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**NFB Pledge**

I pledge to participate actively in the efforts 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 Saturday, December 8, 2018. We meet from 9:30 a.m.-noon. We meet at The Fountains of Melbourne, 4451 Stack Blvd., Melbourne, FL, 32901.

Anyone needing transportation, please call Maria Rigogliosi, (321) 795-7376, no later than Tuesday, December 4. This is to ensure you are placed on the list for transportation.

As a reminder, SCAT charges a fare of $1.50 each way, for a total of $3.00. Drivers are unable to make change. Fare cards may be purchased by contacting SCAT at (321) 635-7815. Fare cards cost $15.00 and provide 10 trips. Please be sure to request a paratransit fare card.

We will have a 50/50 raffle at our next meeting. Tickets cost $1 each. The winner will receive half of the monies collected for the raffle, plus a mystery prize. See below for more information about our December holiday meeting.

**Happy Holidays**

The Melbourne Space Coast Chapter would like to extend holiday greetings to all of our members and their families. We hope all of you have a warm and safe holiday with your loved ones.

**Holiday Chapter Meeting**

We will have a holiday party during our December chapter meeting. In light of the season, we will not conduct a regular business meeting but resume in January. If any member would like to bring a pot luck dish, please contact Maria at (321) 795-7376, to let her know what you would like to bring or what we are in need of. We will have live entertainment from Bob Rowlett, a blind musician who visited our November meeting. Come and enjoy the fun!

**Membership Dues**

The deadline to pay your 2019 dues to the Melbourne Space Coast Chapter is fast approaching. Annual dues are $10 and must be paid by January to maintain your membership in MSCC and the National Federation of the Blind of Florida. Please remit your dues at our chapter meeting or by mailing to:

Melbourne Space Coast Chapter

P. O. Box 120311

Melbourne, FL 32912

**Plans for the Upcoming Year**

Although we are not having a regular business meeting in December, our board is still hard at work. We have some tentative plans for the direction we would like our chapter to go. Any and all members who wish to participate in making 2019 a success in Brevard are encouraged to help.

**Guest speakers:** We have revisited the issue of guest speakers at our meetings. There will not be a speaker at every meeting, but we have extended an invitation to have NFB Newsline come and talk about the free reading service available to anyone who is print disabled. We also would like to invite the Talking Book Library to come back again and an eye specialist who spoke at a meeting in 2017. Any ideas for guest speakers are welcome. Please speak to any member of the board with your suggestions. We will make every effort to fulfill your requests.

**Workshops:** in 2016 and 2017, we held a workshop to bring information to our members about products and/or services available to the blind and low vision. In 2019, we will revive the workshop, but hold them once a quarter (we can make adjustments for the holiday season). We would like to demonstrate products such as Apple IOS, Android, the Victor Reader Stream and services such as SCAT, DBS and CVI. Member input is essential. Let us know what focus you want for workshops and we will make an effort to bring it to all of you. Members who would like to help plan these workshops would be most appreciated.

**Vision Fair:** The Viera Lions Club has graciously offered to work with us to produce the 2019 Vision Fair. The tentative date is March 21, 2019 (provided the venue is available). We request members assist with the planning by making phone calls or some other task we need help with. Please see Camille Tate at any chapter meeting or call, (321) 372-4899.

As always, plans can be changed to meet the needs of our members. Remember, this is your chapter too. If there is anything you would like us to do, let your board know. We will always make every effort to bring what you want and need to the chapter.

**December Movie at the Library**

Maria Rigogliosi has planned a day at the Talking Book Library for Wednesday, December 12. Several times a year, the library will play a movie in descriptive audio format. For those not familiar with this service, it makes movies accessible to the blind and low vision. When there is a break in dialogue, a narrator will speak to describe the scene so you can follow along. This is so helpful because you do not have to nudge the person beside you to ask what is going on. Deb Martin, Director of the Cocoa Talking Book Library and a chapter member, put together this wonderful opportunity for us to get out and have fun at the movies. The library will provide a snack and a brown bag lunch for those who will take the bus home. If you require a special diet, you are asked to bring what you need.

**Convention Season**

It is that time of year again! Convention season is upon us. We bring this message early to all of you because our National Convention will be held in Las Vegas, Nevada, in July 2019. Our State Convention will be over Memorial Day weekend, May 2019.

The next state convention is Friday, May 24, through Monday, May 27, 2019. It is at the Embassy Suites in Boca Raton, Florida. The room rate is $99 per night, plus applicable hotel taxes. Registration and banquet fees have not yet been set by the National Federation of the Blind of Florida.

The National Convention will be at the Mandalay Bay Resort in Las Vegas, Nevada, from July 7-12. The room rate is $99 per night; this is for singles, doubles, triples and quads. There is a hotel tax and sales tax in addition to the room rate. The resort fee has been waived for NFB conventioners. Make your room reservations after January 1, 2019. Additional details will be reported as they become available.

**The Transportation Question**

Transportation is and will continue to be an important facet of the Melbourne Space Coast Chapter. Our chapter has worked on transportation issues since its inception. Every few months we discuss it at our chapter meetings. We wish to keep it in the forefront as it is an ongoing issue. This in-depth article will discuss your rights and responsibilities under each paratransit system and what you might expect.

**Transportation Disadvantaged**: This is what could be considered the basic level of paratransit. Every single paratransit client receives services under Transportation Disadvantaged.

**What is Transportation Disadvantaged?** It is a paratransit service for the elderly, disabled and low-income residents in Brevard County. It requires an application, which may be renewed every three years. When a person calls SCAT for the first time to become a paratransit user, this is the service you will get. You must be a TD client to receive any paratransit service.

**How does it work?** It entitles you to service Monday through Friday, for certain hours of the day (for example, 9 a.m.-3 p.m.). TD will take you to the doctor, grocery store and mall. You may obtain trips to other locations if SCAT is able to schedule it. There is no TD service on Saturday and Sunday or at night. A client may not always be able to receive TD service when they ask, depending on what the schedule looks like.

**How do you request a trip?** You request a trip by calling SCAT at (321) 633-1878, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays and weekends. By law, SCAT can only schedule trips up to seven days in advance, with certain exceptions. You may request a ride a minimum of 3 days in advance, but no more than seven days.

**What are exceptions?** Exceptions to the rules governing Transportation Disadvantaged are for standing orders such as medical or work. Contracted medical trips include dialysis, radiation and chemotherapy. There is also a percentage of the schedule devoted to standing orders for work. Not all clients who work will have these standing orders and there is most likely a waiting list to obtain this service. As a paratransit client, your requests will not remove a medical trip (as described above); you may not be able to obtain a trip if there is a conflict.

**Americans with Disabilities Act**: ADA paratransit is the other level of service you may be entitled to. This requires a separate application, which may take up to 21 days to process.

**What is ADA?** This level of paratransit has different rules than TD. Not all TD paratransit clients will qualify for ADA. Your qualifications to obtain this service may change over time and you may become disqualified. The application process is up to 21 days long and qualifying for TD does not automatically guarantee approval for ADA service.

**How do you qualify?** Qualification is based on laws within the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. These are federal laws, which are different from the laws governing TD. Under ADA, you may request a ride at least 24 hours in advance, but no more than seven days. You will need to receive an ADA card in the mail upon approval of your application, which can be used for identification purposes if you travel outside Brevard County to another area that has a paratransit service. This service is available as long as SCAT is in operation (Monday through Saturday, throughout the day; Sunday may have limited service based on the route working that day).

**How do I become ADA qualified?** You must request an ADA application by calling SCAT at (321) 633-1878. You may begin the application process over the phone, but a signed application must be submitted to SCAT before you become qualified. This process may take up to 21 days. Approval is not guaranteed. After you have been approved, you will have to obtain a photo identification card, issued by SCAT, that you need to carry with you.

**How do I request a trip?** Trips are requested through the customer service line, (321) 633-1878. You must be an ADA client to legally receive ADA services.

**What are the restrictions?** Under ADA rules, you can not be denied a trip to a friend’s house, mall, restaurant, movies or anywhere else, with some exceptions. As long as the route you are using is in operation, you will be able to use that route for paratransit. By law, you must live within ¾ (three quarters) of a mile from the nearest fixed route stop. If you live outside those parameters, it is up to SCAT and their schedule whether they can complete the trip or not. Any trips you take will not supersede the trips for the above-mentioned medical services. This is also part of the ADA law.

**What are the hours of operation?** ADA paratransit runs during the hours of operation for SCAT and whatever route you are closest to. For example, there are bus routes that end around 5 p.m. If that route qualifies you for a paratransit trip, you may not be able to return after 5 p.m. using paratransit. If the route runs until 8 p.m., then you may get a ride home, provided there is a bus at that hour and it does not supersede a medical trip.

It is important to remember that there is a limited number of buses and drivers. Evening and weekend trips are difficult to obtain due to many different factors. One factor is that with the increase in medical trips for services like dialysis, pleasure trips will be affected. Lack of sufficient drivers, who are subject to certain contract and union rules, may not be available for a trip to the mall at 7 p.m. If the area you are in does not have service after a certain hour, you may not be able to receive a trip either.

We have asked our members from time to time about their issues with SCAT and their customer service. If you are having a problem with a representative and their demeanor or lack of composure, let us know. It is important to know the date, time, who you spoke to and the content of the call-in order for us to work on your behalf. All of us understand the frustration of dealing with the rude or curt. We take those incidents seriously, but can not advocate on your behalf if we do not know about them or have the facts to go directly to SCAT. Please speak with Maria Rigogliosi regarding your issues with SCAT, by calling (321) 795-7376.

While it is important to bring these issues into the open, we always act with professionalism. The system is not perfect and never will be. Removing one irritant may invite two more to join. We do not seek to be given special treatment as blind and low vision citizens, but to be treated equally as our sighted partners in society.

**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 blind people and our dreams. You can live the life you want; blindness is not what holds you back.**