**THE WHITE CANE BULLETIN**

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



## July - August 2016

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: July-August 2016**

**By James Kracht**

Another issue of the White Cane Bulletin is about to hit the stands, and once again, it’s time for me to update you – our members. This month, I will try to update all of you on FCB'S activities and let you know a little of what is ahead.

First and foremost, thanks to all the FCB convention attendees. They have again elected me to serve for another two-year term as your president. With pride and pleasure, I accepted the unanimous endorsement and will continue striving to do my best. It is an honor and a privilege to lead this wonderful organization. There is much work to do, but together, we will persevere and we will get it done.

The 63rd annual FCB convention was a rousing success. We had absolutely incredible vendor participation, including representation from our 3 top sponsors: ESS Voting Systems, Envision America, and Vanda Pharmaceuticals. There was plenty of activity in the exhibit hall. Every time I stopped by, people seemed to be smiling and spending.

Our kick-off Thursday night barbecue was a wonderful way to start the Convention. It was extremely well attended. The food and music were good, and everyone seemed to have a good time.

Special interest affiliate workshops and meetings on Friday went well. Debbie Grubb did a fantastic job with this year's legislative workshop and had a couple of very interesting guests to talk about relevant issues and the lobbying process. We ended the day with a very enjoyable awards banquet. The hotel did a great job with all of our meal functions. Congratulations to all of the deserving award recipients who gave us good reason to celebrate.

Saturday was a full day starting early for me with an Executive Committee breakfast at 6:30 a.m. The meetings, excellent workshops, and panels all went well. It concluded with our annual Saturday night banquet, which featured a tribute and farewell cake for our retiring Sally Benjamin. There was an excellent after-dinner presentation from ACB board member and second-year law student Sara Conrad who told her story. The evening concluded with music by John Richards and our annual raffle and silent auction. A great time was had by all.

Sunday started with another early-morning breakfast hosted by the Braille Revival League of Florida affiliate, which was extremely well attended. Our business meeting concluded with the re-election of me and my fabulous executive committee. Without them, I could never do the job I do. I am blessed to have a really stellar Executive Committee. Thank you all for your strong endorsement.

The success of our convention was in no way due to the efforts of one or two people. So many participated and worked hard to make it happen. Special thanks goes to Sally Benjamin, Mikey Wiseman, Wanda Stokley, Debbie Grubb, Barbara Brown, Paul Kurtz, John Richards, and my wife without whom I never would have made it through the week end. Thank you.

The retirement of Sally Benjamin after 11 years of service to FCB as our behind-th- scenes office administrator is a sad but happy occasion. We are happy for William and Sally as they start this new and exciting retirement phase of their lives. We send every good wish their way for good health and happiness. Sally's leaving is sad, of course, as she has been a behind-the-scenes giant, making sure that so many of FCB'S I's and T's were dotted and crossed. I am sure that with her retirement, we will even better appreciate how much she did for us in keeping the train on the tracks and smoothly moving forward. Our Convention banquet featured a stunning farewell cake. We almost had to serve it with soupspoons because of Sally's tears. We got her to calm down with continuous rousing applause, and hopefully we have sent her off to her retirement feeling good. Don't despair – Sally is not gone from FCB. She will continue serving FCB, working on the convention committee, helping with membership, and otherwise doing what she can.

After learning of Sally's proposed retirement, I appointed a selection committee. My thanks goes to Dan Spoone, Debbie Drylie, Cassandra Jessie, and Debbie Grubb who ably assisted me in soliciting applications, developing questions and methods for interviewing and selecting a candidate, reviewing resumes and writing samples, interviewing the applicants, and recommending the group’s choice to the Executive Committee. On Monday, June 6th, the Executive Committee selected longtime FCB member Kati Lear to be our new executive assistant. Kati comes to us after having retired from a long career with the Division of Blind Services. With her husband, Mark, she resides in Port Orange, Florida. She brings enthusiasm, eagerness, a commitment to dedication and integrity, and a very bubbly personality. I am really looking forward to her joining our team, and I hope that you will all welcome her with open arms and patience as she learns the ropes.

Recently, I signed a legal agreement with outside counsel and am pleased to report that we are moving forward with the long-promised structured negotiations with Publix. I appreciate everyone's patience and am hopeful that Publix will soon provide accessible prescription information to their patrons who are blind and have low vision.

Accessible currency has been a long time coming. Now, almost 10 years after ACB'S court victory against the U.S. Bureau of Engraving, the bureau is seeking another huge delay in delivering the first accessible currency. The delay is being sought under an alleged claim of security. ACB is striking back and vigorously objecting to this further pushback by the Department of Treasury. Eighteen years is just too long.

"Our motion to the judge who upheld the 2008 decision that the U.S. must make currency meaningfully accessible affirms our great displeasure that the Treasury is taking entirely too long to bring accessible currency online," said Eric Bridges, ACB's Executive Director. "When the court ruled in 2008 to uphold our right to equal access, the expectations were that it would take three to five years, not almost two decades."

At the end of July, I have been invited to attend a collaborative meeting with leaders from the Blinded Veterans, National Federation of the Blind of Florida, the Florida Council of the Blind, and Florida Association of Agencies Serving the Blind to develop strategies for dealing with another attempt to move the Division of Blind Services into a new home. The proposal would combine the delivery of blind services with other rehab programs and agencies, thus jeopardizing the needed strength, quality, and independence of blind services.

The continuation of these projects and the launching of new ones aimed at promoting the independence and quality of life for Florida's citizens who are blind or have low vision takes money. This is why your president and other FCB Walk Team members have been working so diligently over the last several months to raise money for the ACB Brenda Dillon Walkathon.

I am hopeful that those of us who can will either follow the link below or use the address to make-much needed contributions to our Florida Hurricanes team.

The walk team is the Florida Hurricanes.

[**http://acb.donorpages.com/2016ACBWalk/**](http://acb.donorpages.com/2016ACBWalk/)

If you prefer U.S. mail, you can make a check payable to “American Council of the Blind” and mail it directly to:

American Council of the Blind
ACB Walk, Florida Hurricanes
6300 Shingle Creek Parkway
Suite 195
Brooklyn Center, MN 55430

Next month, I will travel to Minneapolis to attend the American Council of the Blind Conference and Convention in order to promote our mission and to learn about new initiatives and needs. I again thank you for the privilege and opportunity to serve as your president. I look forward to our future work in addressing the needs of our community.

**2016 FCB Award Winners
By William Benjamin**

At this year’s convention, FCB’s Awards Committee was pleased and proud to have recognized a few valuable members and community advocates. The committee members were William Benjamin, Sheila Young, and Jason Goldfield. The committee would like to thank those people who took the time to nominate well-qualified individuals. The 2016 award recipients certainly embody the spirit of the Florida Council of the Blind. In addition, 10 chapter awards submitted by appreciative affiliates, three state awards – all named in honor of former leaders and advocates for independence of blind and visually impaired persons – as well as the special Presidential Award, were presented.

The Dolly Gamble Award was received by Paloma Rambana. The R. Henry P. Johnson was awarded to Kathy Millican. The Legislative Award was presented to Bill Cowles, the Orange County Supervisor of Elections.

President Jim Kracht presented his special President’s Award to Mikey Wiseman for his countless hours of dedication to FCB.

The new chair, Sheila Young, along with Jason Goldfield and Shelley Sawyer, will now accept award nominations for the 2017 state convention. Those well-deserving individuals will be honored at the 2017 state convention in Orlando. Remember, the deadline to nominate people who deserve recognition is March 1, 2017. If you know of and appreciate someone who has provided outstanding service to people who are blind, please nominate him or her so we all can recognize that person.

**2016 FCB 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 Larry Schneider of Orlando, Florida. The Teresa Blessing Scholarship was given to Lily Brooks Griffis of Mclenny, Florida. The Timothy Turpin scholarship was presented to Michael Jake Beausir of Palm Harbor, Florida. We were delighted that all of the recipients were able to attend the Awards and Scholarship dinner.

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

**Thank-You Letters From FCB Scholarship Winners
Compiled by Greg Lindberg**

Sheila Young and the scholarship committee received the following two letters from this year’s recipients:

Letter #1

Dear Sheila and scholarship committee members,

I am sincerely honored to have been selected as the recipient of the prestigious Gayle M. Krause-Edwards, $1,500.00 scholarship. I would like to thank you and the scholarship committee members for your generosity, which will allow me to complete my research and dissertational work by the end of December 2016. The completion of my Ph.D. will allow me to return to work in the Defense field.

I felt honored and moved upon receiving the Gayle M. Krause-Edwards scholarship at the 63rd FCB Convention. I believe President Jim Kracht and his executive members produced an excellent conference and one to always remember. Besides completing my degree and returning to work, there are two additional objectives that have surfaced from this important May 13th Awards Banquet. Firstly, I would like to commit myself to volunteer more time as a member. Secondly, I want to continue to help people with disabilities, especially the blind and the legally blind. I was inspired from talking with you and other committee members about giving back to the FCB community that has helped and taught me a lot about my disability and how to forge forward in a challenging world.

Thank you again for your warm presentation and generosity.

God bless,

Larry Schneider

Letter #2

Florida Council of the Blind,

I would like to thank the Florida Council of the Blind for awarding me the Teresa Blessing Scholarship at this year’s FCB convention. I plan on using the scholarship to go towards my college expenses. I’m a Master’s student in the Clinical Mental Health Counseling program at the University of North Florida. This scholarship will help relieve some of my financial responsibilities. This will also help me continue my education and strive for my ultimate goal of becoming a Mental Health Counselor so that I can help others. I would also like to thank all of the FCB members for making me feel so welcomed at the convention. It was a privilege to meet everyone and be accepted with open arms. I thoroughly enjoyed this wonderful experience. Once again, thank you!

Sincerely,

Lily Brooke Griffis

**Greater Orlando Council of the Blind Update
By Martha James**

GOCB has been very busy these last couple of months. Back in May, members of the chapter attended the annual FCB convention in Jacksonville. Larry Schneider, one of the chapter’s newer members, attended as a first-timer. He and his wife, Rita, were also delegates. Larry was impressed by the coordination and organization of the convention. He said that it goes to show how a group of people working together can get things done. We don’t mind passing the baton for a year, however, and are looking forward to next year’s convention, which we know will be great!

On June 6, we held our annual awards and scholarship luncheon at the Peach Valley Cafe with many members in attendance. The recipient of the 2016 chapter award is Gary Sinclair. The Community Service Award was presented to Bill Cowles, the supervisor of elections for Orange County. The scholarship went to Yamil Roma-Cortes.

GOCB will hold its next business meeting in September. However, we will get together over the summer socially. We have a pool party planned for August at the home of Gary Sinclair. Thanks once again, Gary, for opening up your lovely home to us.

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

**Sarasota Council of the Blind ­ May-June 2016 Update
By Karen Christie**

Our May meeting for the Sarasota Council of the Blind was held on Monday, May 9th at Denny's restaurant. This was our last business meeting of the season as, during the summer months, many of our members travel, and we instead hold non­business "Meet and Eat" luncheons at various local restaurants during this time. Council business meetings will resume in September.

The May meeting is always special because at this time, our yearly Council scholarship of $1,000 is presented to a deserving applicant. This year's recipient was, once again, Michael Griffin, a local young man who studies Information Technology at State College of Florida. Michael hopes to use his degree to help the visually impaired better access the technology available to them.

Our guest speaker for the May meeting was Dr. John Chait, a chiropractor in Sarasota. He discussed the importance of chiropractic health, including good posture and mobility. He and his assistant, Kelly, demonstrated their points using plastic models to give the visually impaired audience a tactile image of the topics he spoke about.

President Rick Wilkinson discussed the upcoming convention to be held in Jacksonville later in May. Several members will be attending the convention.

Our June "Meet and Eat" was held June 11th at Olive Garden. Being that this was a social luncheon, there are no business matters to report.

The Sarasota Council would like to wish everyone a safe and happy summer.

**2016 FCB Convention: A True Eye-Opener
By Greg Lindberg**

It may be ironic for me to describe the 2016 Florida Council of the Blind state convention as being “eye-opening,” but this adjective is truly fitting for my experience at the annual gathering of the most driven group of visually impaired people that the Sunshine State has to offer.

Being my first rodeo, I really had no idea what to expect at the convention. I had numerous conversations with my fellow Pinellas Council of the Blind members. I talked to President Jim Kracht and the amazing Sally Benjamin. I carefully reviewed the convention schedule. But I still had plenty of questions running through my mind: How many people will be there? Am I going to make any friends or professional connections? Is the information presented truly going to mean something to me? Will I avoid embarrassing myself by hitting a few too many people with my white cane or by accidentally stepping on a guide dog’s precious paws?

All of those questions – and many more – were answered with a resounding “yes.”

During my four days in Jacksonville, I made more connections than I ever imagined with some super talented and interesting people. Thanks to Sharon Youngs, I met some of the “founding fathers” – and mothers – of FCB. I got to talk about some of my passions with others, like beep baseball, technology, music, writing, and career advancement. I had a few unexpected chances to speak at the banquet on Friday night and the party on Saturday night. While I retired to bed early when I got home on Sunday evening, the exhaustion I felt was absolutely worth the lack of sleep.

The workshops I attended were extremely informative and helpful. I particularly enjoyed the employment session, which featured a panel of 5 business professionals who were either visually impaired or worked with others who are visually impaired. I thought Emily Michael, a writing professor at the University of North Florida, was the most engaging presenter. (But maybe that’s just because of the writing thing.) They each offered up valuable nuggets of insight and information about their own experiences applying and interviewing for jobs, dealing with challenges in the workplace, and the main message of why blind and visually impaired individuals must constantly advocate and educate the business world about how we can do the same things as anyone with 20/20 vision would – just in different ways and with some pretty sleek gadgets at our disposal.

As for the exhibit hall, I’ve told several people that it’s like a candy store for the low vision community. I could not believe how many vendors were there, the variety in the organizations and companies, and the amount of incredibly cool devices on display at each table. I could’ve easily walked out of there with 10 or 15 of the adaptive devices I saw, but I know my parents would not have been thrilled with such a shopping spree. Fortunately, I got lots of ideas on the types of devices I want. I came home with enough literature to help me research the various items so that I can make the best purchase decisions to meet my specific needs.

Even the Sunday morning board meeting was much more interesting than I expected. I loved getting a behind-the-scenes glimpse into FCB as an organization and in terms of how much money it brings in and spends. It really put things into perspective for me about FCB’s true footprint in both our state and nation.

Also, I can’t tell you how much I appreciated the assistance of the volunteers. I got to meet at least 7 or 8 of them, and they were all so helpful and friendly. I can’t forget to give Mikey Wiseman a shout-out, either. Mikey – you’re the man! I wish I could learn some of your tricks on how to make things happen. I can only hope that people with other disabilities are just as fortunate to experience gatherings like we are – and that they have people like Mikey and terrific volunteers willing to bend over backwards for them like we have.

To sum it all up, I was truly inspired by everything I experienced at the convention. I have never been exposed to such a large group of visually impaired people like that. But I learned very quickly how capable, gracious, and determined the members of FCB are. I can’t wait to catch my flight to Minneapolis for the national convention in July, and I look forward to many more state conventions in the years to come!

**As I See It
By Ellen Hillstrom**

I was given a white cane a few years ago to assist me with my low vision. I immediately put it in my closet, knowing my vision was not THAT bad. Besides, it would be extremely embarrassing if folks around Venice would see me, gossip about me, and feel sorry for me. They might say, "I knew her when she was healthy!"

Last December, I went on a cruise and decided that to be safer on a wavy ship, perhaps I should carry the white cane for balance. I thought nobody I know would be on that ship anyway. Plus, my doctor advised me that taking a fall could be very possible, and for my own safety, I should use the cane. I needed it every day. Upon my return home, the cane began to grow on me. In my neighborhood, it would not be too bad if a few people saw me with the cane, so I use it now for my daily, half-mile walks near the house. Last week, I even ventured out to a restaurant with friends and forgot to leave the cane at home. My driver told me to fold it up for my own safety while the car was in motion. No one at the restaurant paid any attention at all. When I confessed my anxiety to another friend, she answered sternly, "Ellen, get over it!" I am trying.

The Lighthouse of Manasota provides training in skills that promote self-sufficiency and independence in the lives of individuals who have vision loss. In early March, several of our members of the Venice Chapter of the Blind attended their open house where they announced the opening of its new store called "The Peepers." The public can now select items for the visually impaired, such as magnifiers, closed-circuit readers, sunglasses, computer accessories, and much more. The store is housed at the Lighthouse, located at 7318 North Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, Florida. Their phone number is 941-359-1404. They also have a monthly newsletter to which you may subscribe.

The Lighthouse has many services, including a book club, chair yoga, computer club, information workshops, and, of course, personal counseling. I will need counseling on the proper height and type of white cane that is best for me now that I have become friends with my loaner.

Our chapter received a $1500 grant from the Venice Lions Club, and we attended the awards dinner in April. It is amazing to see all of the volunteer work that one local club does by giving so much of their time and funds to assist other organizations. Thank you, Lions, thank you again. In fact, because of the generous grant, our members attended the state convention in Jacksonville, and two will attend the ACB national convention in Minneapolis.

Our own chapter is busy and thriving, although we are always looking for new members – visually impaired or sighted – who support our mission to strive for the betterment of the visually impaired and blind citizens in the Englewood, Venice, and North Port communities.

I will be celebrating my 82nd birthday on May 24 in Tuscaloosa, Alabama to visit with two sisters (and introduce them to my use of a white cane!).

Ellen Hillstrom is the current president of the Venice Chapter, Florida Council of the Blind. You may contact her at **Ellen91@comcast.net**.

**Around and Around the Roundabout: A Follow-Up
By William & Mary Ann Grignon, Southwest Florida Council of the Blind**

In the last issue of the White Cane Bulletin, we wrote about the intention of the Lee Metropolitan Planning Organization (LMPO) to install roundabouts at several intersections in Lee County. We also wrote that several members of the Southwest Florida Council of the Blind, along with FCB’s own Mike Ulrich, attended an LMPO hearing and expressed our concerns about the challenges and dangers that roundabouts pose to persons with vision loss. Since that publication, the LMPO and local officials have met and have voted to install two roundabouts to start – with more to come. Even more important to our concerns, local officials also voted to fund the installation of the HAWK pedestrian signal, plus audible components at both roundabouts.

After the first meeting, at which the international expert on roundabouts spoke and at which the assembled experts said they did not know whether the HAWK (High-intensity Activated crosswalk system) could be made audible for the benefit of pedestrians with vision loss, SWFCB members did some research. We found out that several municipalities around the country are using the HAWK system, along with audible components that make the roundabout more user-friendly for persons with vision loss (e.g., Washington D.C., Arlington, Virginia, Cambridge (Massachusetts, and Santa Rosa, California). Indeed, as far back as 2010, the Bureau of Highway Operations commissioned a report entitled, “HAWK Pedestrian Signals: A Survey of National Guidance, State Practice and Related Research,” which noted in relevant part the following:

“Some HAWK signals also provide visually impaired pedestrians with audible information when the walk signal is on.”

SOURCE: <http://nacto.org/.../hawk_ped_signals_a_survey_of_national_guidance_ctc.p>

SWFCB contacted the manufacturer of the HAWK system, LTEC-CORP, at 1-800-227-1734 and online at [**http://elteccorp.com/warning\_systems/hawk-hybrid-pedestrian-crosswalk/**](http://elteccorp.com/warning_systems/hawk-hybrid-pedestrian-crosswalk/)

They said that the HAWK can be made audible by using either: Campbell AGPS, [**http://www.pedsafety.com/**](http://www.pedsafety.com/), or the Polara XAV system, [**http://www.polara.com/**](http://www.polara.com/). LTEC-CORP also said that these audible units are tied into the HAWK and share the HAWK power supply, be it AC/DC or solar.

SWFCB then shared these results with the participants at the LMPO hearing.

On April 7, Mike Ulrich attended a Lee MPO Board meeting in Cape Coral, which was also attended by Lee County Commissioners Kiker, Mann, Manning, and Hammon; Mayors of Cape Coral, Bonita Springs, Fort Myers and Sanibel, City of Fort Myers Council members, and City of Cape Coral Council members, including the members of the MPO and the international roundabout expert.

At this meeting, the issues and concerns raised at the earlier LMPO meeting were restated for the benefit of the assembled politicians. A lively discussion ensued. Then under citizens’ input, Mike spoke on how well the MPO worked with the blind community “in coming up with a viable solution to the plight of the blind pedestrian as it relates to navigating a roundabout.” He gave “a big-time thumbs up” to pairing of technologies of the HAWK system and the Polara APS. He told the board, “I would not be afraid to use this system to help me safely navigate a roundabout.”

The earlier input from SWFCB members, the information provided by SWFCB, and Mike’s comments were well received, and a motion to fund two roundabouts, along with the HAWK and audible system for each, was made and passed unanimously.

This is just another example of how advocacy works.

**Talking Books in the Hospital: A New Chapter?**

**By Jeff Saunders**

Progress is measured in many ways!  Lee Memorial Hospital / Gulf Coast Medical Center will be the first Florida hospital system to invite Talking Books into its facility, expanding the horizon of patient care during extended stays and more.  The Hospital fully recognizes the benefits of this service in meeting patient needs, which is a major concern.  The Hospital’s customer service department will handle the operational aspects with support from a local Talking Book volunteer.  Future plans could include the entire Lee Memorial Hospital complex.

On a similar note, the Lee Memorial Healthy Life Center in Estero, Florida recently sponsored a Talking Books Seminar featuring a local Talking Books volunteer.  Approval was granted to incorporate Talking Books into any seminars offered at this location on the topics of eye care and aging to educate the local area’s growing communities.

There should be more to come as word spreads and disability turns into independence in Lee County, Florida with the power of Talking Books!

The author, Jeff Saunders, is a Library patron and member of the Friends of Library Access, Inc. If you would like to join in the effort to spread the word about Talking Books in your area, please call 386-239-6043.

Become a PR volunteer today!

**Politics: Who Wants It and Why Should We Care
By Doug Hall**

For months – perhaps years – we’ve been subjected to endless arguments and politically initiated behaviors that we wouldn’t accept from our children. Don’t worry – much of the current rhetoric should be gone in about six months. Of course, then we need to deal with the aftermath of the elections. We’re constantly hearing on TV, radio, newspapers, and even on our phones that we should support one candidate over another, or reject someone because he or she is trying to destroy our nation. Under the charges and countercharges, the maneuvering and posturing is a desire for power – political power to impose the ideas, opinions, and, yes, prejudices of the winning candidates.

Why should we care? What can and should we do about it? As for the first question, we’d better care. What if the winning people decided to limit Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid? What if the elected people decide to limit the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and other legislation and regulations surrounding disability rights?

What about access to healthcare? Candidates have spoken about the economy of the nation. What about our personal economy? Candidates and elected officials like to talk about the lack of jobs, but how about the fact that the jobless rate among people with disabilities is recognized as being about 70 percent – much higher than the national average. What are they going to do about that? These and many other concerns need to be addressed, but have you heard any of the candidates even mention the term “disability?”

As for the question of what we are going to do about it, I suggest that we get involved, both in influencing candidates by asking questions and exercising our responsibilities to vote. Our leaders and advocates in Florida have been working to enable all citizens to vote independently and in secrecy, and we’ve made much progress. We need to get out there and be seen as a force to be reckoned with.  I urge all of us to register to vote – and then be seen at the polls casting our wishes in the August primary and the November general election. Remember, the person who chooses not to vote is saying that he or she supports the ideas and policies of the candidate who wins.

**How Involved Are You?
By Doug Hall and Nancy Burgess-Hall**

Do any of the following reasons for not getting involved sound familiar?
I’m too busy and just don’t have the time right now. I’m busy with work, so I don’t have the time or energy to take on another task. Let someone else do it. I’m just one person, so what I think doesn’t matter. Officials won’t listen to me anyway. I already told someone once and nothing changed. I can’t do anything because I’m blind. Things are fine, so I don’t need any changes. Can you add to this list?

Well, these are all excuses for not being willing to be a responsible citizen!

Thank goodness that past advocates didn’t rely on these and other excuses to avoid being involved. If it weren’t for people who were willing to step out of their comfort zone, we wouldn’t have the NFB, the ACB, and all of their chapters and affiliates.

Where would we be today if advocates hadn’t pushed for passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Help America Vote Act, White Cane Laws, Service Animal Access Laws, and similar legislation and regulations?

Without HAVA, we’d still be dependent on the trustworthiness of sighted people to cast our votes for us. If people didn’t advocate for Federal and state legislation to protect the rights of people with disabilities, we could be denied access to housing, education, employment, and many other opportunities and services we have become accustomed to enjoying. Just think – if we aren’t aware of what is happening and aren’t involved in the decision-making process, we could lose some of the rights we have and may well not obtain important advantages in the future.

If you are reading this, I assume that you are somewhat involved by being a member of FCB and at least one of its chapters. How are you involved and what skills have you contributed to your own chapter (sunshine committee, telephone calls, bringing in new members, participating in advocacy activities)?

Now that you have heard the importance of active participation, consider these actions when choosing to become more involved: Listen, watch, and read about local, state, and national issues that may impact your life and others with disabilities. Listen to what politicians are saying and doing. Attend community meetings regarding transportation issues (bus service, sidewalks, pedestrian safety, etc.). Call and/or write your opinions about issues to officials, political representatives, and local newspapers. Offer specific, constructive suggestions. Register to vote and do remember to vote!

**Why the Get In The Game Challenge?
By Mary Ann Grignon**

I have been an advocate for many years and will continue to advocate until I am unable to do so. I have spent a lot of time considering what my life would be like if there weren’t dedicated, strong, and persistent advocates before me – in fact, those from many years before my time.

Below is the text of one of the very first speeches I ever gave as an advocate for the council of the blind, which I believe most aptly explains the reason for the challenge.

Real and meaningful change doesn’t happen without lots of people working very hard advocating for change, and it doesn’t happen overnight.

Prior to World War 1, people with disabilities were marginalized, shunned as cursed, treated like freaks, sterilized, and committed to asylums

It wasn’t until the end of World War 1 that the government began to take the rights of persons with disabilities seriously. From there, it would take more than 50 years, including violent pro-disability riots in the 1930s until the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 would be passed. It was another 17 years during which the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was nearly overturned by President Reagan before the ADA would be signed by President Bush in 1990. The struggle didn’t end there. Instead, we would be challenged by 20 years of misinterpretation and misapplication of the law before it would be amended.

Regarding service animals, The struggle to regulate the training of service animals began after World War 1, and it took 30 years, the voices of many blinded veterans, and many charitable organizations on two continents, and then it took 40 more years before the Air Carrier Access Act of 1986 and the Fair Housing Act of 1988 would be passed to insure the rights of service animals and those they serve.

It seems that the wheels of Congress have always moved slowly. It took 65 years from the time that Louis Braille unveiled his alphabet in 1824 until Congress voted in favor of funds to produce embossed Braille books for the blind in 1889.

Okay then, how many of you have heard this phrase: “By public law 89-522?”

If you read talking books, then you have heard that phrase at the conclusion of each and every book you’ve ever read. The question is, did you know that it took over 35 years from the time that Congress created library services until 89-522 was signed, providing free reading material for the physically handicapped?

Of most recent noteworthiness, between the conceptualization of audio description in 1974 and our current legislation, there are 36 years of advocacy, including the 2000 FCC rules mandating audio description for television, rules which were then overturned by the courts in 2002, prompting ACB’s long fight thereafter for the law we now know as the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act. This law was signed by President Obama in 2010.

But advocacy is not just marching on Washington, testifying before Congress, or launching international campaigns. It is mainly comprised of many people doing many small incremental actions over many years. And the Get In The Game Challenge was designed to get you to think about advocacy as a cumulative group of actions, each of which is not hard or scary, but all of which add up to real societal and personal changes.

While just over 30 percent of FCB chapters and affiliates participated in this year's challenge, of the 8 entities that participated, most did all 15 challenges. Participation ranged from 12.7 percent to 72.9 percent. The three top chapters were the Southwest Florida Council of the Blind, the Greater Orlando Council of the Blind, and the Jacksonville Council of the Blind. A special mention should go to the Miami Beach Council of the Blind, which, while not making the top 3, showed tremendous enthusiasm and expressed a newfound understanding of and appreciation for advocacy – exactly the kind of breakthrough and encouragement the challenge was designed to elicit.

I have presented you with a look into the past and a glimpse into today's FCB so that you might decide where you’d like to stand in the future. Will you be a malcontented, complaining individual, or will you be an enlightened advocate? Will you let others fight the fight, or will you stand with your peers and colleagues to fight for your rights? Finally, will you be the one to look back and wonder how it all happened, or will you be someone who says, “I helped!”?

There is much to be done, and each of us can help in the doing.

**Poetry Corner
By Shelley Sawyer**

Greetings to the reader. The selection for this issue is one that I memorized in high school. That was a long time ago, and I really did not think I would find it when I went searching. I was poetry hunting, trying to decide what would work. I had no idea who had written the poem. I typed in a line or two and, wow – there it was. (Isn’t technology wonderful)? Not only did I find this little inspirational poem, but I also learned that there is some controversy about who actually wrote it. I found the same poem credited to two authors. I figuratively flipped a coin and chose the one below. Enjoy…

Don’t Quit
By Alice Enzie Zimmerman?
Written in 1948

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,
when the road you’re trudging seems all uphill,
when funds are low and the debts are high,
and you want to smile but you have to sigh,
when care is pressing you down a bit,
rest if you must, but don’t you quit.
Life is queer with its twists and turns,
as every one of us sometimes learns,
and many a failure turns about
when we might have won had we stuck it out.
Don’t give up though the pace seems slow,
you may succeed with another blow.

Often the goal is nearer than
it seems to a faltering man.
Often the struggler has given up
when he might have captured the winner’s cup.
and he learned too late when the night slipped down
how close he was to the golden crown.

Success is failure turned inside out,
the silver lining in the clouds of doubt
and you can never tell how close you are –
it may be near when it seems afar.
So stick to the fight when you’re hardest hit,
it’s when things seem worst that you mustn’t quit.

For we know the Father above looks down,
He sees our struggles and holds the crown.
He knows the way though it’s rough and drear,
He will give strength so we need not fear.
He offers to you the refreshing cup
of the water of life; then in faith look up.
continue on ‘til the crown is won
which he will give when our work is done!

**Ida Schwerzel: A Century of Memories
By Greg Lindberg**

Let’s take a trip back in time. It was the spring of 1916. Woodrow Wilson was in the White House. Just over 100 million people made up the population of the United States. It was nearly one year before the U.S. joined its allies in World War I.

On the final day in May that year, Ida Restaino Schwerzel was born in Astoria on Long Island, New York. She was delivered at home by a mid-wife, who was friends with her mother. She says she was her mother’s “miracle child.”

“I was probably premature, although they didn’t really know about all that at the time,” she says. “From birth, I was on oxygen and medication. They even gave me B12 shots. They did not expect me to live. But now at 100, I feel better than ever. My mother always gave me an extra hug on my birthday and was amazed that I could keep going. If I ever took a vacation, we’d always look for the nearest hospital in case I needed medical attention.”

Schwerzel had four siblings, and her mother raised all five children due to her father’s abusive personality.

“My mother was like the Rock of Gibraltar,” she says. “She could do absolutely anything. But the neighbors around us were very unaccepting of our mother because she was separated from our father. That was frowned upon much more back then.”

Her mother, Amalia, was just 17 years old when she came to the United States from her hometown of Naples, Italy in the early 1900s. Amalia would later sponsor her only sister, Adelina, to become a U.S. citizen.

“In those days, you put yourself on ‘the list’ to come to the U.S. You had to have a sponsor who was often a complete stranger. Many people could not speak English when they moved here.”

Schwerzel’s grandmother had severe asthma, which she believes she inherited from her. She has struggled with breathing problems her entire life.

“My mother put two chairs together and laid a mattress across them. She put all of my medications, paper, and pencils on them so that everything I needed was in one place. I missed a lot of school when I was young. I had to bring a clumsy oxygen tank to school and give it to the school nurse. When I had a breathing attack, the teacher took me to see the nurse. Kids would huff and puff while laughing at me as I had trouble breathing, which goes to show that some kids have always been mean. I attended PS 83 School in Astoria, New York.”

Schwerzel says it was a different world when she was growing up.

“When I was young, life was simple and trusting. The screen door on our house had just a little latch. It was such a different time.”

She has one surviving sister, Gilda Ebel, who is 92. Her eldest sister was Amelia Virga, who was 11 years older than her. She also had two brothers, Mario and Julio.

“I went to Lawrence High School for two years. There was Browns Business School where you could receive training to become a secretary. You had to pay the tuition two months in advance. My mom signed me up to go there for one month, but I wanted to be a seamstress, so I dropped out. My mother could take a rag and make something beautiful, so I really learned these skills and became a seamstress myself.”

The next chapter of her life would bring some big surprises that would impact her forever.

“I went on to work at Lord and Taylor where I made girdles and bras and did lots of alterations. I met so many famous people there. I actually got to shake Eleanor Roosevelt’s hand when she was First Lady. She took the elevator up to our store, and she had several Secret Service men with her. All of the employees were lined up on either side of the aisle. She shook everyone’s hand and had a pleasant word for everyone. When she shook the store manager’s hand, he whispered something to her, and she started laughing hysterically. I was so eager to find out what he said and asked around if anyone knew what he told her, but he said it would always be a secret. I also met Dorothy Lamour, Eleanor Powell, and June Allyson. The store was on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, so all of the big names shopped there.”

She and her husband, Harold, were married for 60 years. The two first met when both worked at Lord and Taylor.

“I was a corsetiere and started working there when I was about 17 or 18,” she recalls. “My future husband was a stock boy. He’d always wait for me at the employee exit. He kept bugging me to go out on a date, so I finally gave in. On our first date, he told me we were going to get married. I thought he was nuts, but we eventually did, and it’s incredible we stayed together for all those years.”

Harold was a year-and-a-half younger than his better half. He served in the U.S. Army for over four years, including stints at the Battle of the Bulge, the Battle of Normandy, and the Battle at Patton’s Run. These deployments were during World War II.

In 1942, Harold was stationed at Fort Benning, Georgia. Ida took a bus to Columbus, Georgia to meet him there. This is where they would tie the knot.

“I sent a wire to him saying I was on my way,” she recalls. “He bought socks and cigarettes with the little money he had, so I wound up paying for the wedding ring, the hotel, and the Justice of the Peace to marry us at the courthouse. We stayed at the Ralston Hotel in Columbus for $10 a night. My mother was not too happy about all of this since her other children had traditional church weddings.”

She recalls some early forms of technology to which she was exposed.

“When I was younger, I went to the World’s Fair in Flushing, New York. They had an exhibit that showed how overpasses would be built and how they’d work all over our country. They called them ‘highways of the sky,’ and everyone thought it was more like a pie-in-the-sky idea. Also, when one of our neighbors got a TV for the first time, everyone in the neighborhood would go over to his house and crowd around this little box that you could hardly see. That poor man, who was actually very wealthy, wished he had never opened his doors.”

Upon learning they had a child on the way, Schwerzel’s doctor sent a telegram to her husband who was at Fort Sutton so that he would come to New York for Ida’s pregnancy.

“The doctor told my husband to get me out of New York because I wouldn’t be able to deliver my baby due to my health. He even mentioned an abortion. I wound up getting put on strict bed rest for six months and had to eat very lightly. I finally delivered the baby, but his face was so messed up because of how he came out. He also had one weak eye. We were in the hospital for two weeks. He finally started looking better physically. His name was Brian. He went on to serve in the Navy and worked as an airplane mechanic. He died at 59 from a heart attack.”

She also has a daughter, Linda Nicodemus, who is married to Bruce.

“My son-in-law is a prince,” she enthuses of Bruce.

At one point, Schwerzel lived in Belton, Texas right after her son was born and while her husband was stationed at Fort Hood.

“It cost me $10 a week to live in a country house in Texas. The woman who owned it knew I had a baby. She said I could only live there if my baby was quiet. I said he wouldn’t make a sound, but he hollered and cried most of the time. There was no running water, no indoor plumbing, and no use of the refrigerator. I was there for three months. I had to mainly eat peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. I had to use evaporated milk with water. I had to use an outhouse, and I had to fill up a pan with water from the outhouse to get any water there. I had to wash my son’s clothes on a table with a galvanized pale. This woman wanted me out and made things so difficult for me.”

After Texas, Schwerzel moved back to Long Island where her mother was hosting a full house of young mothers and their young children in the family while their husbands were in the service.

Her mother was a wonderful cook, and one of their neighbors thought she should open up an Italian restaurant. She made lasagna, minestrone, and eggplant parmesan. She even made dough herself. She worked in stores when they sold handmade clothing that they made in-house. She worked in a bridal shop where she made bridal gowns for weddings. She also had a beautiful voice and could sing like no other. There were times she’d have one of her babies on one leg and was sewing something on her other leg. “She was truly an amazing woman.”

Harold was German and was born in New York. After his military service, he had many nightmares.

“He would be deep in thought and reliving some of his experiences in the war,” she recalls. “He never wanted to get help because he thought he had to handle all of this by himself. My oldest brother later taught him to be a plumber, which he did for a long time.”

The Schwerzels moved to Florida in July of 1962 after her doctor recommended the climate would be better for her asthma. This is a doctor who had known her since she was a little girl.

“Before I left New York, Dr. Johnson hugged me and said, ‘Ida, if you ever need me, have your family call me, and we’ll get you on a plane to New York.’”

She and her family moved to Pasadena in Pinellas County near St. Petersburg. Her daughter was not very thrilled with the decision as she was about 11 years old at the time.

“When we made it to Florida, I took my daughter to Webb’s City, which was an early version of a shopping plaza on Central Avenue in downtown St. Petersburg. The area was known for its green benches where people would sit and talk. We got on a bus that was loaded with gray-haired people. She couldn’t sit and had to stand in the middle of the bus. Then she proceeded to yell out, ‘Mom, you brought me to Florida where old people come to die!’ I was so embarrassed, but everyone started cracking up on the bus.”

Her daughter did enjoy going to the beach, though. She wound up working for Verizon and retired in 2016 at age 65.

The Schwerzels lived in Pasadena for five years. They spotted a small sign for another house while driving on Bayshore Drive.

“We looked at it since it was right on the water. We paid $17,000 for that house and lived there for 21 years. It’s probably worth close to a half-million dollars now”

She recalls that her mother and grandmother had their doubts that Ida was actually residing in the Sunshine State after spending so many years of her life in New York.

“My mom and grandma never believed I had moved to Florida. They finally took a train to St. Petersburg, and when they showed up on our doorstep, they couldn’t believe it was true.”

The couple then moved to Clearwater around 1990 and moved into their current home nearby in 1994. A sign in front of the home says, “Welcome to the Schwerzels…established 1994.” Her daughter and son-in-law reside next door to her.

In terms of hobbies, Schwerzel likes spending time outdoors.

“I love gardening and doing things outside. At 95, I was still getting on the roof to clean the leaves off. Even now, I still go out and check up on the plants I have to make sure they look healthy.”

She enjoys watching Law & Order, America’s Got Talent, Bay News 9, and The Weather Channel. She admits to never owning a cell phone and never using a computer.

She also enjoys going to Pinecrest Community Center, a senior living community near her home in Clearwater.

“I’ve been going there for several years to listen to a man named Bill Clark play the piano. I also know some of the people who live there. About three years ago, I was approached by a woman who asked me, ‘Do you live here?’ I told her I did not, and she said I would not be able to come anymore. So, I wrote a letter to Bill explaining what happened. Would you believe he made up a special card for me that says, ‘Ida Schwerzel is allowed to be here.’”

She had to give up driving around age 87. She had a simple procedure done to remove the cataract in her left eye, but something went wrong, and she wound up going blind in that eye. She also has macular degeneration in her right eye.

“I had to give up my license because I knew it just wasn’t safe for me to be driving,” she admits. “Giving that up felt like losing my arm, but I just couldn’t handle it.”

Schwerzel joined the Pinellas Council of the Blind around age 88. She had been attending the Watson Center to receive vision rehabilitation, which is now called the Lighthouse of Pinellas. She took several classes, including creative writing and yoga. Someone there referred her to the PCB. By all accounts, she is the oldest member of all chapters within the Florida Council of the Blind and may have that same designation within the entire American Council of the Blind.

Schwerzel has a white cane but prefers to use her walker for balance support. She attempted to learn Braille, but when she got frustrated with not being able to feel all of the marks, she told her doctor, “This stinks. After that, he told me I didn’t need to fool with it anymore. Fortunately, I get along pretty well with the vision in my right eye. I have a talking clock in my house”

She enjoys attending every monthly meeting of the PCB.

“I have made several friends in the Pinellas Council of the Blind,” she says. “Lucille Gradel and Eugene Batke are two of my favorite people.”

Asked what has given her longevity, she says it’s all about mindset.

“There is no secret to living a long life. To me, attitude means everything. You can survive a lot of things. As humans, we are all stronger than we think we are. Once you’re put to the test, you realize this, but you won’t understand this until you’re tested.”

Along with her daughter and son-in-law next to her, she also has neighbors who’ve been extremely helpful to her.

“I am surrounded by so many people who are wonderful and supportive,” she glows.

Her husband, Harold, died of prostate cancer at about 85.

“His doctor took each of our hands and gave us the news. He was in tears, and so were we. My husband only had common colds and a tonsillectomy in his lifetime, but this cancer came on strong.”

When asked about the secret to her 60-year marriage with Harold, she offers some very sensible advice.

“You have to love each other and be tolerant,” she says. “There are times you might want to kill your spouse for something they said or did, but love always wins. Never go to sleep angry with each other. Harold and I would always kiss, say good-night, and then laugh.”

Thanks to her lifelong consumption of much more oxygen than the average person, she thinks oxygen has been a miracle treatment for her.

“People should take some oxygen every few months. I think oxygen can truly do wonders for everyone’s health. I think it’s why I am still here today.”

Schwerzel has lived through 17 presidents in her lifetime. When asked about the unprecedented drama of the 2016 presidential race, she does not hesitate to share her opinion.

“I think Donald Trump will make it. He’s just so different, and he sure has the mouthpiece.”

She has five grandchildren, three great-grandchildren, and two great-great-grandchildren.

“It’s a lot to keep track of,” she says with a laugh.

On reaching the century mark in age, Schwerzel jokes that it’s no big deal.

“It’s another year, another number,” she says with a smile. “I hate the word ‘old.’ I like the word ‘older’ better.”

Like all centenarians, she received a card from the White House that was signed by both Barack and Michelle Obama.

“They probably send out thousands of these cards every year now,” she says.

Her mother lived to 85 years old and passed away from throat cancer. She had a nephew who died of throat cancer, a brother who died of tongue cancer, a sister with breast cancer, and a cousin with pancreatic cancer. Of course, Harold was also in the same group.

“I told everyone not to bring me any gifts for my 100th birthday. Instead, I want everyone to make a donation to either cancer research or Hospice.”

Her family threw a big party for her with nearly 40 family members in attendance, many of whom flew in from all over the country.

She sums up her past, present, and future with one quote that truly defines her.

“I am a ball of fire, and I have no plans to let that ball stop rolling!”

**Q&A: New FCB Executive Assistant Kati Lear
By Greg Lindberg**

I’d like to extend a warm welcome to the new executive assistant for FCB, Kati Lear! I had the chance to get to know her a little better through this Q&A:

Q: What is your full name?
A: Kathryn “Kati” Ottman Lear

Q: Where were you born?
A: Cleveland, Ohio

Q: Where do you currently live?
A: Port Orange, FL

Q: Tell me about your family.
A: My husband, Mark, and I will be married 35 years on July 4. He has partial vision.

Q: What are your hobbies?
A: I enjoy reading, swimming, walking, visiting with friends, bowling, eating, and anything else that sounds like fun.

Q: What is your visual impairment?
A: I am totally blind. I have a twin brother, Kurt Ottman, and we were born two months and a week premature. I am currently working with my fifth guide dog, Cameron. All of my dogs have been from Southeastern Guide Dogs.

Q: How did you get involved in FCB?
A: My husband, Mark, and I have been members of the Halifax Council of the Blind for a long time – about 25 years. I have not been an officer, but Mark has been our chapter’s treasurer since 2008.

Q: What are your goals as the incoming FCB executive assistant?
A: My goals are to provide FCB with good service as an Administrative Assistant by providing answers to asked questions, while completing the tasks given to me by our president, Jim Kracht.

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**Handy Telephone Number References**

Project Insight: (800) 267-4448

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

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

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

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

ACB Legislative Hotline: (800) 424-8666

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

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

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

 Press 00 and speak with your long distance carrier,

 or Florida only: (800)982-2891

BellSouth Disability Services: (800)982-2891

 (From anywhere)

Social Security: (800) 772-1213

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- THE END-

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