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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 face-to-face chapter meetings will continue to be held virtually due to the current health crisis. Once we can resume chapter meetings in-person, all will be notified. The Fountains of Melbourne will remain closed to outside visitors until further notice. We will maintain contact with them to find out when we may resume meeting there. However, we will conduct our chapter meetings via Zoom. The Zoom instructions will be printed below in this newsletter. The information will be posted to our chapter email list and those who do not have access to email will be contacted by telephone. Please bear with us during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

**Membership Dues**

Membership dues are due by January 31, 2021. If you pay your dues from now through January 31, your dues will be considered paid for the year of 2021. If your membership lapses and you have not become current as of January 31, you will no longer receive a chapter newsletter until your dues become current. Remember, your dues help defray the cost of printing our chapter newsletter, paying for our meeting space (right now, it is virtually through Zoom) and all other sundry expenses a chapter may incur while planning events. Additionally, only current paid members have the right to vote in local, state or national NFB elections, make and second motions or vote on any motions brought to the floor. Only current paid members may run for open board seats or nominate any other members for board seats.

Due to our not meeting in person at this time, please mail your dues to:

MSCC

P.O. Box 120311

Melbourne, FL 32911

Please make checks payable to MSCC.

The chapter now has access to its own PayPal account. If you wish to use PayPal, you will need to have an account with them. The account itself is free, but there may be fees associated with sending or receiving funds. To pay your membership dues using our PayPal account, please follow the below instructions:

Within the app or using your computer, please select to send money. You will send it to Melbourne@NFBFlorida.org (this is our official NFB email address). The amount is $10.

Please make sure you have linked your bank account to PayPal. This is the no fee way. If you link a debit or credit card only, you will incur a fee to send money through PayPal.

When you are ready to send, please make sure to select your payment type to “Sending to friends and family”. This makes sure the chapter receives your full dues amount. If you leave it at “Paying for goods and services”, the chapter will incur a fee, that will come out of the amount of money you send.

If you need help, please feel free to reach out to any board member or a chapter member that may use PayPal. Camille Tate can be reached at 321 372 4899.

**Coronavirus (COVID-19) Policy Update**

We are continuing to monitor the situation and hope that we will be able to see each other in person soon. The National Federation of the Blind lifted its previous policy directive cancelling all in person meetings of the organization. Instead, we are allowed to meet, provided we follow local and state guidelines. Considering our normal meeting space, The Fountains, remaining closed to outside visitors at this time, we will not meet in person. We encourage our members to practice social distancing if you must be out in public, maintaining a minimum 6 ft. of distance from others. You are encouraged to wear a mask if you are concerned, have a compromised immune system or have any other health issues that could be adversely affected by COVID-19. It is best that if you have no pressing business in the outside world, please stay at home. Refrain from touching the eyes, nose, and mouth. Consistently wash your hands with soap and water. Disinfect the surfaces in your home. Although it may be tough, do not shake hands, kiss or hug others. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO) have established precautionary guidelines that everyone should follow. The majority of our membership is in the most vulnerable population devastated by this virus and the health and safety of our members is of utmost importance. We are a family!

**Chapter Meetings and Zoom**

We have cancelled our in-person chapter meetings in response to the Coronavirus.

We have moved to a new platform for our virtual chapter meetings. Zoom has become the most widely used video conferencing software. You do not have to use a computer or smart device to access Zoom and we ask that if you do use such a device, please have your video turned off. This will give you the best connectivity. Zoom is the most accessible conferencing system and is easy to use. You can access a Zoom call using a computer (any operating system), smart device (Apple iPhone or iPad or, any Android phone or tablet) or dialing in (the same way you called in using Free Conference Call). If you need assistance to get into the Zoom call, just ask; there are chapter members that will bring you into a call.

There are a number of phone numbers you can use to call into a Zoom room. You may pick any of those phone numbers. If one is busy or doesn’t connect, use the next one in the list. We suggest you use the New York number (646 area code). You do not need a Zoom account to enter a Zoom call.

If you will use a smart phone or tablet, you may click the link provided or type in the meeting ID number. Below is the procedure if you will use a smart device or computer:

**Using a Computer**

* Click on the link in the invitation email.
* Zoom will download to your computer and open automatically. If you have a microphone on your computer, the waiting room will open up (this is now standard procedure. The host will admit you.).

**Using a Smart Phone or Tablet**

* If you access email on your phone, click the link in the invitation email. Zoom will download automatically and open.
* A screen will pop up asking how you want to connect. Please choose internet audio. If you don’t, we will not be able to hear you if you wish to speak.
* If you do not use email on your phone, go to the app store (or Google Play) and download Zoom. You may be required to sign up. Enter your email address and create a password.
* On the meeting screen, enter the meeting ID only (you do not need the phone number for this).
* Please make sure you select internet audio for your connection on the pop-up screen so we can hear you.

**Dialing In**

* If you are going to dial in, whether it is on your cell phone or landline, just enter in the phone number, then the meeting ID and the pound key (number sign).

All callers will be placed in a waiting room until the host admits you. Do not worry if you cannot hear people at first. It does take time to admit people if there are a lot coming in at once. We are hoping to be able to admit multiple people at once, but not sure if the new update includes that feature.

As always, if you need help, please ask. We will not know unless you speak up. If any members want some training on how to use Zoom, just let us know. We can schedule an hour or so to work with the members. If you are comfortable using a computer or smart device, it will be a little easier and quicker to get the hang of it.

Here are the protocols for our chapter meetings:

* When accessing the call, if you are coming late (i.e., after the listed time the call is supposed to start), please do not announce yourself when prompted. If someone is speaking, then you will be talking over them. The moderator of the call will wait until all talking has ceased before asking you to announce yourself.
* If you are seeking the floor to speak, please wait for whomever is talking to finish before stating your name and wait to be recognized. Again, this is to ensure that no one is talking over anyone else and so others can hear.
* If you are in an area with background noise, please mute yourself. You do this either by hitting \*6 or using the mute function in your phone app (the mute button on the side of the phone does not work if you are using a voice over function). If you are using a computer, hit the Alt key and A (this is the mute toggle function; hit it again to unmute). If you used a smart phone or tablet by clicking the link, there is a mute button in the lower left side of the device; you can tap or double tap to toggle mute and unmute. When you want to seek the floor to speak, hit \*6 to unmute. Of course, if we have any difficulty, the moderator can mute everyone and we can proceed from there.

This information will be transmitted again as we come closer to our teleconference meeting date and will be repeated once our call has started.

We thank you for your patience with us as we weather the storm that has gathered across the globe.

**7th Annual Car, Truck and Bike Show, aka “The Joe Show”**

We are in the planning stages of our 7th Annual Joseph B. Naulty Car and Bike Show, AKA “The Joe Show”, presented by the Melbourne Space Coast Chapter, National Federation of the Blind of Florida. We hope to build on last year’s success! The next show is tentatively scheduled for Saturday, October 9, 2021. This date is subject to change. We are excited to bring back our chapter’s largest fundraiser and community awareness project to Brevard County.

**Car Show Committee Request for Help**

As we plan our 7th car and bike show, we realize the work cannot and should not be done by one person. It takes effort to pull off an event of this kind. The chapter president, Camille Tate and Car Show Committee Co-Chair, Julia Savage, is putting out a call to the Melbourne Chapter members. The committee needs your help. Whatever job you can perform that would help the committee would be greatly appreciated. It is through the strength and teamwork of our members that we can accomplish our goals.

While the car show is not yet set in stone, we ask that our members step up to participate on the Car Show Committee.

**Washington Seminar Wrap-Up**

The National Federation of the Blind of Florida really stepped up its gamed this year with our virtual Washington Seminar. The pandemic saw many changes in the way many corporations conducted business. The ease of accessibility with the Zoom platform enabled all 52 affiliates of the National Federation of the Blind to participate fully in the activities of Washington Seminar. In fact, the National Federation of the Blind of Florida was able to send delegates to Washington Seminar from all 12 chapters and a constituent from each of the 27 House Districts. We never had such an opportunity before to have such attendance. I am pleased to announce that as of the drafting of this newsletter, there will have been an initial meeting with all 27 Representatives and both Senators from the state of Florida. Thanks to our co-Legislative Director, Russ Davis, we managed to make the most effective use of the virtual platform to cover the entire state.

We are happily on our way to repeat our success with one of our bills from last year. The Access Technology Affordability Act (H.R.431/S.212) or ATAA now has six co-sponsors from Florida, with the promise of a seventh in the next few days. Overall, this bill has garnered 66 co-sponsors in the House and 12 in the Senate. We are reaching our 2020 numbers of support and hope it will make it to the floor this year. The COVID-19 pandemic placed many legislative initiatives on hold while Congress dealt with the crisis.

We are still waiting for lead sponsorship for the three remaining issues presented at Washington Seminar. Once we receive more information, we will reach out to our membership for further action.

**Legislative Alert**!

The Legislative Alert from the National Federation of the Blind of Florida may precede this newsletter, but the information will will be relevant. The Vote By Mail bills in the Florida House and Senate (HB7041/SB90) will be quite damaging to those of us who use the Vote By Mail system, formerly called absentee ballot. While many bills often contain information that is confusing or uses a lot of legal speak, some components of the House and Senate bills are troubling.

In the 2020 General election, more disabled people and people of color voted than have ever in the history of American elections. Many people who normally would not vote utilized the Vote By Mail process to cast their ballots. This was due to health and safety concerns over polling precincts and being out in public during the pandemic. However, the Vote By Mail process has been used for decades with little or no issues (except where the post office is concerned). Now, Florida legislators want to make the process difficult or impossible for certain groups traditionally underrepresented to be able to cast their vote.

If you are already registered to receive a mail-in ballot, if this bill passes, you will have to register again. This is a drastic change from the current system, where as long as you cast a vote in at least one election every four years, your voter registration remains active. This would now change for those who request mail-in ballots and require them to register each and every year for their mail-in ballot. The current database of Vote By Mail registrations will be erased and all who might not have had to register will be required to do so. Here is part of the problem for the blind community. Most voter materials, including online registration and definitely print registration, is inaccessible. It has been for years. The point is not that we should find someone to help us. The point is that we should NOT have to ask someone to help us. The moment a process requires the intervention or help of a sighted person, it is no longer accessible to the blind.

The House Bill 7041 will remove millions of drop boxes across the state and require the remaining drop box locations to have in-person surveillance. If Supervisor of Elections office fails to provide such in-person surveillance, they will be subject to a $25,000 fine. Additionally, if a relative or someone who does not share a physical, residential address to the voter and attempts to drop off the voter’s ballot, the person may be subject to criminal action.

These are just some of the components of HB 7041 and SB90 that the National Federation of the Blind are opposed to. The changes in registration for Vote By Mail will make is difficult or impossible for voters who are transportation disadvantaged, mobility challenged or who lack the financial means to ensure they can reach a polling precinct. In other words, the disabled, those groups with a history of disenfranchisement and the poor will have their ability to vote made all the more difficult. A letter will be circulated in template form, that can be used by members of the National Federation of the Blind of Florida to be used to contact their state legislator. Help for those who do not know their legislator will be given to all who request it.

**National Convention 2021**

The National Convention will be virtual again in 2021. Have no fear, we expect to be eating shrimp etouffee and beignets in New Orleans in 2022!

The dates for National Convention are Tuesday, July 6 through Saturday, July 10. It will be held over Zoom, just like last year. The deadline to register so you will be eligible to vote is May 31. Please visit nfb.org/convention and follow the links to reach the registration form. Registration is free of charge, but you can make a donation to the National Federation of the Blind if you choose.

If you have not paid your chapter’s 2021 dues as of yet, please do so as soon as possible. Any member whose dues are delinquent will not be eligible to vote at the National Convention. Please see the article earlier in this newsletter on how to pay your dues.

**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.**