

THE FEDERATIONIST

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NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND OF CONNECTICUT

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From the Editor

Maryanne Melley

Executive Editor, The Federationist

First I must tip my hat to Kathryn Webster who was the previous Executive Editor of The Federationist. Compiling articles, editing them and putting everything together is no easy task. Kathryn did all this with profound professionalism and I have big boots to fill. In the Fall/Winter 2017 addition there seven articles ranging from The Washington Seminar to an opinion piece from Al Daniels. I have tried to make this issue interesting with different topics that people will find both useful and enjoyable. I will accept positive input as to how I can improve at my job. More articles from my colleagues in the NFB of CT are always welcome. What you send me is important to our entire affiliate. I could use more pieces that speak to things that directly affect the blind such as legislative developments, any conflicts you may be experiencing regarding lack of access being with a guide dog or ATM's, kiosks, bus, taxi or Uber and Lift drivers etc. I want to hear your story and so does the affiliate. I look forward to your thoughts on this issue. I will get the Spring/Summer issue out in a timelier manner.

Thank you for your patience,

Maryanne Melley

The Washington Seminar in Review-An Excerpt

From The Braille Monitor Vol. 61 No. 3 March 2018

By: Gary Wunder

Focus is defined as the state or quality of having or producing clear visual definition, e.g., his face is out of focus; the point at which an object must be situated with respect to a lens in order for an image of it to be well defined; a device on a lens that can be adjusted to produce a clear image; to focus a telescope; a person or their eyes; adapt to the prevailing level of light and become able to see clearly. But for all the references on focus that relate to vision, focus was the heart and soul of the 2018 Washington Seminar, and it had nothing to do with sight or cameras or telescopes. It had everything to do with a laser-like focus or concentration on improving the lives of blind people. It had everything to do with not being distracted by the divisive issues that seem to divide the country and everything to do with finding common ground, being bipartisan, and dealing head-on with the issues that affect all of us regardless of our political ideologies and the labels that might be attached to us. The most important label we displayed with pride-the one that identified us as members of the National Federation of the Blind.

The National Organization of Parents of Blind Children started early by hosting its own two-day seminar, and as a parent I met at the elevator said, "This seminar was wonderful for us. It came at just the right time, gave us lots of information, and has convinced us that there are opportunities for our child we didn't dare to dream possible. We are so grateful." What more could an organization ask of a division responsible for creating a magazine called Future Reflections which is dedicated to bringing such hope and comfort to parents of blind children and such opportunity to blind people themselves.

But we had more than parents who wanted to meet to discuss issues in-depth. One was the National Federation of the Blind Merchants Division, and there was much for them to discuss. What once was a program that offered a small corner in a federal or state building was transformed in 1974, and blind merchants today have business locations that private vendors would love to occupy. When big corporations come to Washington to tell Congress that these facilities should be assigned to them rather than the blind, the blind have something to say about that.

We demand our right to be a part of the free enterprise system, not just as women and men employed by someone else but as managers who oversee lucrative businesses who are the job creators of our nation and who provide a quality service that is as fine as any big business can supply. A more detailed report of the division's meeting can be found later in this issue.

Our meeting in Washington has for a long time been the midwinter meeting of our National Association of Blind Students, and the room for that meeting was jam-packed. A report of this meeting is found elsewhere in this issue.

On Monday afternoon many who planned to go to Capitol Hill met with members of our legislative team to become familiar with the intricacies of the legislation we would discuss with those on Capitol Hill and to hear some dos and don'ts when dealing with the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate. The issues we were briefed on are covered in the fact sheets that appear elsewhere in this issue, but what is so special about the early afternoon meeting is the tips we are given: Start by defining the problem. If this is an issue we have covered several times and the member or his staff already knows about it, go lighter on the problem, stress the need for its resolution, and reserve more time for new issues. Don't forget to say thank you for past support. At the end of the presentation, don't forget to make the ultimate ask-will you cosponsor this legislation? If the answer is clearly no, move on. If the answer is clearly yes, move on. If more information is likely to determine the outcome, make sure you understand what is needed, find the answers, and do the follow-up to ensure that this information gets back to the Congressman's office.

When the gavel fell at 5 PM to signal the beginning of the Great Gathering-In Meeting, President Riccobono inspired the group with these remarks which set not only the tone of the evening but the tone of the four-day event:

"Some have been wondering what that sound is in Washington, DC. No, it's not the sound of the government gearing back up after a shutdown. No, it's not the sound of social media being blown up with fake news. And it is certainly not the sound of uncertainty, confusion, doubt, or despair. Those who are in the know recognize that what they hear in Washington is the heartbeat of the blind of the nation.

We have come with hope and confidence to speak for ourselves, to lead the way with authenticity, to call upon our elected leaders in Congress and urge them to join us in achieving security, equality, and opportunity and to answer the question, who are we?" The crowd responds with "NFB." "But really, who are we? We are The National Federation of the Blind." The crowd now responds with "National Federation of the Blind, National Federation of the Blind, National Federation of the Blind," and it does so each time the President and later presenters pause and prepare to say the name of our organization. President Riccobono continues:

We are the only organization that believes in the full capacity of blind people. We are the National Federation of the Blind. We have the power, influence, diversity, and determination. We are the National Federation of the Blind. We value collective action, democracy, respectful participation, courage, and love. We are the National Federation of the Blind. We are filled with hope, energy, and love by participating in our movement because our expectations are raised, and our contributions make a difference to us and to others. We are the members of the National Federation of the Blind.

It is up to us to make sure that the government does not create artificial barriers between blind people and our dreams. The Social Security Administration provides benefits to blind people that are a critical safety net while receiving rehabilitation training and while seeking and securing employment. We are invited to come to local SSA offices to meet with personnel of the agency about our benefits, but we are required to check in using touchscreen kiosks. We value full participation, but the Social Security Administration has implemented inaccessible visitor intake processing using touchscreen kiosks that require blind people to provide private information, including their Social Security number, to the sighted person who just happens to be nearby. We are not willing to be second-class citizens. We have asked the government for equal access, and they have dragged their feet. We have dragged them into court because we are the National Federation of the Blind.

We seek to enjoy opportunities like all other Americans. In addition to work and school, we like to grab a meal out and maybe a movie now and then. Apparently it is not just the government that is fascinated with the use of kiosks. They also appear on our restaurant tables and in our grocery stores.

Late last year we settled with E la Carte and Applebee's to incorporate text-to-speech capabilities into all current and future PrestoPrime touch tablets across the nation.

In November we resolved a class-action suit with Redbox which will result in Redbox outfitting its kiosks with tactile keyboards, headphone jacks, and text-to-speech capabilities. When Redbox is done, blind people who live in areas that are served by Redbox should never be more than a five-minute-drive from an accessible Redbox kiosk where you can pick up the latest movies offered by the company. We will monitor Redbox to make sure they get it right because we are the National Federation of the Blind.

We want to work, but we are often denied equal access to information about available jobs. Working with us, Monster has renewed its commitment to accessibility and has agreed to make all of its employment job ads available through monster.com and monster-branded applications fully and equally accessible by next December. Monster will also collaborate with us on ways that it can educate employers and promote the benefits of employees who are blind in real jobs. We want to work in integrated, competitive employment. We are the National Federation of the Blind.

We want our blind children to get the best education they can. Some school districts hold our blind students down. In Iowa a local school district had failed to educate a blind student to such a degree that he was poised to transition out of high school without the ability to read Braille or use screen-access software. We will not allow educators to fail another generation of blind students. If they will not teach them, we will advocate for them and teach them ourselves. That is what we did in this case, and today this high school student is receiving training to make up for the years of insufficient services he received in Iowa. The training is being conducted by BLIND, Inc. in Minnesota. BLIND, Inc. is a training center operated under the philosophy of the National Federation of the Blind.

We come to Washington, DC, to let our elected officials know that we intend to give them advice and vote to determine whether they will return next year. Some states believe that we need not enjoy the full range of voting opportunities afforded to sighted Americans. We know what equality means, and we have the power and determination to get it when it is not granted.

Earlier this month the office of Ohio's Secretary of State changed its mind about access to voting for the blind. All Ohio counties were ordered to implement an accessible absentee ballot-marking tool in time for the November 2018 election. We helped them change their mind, and we are the National Federation of the Blind.

If you have not yet met us, you can be certain you will. Whether you are a museum creating a significant historical exhibit of our time, a manufacturer of vehicles that require no driver, an airline that insists on burdensome notifications before we can board, or an antiquated professional organization trying to ride a dead horse to accreditation, you will soon know that we are the National Federation of the Blind-we are the National Federation of the Blind-we are the National Federation of the Blind.

We come with our dreams and our legislative proposals. We have not asked that the proposals be written for us. We have crafted the solutions and have come to get them enacted. We speak with a unified voice built on the authentic individual experience of thousands. We have gathered together to transform our dreams into reality. We have come to live the lives we want.”

Fake Service Dogs, a Real Problem

By C. D. Watson

The relationship between a service dog and his companion-his partner-is one of mutual respect, trusty honor, faith and complete love. Service dogs can become the eyes, ears, arms or legs to a person in need. They lead, guide and protect. They improve the quality of life for so many individuals with differing physical and mental challenges. One partner of a service dog says “I entrust my life to my dog-he has never failed me!”

In 1990 American with Disabilities Act (ADA) established the law that provides access to public places for service dogs, areas that are typically prohibited to pets. The Department of Justice allows businesses to ask only two questions of individuals with service dogs:

Is the dog needed because of a disability?

What task is the dog trained to perform to mitigate the disability?

Service Dog Cheats

Business owners are complaining of a recent increase in the number of people “faking” the status of their pets as service dogs to gain access to areas otherwise off limits. Hotels, restaurants, trains and airplanes are all targets. For example, it is a widely accepted routine for top show dogs to fly from competition to competition in the passenger cabin of airplanes as “service” dogs.

I listened to a woman bragging at a recent dinner party about how she takes her Jack Russell terrier everywhere because she printed a “service animal” certificate from the internet. She can stay at hotels without paying the pet fee. “No one dares ask about him,” she said with a laugh. Another woman contends that her Border collie by his appearance and nice behavior create a better public perception of service dogs. She is breaking the law

Service dogs are not show pieces. They do not work to look good or entertain the public. They are not walking canine advertisements. Service dogs are working animals. Dogs whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support do not qualify as service animals under the ADA. To falsify the qualifications of a service dog is a criminal offense.

While an identification protocol is controversial, it may be the only system that business at risk and individuals deserving ADA protection can be mutually safe-guarded. The liability to a business challenging the identity of a dog is huge. Falsely accusing a valid service dog can result in lawsuits. On the other hand, allowing access to a dog that isn’t a trained service dog is in danger if that animal later causes damage to property or to a person.

What is the harm in posing pets as service dogs? The biggest backlash is creating public resentment of real service dogs. One act of disobedience, one minute of misbehavior, one unfortunate attack from a faker can create a lifetime of public suspicion, mistrust and tension. Handicapped individuals, who depend on their service dogs, and the animals themselves, do not deserve the added stigma.

Paul Duquette & Trantolo/Trantolo Technology Fund

By: Cheri Duquette

The 3rd Annual Fishing for a Harley Tournament is around the corner. The NFB of CT has been very fortunate in having the law offices of Trantolo and Trantolo sponsor a Fishing Tournament with all proceeds benefiting us.

The tournament takes place at Sun Valley Beach Resort in Stafford Springs, CT, and should be sometime in the spring. The top prize is a new Harley Davidson motorcycle. The pond will be stocked with fish, tagged for different prizes, along with the grand prize of the motorcycle. Yes, last year someone did win the motorcycle!!

Flyers and more information will be forthcoming and I cannot urge you all enough to help get the word out. We made approximately \$3,000 last year and our goal is higher for this year. Once a date has been established flyers will be available to be distributed. I asked that each one of our members work diligently in getting the word out to the public, posting flyers, and letting your family & friends know about it. All participants are welcome, entry fee is expected to be \$10.00 per participant, participants will need to bring their own fishing pole (one rod per person) and are welcome to bring their own bait or purchase it at the event.

I cannot emphasize the importance of this fundraising event, especially since funding for the Cocomo Grant will no longer be available to us. All funds received will go into the Paul Duquette & Trantolo/Trantolo Technology Fund and will be used to assist Connecticut NFB members with purchasing needed technology.

QR Reader, an iPhone App

By: Debbie Reed

Today I had the amazing experience of using a free QR code reader that I downloaded on my iOS device. CRIS Access has collaborated with the New Britain Museum of American Art to make art accessible to blind and visually impaired persons. I was amazed at how easy it was to hold my device in front of the code next to the exhibit, then hear a noise that the code was picked up and then hear all about the art and artist. While each audio description is less than two minutes, you learn details about the artist, where they studied, what medium was used to create the art and more. There is some really interesting information that a sighted person would not find on the small wall plaques next to the art.

My husband and friend who are both sighted wished these descriptions were available on all of the exhibits. According to Kate Swanson, Coordinator of Family and Community Programs at the museum, they are hoping to expand this collaboration with CRIS Access to include more works of art. At present there are five exhibits with this feature.

Currently other museums with this accessibility include: Mystic Aquarium, Connecticut Valley Agricultural Museum, New England Air Museum, Old Sturbridge Village and Mark Twain House is coming soon!

Hear, Hear, Can You Hear

By Al Daniels
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One of the most humorous questions is, "Can you hear me?" If you can't hear the person speaking, how can you reply, "No"? So if you don't answer, you obviously don't hear. We all like to be heard, but sometimes we don't want to hear. How about this? You call a business you deal with and the first thing you hear is, "This call may be recorded". The next thing you hear is "Push one if you Or push 2 if you ...". Suppose, and it's usually the case that you are not calling about either option 1 or option 2. Push 0 for Operator is useless. In other words, the business does not want to hear you unless your call concerns either option 1 or 2. How hard-nosed is that? In my book it's not a good deal. However, you know such a business is so powerful you have no choice but to shut off your connection with them or take your lumps.

The world turns and then there is a firm that employs a live person to answer the phone. All is not well yet, because the person who answers the phone is trained to further the company's interest or to cut you off if they lose their patience. The person who is on the other end does not want to answer your question and indicates so by repeating the phrase they are trained to say, over and over no matter what you say.

In the above case the firm hears only what they want to hear which is usually oriented toward financial gain in their favor. What to do? If only I were a rock star! I would give a blast of the grungiest, most distorted, and weirdest art music, every time they would not listen. Of course there are such art forms existing already. The artist creating in such a manner must do so in frustration. Or, it may be that those people who participate in one sided communications have already partaken of art, and that's why they don't know how to communicate effectively.

The best customer is a satisfied customer. And yes, I believe it is true. Large corporations are aware of this. The step they take in the right direction, is asking for the customer to give an evaluation when communication is completed. To a frustrated caller this is only putting salt in the wound.

The phone call has been recorded in the beginning. I would say this is starting with an invasion of privacy. Why should they exacerbate the problem by requesting you to fill out a glowing evaluation? That is adding insult to injury!

“Mom and Pop” has come to be a catch phrase. The person runs a business and has a meet and deal relationship with the customer. Usually “mom and pop” is successful because they know what makes each person a “satisfied customer”. It is almost impossible to recreate this business relationship on the corporate level. Need I explain the working of a pyramid scheme? It imitates a “mom and pop” principal, sole proprietors selling goods to the public. The salesman becomes a management figure wholesaling goods to other sales people. The management level usually inflates to an unbearable size, with commissions going to “the middle man”. The consumer is supposed to bear the weight of the added burden.

The true “mom and pop” operation will always be successful because they are the eyes and ears of the consuming public.

If you can hear and respond and accommodate, you must just be ready to enter the business world. The desirability of your product is not a small part of making a success. There are innumerable factors, but meet and deal relies on communications. Hearing is undoubtedly fifty percent of communication. Keep your ears open, have a good heart, and pray for rain!

Al Daniels was a vendor for eleven years. He is in retirement but is firmly based in small business. He presently is a freelance musician and uses his business skills to continue working as a blind musician.

Connecticut Lions VIP Fishing

By: Maryanne Melley

The Berlin Lions with support from other chapters has been running a fishing tournament for people with visual impairments for 10 years. In 2017 there were so many participants that two boats were needed the Blackhawk and a smaller boat named the Sunbeam. Both boats set off out of Niantic on an early June morning. It was a cold and rainy trip out to the open ocean but everyone was in good spirits. Hot coffee, tea and a variety of breakfast items were passed around to help the hour and half trip out to open water go by faster. It also gave us time to get to know each other better. Each boat had a combination of VIP fishing men and women and Lion volunteers. The Lions are extremely nice and I was able to catch up with some of my NFB friends.

The nice thing about this trip is there is no fishing ability required which is a good thing seeing as I have none. Once we got out into Open Ocean the rain had stopped and so did the boat. The Lion guides would bait our hooks and teach us how to drop the line feeling for when the weight would hit the bottom and making sure there was enough tension to feel if a fish would bump at the hook. All of us had our poles in the water in tense anticipation of the first fish when suddenly we hear "Fish On" everyone was excited and wanted to know who the lucky person was. Then everyone started catching fish! The first one I caught gave me such a fantastic feeling! As the day progressed and more people caught fish there was a real feeling of comradery. People would cheer when anyone caught a fish. It was a competition but it was fun also. You see the top three people that catch the most fish win a trip to the Outer Banks of North Carolina in October. Everyone wants to win that trip!

Once we were done fishing the Lions collect punch cards that tally how many fish each person has caught. Everyone gets to relax on the boat ride back to the docks. When we arrive at the docks they take a group picture and then treat us to an early dinner. That felt great this trip to get out of soggy cloths! After our meal they announce the winners. Even though I was on the smaller boat I came in first place. I was going to the Outer Banks!

It seemed like forever for October to come around but finally it did. Once again I woke up pre-dawn to be driven down to a junction off Rte. 95 where the bus would pick up the Connecticut winners and volunteers. It already had groups from Massachusetts and Rhode Island on it. We had a 12 hour ride to North Carolina but the time goes by pretty fast with short breaks and meeting more people. Once you arrive you are greeted by a welcome dinner provided by Bob and Dee Christiansen two Lions members that used to live in Berlin. After that you check into your hotel room which is right on the ocean. The next few days are full of fishing and getting to know more blind and visually impaired people and Lions. Before you know it it's time to go home.

I cannot recommend the VIP fishing tournament more strongly to all of you. It is a life changing experience. It is also the most involved I have ever seen the Lions be with the Blind. It is a teaching and learning trip for both the Lions and the blind. Many Lions learn just by observing how we behave and also by being told, nicely, that we do not need their assistance as much as they think we do. The Lions and many other people along the way come to realize that we are truly independent individuals.

