President’s Message for November, 2015I am happy to announce that we have made great progress in several areas during November. Thanks to the hard work of Russell Smith and the scholarship committee, our state scholarship application is nearly ready to go on the website. I commend Russell for his assertiveness in taking the lead on this project. He knew what needed to be done and developed a plan to accomplish it. Chapters need to work with the ICBVI staff in your area, as well as teachers of the visually impaired, high school counselors, and blind students you know to be sure that they receive the scholarship information and receive assistance to complete it, if necessary. Although I expect prospective students to be responsible, I know that completing the scholarship application can be daunting, especially for young, and/or inexperienced students. Let’s be sure we have a strong group of candidates this year so we have a great scholarship class for our 2016 convention.

As a result of the hard work of Al Schneider, newsletter editor, along with Susan Bradley and Vickie and Larry Bateman, our Gemstate Milestones newsletter is out on email and will soon be available in print and braille. If you do not receive the newsletter, please contact me and I will add you to the list of the format of your choice. The print newsletter was professionally printed and contains pictures which we have never had before. Kate Holgate, from Stoltz did the layout, and Patrick Schneider from Pets Best did the layout and printing. Both of these individuals donated their services. We deeply appreciate their contributions to help our newsletter be greater than it was. Al has ideas about placing the newsletter in eye doctors’ offices and other places so blind and visually impaired people and their families can hear about the federation and learn that blindness need not be a tragedy. Great work!

I was invited by Cindy Grover, who is the TVI for the Caldwell school district, and a member of the Canyon County chapter, to participate in an ADL class for blind teens in the Treasure Valley Area. This class is a collaborative effort between the outreach consultants from the Idaho Educational Services for the Deaf and Blind (IESDB) and Cindy Grover. The class is held monthly in the ADL room at the Commission for the Blind. On the day that I worked with the students, they were learning interview skills and I was their interview subject. I enjoyed talking with the students, as well as eating some yummy chocolate chip cookies they made in the cooking class.

I was contacted by President Riccobono to write a letter of support for a college professor at BSU who is requesting a 1 semester sabbatical in order to complete his certification in literary braille, and begin work to learn Nemeth code. His ultimate goal is to make braille materials available on demand to blind students in the BSU department of Engineering, as well as other departments, depending on time. The letter was written and submitted, and I received word yesterday that the sabbatical is almost sure to be granted. The professor will certainly be a speaker for our chapter and probably for the convention in 2017.

I was asked by Carlton Walker, the director of the Bell program to speak about our Bell program on a conference call primarily for new states that are planning to start Bell programs. We have a strong program and I was honored to be asked to tell others about it.

I attended the Capital City Development Corporation meeting which focused on public transportation on the state and federal level. I received an email today from Idaho Smart Growth and have just learned that congress, last Friday, passed a 305 billion dollar 5 year transportation bill. Although this bill, Fixing America’s Surface Transportation) FAST) did not give everything people wanted, it will bring some stability to our push for Idaho’s transportation. One of the presenters at the CCDC meeting was from the Community Transportation Association of Idaho (CTAI) which has been very involved in trying to improve public transportation for the state. They will have their convention February 22-24 in Boise. I asked the presenter if he would consider speaking to our state convention, as he lives in Moscow.

Our state convention planning is moving forward. I have confirmation from 3 vendors who plan to display at our expo and some tentative commitments from others. I also have speaker commitments from Brian Darcy from IESDB, and Sue Walker from the Talking Book Services. I will talk to the new administrator of ICBVI once that person has been hired.

We will be discussing the convention as part of our upcoming board meeting January 18.

Our legislative luncheon will be held January 18 at the Crystal Ballroom, 802 W. Bannock, in downtown Boise. We can walk there from the board meeting, which will be held at ICBVI. The lunch will cost $25.00. The choices will be either a chef salad or teriyaki chicken. You can call Jan Gawith, at (208) 342-3066 with your menu selection. We need a strong representation from our members to make this event a success. Invitations for the legislators are at the printers. Sean Malone has already contacted many legislators by email. Susan Bradley and I will be attending a Boise Chamber of Commerce reception for elected officials and plan to personally invite legislators to this event. As I have said before, please ask your legislators to attend.

Our state affiliate will hold a braille readithon from January 4, (Louis Braille’s Birthday) through March 4th. Susan Ford is the chair of this event. It is not a reading contest, although those who participated in the past may set personal goals to read more braille pages this year. We will give cash awards for everyone participating, so get your fingers ready to read. Please let Susan Ford or me know if you need help obtaining braille materials. Susan’s number is (208) 376-1727.

Remember our state convention is April 22-24 at the Red Lion hotel in Lewiston. Room rates are $89.00 for singles, doubles, triples and quads. Make your reservations at (208)799-1000. Be sure to specify that you are booking your room for the NFBI convention and want the $89.00 rate.

Our fundraiser for Schwan’s where we can get %20 of the cost of our order contributed to the NFBI, continues through December 15. This is a great time to use Schwan’s as a way to purchase Christmas gifts, as well as a chance to try new things. I purchased the edamame for a friend who is vegan. I have tried the mashed cauliflower, and the chicken rice soup. I highly recommend both items and have reordered them again for myself.

Best wishes for the holidays.

Dana Ard, President

National Federation of the Blind of Idaho

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