who have co-sponsored HR2264 are Chris Smith and Leonard Lance. S2596 was just introduced on February 25, 2016, so there are only two senators who have co-sponsored that bill nationally. Also, New Jersey Congressmen Donald Norcross, Frank LoBiondo and Tom MacArthur serve on the House Armed Services Committee, which is where HR2264 originated.

#4. Marrakesh Treaty – Our final issue is the one which concerns only the Senate. It is commonly referred to as the **Marrakesh Treaty**. This treaty, if ratified by a two-thirds vote in the Senate, would greatly expand access to books and other printed material to blind and print disabled people throughout the world. It would allow a person from one country to get a book in non-visual format from another country rather than waiting for his or her home country to create its own non-visual version. It also makes it easier to acquire material in multiple languages. President Obama transmitted the treaty to the Upper Chamber in early February, and we are making the push to get ratification.

There are, of course, other concerns that we in NFB pay attention to; however, these four are the ones we need to focus on most strongly in 2016. While going to DC and addressing them face-to-face with our elected officials is certainly important, it is only the beginning of our legislative agenda. We cannot ignore these issues until next January. All of us need to make an effort to help all blind Americans live the life we want.

To contact your member in the House of Representatives or the US Senators from New Jersey, call the Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121. To find your House member, either contact your local public library or go to www.house.gov and enter your zip code.

JOIN THE CBVI REGISTRY FOR INFORMATION

By Pam Gaston

On behalf of our Executive Director, Dan Frye, I am inviting you to register to receive important announcements from the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI).

We want to make sure that as many of our consumers, colleagues and other shareholders as possible register. Please feel free to share this link with all of your contacts who could benefit from, or have an interest in, registering for CBVI's one-way announcement communication system: <https://cbvi-facts.dhs.state.nj.us/rcid/>

Thank you in advance for helping us spread the word and supporting our efforts to expand on our ability to share information.

RESOLUTIONS PASSED AT THE 2015 NFBNJ CONVENTION

By Ryan Stevens

During the Business Meeting of the 2015 State Convention of the National Federation of the Blind of New Jersey, four resolutions were adopted by the affiliate membership. Resolutions are policy statements from NFBNJ sent to outside people and organizations, and their intent is to address concerns which affect blind New Jerseyans. The following offers a brief description of each resolution ratified this past November.

- **Resolution 2015-01 commends Dan Frye**, the Executive Director of the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, for implementing changes in policy at the Commission, as well as working more closely with blind consumers than in the past. With these changes, Commission clients are beginning to receive better outcomes from services, and to have a stronger voice in determining their future.
- **Resolution 2015-02 strongly urges NJ members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives to co-sponsor the Transitioning to Integrated and Meaningful Employment (TIME) Act.** This bill, presented as S2001 in the Senate and HR188 in the House, seeks to eliminate the paying of subminimum wages to disabled workers over a 3-year period. Neither of our Senators, Corey Booker and Bob Menendez, nor any member of the New Jersey House delegation has signed on.
- **Resolution 2015-03 demands that Access Link, New Jersey Transit's paratransit service, use text messaging to communicate with its DeafBlind riders.** Because Access Link does not utilize this technology in conjunction with adaptive technology owned by their customers who are both deaf and blind, those riders do not receive information as effectively as other riders, which is a clear violation of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Incorporating this system would rectify this problem. This resolution also points out that New Jersey Transit currently uses texting to communicate with non-disabled riders, which means Access Link has the capability to do so as well.
- **Resolution 2015-04 calls upon the New Jersey Legislature to place orientation and mobility training at the same level of importance as teaching Braille to blind elementary and high school students.** Right now, Braille instruction is considered the default unless every member of a student's Individualized Education Plan team believes it is not necessary. NFBNJ believes that cane travel instruction is as equally important for the success of blind children into adulthood, and this resolution states that unequivocally.

To read the full text of these resolutions, go to the **Resolutions** page of the NFBNJ website at www.nfbnj.org.

SPREADING THE WORD ON DEAFBLINDNESS

By Alice Eaddy

I was thrilled and honored to speak at the State Convention of the National Federation of the Blind of Alabama (NFBA), March 4 – 6, 2016 in Mobile, Alabama. NFBA President Joy Harris extended the invitation to me as president of the Federation's Deaf-Blind Division. This is the first time that the president of the Deaf-Blind Division has been invited to speak at an affiliate convention.

Wow! This was a great opportunity for me to spread the word about DeafBlindness and abilities! I highlighted the work of the Deaf-Blind Division, including awareness of DeafBlindness, educating the public, advocating for everyone with vision and hearing loss, the nationwide availability of Support Service Providers, the iCanConnect technology program, sharing ideas, meeting others, developing friendships and sharing successes, all of which are things that some of us have never before experienced.

I was also pleased that President Harris accepted my use of a Support Service Provider (SSP) as a medium for access. Just like with me and my guide dog, the partnership of a good access medium, or SSP, is priceless and security for me, so I felt it was important to showcase the effective use of an SSP. Generally speaking, SSPs help in shopping, doctors' visits, emergency room situations, classes and workshops. The only drawback is that, in New Jersey's SSP program, I get only 16 hours per month of SSP services, so I covet my hours.

It was important for me to convey that I am in charge of my SSP, providing her with direction and relying on her for information. She was in the background during my presentation, providing touch cues, which are hand signals made on my back to let me know what's going on in the room while I'm presenting.

A lot can be said without ever really speaking at all. My SSP and I demonstrated that there is life without sound. It's all about the value of the human spirit. We are. We think. We dream. So many doors are opening because of technology, and I'm at peace with who I am – a combination of science and darkness revisited by the light of liberty provided by an experienced SSP.

We – my SSP and I – are painting a picture of who the DeafBlind are, and what we are by virtue of stage presence and the beautiful ebb and flow of reacting to the vibes of others with the sole purpose of making a mark and enlightening and opening a door to the future.

**ADVENTURES IN ADVOCACY:
WASHINGTON SEMINAR VS. THE BLIZZARD**
By Ryan Stevens

Editor's Note: *Despite the worst snowstorm of the season, NFBNJ members persevered in making contacts and discussing blindness-related issues with our legislators at the 2016 Washington Seminar. In the photo below, back, left to right: Ryan Stevens, Legislative Coordinator; Congressman Donald Norcross (District 1); and Alice Eaddy, president of the Deaf-Blind Division. In front: Vee Gaspa, president of the NJ Association of Blind Students.*



Welcome, my fellow New Jersey Federationists. Join me here by the campfire, for I have a story for you ...

It started innocently enough in January of this year, as we prepared for our annual expedition to Washington, DC. Eleven of us from NFBNJ had been selected to go to Capitol Hill to meet with our members of Congress and their aides to continue the fight to achieve equality for all blind Americans. Most of us were seasoned veterans of this venture, but there were three who were making the journey for the first time in many years, and one who was going for the first time.

In preparation, we secured our hotel and train reservations, and received our meeting assignments. One of our party was scheduled to attend an event at the National Center in Baltimore the weekend before the seminar, and then would meet us in Washington. The rest of us would travel to Washington on Monday: The Northern members of our group leaving on Amtrak from Newark and joining the Southern contingency in Philadelphia for the remainder of the trip. As we finalized our teams and plan of action, a troubling obstacle loomed: A massive snowstorm was working its way up the Eastern Seaboard. As a result, the National Center cancelled their weekend event, so our colleague would be traveling with us on Monday. Another of our crew decided to head to Virginia prior to the storm, in hopes of getting into DC more easily.

The snowstorm hit as hard as expected, dumping more than 2 feet of the white stuff. Sunday evening, we learned that our train on Monday had been cancelled. Our fearless leader spent three hours on hold with Amtrak to find out about alternate trains, without success. How would we get to our nation's capital to fulfill our duty? On Monday, we learned that there were several trains running, so we decided to go to Newark and Philly and get to Washington as best as we could. Only seven of us were able to make the trip, as one person ended up with a scheduling conflict, and the two who lived in the Shore area and the one who had headed to Virginia found themselves stranded. Those who

left from Newark got stuck in traffic and began their train ride three hours late, while the Philly crew was miraculously only one hour behind schedule.

Once we arrived in Washington, we had to deal with the upheaval there. All of the NFB events at the hotel had been either cancelled or rescheduled. The “Great Gathering In” meeting had been moved from Monday evening to Tuesday morning, the same time as our meetings with members of Congress. On Tuesday, most government agencies were closed, and no one was sure which Congressional offices, if any, were open. We learned that one of the three House office buildings was completely closed, killing four of our appointments. We also learned that while the other two office buildings, Longworth and Rayburn, were open, people could enter the Capitol only through Longworth. The NFBNJ teams called House offices to verify and reschedule appointments. Only two of those appointments were kept that day.

Three of us took on the task of heading to the Longworth Building for the Congressional meetings. Upon arriving, we discovered that only one entrance was available, and it wasn't the main one, which meant that we had to walk around the outside of the building in the frigid Washington air, trying to find the entrance. Once inside, we went through the usual security routine and headed to our appointment with Congressman Donald Norcross and his aide. Afterwards, we worked our way to the sub-basement to get over to the Rayburn Building. Once there, we dropped off an information packet to another Congressional office, then went to get lunch. None of the food venues in Rayburn were open, so all we could do was review the meeting with Congressman Norcross and plan our strategy for our next appointment, with an aide of Congressman Bill Pascrell, which went well. We were then ready to go back to the hotel.

While we could not enter the Rayburn Building, we were allowed to exit it, but doing so turned out to be a mistake. All vehicular traffic around Rayburn had been blocked, so there were no cabs available. Again, we were out in the cold, this time with no idea of what to do and unable to go back inside. As we were talking about it, someone who worked for a House member from California offered to help us. He walked us to where there was traffic and got an Uber driver for us.

When we again joined our colleagues at the hotel, we learned that one of them had been on the phone all day trying to reschedule Tuesday appointments for Wednesday. Two members of our group had originally planned to stay through Wednesday to meet with the staffs of Senators Corey Booker and Robert Menendez, so these calls were certainly worthwhile. Some House meetings were indeed successfully moved to Wednesday, and our two compatriots were able to handle them along with those with the Senators' aides. They also dropped off information packets at the remaining

Congressional offices. Amazingly, despite the horrible conditions, all of us got back to New Jersey safely and on time, regardless of which day we returned.

All melodrama aside, we proudly fought through this extreme situation because the Washington Seminar is the most important NFB activity. Working directly with our legislators is the most effective way to improve the lives of all blind Americans. Of course, we from New Jersey weren't the only ones to face the challenges of getting to Washington this year. Other Federationists from around the country, including those who never deal with snow, overcame flight delays and other travel difficulties to carry on the work of this organization. This level of dedication should be remembered the next time we are asked to send an e-mail or make a phone call to our Congressional representatives.

The PAC Plan

By Brian Mackey, PAC Plan Chairman

Greetings, fellow Federationists throughout the New Jersey Affiliate! This is my first update on how we're doing with our contributions to the PAC Plan. Before I begin, I would like to thank my predecessor, Ryan Stevens, for his many years of service on this project.

"PAC" stands for "Pre-Authorized Contribution," and the plan is the easiest way for NFB members to make regular donations to our organization. It's easy because it's a one-time process to sign up, and it's easy on the wallet because you can contribute as little as \$5 a month. It's important because it helps fund the programs and activities that are so vital to the success of blind people. It helps with providing free literature, free white canes, free slate and styluses, and much more.

In terms of our ranking among the states, as of April 2016, we are #26 with a monthly contribution of \$504.50. This amount comes from the generosity of 35 individuals and chapters. Thanks to all who help the Garden State make such a fine showing, but I think we can do more. We're only \$7.50 behind Pennsylvania, and we trail Mississippi by \$55.50. If we pass Mississippi, it would put us over \$550 a month and solidly in the Top 23.

Thanks to modern technology, signing up on PAC is significantly easier than ever. You can create or increase your PAC contributions by using an online contribution form. Donations can be made from either your checking account or your debit card. The online form is available at <https://nfb.org/make-gift>. Click on the Pre-Authorized Contribution (PAC) link. You can choose to start a monthly contribution or increase an existing one, select your payment method, and fill in the corresponding information right there. You can then print the form, sign it and send it to NFB's National Center.

Making these regular tax-deductible contributions, and encouraging your friends, family and fellow Federationists to join, as well, shows how important the NFB is to you, and demonstrates how proud an affiliate New Jersey is.

REFLECTIONS ON THE SOUNDING BOARD

Compiled by Katherine Gabry

In 2005, Joe Ruffalo cautiously approached me to step in as temporary editor of *The Sounding Board*. Not only did Joe know my background in journalism, but he was desperate for someone to fill in, since the editor at that time, John Cucco, would soon be leaving for college. Although I hesitated, Joe can be very persuasive, and soon I was editing, writing, rewriting and laying out articles.

While I've served on the POBC-NJ board for over 20 years, my tenure as editor of *The Sounding Board* has led to a much deeper understanding and appreciation for the work that's done by this organization as a whole, by so many worthy individuals who volunteer their time and talents, and for the leadership of our State Affiliate president, Joe Ruffalo.

Through my 11 years in this "temporary" position, my goal has always been to make this your magazine, to have you contribute and comment, and make this publication by, about and for you, the members of the NFBNJ. I feel that, together, we've succeeded in that mission, as our magazine routinely has contributions from more than 25 individuals, and, on a first layout, the magazine is typically more than 50 pages. We've also grown from one editor, to a whole team of people that puts this publication together. Mary Jo Partyka is my right-hand editor, and we recently brought Barbara Shalit on as another editor. Joe is involved, as is Jerilyn Higgins, in providing direction, deciding the content, and proofing the masterpiece. We've certainly come a long way since Joe resurrected the original *Sounding Board* in 1994, after a long period of dormancy.

RACHAEL DEGENSHEIN LAPIDIS, *the first editor of The Sounding Board, as we know it, is a 2004 graduate of Dartmouth College. She earned her master's degree in psychology at the University of California, San Diego, where she is now manager of Student Affairs in the Psychology Department and teaches classes in psychological disorders of childhood. She, her husband Alen and their daughter Emmeline reside in San Diego. Here are Rachael's reflections on being editor of The Sounding Board from 1994 – 2000:*

The Sounding Board and I grew up together. When I was in middle school, my Uncle Joe, known to you as President Joe Ruffalo, asked if I'd be interested in helping him revive the dormant publication. As an aspiring journalist, and his favorite niece, I agreed. For the next six or so years, I enjoyed learning about the goings on in the state, the courtesy rules of blindness, and exotic names like Ever Lee and DeNotaris. I must admit that the editing and formatting were my favorite parts, along with my Through

Our Eyes column. I also recall at least one blizzard that led to a multi-day edit-a-thon as Uncle Joe was snowed in at our house.

It was wonderful hearing how the news in *The Sounding Board* gave people a lifeline to meet others who also had visual impairments and to learn about all the events, resources and friends-to-be waiting for them in the state. Though the world at times can seem bleak and cruel, here were people building a community, standing up for their rights and helping each other. It was inspiring.

I was humbled to have received recognition for my co-editorship. I received a scholarship from Sears in the amount of \$1,000 that I donated to the NFBNJ Scholarship Fund and was honored as a Distinguished Volunteer for the organization. I was profiled in *React* magazine, and was even able to discuss *The Sounding Board* on the Ricki Lake show.

I had to relinquish my editorship upon embarking for college, but I still keep up on the happenings of the NFBNJ largely through my uncle and my mom, Jane Degenshein, now president of the Senior Division and the Tech Division, and newly elected to the affiliate board, and facilitator of the ECHO group in West Orange. It's amazing how I still feel a kinship with folks like Kathy Gabry and Carol Castellano whom I met all those years ago.

Now, I have a daughter of my own. She loves to tap her Grammy's long white cane, and book player, and instinctively knows to help guide her hands when they play together. She is a little less than two and Uncle Joe jokes that just 10 more years and she can be the next editor of *The Sounding Board*! I know he's kidding, but given how formative of an experience it was for me, I hope she gets to be that lucky.

JOHN CUCCO stepped in as editor of *The Sounding Board* when Rachael left for college. He served from 2000 – 2005. Here are his comments on his role as editor:

It was the spring of 2000, and I was getting ready to leave middle school for high school. *The Sounding Board's* prior editor was herself leaving for college, and Joe Ruffalo and Carol Castellano asked me to take over. Looking back, it's incredible that they gave me that opportunity when I was so young, and also incredible that it worked out. Over five years and 10 issues, my skills and understanding improved, and Joe promoted me along the way from co-editor to editor. I learned a lot about writing styles and editing, but also about the positive attitudes and hard-working people that make up the NFBNJ.

My memories have faded a bit over the decade since I was editor, but I'll share some things that stand out in my mind. For every issue, Joe wrote a Presidential Message. Typically, he would have an outline in his mind, but dictate much of the actual message over the phone to me. At one point I constructed a "hands-free device" from a headband and some rubber bands. By attaching the phone to my ear, I could listen to Joe and type with both hands. Nowadays, I guess speakerphone would be easier. I also

got my introduction to voiceover work without even having to audition, recording the audio version of *The Sounding Board* on a home tape player.

(Former Editor's Note: *That did not turn into a career for me.*)

I credit *The Sounding Board* for quite a bit, though. It was such a unique opportunity, and great both for my resume as well as my writing and editing skills. I am sure it helped get me into college, just another example of the NFB helping achieve educational success. After college at Brown University, I stayed in Rhode Island, and my first job was as a writer for the RI Department of Health. I now work at HealthSource RI, Rhode Island's state health insurance exchange. And one more update, my sister Serena Cucco, to whom my whole family owes our involvement in the NFBNJ, just started a job with the NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. In my last issue in 2005, Serena wrote about a summer job at Diamond Spring Lodge, so make sure to ask her to contribute to the next issue with her thoughts on working at NJCBVI!

Thank you again to Joe for giving me such a wonderful opportunity, and to Kathy Gabry for continuing the fine work of *The Sounding Board*. As the NFBNJ celebrates its 40th anniversary issue, both the leadership and the membership of the organization should pat yourselves on the back for your tremendous success so far. Best of luck in the next 40 years!

MARY JO PARTYKA

My Reflections on Co-Editing The Sounding Board

One of my ambitions since high school was to write for a newspaper. Although I wrote reports in college and as part of my job, I never thought my opportunity to write for a publication of any kind would come to fruition. My wish came true after I retired in 2013. At that time, our State Affiliate president, Joe Ruffalo, asked me to co-edit *The Sounding Board*. I had always enjoyed this publication, but on becoming one of the editors, I became invested in making it something people would enjoy reading.

When I receive articles from members of our affiliate or other organizations, I try to find a way to capture the audience's attention at the beginning and to make the article flow. This isn't always easy, especially if we are under pressure to meet a deadline, but things always work out.

Working as a team with Joe Ruffalo, Jerilyn Higgins and Kathy Gabry is great. If one of us misses something important which should be in an article, someone will catch it. Rewriting articles doesn't bother me. I did it as part of my last job and realize that rewriting comes with the territory.

In addition to receiving articles from the members of the New Jersey affiliate, I have come in contact with people who submit articles which were written by other

newspapers or magazines. Before an article can be accepted for publication in *The Sounding Board*, it must be approved by the entity that originally published it. Sometimes I feel like a detective trying to track down the source of the article.

I hope that *The Sounding Board* will continue to exist for another 40 years, and that I can remain part of its staff.

KEN LAWRENCE

Through The Sounding Board, I found an organization of participation, engagement and action

In January 2001, a friend introduced me to NFB Newsline, so that I could read the Newark *Star-Ledger* newspaper. Eventually, I also began to read the *Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today*. This was a whole new world to me. One day, while browsing the State Affiliate's section on the old New Brunswick-based Newsline service center, I viewed an old issue of *The Sounding Board* that featured the 1999 Fall State Convention, including the resolutions, and for the first time, I really came to know what the NFB was actually doing.

For the rest of that year and through the 9/11 tragedy and the announcements of both the pending Job Line and national Newsline services, I also called several of the other Newsline service centers, including Maryland, where I read Maryland's counterpart to our newsletter, *The Braille Spectator*. Reading these things and the national information on the work underway to build and fund the national research and training institute, I came to see that NFB was an organization of not only blind people, but of *active* blind people.

For the first time in my life, I had found an organization that wanted to know what I thought. I had discovered an organization of participation, engagement and action, not just repeating the philosophy, but putting that philosophy to work. Without reading these things, I might not have taken it upon myself to make the call that would get me to local chapter meetings. Furthermore, when Newsline went down, I might not have called Joe Ruffalo to ask about how to get it back up and going. I also maybe wouldn't have called NFB's national headquarters in the effort to update my old Optacon information and obtain a Newsline application so that I could read nonstop.

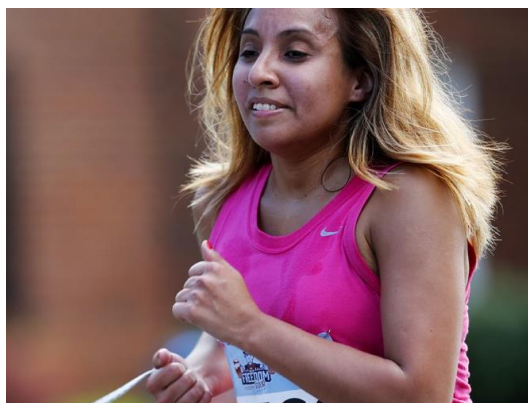
It all came down to that old *Sounding Board* issue. Without that, the date of March 9, 2002, when I attended my first meeting at the Joseph Kohn Center and met Joe Ruffalo and Jerilyn Higgins for the first time wouldn't have been possible. Reading that *Sounding Board* issue, I stopped letting someone else tell me what NFB stood for, and I rather got it in my own words.

A JOURNEY TO RUN AGAIN

By Evelyn Valdez

Reprinted with permission from the Pacers Blog

Editor's Note: *Evelyn is a logistics management specialist for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, but her Jersey roots run deep. She was a student and a mentor in New Jersey's LEAD program, served on the NFBNJ Board, and was the president of the New Jersey Association of Blind Students. She received NFB national and state scholarships while working toward her bachelor's and master's degrees at Kean University, and she graduated from the Louisiana Center for the Blind. Find the original article and more pictures at <https://www.runpacers.com/training/motivation/a-journey-to-run-again/>*



I am a blind distance runner from Alexandria, VA. Other than running, I also enjoy skiing, boxing and many other outdoor recreational activities. I ran in high school as a sighted runner, but as I went blind I did not think that I would be able to run again.

Recently, after moving here about two years ago, I injured my ankle badly, and this put a major dent in my confidence. My walking speed slowed, and I became hesitant getting around. But, in February, I was introduced to a personal fitness trainer at work, and he told me that he would help me get back on my feet and running again. This is when my journey begins.

I consider myself disciplined and committed to staying fit and building a stronger "Evelyn." Since I'm an active participant in my life, I consistently renew the pact that I have with myself.

My personal fitness trainer introduced me to tethers and the treadmill, and eventually we decided to step it up a notch and start running outdoors. Now, running allows me to feel so free and reassures me with a "sitting on top of the world" feeling!

After running for a few months, my trainer and I registered for the Marine Corps Marathon 10K race as a short-term goal and stepping stone for other races. With the momentum that I had built, this event became the sealing deal for me. Running is what I want to do! I want to add a special shout-out and thank you to Joy Allen from the Pacers Fairfax location. She welcomed me to the Pacers community with open arms, and I couldn't be happier!

Finally, the day had come: October 25, 2015. I was up and ready in the early hours of the day. With a guide alongside me, I was putting myself to the test. The crowd and participants were lively and ready. We didn't let the slight drizzle and overcast skies

slow us down on race day. The crowds along the 10K course were loud and supportive. With shout outs like “Go champ!” and “Keep it up girl!” I got the running bug!



Evelyn and her guide running in the Marine Corps Marathon 10K race.

With the race in my rearview mirror, I am looking forward to doing many more races, like the Shamrock half-marathon and the Divas 5K run later this year.

I would like to leave you with this one thought: You need to just take the first step and commit yourself to doing something. I give it my all. If I can do it, then you can, too. If you don't feel uncomfortable, then there is no challenge!

FOR ARTISTS & CRAFTERS: SELL YOUR WORK THROUGH THE CRAFTERS ASSOCIATION Received from Sue Sherry, Pathways to Independence

Pathways to Independence in Kearny offers a Crafters Association that supports New Jersey residents who are blind or visually impaired in selling their arts and crafts. The Crafters Association began in 1998 and is funded by the NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Potential crafters must be registered clients of the Commission. Pathways can provide craft materials, if necessary. A craft coordinator takes your completed work and makes every effort to sell it. You receive a check from Pathways for the total amount of your sales, minus any materials costs that Pathways may have provided. For more information, call Lisa Johnson at Pathways: 201-997-6155, ext. 17.

GUTTENBERG RESIDENT NAMED HADLEY SCHOOL'S BRAILLE STUDENT OF THE YEAR By Art Schwartz, Staff Reporter, *Hudson Reporter*

Editor's Note: This article has been condensed and reprinted with permission from Hudson Reporter Association, LP. The article, in its entirety, and photos are available online at http://hudsonreporter.com/view/full_story/26924131/article-Guttenberg-resident-named-Braille-Student-of-the-Year--Served-as-only-blind-court-reporter-in-the-U-S---?instance=latest_story



The call came out of the blue. "I had the woman repeat it four times on the phone, I was so shocked," said Guttenberg resident Myra Brodsky. The caller assured her that it was true: Brodsky had been named Braille Student of the Year by the Hadley School for the Blind, a free, nonprofit school serving more than 10,000 students annually in all 50 states and 100 countries, and the world's largest educator of Braille.

Last October, Brodsky traveled to Chicago to accept the award. It wasn't the first time she was celebrated for her accomplishments. The New Jersey Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired also recognized her success when she worked as a court reporter in New York State some years ago. At the time, Brodsky was the only blind court reporter in the U.S. assigned to a courtroom.

It didn't begin that way. Brodsky did not lose her vision until later in life. Born in New York 74 years ago, she kicked around a number of jobs including receptionist at the William Morris Agency and legal secretary, all while going to school at night in the 1960s. Eventually she settled on becoming a court reporter.

Her first position was in the workers compensation area, before transferring to family court and eventually to the attorney general's office, where she worked for 18 years. "It was a very good job in those days," she recalled. "Family court was a trip."

In 1980, while working for the attorney general's office, she received the news that changed her life. "I was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa, and I didn't know what it was," she said. "But the doctor that diagnosed me didn't charge for that visit so I thought, 'Oh my God, he feels sorry for me. It must be a terrible disease.'"

When Brodsky told her supervisor that she was going blind, the supervisor urged her to go on Social Security Disability. "I said, 'No, I'm too young, I want to keep working,'" recalled Brodsky. "I could still do my court reporting regularly with bright lights and very high magnification."

And then things got wonky. "They tried to eliminate my job around 1994," recalled Brodsky. It was part of a purge by a new administration that wanted to outsource the

bulk of the court reporting operation. But Brodsky wasn't about to go, and she fought back, taking the battle to Albany. Luckily for her, the Americans with Disabilities Act had been signed into law in 1990, giving her a measure of protection. As a result, the administration created a new, diminished position for her, "as long as I could get a computer that would do my court reporting like everyone else." Brodsky got in touch with the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI), and they put together a team to keep Brodsky in business.

"That's when I met Kay Chase," said Brodsky. "She was completely blind ... and she devised a computer that would work the same way as everyone else's and be compatible to their court reporting system."

As a test, the administration put Brodsky in a courtroom with a non-blind reporter and had her compete to prove herself. With the backing of her team, Brodsky was able to impress the brass, and found herself transferred back to workers compensation in 1997.

Among the testimonies she took after fighting to keep her job was that of the widow of Daniel Pearl, the American journalist kidnapped and beheaded in Pakistan. She also recorded claims filed by many relatives of 9/11 victims.

Brodsky retired in 2007 after getting a guide dog. She has continued to remain active, swimming and taking aerobics courses regularly. Four years ago, at age 70, she entered the State Senior Olympics and took home three gold medals for swimming.

In her retirement, she also found a new career in art education for the blind. She has worked in this capacity at numerous galleries and museums, including the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim, both in New York City. Her role consists of listening to descriptions of artworks, then questioning the descriptions and crafting her own picture of the artwork in words. "The goal is to make art accessible to the blind. It's very, very cool," she said.

It was also after retiring that Brodsky decided to learn Braille, and she enrolled in the Hadley School in 2007. "It's really wonderful," she said. "The courses are fabulous. I found it so simple to learn Braille through Hadley, the way it was laid out."

Learning at her own pace, Brodsky had no idea she was excelling in her courses, and was surprised to learn that she had been named Braille Student of the Year. She has since taken numerous other courses at the school, which offers a varied curriculum.

Founded in 1920, The Hadley School for the Blind is funded entirely through contributions from individuals, foundations and corporations. Their mission is to promote independent living through lifelong, distance education programs for people who are blind or visually impaired, as well as for their families and blindness service providers. For more information visit hadley.edu or call 800-323-4238.

NEW JERSEY'S BELL ACADEMY: JULY 11 – 22, 2016

WHAT: The Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning (BELL) Academy is a 2-week program for visually impaired and blind children ages 4 – 12 who have had minimal exposure to braille. It is also for those who could use more exposure to braille and blindness skills. We have a “braille rocks” attitude, with fun, games, field trips and friendships. Instruction in activities of daily living furthers the children’s independence and self-sufficiency, and blind mentors and volunteers provide excellent role models, keeping expectations high and proving that blindness is not the characteristic that defines one’s future. All BELL Academy children receive a free white cane and a free slate and stylus from the NFB.

WHEN: Weekdays, July 11 through July 22, 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

WHERE: PRAHD (Puerto Rican Association for Human Development), Perth Amboy, N.J.

FOR MORE INFO: Contact Mary Jo Partyka at choirnfb@gmail.com or 609-888-5459.

BELL ACADEMY APPLICATIONS AVAILABLE ONLINE

By Carlton Walker

Braille rocks and BELLS ring! Please note that the application process for NFB BELL Academy contains several steps:

1. Fill out the NFB BELL Academy application at: <https://nfb.org/bell-summer-program-form>,
2. After you submit the application, you will receive a confirmation e-mail. That confirmation e-mail will direct you to fill out the permission and release forms at: <https://nfb.org/bell-permission-and-release-forms>.
3. After you complete the permission and release forms, you will receive another confirmation e-mail. This second confirmation e-mail will contain your answers to the permission and release forms.
4. Print out this second confirmation e-mail, and sign and date it at the bottom of the last page.
5. Send the signed confirmation e-mail to your NFB BELL Academy state coordinator, listed on the e-mail.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns at 410-659-9314, extension 2225 or via e-mail at cwalker@nfb.org.

YOU CAN HELP SPONSOR THIS SUMMER'S BELL ACADEMY
From Ice Cream to T-Shirts, Braille Paper to Pizza

We're pleased to announce the following sponsorship opportunities available for the BELL Academy this summer:

- \$200 Tee shirts for all participants
- \$200 Supplies for arts and crafts
- \$150 Christmas in July party with Santa
- \$100 Louis Braille birthday party
- \$100 Various games: Twister, Bingo, etc.
- \$50 Ice cream at the beach
- \$30 Mid-week pizza party
- \$30 Braille paper
- \$20 Dark lined paper
- \$15 20/20 pens
- \$10 Snacks per day
- \$5 Water for each day

Your check should be made payable to NFBNJ and sent to Joe Ruffalo, NFBNJ President, 254 Spruce Street, Bloomfield, NJ 07003. In the memo, please write "BELL." Sponsorship in any amount will be appreciated. Thank you for your interest and support in driving the BELL Academy vehicle along the road to literacy and learning for blind children.

BRAILLE CLASSES FOR EVERYONE
By Rebecca Bryant

Editor's Note: *Rebecca is the president of the Northern Chapter, a member of the State Board and a member of the Braille Division. The Northern Chapter offers Braille classes to members after each meeting and has now made additional classes available.*

If you would like to learn to read Braille or brush up on your Braille reading skills, then this class may be for you! Classes are held at the Newark Public Library, 5 Washington Street, 3rd floor, Special Service Room, Newark, NJ 07102. They are offered on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The instructors are Rebecca Bryant, Siham Atchan and Paul Caruso. The chapter also holds classes after their monthly meeting, which is on the third Saturday of each month.

To sign up, please contact Rebecca Bryant at 973-732-6559 or Paul Caruso, chairman of the Braille Committee, at 609-915-8037. ***Please note that only those who have scheduled classes in advance will be able to attend.***

FROM OUR ARCHIVES - 2001
CAN BLIND PEOPLE BE HELPFUL?
By John Cucco

Editor's Note: *John graduated from Brown University with degrees in physics and political science in 2009. He now serves as a Deputy Director at HealthSource RI, Rhode Island's health insurance exchange. John is currently busy planning his wedding.*

I have lived with a blind person all my life, so I consider myself an authority on the issue of whether a blind person can be helpful. However, this is an unfair task because I am a 14-year-old boy, and I don't really want to talk about why my 17-year-old sister is so helpful. But when I actually sat down and thought about it, I realized that (my sister) Serena is often a useful person to have around. For instance, she is really good at Spanish, so whenever I have a question about my Spanish homework, I ask her instead of consulting a Spanish/English dictionary. She's quicker and helps with the grammar, too. I know other kids also find her helpful because they often call for the homework. Serena is a good student and has a great memory, so she always knows what all her homework is.

Serena is actually also known as "the family memory." She remembers names, numbers and even where the car is parked sometimes. If there's no pen or pencil around, Serena is a critical asset to the family.

Another way Serena helps is in chores. Our parents have split up the chores, and we share doing things like clearing the table and emptying the dishwasher. Although Serena is supposed to do half, sometimes she doesn't do it and sometimes my parents ask me to do things and not Serena. I realized that I in fact help Serena to learn skills for daily living when this occurs. Whenever there is a chore injustice in our house, I whine, "Mom, Serena doesn't have to do this!" To my dismay, instead of releasing me, Mom just makes Serena work, too. So Serena can do all the things I can, because I won't tolerate doing it all myself. As far as chores are concerned, blind people should definitely be equal to sighted people.

HONEYWELL RESPONDS TO REQUEST FOR MORE ACCESSIBLE THERMOSTAT

By Sue Tillet

Editor's Note: *Sue has been a member of the NFBNJ and the Capital Chapter for 15 years. She is also a member of the Braille Division and the Guide Dog Division. Sue lives in Princeton, where you will often see her walking with her guide dog Roz, and where she is well known for her involvement in the Community Experience Program, which pairs high school students with senior citizens to help them with household tasks and Braille. In this article, Sue describes her frustration with her inaccessible Honeywell thermostat and her advocacy efforts that will – hopefully – make a difference for many.*

Two years ago, when I moved into my current house, I didn't fully explore its appliances, and found out, to my chagrin, that all of them had touch screens. After studying them with a friend and labeling them with locator dots and a Braille dymo tape labeler, I was able to use all of them to some extent; however, most of their features were off limits to me. You would think that, by the age of 68, I would have learned to be wary. Just because something talks, it is not necessarily accessible.

Such was the case with my new thermostat. I searched for contact information, and e-mailed the following letter to the Honeywell Corporation on January 7, 2016:

Dear Honeywell Development Staff,

I recently switched from oil to gas heat and had to have a new thermostat installed. I am blind, and needed to find one that I could operate. Imagine my delight when the company told me that they could provide me with a talking thermostat. I was pleased to be able to raise and lower the temperature, but the menu settings are totally off limits. Apparently this thermostat is designed for a person who doesn't want to get off the couch, and not as an accessible thermostat for someone who is visually impaired.

I had a friend set the presets to 64 degrees during the day, and 58 at night, figuring that I could raise the temperature when I am home. This turns out to be a partial solution. Sometimes "she" (the thermostat) says, "I cannot fulfill your request at this time. Try again later," or "Cannot connect to Wi-Fi, call tech support," or she instructs me to go to the touch screen, which, too, is totally inaccessible to me.

Next I downloaded your app, thinking that I could control it from my iPhone, but the app isn't very accessible either.

It seems to me that you have a good start here on a product that could easily be made accessible. Having speech already built into the unit should make it possible to allow it to control all the different menu settings. I am certain that the Research and Development Committee at the National Federation of the Blind Jernigan Institute would be willing to work with you on this project. The app is probably a simple fix — voice

labeling some of the buttons, and perhaps reordering them to make them function properly. The people at Apple have made their products very accessible, and I am sure they could advise you.

As our population continues to age, we are more than ever in need of products that are extremely intuitive for everyone to use, and accessible to people who are blind or visually impaired. I would urge you to use people who are blind as your beta testers, and I would be more than happy to help you. I look forward to hearing from you about this matter.

I provided my contact information and copied Anil Lewis, the executive director of the NFB's Jernigan Institute.

Upon reading my letter, a friend said that she didn't think I would get anywhere with e-mail and that I would have to go further up the chain of command. She researched the matter and found the name and contact information for a CEO, and I mailed him a copy of my letter. Sure enough, I got a canned response to my e-mail; however, a week later, I received a phone call from a representative who had a significant position in the company. I tried to explain the inaccessible features of both the thermostat and the app to him. He didn't understand what I was telling him about the iPhone app, so I showed him how to turn on Voiceover on his phone and had him open the thermostat app. He was fascinated with the talking iPhone and immediately saw the problem with their app. He asked if he could send a developer from their headquarters in Minnesota to my house in Princeton so that we could work on making the thermostat more accessible. He wanted to know which aspects would be the most important to work on. I told him that we needed to go for complete accessibility. I explained that what is important to me might not be important to someone else. I then called the NFB and asked Anil if the Technology and Development Committee would be interested in getting involved in this issue.

On February 9, David Quam, Honeywell's product manager; Anil Lewis, chairman of NFB's Technology and Development Committee; and Carl Belanger, a self-proclaimed computer enthusiast; came to my house, and we went over every aspect of the thermostat. Anil, Carl and I made suggestions as to how Honeywell could make the thermostat and the iPhone app fully accessible. We also pointed out to Dave that Honeywell needs to make all of its products accessible and intuitive for our aging population. He was completely engaged and enthusiastic, and took excellent notes.

Judging from our follow-up conference call in March, though, I think change is going to happen slowly. While Honeywell may make its app more accessible, I don't think there will be much change to my current thermostat. However, I do believe we will find future Honeywell products to be much more accessible and user-friendly.

WHITE CANE AWARENESS DAY

By Rachel Bodek

Editor's Note: *This article has been edited from Rachel's talk at a White Cane Awareness Day hosted by the Association for the Visually Impaired (AVI) in Rockland and Orange counties, New York. Although a resident of New York State, last summer Rachel's son attended the BELL Academy sponsored by the NFBNJ, in Perth Amboy, NJ. He received a cane through BELL. The NFB's Free White Cane Program is available at www.nfb.org.*

My white cane experience is an evolving process. Although my journey has been difficult and painful, I am making headway, and I can be seen with my white cane around town these days.

I became legally blind as a young teenager — a very challenging time for me practically and emotionally. The New York Association for the Visually Impaired (AVI) sent an orientation and mobility (O&M) trainer to teach me to travel independently. After a few lessons, a family member said that she had seen me at an intersection with my “therapist.” Completely embarrassed, I refused further services. I resumed O&M training a few years later when I was more accepting of my vision loss. With my usable peripheral vision, I can generally see enough to get around without a cane. My O&M instructor, Jayne, emphasized that a secondary goal of cane use is to identify me to others as an individual with a visual impairment. I was hesitant about utilizing the cane primarily for this reason, having no interest in advertising that I had limited sight. For the time being, my cane remained in my speech demonstration bag.

Soon I started speaking about my disability in schools and at public gatherings in my community. I spoke about independence and braille, and I showed adaptive devices, including the long, white cane. I explained its purpose while stating that I didn't really need to use it because my vision loss wasn't so severe. I would even joke that my O&M instructor encouraged me to use it just for others to identify me as visually impaired. I let everyone know that that was exactly why I didn't want to use it.

Several years ago, AVI hosted a vision awareness seminar where I spoke. After my talk, Farouk, an O&M instructor for the New York State Commission for the Blind, asked me, “If you're trying to make your community aware and sensitive to individuals with visual impairments, don't you think you should be a role model and use your cane even if you don't need it as much for your own visual needs?” Jayne defended me, saying that I needed to feel comfortable using the cane and needed to go at my own pace. I thought a lot about this, but still couldn't entertain the idea of using a cane. The stigma was too much for me to bear.

My father has the same eye condition as me. He started using a cane recently, only after he started bumping into things and tripping. It was quite a challenge for him in the beginning. This further discouraged me.

With time, I started realizing that the cane could help for identification purposes, so I began using it. When my husband had to undergo surgery about two years ago, I thought that if I had my cane with me at the hospital, I wouldn't have to explain to everyone that I was visually impaired. I had the cane with me throughout the surgery. After receiving the great news that all went well, I nearly forgot my cane in the waiting room!

Then I attended AVI's first White Cane Awareness Day. My dear friend Hindy, who's totally blind, was there; I told her I had resolved to start using my cane more so that she would feel more comfortable using hers. I moved my cane from my speech bag to my active pocketbook. I used it occasionally, with both negative and positive outcomes — still uneasy using it in my community. Once, I walked into a local bank hoping the employees would recognize I needed help completing a form. When I asked a teller for help, she asked, "Why do you need help?" and, displeased, I told her I was visually impaired. Another time, I needed to be fingerprinted for a new job. Walking in with my cane, the woman behind the counter immediately asked where I needed to go. She offered to show me and even asked, "Can you see enough to follow me or do you want to hold onto my arm?"

Last summer, my son, who is also legally blind, attended the National Federation of the Blind's Braille Enrichment and Literacy (BELL) Academy in Perth Amboy, New Jersey. The primary focus at the program is encouraging the children to use canes and to improve their braille skills. At this program, my son received his own cane. Another mother there said that she had asked my son whether I used my cane and he said, "Not really." This was my wake-up call. I thought, "If I'm not comfortable using the cane, how can I expect my son to be?" That was the final push. I prepped my husband and kids and declared that God gave me the visual impairment, and there was no reason for embarrassment. I now use my cane when I walk to work and am gradually using it more and more.

I don't know if and when I will be completely comfortable using my cane, but I'm using it regardless and am actually benefitting. Hopefully, so are others. My new mantra is: *If you want to do or use something that will help you, as long as it's not hurting others, there's no reason for you not to do or use it.*

ABLE ACT (ACHIEVING A BETTER LIFE EXPERIENCE) ACCOUNTS

General Information Compiled by Barbara Shalit

Editor's Note: *Money held in an ABLE account is exempt from the \$2,000 limit on personal assets for individuals who wish to qualify for public benefits such as Medicaid and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).*

The Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act of 2013 passed the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate in December 2014. In New Jersey, Governor Christie signed bills S2770 and A3956 into law on January 11, 2016. Starting in October 2016, people with disabilities will be able to open ABLE Accounts in New Jersey.

The ABLE Act creates tax-free savings accounts for people with disabilities. This means that people with disabilities will be able to accrue up to \$100,000 in savings without losing access to Social Security and other government benefits, and Medicaid coverage will remain intact no matter how much is saved in the person's ABLE account.

ABLE accounts can be used to cover qualified expenses, such as education, housing and transportation, employment training and support, assistive technology, personal support services, health care expenses, financial management and administrative services, among others. Accounts may be established in any state, regardless of residence, allowing individuals and families to shop around for the state program that best suits their needs. Here are some other key points about the ABLE Act:

- Only one account per person is permitted.
- Each state will have its own regulations.
- Contributions may be made by anyone and may or may not be tax deductible, depending on that state's ABLE law. Interest earnings are not taxed.
- Eligibility is limited to individuals with significant disabilities with an age of onset of disability before turning age 26.
- If you receive SSI and/or SSDI benefits, you are automatically eligible. Otherwise, if you meet the age of onset disability requirement, you are still eligible to open an ABLE account if you have a disability certification from your physician.
- Total annual contributions by all participating individuals, including family and friends, is \$14,000, adjusted annually for inflation. The total limit over time will be subject to the individual state. Many states have set this limit at over \$300,000.
- When an ABLE account exceeds \$100,000, the beneficiary will be suspended from SSI eligibility and no longer receive that monthly income. However, the beneficiary will still be eligible for Medicaid.
- The act contains a Medicaid pay-back provision when the beneficiary dies.

TECH TIPS & INFORMATION

Accessible Games Book – Check out this recent book from the National Braille Press, *Anyone Can Play: Accessible Games for the iPhone, iPad and iPod Touch*, edited by Judy Dixon. It covers seven types of games: competitive, word, card, adventure, strategy, role-playing and sports. The cost is \$12. The book is available from the National Braille Press, www.nbp.org, or 800-548-7323, ext. 520.

Blind Abilities (iOS, Free App) – We are a community of blind, visually impaired and DeafBlind members sharing our experiences dealing with accessibility, technologies, devices and enhancing opportunities in the job market for the blind, visually impaired and DeafBlind. We interview developers, users and advocates in the field. Our Teen Cast podcasts focus on promoting successful transitioning from high school to college and employment. For more info, go to <https://blindabilities.com/> Submitted by Jane Degenshein

Medicare, Medicaid Equipment Update – New Jersey Medicaid and HMO Medicaid may pay for high-tech blindness-related and low-vision devices like desktop and portable CCTVs. Machines that convert printed material to audible speech may also be available. Please call Allen N. Blumenthal, Durable Medical Equipment (DME) Medicaid and HMO provider, for info at 201-245-6623.

Visual Brailier (iOS, Free App) - Visual Brailier is a simple braille editor from APH. It's a braille writer for your iPad, and it has a place in every braille transcriber's toolbox. Use it for NLS certification exercises or to practice UEB. Features 6-dot braille on-screen keyboard, support for any and all 6-dot braille codes, an indefinite number of 40-cell braille lines, cut, copy and paste braille, refreshable braille display input and output, BRL (unformatted) and BRF (formatted) braille file export. For more information, please visit <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/visual-brailier/id888739587?mt=8>

Wikipedia Mobile (iOS, Free) – Search, read and explore your favorite free online encyclopedia! <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/wikipedia-mobile/id324715238?mt=8>

KNFB Reader – This mobile app reads print aloud. It's easy to use. Take a photo and the app reads the text aloud in clear, synthetic speech. It's fast, almost instantaneous. For photos, KNFB Reader provides a field of view report and tilt guidance for more accuracy, capturing print in the photograph. To learn more about purchasing KNFB Reader, visit www.knfbreader.com. To join the KNFB Reader List, go to Reader-Users@nfbnet.org. To subscribe to the KNFB reader list, go to http://nfbnet.org/mailman/listinfo/reader-users_nfbnet.org

DID YOU KNOW ...

Tactile Books & Games – Ambron Products, from the Colorado Center for the Blind senior support groups, offers tactile stories, games, coloring books and other products (print and braille) at www.ambronproducts.com. Other contact info: Estelle Shukert, 2924 South Ingalls Way, Denver, CO 80227 303-789-7538, ambronproducts@gmail.com

Social Security Publications Updated – To find the most up-to-date info on Social Security programs, go to <https://www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs/>

“The Power of Love” – The e-book version of “The Power of Love: How Kenneth Jernigan Changed the World for the Blind” is now available from iUniverse, Amazon, googlebooks.com, barnesandnoble.com and other booksellers for \$9.99.

“Blind Ambition” – Ever Lee Hairston’s book “Blind Ambition: One Woman’s Journey to Greatness Despite Her Blindness” is available from Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

Vehicle Donations – The NFB continues to partner with Vehicles for Charity on a vehicle donation program. The total number of vehicles donated nationally is 742; NJ donations total 30. The vehicle donation program accepts cars, trucks, boats, motorcycles and recreational vehicles. Donations may be eligible for a tax deduction on the donor’s federal income tax return. The NFB receives an average of \$360 for each donated vehicle. For more information, visit nfb.org/vehicle-donation-materials. The NFBNJ Vehicle Donation Coordinator is Anthony Lanzilotti, 267-414-4010, tti777@gmail.com

Recycle your clothing, household items – The NFB has teamed up with GreenDrop to collect donations of clothing and household items. People living in Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, the District of Columbia, and Virginia can donate items through drop-off locations or by calling for a pick-up from their home or business. Funds raised support programs for blind STEM students, veterans and seniors, as well as the ongoing efforts to improve equality for the blind. For questions about collections, contact Alice Kallaugher at akallaugher@nfb.org or 410-659-9314, extension 2282. The NFBNJ Coordinator is Linda Deberardinis. Her phone number is 856 7647014 or ldeber@comcast.net.

Blind Veterans Programs – The National Federation of the Blind is reaching out to blind veterans across the country. If you know any blind veterans who you think would benefit from our programs, please contact Mrs. Patricia Maurer at pmaurer@nfb.org or 410-659-9314, extension 2287. The NFBNJ coordinator is Joe Ruffalo. His contact info is 973-743- 0075 or nfbnj1@verizon.net

**FROM THE KITCHEN OF THE NORTHERN CHAPTER:
CARROT RIBBON SALAD & HEALTHY SHEPARD'S PIE**

The Carrot Ribbon Salad recipe was submitted by Rebecca Bryant. Rebecca is the president of the Northern Chapter, a member of the affiliate board, a member in the Senior, Technology and Braille divisions and also the president of the Diabetic Division. She facilitates Braille lessons three times per week at the Newark Public library. The Shepard's Pie recipe was submitted by Solomon Bryant, also a member of the Northern Chapter and the husband of Rebecca. Both recipes are from the Healthy Options Class at the Vision Loss Alliance in Denville.

Carrot Ribbon Salad with Maple Balsamic Dressing

Salad Ingredients – Makes 1 Serving

3 carrots	a scallion, torn into small pieces
2 tablespoons raisins	2 tablespoons sunflower seeds

Dressing – Mix Together

1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar	1 tablespoon olive oil
2 tablespoons pure maple syrup	Pinch of salt and pepper
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard	

Peel carrots into ribbons using a vegetable peeler. Add the raisins and scallion. Pour dressing over all, and top with sunflower seeds.

HEALTHY SHEPARD'S PIE

Enjoy this healthy dish!

Ingredients – Makes 1 Serving

½ cup ground turkey, browned in a pan or microwave, or mushrooms for the vegetarians	1/4 cup canned tomato sauce
¼ cup frozen peas and carrots, thawed	1 tablespoon of fresh parsley
1 TBS Worcestershire sauce, or 1 tsp Worcestershire powder	1 tsp garlic powder
	1 tsp onion powder
	Dash of salt & pepper
	½ cup mashed sweet potatoes

Directions

1. Add all ingredients in a bowl – except the sweet potatoes – and mix with fork
2. Pour this mixture into the bottom of a small pie plate or casserole dish
3. Spread the mashed sweet potato over top
4. Bake in the oven at 400 degrees for 10-15 minutes, until warmed through

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Deadline for the Fall 2016 issue is Sept. 15, 2016.

CHECK US OUT ON THE WEB AT

www.nfbnj.org www.blindchildren.org

To receive *The Sounding Board* and other information via e-mail,
please contact Alice Eaddy at nfbnj.secretary@aol.com