**The Blind Missourian**

 **December 2023**

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### Table of Contents

Youth Programs by: Jenny Carmack 1

Blind Equality Achievement Month: Connections,

 Growth, Partnerships, and Progress by Daniel Garcia 6

NFB Blog Post by Isaac McBurney 8

GED to PhD by Josephine Grove, PhD 11

2024 Scholarship Announcement by Robin House 13

National Federation of the Blind of Missouri

 2024 Scholarship Program 14

Convention Assistance Available by Eugene Coulter 16

2024 State Convention Packet by Eugene Coulter 17

Chapter Elections and Reports 21

NFB Pledge 24

One Minute Message 24

# Youth Programs

By: Jenny Carmack

When I was a child/teen there were very few (if any) activities that I could be involved in and feel fully included and content. Today things are different; there are a variety of activities for blind/visually impaired children and teens to participate in. These activities are created with them in mind, so they have the opportunity to feel independent, successful, and accomplished. The NFB of Missouri offers many of these opportunities for youth of all ages across the state. Here is the breakdown of what has been happening throughout the second half of 2023 and a glimpse into the future!

## **BELL Academy**

July 31 - August 11, 2023, we held the 10th annual BELL (Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning) Academy for children ages 4 - 12 years old. This year’s theme was Travel and Transportation, and we offered many lessons around this theme.

BELL participants went on two field trips. The first one was to a transit center where the students were able to explore all the parts of a public transit bus: the fare box, the cord to pull to indicate “stop requested,” the wheel chair ramp, the bike rack, and how the seats are arranged from the front to the back of the bus. Then they went on a short bus ride to practice bus safety such as where to place your cane while you ride and when and where to exit the bus. Last, the students were able to explore how the ticket purchasing machine works using the audio and the Braille on each machine. The second field trip was to the National Museum of Transportation, where the students explored and learned about a variety of vehicles: a dairy cart that was once drawn by horses, a dump truck, an electric car, a solar powered car, and various types of trains. The staff at the museum made these vehicles available for students to explore with their hands and really get to understand how these vehicles are constructed inside and out, while a tour guide told them about each vehicle and its importance and answered any questions. The purpose of these field trips was to help students gain a deeper understanding of the various modes of transportation that they currently use and will use in the future. Much of the information they gained through these experiences is like what others gain visually: what a car engine looks like, how train cars are coupled, different types of wheels for different vehicles, etc.

We did a variety of other activities during the two-week program as well. We wrote silly stories about taking a trip on a train; this is where we start out with a topic and pass the Braille writer around for each person to add their own sentence related to the topic without reading what was previously written, then we read it all together. The students really get a good laugh from these stories. We went on a fishing trip (pretend of course), and when the students caught a fish, they had to read the sentence on the fish or throw it back in the pond. We talked about our dream vacation and what types of transportation we would use to get there, then act out the travel experience: flying in a plane, driving a car, rowing a boat, or walking. We got to interact with several different tactile maps, and then we created our own tactile maps; this really challenged our minds to think differently. Of course, we cannot forget some of our favorite activities: Braille Twister, the Ninja running rope, playing games like Jenga and Tic Tac Toe, helping to prepare snacks, and treasure hunting. There were many other lessons; the students stay busy each day of the two-week program. Then we can’t forget the Family Presentation on the last day, the time when students get to show off the skills they have learned or improved on during the two-week time: one student read an entire contracted book with no help, one student wrote his name and the alphabet while confidently using learning shades and performed some magic tricks for the audience, and another student wrote her name and the alphabet on the Braille writer using her feet to demonstrate that Braille can be written in many ways. We want to offer a big congratulations to our BELL graduate, Salome Cummins, who participated in BELL from the age of 4 until 12, even doing two programs in one summer; we are so proud of her!!!

A look ahead! We have begun to plan for next year’s BELL Academy. By the end of this year (2023), save the date flyers will be circulating, we will provide the dates, cities, and theme for BELL. This will give families more of a chance to plan and prepare to participate next summer. Registration will open in February. When you see the flyers, please help spread the word by sharing with parents and professionals you know.

## **STEM2U**

On August 19, 2023, STEM came to Missouri. This year’s STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) was called “Launch into STEM,” and astronomy was the theme. Students came from around the state to Jefferson City to conduct five different experiments. While conducting these experiments, students enhanced their scientific skills in: hypothesizing, theorizing, developing a plan (or method) for conducting the experiment, carrying out the experiment, and evaluating to see if they proved or disproved their hypothesis or if their theory was correct. Additional skills practiced throughout the day included, but were not limited to: reading and drawing tactile pictures as part of experiment planning, trial and error, communication, team work, and most importantly a sense of confidence when it comes to their ability to participate in STEM activities.

Each experiment that the students conducted came with some background information and directions (in large print and Braille). First, we read through the information and directions provided, then we discussed theories that applied to the experiment, then students got to work hypothesizing, planning, and conducting their experiments. After each experiment we came back together as a group and discussed the results and what was learned. The experiments included: creating a balloon rocket in which the students had to make the balloon travel along a 10-foot long string, making a rocket out of a camera film case in which students experimented with the chemical reaction between water and an Alka Seltzer tablet, creating a simulated moon surface and using different objects from various heights to see the widths and depths of the “craters” that each object created, building a model moon bunker out of marshmallows and toothpicks which involved drawing out the plan before building it, and finally creating a small scaled parachute that would work as a real one would.

As you can see, these experiments seemed simple but allowed for students to build a variety of skills and provided them with the opportunity to challenge themselves but to come out feeling successful. The students and volunteers had a great time and learned a lot from each other. Toward the end of the day, two students were talking about a STEM Day that was held at their school, and one of them said, “we just sat there most of the time because no one knew how to help us, and we didn’t know what to do.” That quote sums up why it is so important for us to bring STEM opportunities to students. The STEM field is rapidly growing, and changing and blind people can and should be included in all aspects of it.

A look ahead! Missouri is proud to be hosting another STEM Day in the spring of 2024. The theme will again be astronomy but with a whole new set of experiments and experiences. Students in grades 3 – 12 will be invited to participate, no matter what level of experience they have with science. Watch for more information to be out in early January.

## **Cane Drivers**

Missouri’s Cane Drivers took a break during the very busy summer months, but has geared back up now that the school year has begun. This group of teens (ages 13 – 19) is led by the teens with support and guidance from adult mentors. This means that the teens plan and lead their activities, which involves recruiting participants, advertising the activity, planning the activity, writing an agenda for each activity, and leading the participants through each activity. This group has a chair (currently Patrick Wilson) and a co-chair (currently Terra Coccovizzo) who do most of the planning but try to bring in help from other teen participants. Teens who participate in this group have the opportunity to improve upon their skills in: leadership, self-advocacy, self-confidence, socialization, and career readiness. Most of the activities are done the second Thursday of each month over Zoom with 1-2 in person activities each year.

In October, Patrick and Terra put together a “Name that Tune” game to draw in students for the first meeting of the year. In November, the leaders guided a conversation about what they want the upcoming retreat to look like and what types of things they want to do beginning in January. Ten teens will have the opportunity to participate in a weekend retreat in Columbia December 8-10, 2023. During the retreat they will be cooking their own meals, cleaning up after their meals, network with other NFB members, develop some advocacy techniques through roll playing skits, and more. They are looking forward to this awesome experience.

A look ahead! In January, the group plans to start a book club; a book will be chosen, and every other month they will have a book discussion. On the months that is not the book discussion they are planning to bring presenters from various professions to talk about their jobs, needed education, and accommodations they use to perform their jobs. Also, in 2024 we will be working on getting chapters to sponsor local activities for teens. Details on meetings and local activities will begin coming out in late December and early January.

## **Mission BEAM**

There are exciting things happening in the Mission BEAM (Blindness, Empowerment, Advocacy, and Mentoring) Program. The two-part program has been holding various workshops for the past two years in different cities around Missouri. The value of these workshops is that students have the opportunity to come together to spend a day focusing on a specific skill. Students learn from each other and several different blind adults at one time. The workshops provide skill building, networking, and real-life experiences. On November 18, 2023, we held the “Confidence in the Kitchen” workshop. The purpose of the workshop was to help students increase their confidence in working independently in the kitchen to prepare meals and snacks. Upon talking to many students and their families it was determined that the most intimidating things about working in the kitchen are: using knives and using the stove/oven. We hear these concerns and want to help students to know that they are completely able to prepare and cook any kind of food they want. During the workshop we discussed good safety practices, steps for planning and preparing a meal or snack, explored various kitchen aids that may make working in the kitchen easier, and prepared a meal of spaghetti, salad, and garlic bread (incorporating cooking on the stove top, using the oven, and cutting vegetables). Students who participated got to take home a flash drive with various resources and simple recipes and some things to help them to use their kitchen with more confidence (bump dots and puff paint for marking appliances, oven mitts, cut resistant gloves, push/pull tool for pulling and pushing oven racks, and double-sided spatula). One student told us that their favorite food is pasta but that mom makes it, and now the student is going to try to boil and drain their own noodles. Another student said that they had never grated cheese before, but now they want to grate their cheese the next time they have scrambled eggs. Another student said their kitchen was being remodeled with new appliances and was glad to have the bump dots, so they could mark the new appliances.

The second part of Mission BEAM, that has not yet launched, is the one-to-one mentoring between a successful blind adult and a high school student. We have interviewed five potential mentors, and they are making their way through the training and background checks. We are so excited to be so close to launching this part of the program! This mentoring will help students to make goals and develop strategies toward meeting those goals. Students will have the opportunity to work with their mentor on a weekly basis to participate in activities that will help them to be prepared to transition from high school into their post-secondary path (ex. employment, tech school, training center, higher education, etc.). Applications for mentors will be open on a continuous basis. If you or someone you know is interested, please go to: [www.nfbmo.org/beam](http://www.nfbmo.org/beam) to complete an application.

A look ahead! We are looking to begin recruiting students to participate in the one-to-one mentoring in January. Announcements and the link for the application should be shared in early 2024. We will be holding two more workshops before the end of this academic year; the dates and locations are currently being decided and should be shared in late December or early January.

Wow! Look at all these opportunities for students. Putting all these activities together takes a lot of collaboration from so many people, from those who give their time to be an on-site volunteer, to those who take their time to prepare and share things behind the scenes, from those who work to recruit families for each activity to those who help to plan activities/lessons, and everything else that so many of our members and friends have done and continue to do to make these opportunities possible. I also want to thank the various community partners we have who have allowed us to use their facilities to hold our program activities: libraries, churches, and Lighthouse for the Blind; we truly appreciate your generosity and willingness to give the space we need to carry out our programs. Last, but certainly not least, I want to give a big thank you to the families who have made it possible for their student to participate in these activities. We know that families have: rearranged plans, pulled kids out of bed early in the morning, provided transportation for their students (sometimes 100 miles or more), and always do so with smiles and words of gratitude. Thank you all!!!

In closing, you can keep up to date on all youth programs by going to our website: [www.nfbmo.org](http://www.nfbmo.org) and going to the “youth programs” tab. There you will be able to read about upcoming activities/events, find flyers, and read reflections from students and volunteers. Please feel free to send an email anytime to: youth-programs@nfbmo.org

# Blind Equality Achievement Month: Connections, Growth, Partnerships, and Progress

By Daniel Garcia

In the National Federation of the Blind, October is Blind Equality Achievement Month. It is during this month that members of the NFB put forth an extra effort to make connections with our communities, grow our membership, leverage the relationships that we have built with community partners, and reflect on the progress that the organization has made to make life better for blind people.

The December 2022 Blind Missourian featured an article I wrote about the Kansas City Chapter’s efforts during 2022 Blind Equality Achievement Month. I mentioned in that article that we had contacted the Kansas City Area Transportation Authority about the inaccessibility of the application to sign up for the complimentary paratransit service. Though an official of the KCATA then came to talk to our chapter in November 2022, about this and other issues, there was a subsequent lack of communication between the NFB and the KCATA in the following months. As a result, the Kansas City and Ivanhoe Chapters passed resolutions in March 2023 asking the KCATA to have an ongoing conversation with us about transportation issues in Kansas City. The text of this resolution can be found in the June 2023 Blind Missourian. After passing this resolution, we took action by sending the text of the resolution to various KCATA officials. President Wright also wrote a letter to the KCATA explaining that the affiliate was willing to help the Kansas City and Ivanhoe Chapters in any way to advance the cause of better transportation services for blind Kansas Citians. This led to an in-person meeting with the KCATA on April 12. This meeting was very productive, and we then started meeting quarterly with them via the Microsoft Teams platform. During our quarterly October 11 meeting, we learned that the KCATA had created an accessible PDF to sign up for the complimentary paratransit service. We subsequently tested this document and found out that it was indeed accessible. Though this issue has been resolved, there is much work to do to improve the service they provide, and we will continue to provide productive feedback to the KCATA.

On Wednesday, September 6, I received an email message from Kirby Hough, Blind and Low Vision Coordinator at The Whole Person, an independent living center in Kansas City. She explained that they were having a resource fair as part of their “White Cane Awareness Month” and that they were offering us a table to distribute information. By mere coincidence, this resource fair would be held on October 11, a couple of hours after our quarterly meeting with the KCATA. Needless to say, that this was a very hectic and exciting day. This event gave us the opportunity to hand out NFB literature which any chapter can obtain for free from our Independence Market. I am very grateful to Julie Dawson, Kathy Giffen, Willa Patterson, and Tony Waterhouse-Leal for volunteering to help me represent the chapter at this event. I am happy to report that one of the individuals who stopped by our table is Dennie Pierce who has recently moved from Iowa. He was involved in the NFB of Iowa and decided to join our chapter during our November 18 meeting. I also spoke with the other vendors, and one of them expressed an interest in sponsoring our upcoming convention. I am grateful to Dave Hutchins for taking the initiative to invite Kirby to be a guest speaker during our April 8 meeting. I can only guess as to whether we would have been invited to the resource fair had we not been in Kirby’s radar.

We also had a guest speaker during our October 21 meeting. Missouri Federationnists know Amy Wilson as one of our affiliate board members, but during that meeting, she was there in her role of CEO and founder of Safety Positive Foundation, an organization dedicated to “problem-solving the personal safety needs of the blind community.” Not only does having guest speakers help to create more interest in attending a meeting, but it also serves to give members information about resources available to the blind community that we can use to improve our lives.

People from outside of the organization can also have a great impact on our ability to carry out our programs and serve as great ambassadors between the NFB and the public. Sharen Bradford is a blind individual who on two occasions a few years apart received two CCTVs from us. She had wanted to pay us for the CCTVs, but we told her that they were a gift to her and that they had been donated to us. Although Sharen is not a chapter member, she eagerly participates in our annual fall nut sale which takes place during October. She has many neighbors and church members who eagerly anticipate the goodies we sell from Farmstead Nuts & Treats. She gets us lots of orders, oftentimes outselling some chapter members. I think that it is fair to say that she has paid for those CCTVs several times over, and she has done it in a way that is more enjoyable to her. When President Riccobono started a conversation in the Chapter Presidents’ Mailing list on October 30 about what chapters are doing to widen the circle with regards to fundraising outside the NFB, I replied with Sharen’s story as an example of what our chapter does.

As I write this, it is one day before Thanksgiving, and I am again filled with gratitude for the sixteen individuals from seven different states who founded the National Federation of the Blind in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania on November 16, 1940. I am also grateful for the generations of Federationists who followed and worked hard to make life better for all of us. Let us all commit ourselves now to continuing the fight. The work we do now may or may not benefit us, but it will surely benefit future generations of blind people. I am also filled with gratitude for a growing chapter with many talented and dedicated individuals who are the leading force in representing the interests of all blind Kansas Citians.

# NFB Blog Post: My First National Convention

By Isaac McBurney

Hello, my name is Isaac McBurney, and this was my first tine going to a national convention. Before I share more about my experiences of a rookie deep in the heart of the federation, I want to share more about myself first.

I got really involved with the NFB in April at the state convention. I had gone to some of the various youth activities here and there but never really got fully involved. I was selected as a state scholarship finalist, so I went to the 2023 state convention. I met so many great people there and knew this was an organization I wanted to be more a part of. A few weeks later, the scholarship team reached out and asked, as the top scholarship person, if I wanted to go to the convention in Houston. I said “yes”, and started packing that day! So, in having this in mind, let’s get into my first convention!

I have never been to a convention of this size before, so it was one thing to be in the presence of this many people, but the fact that most all of them were blind or visually impaired had a really big impact. We were all tripping over each other’s canes and guide dogs, but we didn’t care because it was an even playing field. No one could see this was happening, and it felt nice to not be the only one running into other people or things. I’m used to being the only one with a cane when I’m out and about, so it feels a little awkward to use it sometimes, but I didn’t feel that here. Even at the airport on the way home, I met someone who was at the convention. I had some time before my flight Friday, so I went to the Space Center and saw several other blind people. The blind people were taking over the city!

I went with my mom to the national convention, and my dad got to go with me to the state convention. They both learned more about blindness and what it means to “Live the life you want”. I know they both learned a lot from it, as well as more about blindness from some different people than they’re used to.

The hotel staff made every effort to make the convention as accessible as they could. The staff evidently got trained, had Braille menus at the restaurants, and described what was going on in situations where they needed it. You can tell that the NFB helped make this the best place for the blind. Some of the participants were also talking signs, saying things like “this way to the elevators”, “exhibit hall down the escalator on your right”, things like this that were really helpful. These are things that I wouldn’t have thought of and offered a really accessible way for all of us to know where we were and needed to go.

Throughout the week, I got to learn more about some good resources that I will definitely look into. I also got the opportunity to do a Juno walk with one of the guide dog schools there. I’ve been looking into maybe getting a guide dog at some point, and this was a really good opportunity to be able to have this here to see if it was a good fit. I also learned more about some of the book and accessible media projects that some companies are working on.

Also, during the week, I went to several sessions and workshops where I learned so much more about apps, organizations, and people in the blindness field. I went to the National Association of Blind Students Division meeting where I got to hear from some of the students about college and how they made their experience the best they could through accessible means. It was cool to be surrounded by others wanting to peruse higher education at all different stages, undergraduate students, PhD candidates, everyone. It was really cool! I also went to the Performing Arts Division meeting and nerded out over all the different things we talked about, as well as the at improv workshop. I was also able to connect with blind actors, directors, musicians, and so many more people.

President Riccobono and all the board that I met throughout the week were so nice! I went to the presidential suite the first day and got to talk with him for a few minutes. I also learned at the Performing Arts Division talent show that First Lady Riccobono did Speech and Debate in high school. So, I talked with her about that for a few minutes. They all seemed really down to earth and wanting to connect with the people.

A few weeks before I knew I was going to go to the national convention, I found out that an international friend I had met at Space Camp was going. So, it was really great to be able to reconnect with him after five years. Not really convention related, but something I’ve learned in my life thus far: the people you meet at these blindness events are some of the best people you can have in your network. They understand the struggles, as they’re living through it too. I feel that I can talk to them and they know what is going on. At this convention, I have met some more of these people. Sorry for the little tangent. Let’s get back into my closing thoughts.

So, reflecting at the end of this post on a few things: was waking up at 2:30 A.M. Friday morning, only getting two hours of sleep that day (because that’s how I roll), spending a week away from home the summer before starting college, and having busy days, worth getting to meet and connect with so many other blind people, exploring a new city, and making so many memories. I think it is!

I am so thankful to the NFB of Missouri for giving me this wonderful opportunity to experience the magic that is National Convention. I know this won’t be my last convention, and I hope to see you there.

If the national convention proposes a financial hardship for you to be able to go, they gave out almost 100 first-time convention scholarships for people to go and experience this great place. If you’re up for it, you should apply. Also, if you’re a college student, definitely apply for the state and national scholarships! A surprising amount of people, myself included, got involved with the NFB through their scholarship program.

I hope through this post I was able to provide some insights in to my time at my first national convention. If you get the chance, you should definitely make a plan to attend! That’s enough from me, for now. I hope you have a great day!

# GED to PhD

By Josephine Grove, PhD

In 2020, one week before the COVID shutdown, I completed a doctorate in Higher Education Administration from the University of Phoenix Online. While many graduates earned terminal degrees that year, my graduation was unique because, on graduation day, I was 79 years old. Additionally, I'm an African American woman who is legally blind. Legally blind indicates visual acuity with the best correction in the better eye less than or equal to 20/200. My visual acuity is 20/400. In my case, blindness is caused by the disintegration of the rods and cones in the back of the eyes, known as rod/cone dystrophy. This means I may not drive a car and have almost no central vision but reasonably good peripheral vision. I can only read the printed or written word with different forms of magnification. I rely on speech voiceover to read materials to me. For example, my computer reads what is on the screen using ZoomText software designed specifically for blind and visually impaired individuals. My iPhone, watch, and even bathroom scales all use speech technology to convey information.

As my vision loss escalated, the challenges to my educational journey increased. My first diploma was my GED, earned after I left high school to deliver my first child. Next, I earned an Associate’s Degree in Nursing while my vision was still 20/20. When I earned my bachelor’s degree in 1983 from Stephens College, I could still read and drive with only mild difficulty. Ten years later, when pursuing my master’s degree at Fontbonne University, I found it difficult to read my handwriting and resorted to using a thick black marker for written communication. While embracing my educational goals, I worked full-time and raised four children as a single mom. Quite frankly, I lived in fear that my employer would discover I had vision problems, and I would subsequently lose my job.

Sixteen years later, in 2009, while teaching online, I began studying for my doctoral degree. By this time, I depended entirely on magnification and electronic speech recognition for written communication. During the final year of study, I relied on my daughter to make corrections on the dissertation because although I could hear the mistake being read by the computer, I could not visually locate the sentence on the page. Imagine the frustration and loss of valuable time. As a result, with one setback or another, it took eleven years for me to complete my PhD. The most arduous task was writing the dissertation, conducting research, trying to read graphs, and designing Excel spreadsheets using accessible computer tools. I was fortunate that many family members and friends supported me with this monumental document.

The fact that I graduated at all is a success story. I began the doctoral journey one month before major surgery to reduce my burgeoning weight. Recovery from this procedure would take the next two years, with numerous hospitalizations. The difficulty was worth it, as I lost over 120 pounds, and my general health improved significantly. Despite complications, I only missed a few days of class, and with the accommodation of extra time because of my blindness, I turned in all assignments by the deadline.

Quite soon after that recovery, I discovered a lump in my breast. A biopsy was performed, and the diagnosis was cancer. Although the lump was small, I elected to have a right mastectomy. The weeks following surgery were demanding, and I was extremely fortunate that no radiation or chemotherapy was required. I missed only one week of class and continued my studies. I'm happy to report that I am cancer-free today.

Because of the pandemic, my graduation was presented via YouTube. I prepared at home with thousands of other graduates. Family and friends around the country tuned in to watch. When my name was called, my son and his wife were at my home to officially place my cowl over my head. It was beautiful, even though I had often imagined walking across the stage to the sound of Elgar’s Pomp and Circumstance. Recently, at a party for my 82nd birthday, I asked my brother, who hosted the event, if I could "walk" in my regalia into the party. He readily agreed, and I had the chance to thank in person many of the people who helped me complete my doctorate. No matter how lofty your dreams and ambitions are, you can succeed despite any challenges you face.

Pursuing goals requires due diligence, belief in yourself and your dream, focus, persistence, determination, and discipline. Refuse to indulge the naysayers who might ridicule your efforts or sabotage your daily objectives. No matter what obstacles you encounter, do not blink. You can do it.

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# 2024 Scholarship Announcement

By Robin House

Greetings,

I hope this message finds you well. The National Federation of the Blind of Missouri is all about promoting opportunities to enable blind students to attain their education and career goals. I am writing to let you know about the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri 2024 Scholarship Program. I am asking for your help in distributing the attached scholarship announcement to high school seniors and college students in Missouri. This is a wonderful scholarship opportunity for Missouri students. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely

Robin House

Scholarship Chairperson

NFB of Missouri

National Federation of the Blind of Missouri

2024 Scholarship Program

The National Federation of the Blind of Missouri announces our 2024 Scholarship Program. We will be accepting applications until February 15, 2024. We invite all qualified candidates to apply. Applicants must be legally blind and plan to enroll in a post-secondary institution for the fall of 2024. Applicants should live in Missouri but need not be a member of the National Federation of the Blind. Scholarships begin at $750 and are based on merit. We invite applicants to submit all information and documents online. All application materials must be received by February 15, 2024, either through the online form found at www.nfbmo.org or at the email address provided below. Acknowledgment of applications and documents will be sent upon receipt. If you have questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact as listed below.

Q. What are the benefits of a National Federation of the Blind of Missouri Scholarship?

A. Meet other blind students and learn about the Missouri Association of Blind Students (MABS).

B. Learn more about how to “Live the Life you Want”

C. Network with other successful blind people in the career area that you are interested in. No need to reinvent the wheel.

D. Make new friends.

E. All of the above are correct. *Correct answer: E*

Scholarship Application Checklist

* Official application form
* Student essay
* Student transcripts
* Two letters of recommendation
* Proof of legal blindness
* A letter from an NFB of Missouri Scholarship Committee member. Contact the Scholarship Chair to arrange this interview after you have completed the first 5 requirements.

Please note:

\* Letters of recommendation must not be submitted by the applicant, but must come directly from the person authoring the recommendation.

\* In an effective essay the applicant may consider sharing about his or her life in a way that gives the committee insight into him or her. The essay should cover the ways in which one lives successfully as a blind person and describe personal goals for the future. Committee members give the essay a great deal of attention.

\* In addition to receiving the monetary award, the scholarship finalist will attend the convention of the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri, April 11-14, 2024, at the Hilton Kansas City Airport Hotel, 8801 NW 112th St, Kansas City, MO, 64153. Accommodations, convention registration, and planned meals during the convention will be included. We are also happy to help coordinate transportation to ensure this is not a barrier to our scholarship class. The type of transportation assistance may vary based on where in Missouri the winner resides and the available transportation resources in that community.

\* Throughout the convention, scholarship winners will have an opportunity to learn about the National Federation of the Blind and network with successful blind people. In addition, final interviews with the Scholarship Committee will aid the committee in determining the scholarship each winner will receive.

\* You should know that merit scholarships from the National Federation of the Blind go directly to the winner. Therefore, students can use funds to meet expenses that other funding sources do not cover. Also, merit scholarships are viewed favorably when included on a resume.

The application can be found on the NFB of Missouri website. If you have any questions about the application process, please contact the scholarship chair.

Robin House, Chair, Scholarship Committee

National Federation of the Blind of Missouri

Phone or Text: 314-265-6852.

Email: scholarships@nfbmo.org

Web Page: [www.nfbmo.org/scholarships](http://www.nfbmo.org/scholarships)

# Convention Assistance Available

By Eugene Coulter

We are pleased to announce that applications will be open on February 1, 2024 for convention assistance through the Gwen and George Rittgers Convention Memorial Fund. Applications must be submitted online by March 12, 2024 at 5:00 pm. Applicants will be notified by March 16 of the committee’s decision. When applications open go to the state convention page on the affiliate website [www.nfbmo.org](http://www.NFBMo.org) and click on the convention assistance link to apply. Priority is given foremost to those who will be attending their first state convention. Then the committee may consider applicants who have not previously received Rittgers funding. Normally, funding is not granted to those who have previously received a stipend for state convention from the fund. Applicants should make hotel reservations but should NOT register for the convention until after they are notified of the results of their application.

 Rittgers stipends are based on financial need, therefore, those applying for funding should lay out their needs so that the Rittgers Committee can get a picture of the applicant’s situation, so we can make the most informed decision to help the greatest number of people. Applications are kept strictly confidential and are shared only on an absolute need to know basis. Also, keep in mind that funding is very limited and will only cover a part of the recipient’s expenses, but the hope is that it will be enough to make the difference in the applicant’s ability to attend the state convention.

Just because a person receives funding from their chapter or another source does not mean that they will not get assistance from the fund. Please state whether you will need hotel accommodation for two or three nights.

Generally, there are stipends provided for the national convention. A notice will be posted on or before April 19, 2024 on the affiliate website and list serves about the availability of funds with the application deadline for these funds being May 20, 2024, at 5:00 pm.

If you have additional questions, email me at GCoulter@NFBMo.org or call me at 573-474-3226. Thanks for your attention and look forward to seeing as many folks at the state convention as possible.

# 62nd Annual Convention of the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri

Hilton Kansas City Airport Hotel

8801 NW 112th Street, Kansas City, MO 64153 Phone: 816-891-8900

April 11-14, 2024

pre-register online at www.nfbmo.org

The Kansas City and Ivanhoe Chapters would like to warmly welcome you to Kansas City for our 62nd annual convention. Kansas City is proud to be the home of museums examining World War I, the Negro Leagues, the Steamship Arabia, and the Nelson Atkins Art Museum. Visitors can enjoy many entertainment options including Starlight Theater and our four professional sports teams including the multi-time Super Bowl Champions the Kansas City Chiefs.

Come to the Hilton Airport Hotel with room rates of $109 a night (plus 16.6% tax and $1.76 KC development fee). To make reservations, call 816-891-8900 before March 21. The hotel is pet friendly and has a fitness center, free Wi-Fi, and complimentary airport transportation. Hotel check-in at 3:00 PM and check out at noon. Hotel dining options include Asado Urban Grill, Asado Lobby Bar, and Starbucks.

•The hotel’s web page is kansascityairport.hilton.com.

Once again, we have the Federation Saver Package for $80 if bought by April 1. This includes registration, a banquet ticket, and a Saturday lunch ticket, saving you up to $35. Be sure to make your choice between chicken and steak for the banquet when you register. We will also have a planned lunch for Friday and the Prayer Breakfast Sunday. After April 1, the cost for registration and all meals will increase by $5 each. There will be opportunities to register and pick up packets on Friday and early on Saturday. Hospitality will be open on Friday evening.

We will be offering the Kid’s Zone for children in need of supervised care. There is no cost for children registered for the convention. See the information on the following pages for details on Kid’s Zone, children’s meal prices, and exhibitor/sponsorships. To donate door prizes, please contact Chair, Linda Coccovizzo. Her email address is linda@coccovizzo.com. Those bringing door prices should drop them off at the registration table.

•Note: All attendees are required to adhere to Our Code of Conduct, and we will abide by all government issued Covid protocols.

National Federation of the Blind of Missouri

62nd Annual Convention, April 11-14, 2024

Please use one form per residence. Several registrations may be combined on one check if they are sent together. Sorry No refunds unless the event is cancelled.

First Registrant’s Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Second Registrant’s Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, Apt.: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, State: \_\_\_\_, Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, Email: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Select preferred agenda format: Braille \_\_\_ Print \_\_\_ Email \_\_\_

Federation Saver Package: only available until April 1, 2024, Includes registration, banquet, and Saturday lunch.

Number of packages including Chicken for banquet \_\_\_ at $50.00 $\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Number of packages including steak for banquet \_\_\_\_\_ at $50.00 $\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\*After April 1, 2024, please add $5 for each item below.

Friday Lunch: number needed \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ at $25.00 Total: $\_\_\_\_\_\_

Prayer Breakfast: number needed\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ at $20.00 Total: $\_\_\_\_\_\_

Convention Registrations in addition to saver package \_\_\_at 25.00 $\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Chicken banquet in addition to saver package \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ at 50.00 $\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Steak banquet in addition to saver package­­ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ at 50.00 $\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Saturday lunch in addition to saver package \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ at 25.00 $\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 Total amount enclosed: $\_\_\_\_\_\_

Send payment made out to NFB of MO to: Carol Coulter,

1504 Furlong Drive, Columbia, MO 65202.

National Federation of the Blind of Missouri Convention

Children’s Registration Form and Kid’s Zone Request April 12-14, 2024

We will be offering childcare for those children of parents who are registered for the convention in need of supervised care. There is no additional cost for children who are registered for the convention, see the form below to register. Care will be provided during all general sessions and the evening banquet until 9:00 PM. Meals are not provided in the Kid’s Zone, so parents need to feed their children. Important: Parents wanting care for their children must send this request along with payment for registration and meals on or before March 12, 2024. Mail it along with payment to the address below. Note: for children NOT needing childcare, payments for pre-registration and meals must be received by April 1. Payments can be mailed or made at www.nfbmo.org. Meals and registration purchased after April 1, 2024, will cost an additional $5.00 each.

Name of Parent or Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Names and Ages of Children: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Special Concerns: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Are the above-named children in need of services in the Kid’s Zone? \_\_\_\_\_

Number of registrants: \_\_\_ at $10.00 Total: $\_\_\_\_\_\_

Annual Child’s Banquet: \_\_\_\_ tickets needed at $25.00 Total: $\_\_\_\_\_\_

Friday Lunch: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ tickets needed at $10.00 Total: $\_\_\_\_\_\_

Saturday Lunch: \_\_\_\_\_\_ tickets needed at $10.00 Total: $\_\_\_\_\_\_

Prayer Breakfast: \_\_\_\_\_\_tickets needed at $20.00 Total: $\_\_\_\_\_\_

 Total amount enclosed: $\_\_\_\_\_\_

Send payments made out to NFB of Missouri to: Carol Coulter

 1504 Furlong Drive, Columbia MO 65202.

National Federation of the Blind of Missouri Convention

Sponsorship and Exhibitor Registration April 12, 2024

We are pleased to offer the opportunity for companies and organizations to either exhibit or sponsor our 2024 convention. This year we will be at the Hilton Kansas City Airport Hotel 8801 NW 112th St Kansas City, MO. from April 11-14. Exhibits will be open on Friday, April 12 from 1:00 PM to 9:00 PM. Below is the registration form including information on sponsorships. Forms must be returned by April 1.

Name of Organization: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Contact person: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Items exhibiting: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Exhibits:

•\_\_\_\_ $40 for exhibit table only

•\_\_\_\_ fee waved NFB Chapter or division exhibit

Sponsorships:

•\_\_\_\_ Bronze $100 includes exhibit table, 25-word informational message in agenda, and a mention on the www.nfbmo.org State Convention Page until April 30, 2024.

•\_\_\_\_ Silver $250 includes exhibit table, 60-word informational message in agenda, a thank you at opening ceremony and banquet, and a mention on the www.nfbmo.org State Convention Page until April 30, 2024.

•\_\_\_\_ Gold $500 includes exhibit table, 100-word informational message in agenda, a thank you at opening ceremony and banquet, and a mention on the www.nfbmo.org Home Page and State Convention Page until April 30, 2024.

•\_\_\_\_Diamond $1,000 same as Gold plus a one-hour showcase Friday morning and the ability to include your company logo on the NFBMO.org website until April 30, 2024.

Make checks payable to NFB of Missouri and mail to: Carol Coulter, Treasurer 1504 Furlong Drive, Columbia, MO 65202.

# Chapter Elections and Reports

Not every chapter’s election had taken place in time for this issue. We hope to have their election results in the next issue.

## **Jefferson City Chapter by Melissa Kane**

President: Debbie Wunder

Vice President: Eric Meister

Secretary: Pam Nesselhuf

Treasurer: Carolyn Patterson

Board Member 1: Vivian Smith

Board Member 2: Sue Tussey

Board Member 3: Rick Elgin

## **Kansas City Chapter by Daniel Garcia**

President: Daniel Garcia
First Vice President: Linda Coccovizzo
Second Vice President: Laurice Cason
Secretary: Sarah Coccovizzo
Treasurer: Jeff Giffen

First Board Position: Willa Patterson
Second Board Position: Tony Waterhouse-Leal

Third Board Position: Julie Dawson

The Kansas City Chapter has a strong board, and we (along with the Ivanhoe
Chapter) will continue to be a leading force in advocating for the rights of
all blind Kansas Citians. The job of president can be difficult, but it is
made easier by the fact that I have such talented and dedicated leaders who can
help me lead the chapter.

## **Columbia Chapter by Gary Wunder**

President: Gary Wunder

Vice President: Gene Coulter

Secretary: Dacia Cole

Treasurer: Carol Coulter

Board Member: Grace Warn

The Columbia Chapter had a successful Blind Equality Achievement Month with a fundraiser at Shakespeare's pizza, a presentation on KFRU radio, and an afternoon of gameplaying at Valhalla’s. Our chapter meeting also included a visit from our paratransit agency, where we offered a number of suggestions and hope for a better working relationship.

We will also be soliciting donations through CoMoGives, a central Missouri based platform for organizations to use during the month of December to support our worthy programs. We had two new members join this year and are glad to welcome to our family Lydia and Julia. We will finish out the year with a Christmas party on December 9. With love for one another and energy in a cause we share, we look forward to 2024.

## **Lewis and Clark Chapter by Jenny Carmack**

President: Jenny Carmack

Vice President: Mark Harris

Secretary: Stephanie McDowell

Treasurer: Randy Carmack

Board Member: Nancy Aguilera.

What has the Lewis and Clark Chapter been up to lately? In short: planning, working on member retention, and recruiting new members.

On August 31st, we were honored to host the Route 66 Ride for Braille Literacy Pit Stop Party in St. Louis. The Lewis and Clark Chapter along with the St. Louis Blues Blind Hockey Club, Wolfner Library, news media, and many friends and guests met at the Kirkwood Public Library to celebrate as Dan O’Rourke made his way through St. Louis on his journey along Route 66. Dan was making this ride to bring awareness to the importance of Braille literacy and to raise funds for the NFB’s Braille literacy programs. We had the opportunity to hear Dan talk about why this is important to him, why he chose to do this, and how his journey was going. We were excited to be a part of this memorable moment.

On October 1st, we had our annual chapter picnic, which also served as our chapter’s 20th birthday celebration. Yes, that is right, the Lewis and Clark Chapter is 20 years old, and going strong. We had lots of good food and even better friends to share the day with. FYI, according to Alexa, the most memorable events from 2003 were: the launch of Word Press (a website development program), the launch of the Ellen DeGeneres Show, and the retirement of Michael Jordan. HA, HA!

On October 14, we had a Dine and Donate event at Mods Pizza. This meant that after the chapter meeting, we all made our way to the pizza place, had some good fun, and raised some money for our chapter. Thanks to our families and friends who had a meal at Mods that day.

On November 1st, we launched an online fundraiser through Mickman Brothers selling live holiday wreaths and other décor. This fundraiser will be ending on

December 7, but I hope some of you got these fresh smelling and beautiful decorations for your home. Thanks, if you did purchase any.

On November 4th, the chapter had an informational booth at a senior fair in Maplewood. The booths of this fair contributed information on how they can be of benefits to senior citizens of the community. We had a variety of pamphlets, alphabet cards, and Kernel Books on hand to distribute. At our November chapter meeting, we held our annual elections, the results are listed above. I am very excited to be working with each of them as we continue to build the chapter.

To round out our year, we are having a holiday party at Ami’s Italian Restaurant on December 2. Then, it will be time to relax, reenergize and be ready to go in January. Happy Holidays!!!.

## **Show Me Chapter by Denis Miller**

President: Dennis Miller

Vice President: Dan Keller

Secretary: Carol Morgan

Treasurer: Gene Fleeman

Board Member: Matt Schumacher

# Pledge of the

# National Federation of the Blind

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.

# One Minute Message

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.

# **Board of Directors**

**National Federation of the Blind of Missouri**

**Officers:**

Shelia Wright, President Jenny Carmack, First Vice President

Daniel Garcia, Second Vice President Becky Boyer, Recording Secretary

Dennis Miller, Corresponding Secretary Carol Coulter, Treasurer

**Board Members:**

Eugene Coulter Seyoon Choi Janice Grisham

Amy Wilson Randy Carmack Jeff Giffen Svetlana Ehlers President Emeritus, Gary Wunder

# **Chapter Presidents**

Columbia Chapter, Gary Wunder, 573-874-1774

Jefferson City Chapter, Debbie Wunder, 573-874-1774

Springfield Chapter, Janice Grisham, 417-761-0253

Kansas City Chapter, Daniel Garcia, 816-621-0902

Lewis and Clark Chapter, St. Louis, Jenny Carmack, 314-239-9776

Mineral Area Chapter, Farmington, Roger Crome, 573-701-8409

Ivanhoe Chapter, Kansas City, Linda Black-White 816-923-7074

Show Me at-large Chapter, meets via Zoom, call Dennis Miller, 660-234-5351

Blind Missourian Editor Carol Coulter

Proofreaders: Shelia Wright, Daniel Garcia and Grace Warn

Read by Elisabeth Coulter

### FREE MATTER FOR THE

### BLIND AND PHYSICALLY

### HANDICAPPED

### NFB of Missouri

**1504 Furlong Dr.**

**Columbia, MO 65202**