November 2024 minutes of the Chapter meeting

The National Federation of the Blind of California

San Fernando Valley Chapter

Date: November 9, 2024 Saturday

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 AM. Vice President Candace Luther facilitated the meeting. We began with the Pledge of Allegiance, the NFB Pledge, and the one-minute message.

Question of the day: If you could meet a celebrity, who would it be?

Attendance:

Robert Stigile-President, Joy Stigile, , Robin Smith, Julie Skujins, Lynne Nishihara, Anthony Melena,

Lilia Mares, Fernando Macias, Candace Luther-Vice President, Lindsay Kerr-Treasurer, Tiffany Johnson,

Ron Hilliard - Member-AT-Large, Juanita Herrera, Sheila Castro-Secretary, Keith Caballa,

Britney Bates, David and Valerie Delawder, Shelby Felter, Jane Suh, John and Nancy Albarran,

and Sean welker -guest.

**Announcements:**

Lynne wanted to share something that may affect people here. This year, Congress passed a new law requiring all businesses, not just large ones like Microsoft but also small businesses—especially those registered under your personal name—to comply. The law aims to ensure that no crimes are associated with your business and to prevent it from being used for identity spoofing.

As part of financial crime enforcement, the government now requires everyone to register their personal business. You may have already received a notification about this, along with information about a nonprofit organization that can assist you for a fee of $99. However, you can also handle the registration yourself through the Secretary of State's office. Lynne has the link and can send it out on the listserv.

 Robert would like to remind everyone about their $10 dues. You can pay via Zelle at nfbevents@gmail.com, or you can also use PayPal or Venmo.

 For those who haven’t heard, Walmart is now an AIRA access partner. If you visit a Walmart store, you can use AIRA for free minutes. Additionally, you can use AIRA for online shopping at Walmart by having the AIRA agent assist you on walmart.com. For the first two weeks of November, this service will only be available in California, Texas, and Florida. After that, it will expand nationwide. It’s a great partnership with AIRA, and if you have any questions, you can contact Robert.

 Next, Robert shared updates from Hearts for Sight (HFS). Racquel and the HFS team are away for a camp at Harwood Lodge this weekend, so she is unable to join the meeting to provide the HFS announcements. She asked Robert to share them.

The first announcement is that on Sunday, November 17th, there will be a hike at Crystal Cove's El Moro Canyon in Orange County. Bus transportation will be provided, and an email has already been sent out for registration.

The next event will be on Sunday, November 24th, in Newport Beach. It's a Luau & Water Adventure, featuring McKinnon Surf and SUP lessons from 10 AM to 4 PM at Newport Harbor. Bus transportation will also be provided. There will be a festive, island-themed atmosphere, so everyone is encouraged to wear their best Hawaiian shirts, shorts, and sandals. A $25 deposit is required to reserve your spot, as space is limited to only 20 people.

On Sunday, December 8th, HFS will explore Catalina Island for a day of adventure and a scavenger hunt. They will depart from San Pedro aboard the Catalina Express, heading to Avalon. A refundable $50 deposit is required to reserve your spot. Each participant will receive a $50 stipend for food, souvenirs, or other island activities. The scavenger hunt will require participants to use their O&M skills to find various items on the island, or possibly purchase something to bring back as your proof.

* Shelby announced that the California Association of Guide Dog Users (CAGDU) is hosting a walkathon. You do not need to have a guide dog to participate; all you need to do is register and pay the fee. Throughout the month, participants can either walk or run, and at the end of the month, you will log your steps and submit them to Tiffany Manaj. There will be prizes for both walking and running categories.

Shelby also mentioned that they will soon be starting an Orange County Chapter of the NFB. If you know anyone in the area who may be interested in joining, please let her know.

**Secretary’s Report:**

Robert made a motion to approve the October 2024 minutes, which was seconded by Tiffany.

**Treasurer’s Report:**

**Lindsay sent out the October Treasurer’s report on November 11, 2024 in the list serve.**

A quick note: several people sent Robert their membership dues yesterday. Just in case you're wondering, these dues will not be reflected in the October Treasury report that was submitted. Robert assured everyone not to worry, as they will appear in next month's report.

Lindsay provided an update, mentioning that she and Robert are still working on resolving the bank account situation.

Joy also reminded everyone about the dues, noting that members can still send their dues in December. However, Robert will not accept cash payments at the holiday party. They emphasized that there will be no business, Chapter transactions, or financial transactions during the holiday party. The event should be a fun night for everyone, including Robert.

For those who still wish to pay their dues in December, you can do so through Zelle at nfbevents@gmail.com, PayPal at rstigile@gmail.com, or Venmo to Robert Stigile.

**Committee Report:**

**Fundraising:**

Joy announced that a fundraiser will be held at Bob’s Big Boy on the first weekend of January, as several members have birthdays during the first part of the month. However, she needs to check with Julie to ensure that Winter's party does not conflict with the event.

**Holiday Party:**

Our Chapter’s holiday party is just around the corner! The event will take place on Saturday, December 14, 2024, from 5:00 PM to 8:00 PM at The Magnolia Grill in North Hollywood. The address will be sent out along with the holiday menu in the list serve.

There have been a few changes: The cost will now be $29.99 plus tax (tip not included). Please remember to tip when paying.

Regarding the holiday menu, in previous years, we had only two choices for each meal. This year, the manager has added a third option for each variety of meal. So, we will now have three dishes to choose from. Beverages and non-alcoholic drinks are included. However, if you wish to order an extra drink or an alcoholic beverage, there will be an additional charge.

A reminder will be sent out, especially regarding the RSVP deadline, which is December 11th. We need a headcount for the manager so the restaurant can be properly prepared.

The party program will be the same as last year, including Christmas carols, singing, games, and prizes. There was a question about the gift exchange, which will depend on Robert’s approval. If approved, the suggested gift amount will be either $20 or $25. Ideas and suggestions were brought up by Juanita, Nancy, Julie, and Lynne.

The agreed-upon decision is that the gift exchange will be voluntary, with a suggested value between $20 and $25. Gifts should not be used or old unopened items. If the Chapter decides to participate in the Adopt-A-Child Program, the gift exchange will be omitted from the holiday party.

**Adopt A Child Program:**

The committee has not discussed the Adopt A Child program in a while, and they were unsure if any of the members had sent emails to prospective families with children who are blind and/or visually impaired. Lindsay mentioned that the only place she had posted the application was at the Braille Institute.

Further discussion took place regarding the next steps, but since there were no results from the committee, Robert decided not to move forward with the "Adopt A Child" program this year. Instead, the plan will be to prepare for it and execute it next year.

According to Robin, Tiffany had to leave the meeting due to an emergency, as she had the results. Juanita suggested that, for next year, the committee consider reaching out to the Blind Children's Center.

**National News:**

The Presidential Release will be live on Monday, December 11th, at 5:00 PM. Zoom information will be sent out on the listserv. Robert encouraged everyone to tune in and listen to what’s happening on a national level.

He also mentioned that if you are a student, the National Scholarship application will be available starting December 1st, 2024. The deadline to submit applications is March 31st. Please do not wait until the deadline, as there are several steps involved. In addition to filling out the application, you will need to submit a letter, references, your GPA (4.0), and proof of being legally blind while residing in the United States.

**Washington Seminar**  
*February 3–6, 2025*

Applications will be available soon. The Affiliate will be offering grants of $500. Our Chapter Board will discuss the possibility of providing an additional grant. Please reach out to Robert if you're interested in attending.

The seminar involves a lot of work, as it’s more than just sitting in meetings. You'll walk through the halls of Congress, meeting with Congressional members and Senators. It’s especially exciting this year with a new Senator and several new members in Congress. Notably, a woman won a Congressional seat after Barbara Lee, from the 12th District, ran for Senate but didn’t win. As a result, her seat is now open. Another exciting development is Latifa Simon, the first blind person ever elected to Congress.

**The National Convention**  
Start making your plans now! Hotel reservations can be made starting January 1st, 2025. The National Convention will be held in New Orleans from July 8th to 13th, 2025. More details will be available in January, so stay tuned.

**State Convention**  
The State Convention will take place from March 14th to 16th in Anaheim at the DoubleTree by Hilton. The hotel rate is $159 per night. Our Chapter will need to contribute an auction basket for the convention. Robert will need volunteers to join the committee for this. The committee chairperson will be responsible for presenting the contents of our basket at the Banquet. The State will also be offering scholarships, which will be announced soon. Applicants must be students with a GPA of 3.0 or higher.

In addition, our Chapter will need to discuss the acquisition of door prizes to be given out.

The next item on the agenda was introduced by Robert, who presented the guest speaker, Sean welker. Sean is a former AIRA agent, having worked with the company from 2018 to 2019. After a year and a half, he left AIRA and became involved with a blind organization in the state of Massachusetts—the Massachusetts Association for the Blind & Visually Impaired. They had an apprenticeship program that Sean participated in to learn more about accessibility and assistive technology.

Sean then partnered with Be My Eyes for over three and a half years, growing the team to 50 volunteers. They were providing 76 hours of on-demand service each week. Unfortunately, in January of last year, the organization lost a significant funding source. Sean tried everything he could to save the program, believing strongly in its value. The service had many loyal users who had relied on it for years. The concept was a middle ground between Be My Eyes and AIRA: with Be My Eyes, you never know who you'll get because it’s based on volunteers who aren’t background-checked or trained, and many volunteers don't know how to work with someone who is blind. On the other hand, AIRA offers highly trained agents, but sometimes it's difficult to connect with an agent when needed, and the service can be costly.

Sean aimed to create something that bridged the gap between these two services. His goal was to offer visual interpreting services that are both affordable and high-quality. As of August 1st, Sean launched his small business called “visual eyes access*”*. The business offers two main services: accessibility consulting and visual interpreting. His base rate is $1 per minute, with no subscription required. However, for those who prefer, he offers subscription plans on a monthly, quarterly, or annual basis, with discounts for larger plans. The service is typically accessed through WhatsApp or Messenger for video calls. Sean uses a desktop computer with dual 22-inch monitors to manage calls, ensuring he can clearly see what assistance is needed. On his second monitor, he may use Google Maps or other tools as needed.

One key aspect of Sean's service is building a connection with the same person each time. This helps both parties understand the task at hand and complete it efficiently. Sean mentioned that one of the biggest complaints he's heard since 2019 is that people are concerned about losing unused minutes from their plans or feel they need to save minutes for potential future use. With his service, any unused minutes at the end of a billing cycle will roll over. If a client has a surplus of minutes and doesn’t need to add more, Sean can pause their plan until they’ve used up the remaining minutes. Clients just need to provide notice before the end of their billing cycle so that he can adjust accordingly.

For those interested in trying the service, Sean offers a VIP trial called the *Visually Interpreter Pro-Service*—a 30-minute trial for $20. If you reach the end of the trial and choose not to continue, you can opt out without further obligation.

Sean acknowledges there are many options available but hopes to provide something that strikes a balance: high-quality visual interpreting that’s affordable and accessible for most people. He also offers assistance on a case-by-case basis for individuals facing financial hardship.

Finally, Sean opened the floor for questions. Joy, Jane, Robert, Keith, and Lynne all had inquiries. Robert will send out Sean's contact information via the listserv.

Lynne made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Joy. The meeting was adjourned at 12:14 pm.

Respectfully submitted by:

Sheila B.C.

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Chapter Secretary

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