April Board Meeting Minutes

National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut

The National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut April 2019 board of directors meeting was held on April 13 in Milford, hosted by the Southern Connecticut Chapter. Present were Maryanne Melley, president; Phil Magalnick, first vice president; Nathanael Wales, treasurer; and Cheri Duquette, Josefina Martinez, Jim McCollum, and Mary Silverberg, board members. Second vice present Beth Ryvel and secretary Delmore McLeod were absent. Jim McCollum took the minutes of the meeting in Delmore’s place.

Maryanne called the meeting to order at 11:40 AM.

The meeting began with the treasurer’s report by Nathanael. As of April 10, the affiliate’s checking account balance was $14,003.93, and the available savings account balance was $37,527.21. The general fund balance is $20,817.61. The balance of restricted funds is $30,713.53. The Blackford Fund contains $1,506, after the affiliate’s portion of NFB Newsline expenses were paid. The money remaining in this fund has been earmarked for outreach to promote NFB Newsline. The Cummings Fund, for scholarships awarded to students who are working to become TVIs or O and M instructors, contains $12,053.91. The Demerest Fund contains $7,874.05, which is sufficient to allow that scholarship to be awarded in 2019 and 2020. $269.95 remain in the Higney scholarship fund, which can be added to if donors are found. $3,853.02 are being held in a fund that is left over from the 2016 BELL program, to fund BELL programs in the future. The Paul Duquette technology fund currently contains $2,498.94. The affiliate is holding funds for several chapters and divisions that do not have bank accounts. These are: $159.50 for the At Large Chapter; $243.05 for the Waterbury Chapter; $558.90 for the Connecticut Association of Blind Students; $743.00 for the Connecticut Association of Guide Dog Users; $20.00 for a state merchants division; $153.19 for the Southwest Connecticut Chapter; $453.97 for the Shoreline Chapter; $226.05 for the Hartford Chapter. A fund has been set up for sponsorships for the state convention, which currently contains $100. Nathanael pointed out that expenses have been reduced by closing the outreach office. However, since we no longer have callers in an office contacting donors, are fund raising is likely to decrease unless other outreach efforts are put into place. A motion was raised, seconded, and approved to accept the treasurer’s report.

Maryanne gave an update on the upcoming NFB national convention, which will be held at Mandaly Bay Resort in Las Vegas, Nevada, from July 7-12. She pointed out that, in order to receive a subsidy from the affiliate for attending national convention, applicants must attend all three days of general sessions. A discussion was held concerning the amount of the subsidy the affiliate would be able to award for national convention. Nathanael speculated that, because this year’s convention is being held in Las Vegas for the first time, there is likely to be a greater number of applicants for subsidies. Maryanne pointed out that, after talking with the hotel that is hosting this year’s state convention, the affiliate’s expenses for the sate convention could be around eight thousand dollars, and at this point it is not known how much we would be able to cover through fund raising or sponsorships. For this reason, she suggested $200 as the amount for the subsidy this year. Nathanel suggested $300 would be possible. Phil suggested that, in order to qualify for a subsidy, applicants must have a record of being active in NFB of Connecticut. It was pointed out that a few first-time attendees to national convention may receive Jernigan scholarships. Also, local chapters could be encouraged to raise funds to subsidize their members attending convention. A suggestion was made from the floor that the affiliate limit subsidies for national convention in favor of helping members attend state convention. Another suggestion from the floor was that, in the future, subsidies for Washington Seminar, as well as national and state convention, be discussed earlier, to better enable members to make plans. A motion was made, and seconded, to set the national convention subsidy at $200. All board members present voted to yes, with the exception of Phil Magalnick, who abstained.

Maryanne said she has applied for an affiliate table in the exhibit hall at national convention. It will include the student division’s candy café, and members are encouraged to think of other items that can be sold at the table. Edgar Machicote has been able to obtain donations from various retailers, so the students will not have to purchase candy to be sold.

Maryanne said she has spoken with a retired judge, Charles Gil, who has committed to making a thousand-dollar donation to NFB of Connecticut. He is asking that our affiliate endorse a program he is calling Generations Together. In this program, high school students would be paired with aging blind adults. The students would read to the older adults from novels. The intention is to promote mutual respect and understanding between the older and younger generations. The donation and the program are mutually exclusive. A motion was made and seconded to endorse the Generations Together proposal. The board voted unanimously in favor.

Maryanne delivered a report on DORS, based on a meeting attended by Beth Ryvel. She reported that eye doctors are retiring, and DORS is having trouble finding doctors to replace them in preparing certificates of legal blindness. Also, in the past the state police performed background checks on DORS/BESB volunteers free of charge, but are now charging for them. DORS is no longer performing background checks on volunteers. In October, DORS will become Department of Aging and Disability Services. A motion was made for Maryanne to send a letter to the directors of BESB and DORS, as well as to the state police commissioner, expressing that NFB of Connecticut was unhappy about the decision to discontinue background checks on volunteers, and request that these checks continue to be performed. The motion was seconded and approved.

The BECAP report was delivered by Barbara Blejewski. The next meeting will take place on June 24, and Barbara will be talking about our upcoming national and state conventions.

Deb Reed reported on the Birdies for Charity fund raiser. She stressed the importance of raising money through this charity because of our dwindling funds. The minimum contribution amount is $10, and fifteen percent of all contributions designated for NFB of Connecticut go to our affiliate. Deb said that we were registered, and ready to go. The Travelers Golf Tournament runs from June 17-23, with June 23 being the last day that contributions can be made. Maryanne announced that she will be doing a recorded interview for iHeart radio about the Birdies for Charity fund raiser and the National Federation of the Blind.

Honorata Kazmierazak reported on the Pre-authorized Contribution Plan, known as the PAC Plan. An individual, or a chapter, can arrange to have a fixed amount of money withdrawn from a checking or savings account, or charged to a credit card, to fund the work of NFB. The minimum contribution is $5 per month. Honorata also mentioned the Dream Makers Circle, a program in which bequests can be made to the National Federation of the Blind. Connecticut currently ranks number 45 in PAC Plan contributions. Our state contributes $250 per month total to the PAC Plan.

Melissa Carney delivered a report on the Federationist via phone. It is now possible to read the Federationist in a Word, or listen to it as an MP3 file. She has the next issue edited, and will soon send it to Lucia.

Maryanne pointed out the importance of members and chapters doing outreach to make blind people who are not members of the Federation, and the general public, aware of our organization and the work that we do. Phil Magalnick and Liz Bottner were designated to lead an outreach committee.

Maryanne said that each chapter is expected to find a sponsor to offset the cost of our state convention, and handed out sponsorship forms for each chapter.

Maryanne said that a package will be sent to each chapter, containing contact information for previous donors. In the past, this work was done by the staff in the outreach office, but because the office is no longer open, it is being done by the individual chapters.

Deb Reed reported on the progress of planning the 2019 state convention. Representatives from NEAT will answer questions during general session, based on feedback provided via the list serve. A blind medical specialist and patient representative from the VA will present. An organization called Leap of Faith Adaptive Skiing will present on various adaptive sports. If anyone has any suggestions for the convention, Deb said to feel free to contact her. A shuttle will be available to transport people from the Meredin train station to the hotel.

Phil Magalnick reported that he and members of the Southwest Chapter had successfully advocated to have a television channel in Stamford made accessible. He encouraged chapter members to to get to know their local representatives in government, and to advocate on behalf of themselves on issues they feel are important.

Maryanne reported hearing from the national office that four bills have been introduced in the house of representatives and the senate. These are the Transformation to Competitive Employment Act and the Access Technology Affordability Act. She urged members of the federation to contact their representatives, and both senators, to advocate for these bills.

A motion was made, seconded, and passed, to hold the September board meeting in Stamford. The date will be September 21.

Deb Reed reported that the Central Connecticut Chapter will be holding its next meeting on May 11, and will have a presentation by a chair yoga instructor. Also, a kayaking event is scheduled for June 8. Barbara Blejewski reported that the Hartford Chapter will have Marie Beaulier, formerly of the East of the River Chapter, speak on amateur radio and some other activities she’s been involved in, and that Patrick Olsen of Project Ray will be at their June meeting. Liz Bottner, the newly-elected vice president of the Shoreline Chapter, reported that the chapter had elected Shonda Rosetta as president. Also they had elected a new treasurer, and would be electing a new secretary and board member at their next meeting. Phil Magalnick reported that the Southwest Connecticut Chapter will hold its next meeting on April 20, and will be attended by representatives from CRIS radio and Achilles Connecticut. The chapter will celebrate its one year anniversary at its May meeting. Encole Stuart reported that the Southern Connecticut Chapter will be holding its annual picnic on the second Saturday in June, and that the chapter has several new members. Josefina Martinez reported that the Waterbury Chapter they had done an outreach table in January, and would have a speaker on HIV at their next meeting. Also they had a new member who had been referred by an O and M instructor at BESB. They will be making a trip to a casino on May 18.

Maryanne adjourned the meeting at 3:01.