President’s Update

December 2017

I am amazed that soon 2017 will be a year in the past and 2018 will begin. I really do believe the adage, “the older you get, the faster time flies.” In this message, I will update everyone about important upcoming events, share some events that occurred during the past 3 months, and look back at some affiliate accomplishments, as well as areas that need addressed in 2018.

I have signed the contract for our 2018 state convention. The dates are April 26-28, and the location is the Red Lion Canyon Springs in Twin Falls. The address is 1357 Blue Lakes Blvd. N. Twin Falls, 83501, phone 208 734-5000. Room rates are $81 plus 8% tax for singles, doubles, triples and quads. Breakfast is included. Our convention committee has been hard at work planning this event. However, we welcome your ideas for speakers and program items, so please bring them on. This is the affiliate convention and a great time to get excited about being a member of the National Federation of the Blind of Idaho.

On January 15, (Martin Luther King Day), the National Federation of the Blind of Idaho will hold its annual legislative luncheon at the Crystal Ballroom, 802 W. Bannock. Tickets for the luncheon are $25.00, and checks should be made out to NFB of Idaho and mailed to Harry Gawith, 410 Ave. H. Boise, Id. 83712. There is one meal option, which is gluten free. If you have other dietary restrictions, please let Jan Gawith know at 208 342-3066. We will be discussing state funding for the talking book program, as well as other topics important to the blind of Idaho. Please plan to come. Legislators need to hear from us.

In late September, I attended the National Federation of the Blind of Iowa convention in Des Moines along with Larry and Sue Sebranek. I enjoyed seeing how another state runs its convention. Iowa has a very active and large telephone chapter. I have encouraged members of our Idaho Gems to join this chapter by phone to learn more about what they do to contribute to the chapter success. I participated in a service project packaging dehydrated meals for people in third world countries. This was a fun project and I got to know the other Iowa federationists who worked on our packaging assembly line. Kevan Worley was the national representative and gave an excellent banquet speech.

I met with Sue Walker and Ann Goslin, state librarian, to discuss funding the talking book program with state rather than federal funds. I was asked to write a letter of support to Governor Otter. At this time, we do not know whether or not the governor supports this funding, but my letter of response from him seemed positive. Even if he does not support this move, we have a great opportunity to let our legislators know how valuable the talking book program is for the blind of Idaho.

On a national level, we had 3 federationists conduct testing on ATM machines, as part of our settlement with Cartronics, a manufacturer of ATms. This testing will continue and I hope our testers, as well as other volunteers, will participate in this worthwhile endeavor. Thanks to Yiska Hugo and others who have sent in reports on experiences using Uber with service dogs, Idaho reached the reporting goal set by our national office. This reporting will continue next year. I have submitted 5 names of blind parents for our national parenting initiative. Sylvia Bernert has agreed to be the state-wide parenting coordinator. I know many of us have called our senators and representatives this year supporting several bills. We will need to keep up the fight until our initiatives have passed. I will attend our Washington seminar, at the end of January, along with Ramona Walhof and our new Twin Falls President, Mai Nguyen. Mai, who is from Vietnam, is excited to attend and learn more about our government, as well as meet many successful federationists.

We have had many successes this year. In October, we held our fundraising concert, 3 Bands for Blind Kids. Justin Bonner was instrumental in getting the 3 bands to volunteer time to do this event. Erin Olson designed the flier and tickets, and monitored the event on the Brown Paper Tickets website. The fundraising committee, chaired by Ramona Walhof, worked hard to make this event a success, raising around $2000. Alison Steven led the Boise BELL students in a musical presentation during the first break, which everyone enjoyed. Another fundraising success for the state affiliate was our first ever on-line auction. Again we raised around $2000.00. The affiliate board voted to do this event again in 2018. Our Schwan’s Cares campaign is close to reaching the target goal of $500.00. The Treasure Valley chapter Cycle for Independence, under the leadership of Al Schneider, had its most successful year, raising approximately $23,000. Fundraising is essential if we are going to develop and offer programs to help the blind of Idaho. We have been fortunate to partner with the Idaho Commission for the Blind for our BELL program and for Newsline. However, with changes in federal funding, we cannot be guaranteed these funds on an on-going basis.

Thanks in large part to a grant from the American Action Fund; Idaho had 27 people in our delegation at our national convention in Orlando, Florida. The comments from those attending indicated that the experience was valuable. Hopefully, we will be able to continue to send people to our national convention, as this is an excellent way to help people become excited about our organization. We had the largest number of registrants in recent history at our state convention in Boise. We had 62 participants at our board meeting and 85 at our banquet. This is the first year that our convention provided CRC credits for rehabilitation counselors who attended. I believe no other state convention has attempted to get this type of accreditation, which I believe will encourage blindness professionals to attend our convention and learn about our positive message about blindness.

We had 25 children participating in our 3 BELL Academy programs. All of these participants learned positive attitudes from blind role models and further developed and strengthened their blindness skills.

Now, it’s time to look beyond our accomplishments to our future. We need to continue to build our chapters. We have several strong chapters in our state, and some that need our help and support. I have instituted a chapter presidents’ conference call so presidents can share information and learn from each other. I also am expanding our web committee to form a communications committee. I have asked for people to volunteer to help our web chairman, Kevin Pirnie, to learn to put material on the website. I have heard from several members who are interested in doing this. Strong, vibrant, web communication is essential to get our positive message out to those who need it. Of course, the web does not replace personal contact. We need both.

If I have missed items that should be mentioned, please post them on our listserv. I know it’s always dangerous to mention specific names,

So if I have forgotten to acknowledge someone, let me know.

I wish everyone a blessed and happy holiday season. My hope for 2018 is that we continue to work together to send our positive message to the blind of Idaho and build the National Federation of the Blind of Idaho

Dana Ard, President

National Federation of the Blind of Idaho

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