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**NFB Pledge**

I pledge to participate actively in the effort of the National Federation of the Blind to achieve equality, opportunity and security for the blind; to support the policies and programs of the Federation; and to abide by its constitution.

**Meeting Announcements**

Our next meeting is on Saturday, March 10, from 9:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m. We meet at The Fountains of Melbourne, 4451 Stack Blvd., Melbourne, FL, 32901.

Anyone needing transportation, please contact Maria Rigogliosi, (321) 795-7376, no later than Monday, March 5. This is to ensure you are placed on the list for transportation. As we work with SCAT to improve our members’ experiences in travelling, they have agreed to split our list of passengers so no one spends hours on the bus in the morning. If you live in northern Melbourne, you will be picked up first and dropped off at The Fountains. If you live in southern Melbourne and Palm Bay, you will be picked up following the first drop-off and then taken to The Fountains. This is a trial period to see if the procedure will benefit our members.

As a reminder, SCAT charges a fare of $1.50 each trip, for a total of $3.00. Drivers are unable to make change. Fare cards may be purchased by contacting SCAT at (321) 635-7815, option 403 or 604. Fare cards cost $15.00. Please request a paratransit fare card as these are the only ones that can be used for paratransit trips.

If you are unable to keep your paratransit trip to our meeting, please contact Maria no later than the day before the meeting. No-show and same-day cancellations increase the time others travelling must spend on the bus. Please be conscientious of your fellow members who ride the bus with you.

We will have a 50/50 raffle at our next chapter meeting. Included in the prize is a blue tooth speaker. Raffle tickets cost $1 each. The raffle winner will receive half of the monies collected and the speaker.

**Special Election Results**

We would like to welcome Arlene Naulty to the Board of Directors, Melbourne Space Coast Chapter. Arlene has filled the position vacated in November and will serve until chapter elections in August 2019. Arlene has been a member of the National Federation of the Blind for many years and served as our board’s Administrative Assistant prior to her election. We thank Arlene for her willingness to continue the work of the National Federation of the Blind and the Melbourne Space Coast Chapter.

**A Note About Our Newsletters**

The Melbourne Space Coast Chapter prides itself on the positive responses received regarding The Visionary, the monthly newsletter. To this end, it has come to our attention that some members may not have been receiving their monthly newsletter. We apologize for the inconvenience and wish to make sure all members are able to keep abreast of the happenings within their chapter and our Federation. If you are an email recipient and are missing any issues, please check your junk or SPAM folder on your computer. If you are a current member who receives a print newsletter, please let Camille Tate, (321) 372-4899, know so we can get those back issues to you. Please note that only members current in their dues, as of January 31, will receive our newsletter.

**State Convention**

The National Federation of the Blind, FL, will hold its annual convention over Memorial Day weekend, May 25-28, 2018. The convention will be at the Hilton Airport Westshore, 2225 N. Lois Ave., Tampa, FL, 33607.

State conventions are an important event within our FL Affiliate. It is at convention that you meet your brothers and sisters in the Federation. You can sit in on the breakout sessions, which include information from various committees within our affiliate; ask questions of those involved in projects to further the equality, opportunity and security of the blind; and find where your particular talents will be useful. There will be a fun activity on Saturday night where you can let your hair down and have a great time. In the exhibit hall, vendors will show their wares, along with chapters and divisions within our affiliate, so you can mix and mingle and see what is available to you outside of our chapter. General Session is where you will learn about the work of the Federation, what we have done since our last convention and where we are planning to go next. You will elect your leaders to continue the work of the NFB and vote on some of the policies of our FL Affiliate going forward.

The Melbourne Space Coast Chapter will pay the registration fees for current, paid members who wish to attend the convention. Registration fees are $20 during the pre-registration period, which ends on May 8. MSCC has not yet determined whether we will pay banquet fees, which are $40 during the pre-registration period. All fees will increase by $5 each once the pre-registration period expires and must be paid at the convention. We will advise if MSCC will pay for banquet fees at a later date. If you wish to attend the state convention, please contact Camille Tate, (321) 372-4899, or see her at any chapter meeting. The deadline to be placed on the registration list is April 15. Please be advised that if MSCC pays your registration and/or banquet fees, you must attend at least one day of the convention. If you later decide not to attend, you will be required to return any fees paid on your behalf. Please contact Camille with additional questions.

**National Convention**

The National Federation of the Blind will hold its final annual convention in Florida from July 3 through July 8. It will be at the Rosen Shingle Creek Resort, 9939 Universal Blvd., Orlando, FL, 33829. This is the last time it will be here in Florida for some time to come. You should reserve your room as soon as possible. The convention rate is as follows: singles and doubles are $83 per night; triples and quads are $89 per night. There is a 12.5% hotel tax. The Rosen Shingle Creek also requires a deposit of $100, of which 50% is refundable if you cancel your reservation by June 1; any cancellation after this date will result in no refund. The phone number for the resort is (866) 996-6338.

National Convention is a wonderful experience that all members should participate in at least once. It is the largest gathering of the nation’s blind and so filled with information, technology and products that only one convention experience is not enough. The first few days are filled with seminars and meetings of the various national divisions within the NFB. For example, we have a Parents of Blind Children; Deaf Blind Division; Writer’s Division; Blind Social Workers Division; Guide Dog Users Division and so many others. During those first few days are also breakout sessions. For example, Communications; Webmasters; Lawyers; Social Media and so many others. The exhibit hall is open and filled with vendors such as the NFB Independence Market; VFO (formerly Freedom Scientific, Optilek and AI Squared); Independent Living Aids; each state affiliate and national divisions. General Session is by far the most important and enjoyable part of convention. It is at General Session you hear about the national scope of the work the NFB does on our behalf. You hear about the accomplishments and projects; you hear about the direction we are going and you get to elect your leaders going forward. As a member of the National Federation of the Blind, you vote on the policies of the Federation through Resolutions. You hear from individuals within the NFB and without, who are making strides to break down the barriers between the blind and our dreams.

The Melbourne Space Coast Chapter will pay the $25 registration fee for any current, paid member of the chapter who wishes to attend convention. MSCC has not yet determined if we will pay for banquet fees, which are $65. Please contact Camille Tate, (321) 372-4899, or see her at any chapter meeting, if you are interested in attending. If msCC pays your registration and/or banquet fees, you are required to attend at least one day of convention. Please note that if you later decide not to attend, you will be required to return any fees paid on your behalf. The deadline to be placed on the list for attendance is May 15.

**Amazing Trio Bundle** Raffle

The National Federation of the Blind, FL is having a raffle at National Convention. The raffle tickets cost $5 each. The prizes are: First place, an iPad Pro or cash value (worth $800); Second Place, an Uber or Lift travel voucher or cash value (worth $500); Third Place, a travel voucher or cash value (worth $200).

Members who attended the February 10 meeting were given an envelope with five raffle tickets. Please return the ticket stubs, monies collected and/or any unsold tickets by our June chapter meeting. Please ensure the ticket purchaser writes their name and phone number on the ticket stub. Attendance at the National Convention is not required to win; the winner will be contacted using the information on the ticket stub.

**Talking Book Library**

It has come to the attention of the Melbourne Space Coast Chapter, National Federation of the Blind, Florida, that some members are in possession of older players which do not accommodate “thumb drives” sent from the National Office of the National Federation of the Blind, Baltimore, MD. There is good news on this subject. Members may bring Talking Book equipment to the March 10 meeting for review. Debra Martin, Director, Brevard County Talking Book Library, will be on hand to discuss individual concerns and provide assurances that current readers can accommodate “thumb drives” or take requests for an equipment exchange. This is a rare opportunity to personally speak with Deb and get answers to your questions about your reader.

Members and residents of Brevard County unable to attend the March 10 meeting may call Deb Martin, (321) 633-1810. Deb will assist you. We are also now aware some members do not desire the thumb drive format…and would prefer “the Braille Monitor” be delivered to them in large print. The Presidential Report is only available in thumb drives. Our Chapter newsletter “The Visionary” is available in print but can be sent electronically. These are changes which can be made and we need to hear about your requirements for each special publication.

This is complex, but can be rectified by members who desire a change to better accommodate their needs. Please contact our Membership Chair, Maria Rigogliosi, (321) 795-7376 or e-mail mer1016@yahoo.com.

**Washington Seminar**

Camille Tate, MSCC President, attended the 2018 Washington Seminar for our National Federation of the Blind. Each year, the NFB sends delegates from each affiliate (50 States, Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico) to advance the legislative priorities for the year. This year, our agenda included: Accessible Instructional Materials in Higher Education (AIM He), H. R. 1772, S. 2138; Access Technology Affordability Act (ATAA), H. R. 1734, S. 732; Opposition to the ADA Education and Reform Act of 2017, H. R. 620; and, the Marrakesh Treaty. Here is a brief summary of these priorities:

* AIM HE: As digital and electronic technology improves; blind students are often left behind. Accessing instructional materials in digitized formats have become increasingly difficult. This bill would create guidelines that educators and textbook publishers can follow so that our blind students have an equal chance in the digital and online classrooms that are more and more used in education.
* ATAA: It is estimated that approximately 70% of blind Americans are either unemployed or underemployed. This refundable tax credit, up to $2500 over a three-year period, can help close this gap by allowing us to purchase access technology (screen readers, braillers or other hardware and software) to get us into the job market. Often vocational rehabilitation and other blind agencies are unable to provide this technology in a timely fashion for us to go to work. No employer who hires us wants to wait up to six months to obtain the equipment necessary for us to do the job we were hired to do. This bill could ultimately save the government $9.5 million a year, only with our conservative estimates of removing 1% of SSI and 1% of SSDI recipients from these programs.
* ADA Education and Reform Act: We, the National Federation of the Blind, along with every disability organization and hundreds of other agencies, strongly oppose this bill that would severely limit our ability to gain public accommodations. It erodes and weakens our equal access and protections under the ADA. It removes any incentives for businesses to comply with the ADA and places the onus of notification and “policing” of ADA violators squarely on its victims. This bill does not address the serious concerns and complaints by the business sector from spurious and frivolous lawsuits.
* Marrakesh Treaty: This treaty addresses the 95% of the world’s published works that are currently inaccessible to the blind and print disabled. It prevents us from reading published works from foreign countries and even those published in English-speaking ones as well.

As a member of the Florida delegation, Camille had a slew of appointments on Tuesday, January 30. She met with staffers in the offices of Representatives Webster, Demmings, Murphy and DeSantis. As part of another team, Camille and Brian Norton (the Central and East Central team), met with Congressman Rutherford in the Rotunda. At each meeting, she and her team discussed the legislative priorities, handed out informational packets and answered questions. On Wednesday, Camille and Brian met with John and Jonathan in Congressman Posey’s office, as well as Martin Rivera in Congressman Soto’s office. Since a vote was called on Tuesday, it was surprising and pleasing that Camille was able to greet, briefly, Congressmen Webster and Soto.

**Legislation in Florida**

Legislation and advocacy is a large part of the National Federation of the Blind. To further that end, each state has a Legislative Director and a committee whose job is to advance the priorities and agendas both statewide and on a national scale. The National Federation of the Blind of Florida has rejuvenated its Legislative Committee. The co-chairs are Camille Tate and Merry Shoch. The committee meets on the third Tuesday of each month and the information is posted to the Florida list. To receive these posts, along with other news and information from the National Federation of the Blind of Florida, please sign up at nfbnet.org. In the listings of various NFB lists, go to the Florida internet mailing list and subscribe. This will keep you abreast of all happenings within our affiliate.

We wish to thank the MSCC members who participated in our campaign against H. R. 620, The ADA Education and Reform Act of 2017. This bill would erode the equal access and protections within the ADA for all disabled Americans. Unfortunately, this bill passed the House of Representatives on Thursday, February 15. Although this is a discouraging and disheartening outcome, our work is not done. Due to the rules established by our founding fathers in the Constitution, it takes passing both the House of Representatives and Senate for a bill to become law; then it must be signed into law by the President of the United States. What this means is that we still have time to stop it in the Senate. To this end, we are devising a plan of action, using the collective voice of the National Federation of the Blind, to halt a law that would devastate the blind and disabled and push us back 28 years. Prior to a bill being considered in both the House and Senate for vote, a bill number will be attached to it. This has not happened yet and we are monitoring the situation. The fastest and easiest way to get up-to-date information is to join the Florida list, as we will post our plan of action there first. Please see Camille Tate at chapter meetings or call, (321) 372-4899, for additional information.

Legislation is a hot topic within the National Federation of the Blind and the National Federation of the Blind, FL. The committee is also working on a Blind Parental Rights Bill. There is still a shameful practice of removing children from parents who are blind, sometimes right after the moment of birth. It is often said that a social worker can not in “good conscience” leave a child with such a parent. In family court, a parent’s blindness is often the only reason the child is removed from their custody and that parent given supervised visitation. A parent’s ability to care for their child should not be predicated on whether that person has the ability to see. If a blind person can obtain an education, work and take care of themselves, then why is it so unbelievable they can care for their own children? Several affiliates have already achieved passage of a Blind Parents Rights Bill and Florida is now working towards that goal.

The power of the National Federation of the Blind comes from the collective that we are. Thousands of voices make such a joyful noise where a single voice can be muffled. The collective working towards a common goal can accomplish great things. Our group is strengthened by each individual that comprises it; we uplift one another and soldier on. We are the National Federation of the Blind.

Once we create our plan of action to stop the Senate companion to H. R. 620, we will post steps for the unfamiliar and assistance for those who are uncomfortable calling on their own will be available. The fastest way to get in touch with your Representatives and Senators when they are not in district is to contact the Capital Switchboard. You can be directed to either Congressman Posey, who is our representative in Congress, or the offices of Senators Nelson and Rubio. The switchboard number is (202) 224-3121. Give the name of who you want to speak to or just your zip code. Further information will be available in the near future.

**The National Federation of the Blind knows that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you or your future. Every day we raise the expectations of blind people, because low expectations create obstacles between the blind and our dreams. You can live the life you want; blindness is not what holds you back.**