**SEPTEMBER 2024 BUCKEYE BULLETIN**

A publication of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio

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The National Federation of the Blind knows that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you or your future. Every day we raise expectations, 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.

The National Federation of the Blind is a 501(c)3 consumer organization comprised of

blind and sighted people committed to changing what it means to be blind. Though blindness is

still all too often a tragedy to those who face it, we know from our personal experience that with training and opportunity, it can be reduced to the level of a physical nuisance. We work to see

that blind people receive the services and training to which they are entitled and that parents of

blind children receive the advice and support they need to help their youngsters grow up to be

happy, productive adults. We believe that first-class citizenship means that people have both

rights and responsibilities, and we are determined to see that blind people become first-class

citizens of these United States, enjoying their rights and fulfilling their responsibilities. The most serious problems we face have less to do with our lack of vision than with discrimination based on the public’s ignorance and misinformation about blindness. Join us in educating Ohioans

about the abilities and aspirations of Ohio’s blind citizens. We are changing what it means to be

blind.

The NFB of Ohio has eight local chapters, one for at-large members, and special divisions for community service, diabetics, students, seniors, guide dog users, and members of communities of faith. This newsletter is circulated by email, posted on NFB-NEWSLINE®, our digitized newspaper-reading service by phone, and can be read or downloaded from our website, www.nfbohio.org.

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# **From the Desk of the President**

**By Richard Payne**

Greeting Federation Members,

It has been a wonderfully busy time in Ohio. As you know, we just returned a little over a month ago from the National Convention, and there are several Chapters holding summer activities across the state.

I want to take this opportunity to thank members who served at the Ohio Exhibit Table in Orlando. Our sales went quite well. As many of you know, the 2025 National Convention will be in New Orleans. So, it would behoove members to start thinking now about attending this spectacular event.

The State of Ohio Convention is coming upon us quite rapidly. Please make your hotel reservations at the Doubletree Cleveland/Westlake Hotel at (800) 445-8667. Funds will not be deducted until you check in. The dates are November 14th through the 17th.

Suzanne Turner, Convention Coordinator, and I visited the Convention Hotel a few weeks ago. We were greeted with excitement by the staff. They are preparing to meet members and provide a memorable experience in November. Moreover, we are open to ideas, seminars, and presentations that you can directly send to Suzanne and carbon copy me. I am hoping for one of the largest conventions since the pandemic.

While I am writing, it comes to mind, the conversations that I have been having over the last few months with the new members. They are eager to grow and learn so that they can share the Federation’s commitment. Thus, we are a community of love, hope and determination for those who need a place to belong. I firmly understand the benefits of attending the National Convention, but I cannot wait to see both seasoned and new members at the State Convention. Simply put, our state convention serves as our main summit in the state of Ohio, because the gathering as one affords our members and attendees connection and growth experiences that will elevate our affiliate to a higher level of advocacy. We must always prioritize seeking ways to build and strengthen our chapters and divisions. It is equally important that we carry the message of the Federation to others who are not familiar with our mission. I have been extremely fortunate to previously attend both in person and virtually and I have found that the spirit of commitment to these objectives is extremely high.

Furthermore, I think most of you are aware that for a few years now, the Ohio affiliate has been part of a task force that is currently responsible for identifying and eliminating companies who pay less than a fair minimum wage, to persons with disabilities. We understand and support the right of blind people to be able to perform the same work for the same pay as their peers. You can be certain that your membership in the Federation matters.

During late July, Annette Lutz, Suzanne Turner, and I attended the Accessible Ohio Seminar in Columbus. We had the privilege of being introduced to the governor and had the opportunity to thank him for his support. It was an honor to speak with Director Miller and Governor DeWine for a brief chat.

The next few months are profoundly critical for Ohio. It is time to amplify the value of our efforts by promoting the responsible activities that start at the top, in order to grow and strengthen our affiliate. Consequently, there are several legislative bills currently being worked on. So let us all be prepared to pull up our sleeves to get the work done. We must take a stand because without working hard to protect the rights of blind people, we could find ourselves going backwards. Jernigan said, “We know who we are, and we will never go back.”

Lastly, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate three of our Ohio leaders. Last Friday, Kinshuk Tella graduated from the Louisiana Center of the Blind. Several members and I had the pleasure of taking part in his celebration. He will begin employment in a few weeks. Also, Caroline Karbowski graduated with a MA in Sensory Impairments and Inclusion with a focus in Orientation and Mobility. She too will begin employment at Perkins School for the Blind in the Fall. Both Caroline and Kinshuk will be in Boston making a difference. Finally, Dr. Carolyn Peters has been chosen to attend the 2024 Leadership Seminar at the Jernigan Institute. This will be a great opportunity for her to learn firsthand from President Riccobono. Again, congratulations to them all!

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# Passing the Torch at the Buckeye Bulletin

**By Annette Lutz**

Many of us recently enjoyed watching the summer Olympics in Paris, and we were thrilled by

the talent and tradition of the games. We are excited about the torch being passed to us here in

the United States to host the 2028 contest. And like the Olympics, we here at the National

Federation of the Blind of Ohio are passing the torch as well with this newsletter. As you may

have noticed, the newsletter has been on a hiatus for quite some time, and even though it hasn’t

been the four years that we have to wait between the Olympic games, indeed it has been much too long. But as you can see, we are back!

Ever since I became a member of the NFB of Ohio, I have enjoyed reading this newsletter. As a

new member, it informed me about what was going on around the Federation here in Ohio,

taught me about Federation philosophy, and introduced me to our leadership. This has always

been an excellent publication, and I am proud of our affiliate for what has been shared in these

pages. And I know that this accomplishment would not have been possible without the hard

work of our long time Editor Barbara Pierce.

I know that Barbara spent countless hours pouring over articles, asking (and yes, sometimes begging) for contributions, and editing those that she received to make all of us that did write articles look like much better writers than we were. It was because of Barbara’s years of hard work that this newsletter was the insightful and informative publication that it has become, and on behalf of the Board of Directors and Federationists across Ohio, we would like to thank Barbara for this achievement. This is just one of the many enumerable things that Barbara has done for the Federation over her career with our organization, and we just wanted to share our appreciation to her for all she has done for this newsletter, for our beloved Federation, and for the Blind of Ohio.

Barbara has recently resigned as Editor of the Buckeye Bulletin, and she left very big shoes to

fill. However, we know that our new Editor, Heather Parker is up for the task. We know that this

is not an easy job, but we are confident that Heather will follow in the footsteps of Barbara in making this newsletter the shining example of greatness that our readers have come to expect,

and we are grateful to Heather for taking on this responsibility. We are looking forward to

working with you to produce many issues in the future.

The torch has been passed, and I am sure that it is in good hands.

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# Greetings, Introductions, Traditions and Celebrations!

**By Heather Parker**

Hello and Welcome One and All to the relaunch of the NFB of Ohio Newsletter!

My name is Heather Parker, and I am an ally and an out of state member of both the Cleveland Chapter and the Lorain County Chapter. It is my pleasure and privilege to participate at this time in Federation business as the current Editor of the newsletter.

Our newsletter has been on a long hiatus, and we are very thrilled to resume publishing again! All our chapters are thriving with activities and participation that we are eager to record here for our membership and friends. As we plan the future, your specific participation is invaluable. Starting now, we solicit submissions of almost any kind. If it is important to you as a Federation member, then it is likely important to another member across our vast network. Please begin to think about when you will contribute to the newsletter and what you will say. Working together is mutually beneficial for our progress. Those submissions are welcome at newsletter email link

We are grateful that this issue of the newsletter has a range of perspectives and input. From Pat McPherson, we have an anecdotal how-to and a rally to increase our Federation membership numbers. From his ONH Consulting blog, we have abridged excerpts of two fascinating human-interest stories written by Christopher Sabine. These true stories are culled from the intersecting archives of distinguished musical giftings, sophisticated human intellect, electromechanical engineering and blind histories. The gentleman in one story, a self-taught tinkerer- engineer and the other a musical prodigy that he refuses to mislabel as a savant. Sabrina Brashers was in the Rookie Roundup in Orlando this July and shares her impressions. Suzanne Turner is giving us a useful Quick Reference Guide (QRG) on resolutions to prepare us for our state convention and an additional reflection of the recent 2024 National Convention. Caroline Karbowski has a good news briefing on STEM2U 2024 and the activities that our younger members participated in at the James Webb Space Telescope field trip. And from our Capital Chapter, Annette Lutz shares the promising outcome of an event that she attended this July with other leadership in the Ohio federation. You can read, share, like, repost, and subscribe, but mostly in this moment, let’s celebrate together that an Ohio Federation tradition is continuing as we strive toward collective and personal goals.

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# STEM2U 2024- Scope Out Space

**By Caroline Karbowski**

At the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) STEM2U, we are all about making science accessible and learning the nonvisual tools and techniques to succeed. On May 23rd, 2024 the NFB Ohio affiliate had three students from 3rd-10th grade come to the Ohio State School for the Blind (OSSB) for an afternoon of accessible activities about the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST). We built models of the JWST, learned about the Earth’s atmosphere, discovered why the JWST was sent to space, and explored how it studies space.

All students received a JWST COSI Connects kit, tactile graphics, a 3D print of the JWST from See3D, and a tactile drawing board to use during the program and to take home. A strategy we used to keep the activity materials organized was pre-sorting supplies for each activity into resealable bags labeled with large print/braille labels for the activity number, and even including bump dots arranged as braille numbers in the corner for easy identification. One of the activities we did with the kids was to explore a tactile graphic and 3D print of the JWST to compare relationships between 2D and 3D representations. Another activity we did was to use water beads to understand refraction and particles in the atmosphere. The students also took turns reading the activity lessons in braille, and they hyped each other up if they stumbled on a word. The kids favorite activity was by far the model rockets made from cardboard tubes and rubber bands. They decorated them with gem stickers, braille labels, and bells. The kids tied bells to their rockets so they could hear where they landed and find them. After each launch, they modified their strategy to make their rockets go farther or higher. The students also practiced traveling independently by using their canes to walk from the classroom to outside for the rocket launch and for dinner. The kids really enjoyed connecting with other blind students in Ohio, and were great at supporting each other throughout the program.

Our activity volunteers included teacher visually impaired (TVI) students from The Ohio State University (Teresa Sant and Asma Mohamoud) and former Ohio BELL Academy student, MaKenzie Love. During the activity time for students, we hosted a parallel family meetup where NFB Ohio President, Richard Payne, Capital Chapter President, Annette Lutz, and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor at Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD), Berna King, talked with the students’ families about opportunities and support such as NFB conventions, BELL Academy, and transition services through OSSB and OOD.

Emily Kiehl and Caroline Karbowski were co-coordinators for the program. In December 2023, they joined coordinators from across the country at the NFB Jernigan Institute to go through the activities in the James Webb Space Telescope COSI Connects Kit, and discussed ways to modify the kits and instruction to be more non visually accessible and meaningful. The coordinator training and activity kits were funded by General Motors (GM). For more information on STEM2U, visit the STEM2U homepage. If you’re interested in being a coordinator or volunteer for STEM2U 2025, connect with Richard Payne (rchpay7@gmail.com).

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# Resolutions- A QRG Before Our State Convention

**By Suzanne Turner**

This has no author, but modesty aside, it came mostly from Kyle Walls. The following are Guidelines that explain our NFB resolution process and how to operate it successfully.

The resolutions process of the National Federation of the Blind is frequently one of the most exciting and engaging parts of our annual national convention. It is during those sessions when our priorities are set for the coming year. That being said, it is no surprise that we take our resolutions extremely seriously. We want them to be perfect when they reach the convention floor and that effort starts with you as you write and submit them. Below are a few quick guidelines to keep in mind when you begin the process of writing a National Federation of the Blind National Convention Resolution.

## ANALYZE and PLAN

First, before you even begin writing the resolution, you may want to ask yourself: “Is a resolution the most efficient or effective way to address this topic?” For example, if the resolution is about an access barrier encounter, consider if it might be better addressed by directly calling or writing to the offending party before we condemn and deplore them at an official event.

Conversely, if an individual or organization has done something truly spectacular for blind Americans, let’s determine if there is an award we could nominate them for. A proper analysis of the presenting problem will guide us to categorize our efforts properly. We want to assign condemning resolution actions against repeat inaccessibility offenders and commendation resolutions to those with sufficient corrective actions to past mistakes or spectacular efforts on behalf of blind Americans.

## PURPOSE

Once you have made the decision that a resolution is absolutely the correct course of action, you need to consider the purpose of your resolution. Start by asking the following questions:

1. Who will it be addressing? – One should think of the specific individual or organization that will receive the resolution.
2. Why is a resolution necessary? Is it for commendable behavior or because of egregious actions or conditions or is there another reason?
3. When one thinks of the problem that instigated the resolution- what is the scope and impact of the problem? When, where, how and how often is this area of life affected- is it healthcare, education, public services, etc?
4. Does it have local, state or national level implications?

## GOAL SETTING

After analyzing and defining the issue and identifying the purpose of a resolution, it is time to consider the ultimate goal of the resolution. Does the resolution table the issue(s)? It is possible that a resolution will be the conclusion of the matter- especially when using it for commendation purposes and sometimes for public condemnation reasons. However, if the resolution brings a problem to bear- it may be the beginning of a course of action. If so, then identify how the problem can be fixed and describe those goals succinctly. Determine and state whether or not collaboration with the National Federation of the Blind is appropriate.

## WRITING and FORMATTING CLAUSES

Now that you have determined a resolution is necessary and you have identified the purpose of your resolution, it’s time to actually get to the task of writing it. National Federation of the Blind resolutions follow a specific format.

First, we start with a series of “WHEREAS” clauses that typically start broad and become more specific with each successive clause. Below is a very generic example of the concept:

WHEREAS, the National Federation of the Blind is the transformative organization of blind Americans; and

WHEREAS, the Jernigan Institute, the headquarters of the National Federation of the Blind frequently hosts events where participants will travel from all across the country to attend; and

WHEREAS, a highlight of these events is the cookie break that features many flavors of delicious cookies; and

WHEREAS, occasionally there is not enough of each flavor of cookie to satisfy all attendees;

The Whereas clauses will continue until the problem is identified. Ideally, this should take approximately six to ten clauses, although there is no perfect number. However, as a general rule, you should aim to state the problem clearly in the smallest number of WHEREAS clauses possible. It is possible that the more complex issues that become resolutions may require a higher number of WHEREAS clauses than simpler, straightforward resolutions. One should be aware that including an excessive amount of whereas clauses in your resolution only serves to make the resolution unnecessarily long, less focused, and more difficult to follow.

After you have described the problem in the final “whereas” clause, then it is time to write the “RESOLVE” clauses, wherein you will identify a course of action to resolve the problem. It doesn’t need to be incredibly specific, but it does need to identify who should take charge in solving the problem.

Continuing from the example above:

BE IT RESOLVED that this organization will strive to ensure that there are enough cookies for all attendees of future events at the Jernigan Institute to receive at least two servings; and BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this organization will ensure that each flavor of cookie will be plentiful.

As with the whereas clauses, only use the resolve clauses sparingly. Between two to three resolves should be sufficient, because any more than that can become cumbersome and unwieldy.

For our state convention in November 2024, ALL proposed resolutions should be submitted a minimum of 3 weeks prior to the convention. Address resolutions to the chair of the Resolutions Committee, Frank Bragassa and his email is [Fbragassa@msn.com](mailto:Fbragassa@msn.com) He is the Chair of the Ohio Resolution Committee.

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# The National Federation of the Blind of Ohio Participates in Making Ohio Accessible

**By Annette Lutz**

On Tuesday July 23, Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) hosted their first Accessible Ohio Conference and Expo, and not surprisingly, the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio served as a partner in making this day a success. As one of the many facets of this remarkable day, an exhibit hall of disability organizations and partners was available to attendees, and our affiliate President, Richard Payne, our own Suzanne Turner, and I were honored to represent our organization throughout the day at our table, and we did not have to be there very long before we realized that it was going to be a special day.

Earlier this year, OOD announced that they would be holding this event for venues around Ohio to find ways to make their events and facilities accessible to all Ohioans, especially those with all varieties of disabilities. As a part of this announcement, OOD described the new Accessible Ohio initiative that was approved in the 2024-2025 state budget as a part of Governor DeWine’s continued commitment to Ohioans with disabilities, and for this conference, OOD invited community partners to apply to participate in an exhibit hall to provide information to those attending the conference. Of course, when we received this invitation, we immediately applied, and were accepted, and we remain so happy that we were able to participate in this event.

Not long after we arrived, we were wondering if an agenda in Braille was available, and one of the many OOD employees who were on site for the purpose of helping attendees overheard and arrived with 3 Brailled agendas within minutes. That was our first clue that this event was planned not only to meet the needs of all of those who were there, but to act as a shining example of everything that could be done to make such an event inviting to people with all types of disabilities. In the agenda, a list of all of the available accommodations was front and center so that everyone would know what was available to them. After reading this list, I believe that everything was done to accommodate every conceivable need that someone may have had. There was also a list of exhibitors and a full agenda of the day’s events, and after reading these, the three of us decided that we would like to sit in on some of these ourselves. We realized that many interesting topics were being covered throughout the day, including web accessibility,

emergency preparedness for disabled community members, and proper service dog interactions. I attended 3 sessions including how to make the visual arts accessible to the blind, presented by our own Joy Mistovich. It was during this session in which she mentioned the planned opening of the Museum of the Blind People’s Movement at our National Center in Baltimore, proper staff training in disability etiquette, and the ways in which venues and companies can use Be My Eyes to improve accessibility. All of these seminars were well presented and interesting.

At our table, we had the opportunity to speak with many attendees and other organizations about the Federation and other blindness related topics, and we were able to network with others in the disability community for future contacts on how we can work together. Of course, Suzanne invited many of these contacts to our upcoming state convention, and even if only a few of them come, that will be wonderful. But the high point of the day was when all of us were introduced to the Governor.

As we were sitting there looking over the agenda, OOD Executive Director Kevin Miller came over to our table and stated that he would like to introduce us to Governor Mike DeWine. All of us were pleased to shake his hand and expressed our appreciation to him for his support of the blind of Ohio. We especially mentioned his initial Executive Order making Ohio a Disability Inclusion state and a model employment state for people with disabilities, his signing of our Parental Rights bill, and his support of Ohio’s Business Enterprise Program. It was an honor to have this opportunity to acknowledge his commitment to Ohio’s disabled population and to recognize that he is a friend to the disabled community. We also appreciate Director Miller’s taking the time to bring Governor DeWine over to us and making the introduction. We know that this is a reflection of our continued partnership with OOD and the relationship that our organization has built with this agency. We know that a strong and mutually respectful relationship between the Federation and OOD has created more opportunities for the blind of Ohio and we know that this continued partnership will only grow those opportunities in the future.

At the end of the day, all of us felt a sense of accomplishment and were thrilled to have been a part of such a productive event. I know that those organizations who attended came away with ideas on how to make their facilities and events welcoming to the blind and disabled. We applaud their commitment demonstrated by attending this conference and invite them and any others interested in blind accessibility to use the NFB of Ohio as a resource in their accessibility journey. We also enthusiastically applaud Director Miller and his OOD staff for hosting this well planned, insightful, and productive event. From what we saw, it was a roaring success, and we are proud to have been a part of it, and look forward to even more similar opportunities in the future.

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# The Story of Joe Engressia (abridged)

**By Christopher Sabine**

Today, I'd like to discuss a man who--in his own way--helped contribute to the very fabric of how we communicate--both with and without disabilities. Joe Carl Engressia, Jr.--or Jojo to his family--was born on May 25, 1949 and lived with his parents and younger sister in an apartment in Richmond, Virginia. Both Jojo and his sister Toni were born blind, and doctors were unable to determine the cause. His father, Joe Engressia, Sr., was a high school photographer, while his mother, Esther, stayed at home with the children.

Like many families of children with disabilities, life at home was very stressful. Jojo's parents fought a lot, with their arguments sometimes landing Esther in the emergency room. When Jojo was three, he began pestering his mother to read to him--first fluently and then by spelling each word out letter by letter. This ultimately enabled him to master Braille a month or two after he entered school.

Like me and many other children with Autism characteristics, Jojo had several overriding areas of intense interest. These included the sounds of shower curtains, Jell-O--and probably most embarrassingly for his mother and sister--brassieres. Like me, Jojo's greatest interest as a young child was the sounds of the telephone network. This interest would become pervasive and all-encompassing and form the fabric of the rest of his life--despite pleas from his mother to, "Hang up the phone. Leave it alone".

Jojo's introduction to the sounds of the telephone network began when his mother enabled him to dial the local number for a recording that announced the time. At that time, the local telephone exchange that allowed a person to access a recording of the time was 737, so Jojo's mother placed a piece of tape on the numbers 7 and 3 of the family's rotary dial telephone. This enabled Jojo to identify the digits 3 and 7 from the differences in texture between those digits and the remaining numbers on the rotary dial. One familiar with how a blind child can learn Braille can imagine how Jojo was able to distinguish differences in texture so readily and quickly. Ultimately, Jojo determined the positions of the other dials on his family's phone by using the digits 3 and 7 as a reference point.

To understand the rest of Jojo's story, one needs to appreciate that until the mid 1980's, local and long-distance telephone networks in the United States and world-wide consisted exclusively of electromechanical switches. Prior to 1960, it was typical for a person to require an operator [who]- using a manual cord board- [would..call] a person outside their immediate local area. In the early 1960's, local telephone companies began offering the ability to make a long-distance or extended area telephone call by dialing directly--without initially speaking with an operator. This is referred to as direct distance dialing. These calls would be routed over a succession of local and long-distance trunks. Since these trunks were analog [meaning it] (consisted of mechanical parts), a person could control them by sending special tones down the phone lines. This would enable the person to make free long-distance calls (referred to as "blueboxing", [they could also] route calls to specific parts of the long-distance network by dialing special codes, and even, in some notorious incidents, access telephone lines at military bases, foreign embassies, the White House and several defense contractors.) A whole succession of primarily young people would discover and utilize these special frequencies to explore the telephone network, and many--like Joe Engressia--were blind children. Whether or not these children have ONH or other conditions linked to the Autism Spectrum--like [for example] Retinopathy of Prematurity--is unknown, but it is interesting to conceive that, like many Blind children today who also have Autism characteristics, Engressia and some of these other children of the telephone network were immature and socially awkward and had difficulty functioning in a traditional school environment.

Eventually, Jojo would devise a method for dialing digits by whistling the numbers at the frequency of seventh octave E. This simulated the use of a rotary dial in a process referred to as flashing. This special frequency of 2600 Hz also signaled to a long-distance telephone trunk that a call had ended. Young Jojo would discover that if he whistled a 2600 Hz tone during a call, it would drop the call but still leave him on the long-distance trunk, which carried his call. This enabled Jojo to bypass the equipment that reported toll charges and make other calls on the trunk by whistling them at 2600 Hz: seventh octave E.

By recording, whistling or otherwise broadcasting this special frequency down a phone line, one could also route calls nationally and internationally throughout local and long-distance networks. Engressia--and a group of others dedicated to uncovering the secrets of the telephone network--became known as 'phone phreaks."

Though Jojo would be tested as having an IQ of 172 and mastered Braille quickly, social interaction was a difficult struggle for little Jojo; this would have a profound impact on his later life. He would tell his kindergarten teacher, "Play Stinks!"

By contrast, the droning sounds of the dial tone and the magical ability for Jojo to control and explore the intricacies of the telephone network became a source of comfort, companionship and solace. The telephone network did not argue or yell at him. It was never too busy for him, and it did not fight, become abusive or make demands of him. The telephone network also enabled Jojo to explore how its various switches interacted and develop, test and validate working hypotheses concerning how he could control its operations in a version of the scientific method.

Engressia amassed a collection of technical manuals about the #5 Crossbar, the most advanced and commonly used telephone switch of the day, which he would have his mother read to him. He also learned all he could about the telephone equipment by interacting with [the] telephone repair man, at his local central office. As an aside, the apartment where I lived, located in Cincinnati Bell's operating territory, was served by two #5 Crossbar switches serving two exchanges each. I would not find this out until I was an adult.

Though he became friends with Tandy Way, another blind student in sixth grade who also would go on to become a phone phreak, Engressia had few other friends. Though he would earn an amateur radio license at age 16 and held credentials as a licensed ham radio operator, the telephone network remained his primary interest.

Engressia went on to attend the University of South Florida. There, he earned the nickname "The Whistler" by making free long-distance calls for students in his dorm and charging $1 per call. This was significantly less than the typical long-distance rate at the time. However, [on one occasion] when helping a fellow student place a call to Long Island, Engressia misdialed and ended up being directed to a long-distance operator in Montreal. While Engressia was able to convince the operator to put the call through to Long Island, she stayed on the line and monitored the conversation, suspicious. Naturally, the student talked extensively about the "whiz kid" who put his call through for free. After the operator in Montreal cut in and convinced the student to identify himself, an investigation ensued, leading back to Engressia.

GTE, the local telephone service carrier serving the university, opted not to prosecute Engressia, sensing the potential public relations nightmare that prosecuting a blind college student would bring about. Instead, GTE would use a tactic that high tech software companies would use for years to come when presented with potential security vulnerabilities: disbelief and denial. After all, a young blind man could never learn how to outsmart Ma Bell by whistling in pay phones at college dorms, especially since she operated a large part of the infrastructure responsible for no less than our national security and that of Americas' largest corporations. Yet Engressia, and a fraternity of others that he would help form, were doing just that.

After presenting his case before the university's disciplinary board, Engressia was placed on probation and ordered to donate the $25 he earned from placing free long-distance calls to a worthy cause. Word of Engressia's exploits was ultimately picked up by the Associated Press and the Huntley-Brinkley News Show. Numerous other phone phreaks would reach out to him, which would set the course for the rest of his life.

Engressia would eventually drop out of college about a year short of obtaining his degree, later citing a lack of focus, depression and limited access to a telephone. He moved to an apartment in Memphis, Tennessee primarily because of his interest in exploring the telephone switching equipment in some area central offices. He would make visits to telephone central offices that he found particularly noteworthy, convincing the engineering staff and repairman to take him on tours of the equipment. Though he would later say that moving to Memphis was when his life really started, he found it impossible to live on his $97 welfare check. Like 70% of Blind adults in the United States, Ingressia found it impossible to find a job. Drawing on his experience attending college in Florida, he found a unique solution to this problem: intentionally get arrested.

To read the rest of the account of Joe Engressia‘s life story and what happened with his savvy plan to be arrested, visit Christopher Sabine’s blog at this link  [The Full Joe Engressia Story](https://www.onhconsulting.com/article/458/what-can-a-blind-phone-hacker-with-a-172-iq-teach-us-about-our-children-the-story-of-joe-engressia)

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# Let’s Grow the Federation

**By Pat McPherson**

It seems I am always talking to people who are either newly blind or losing more vision. Sometimes, they are referred to me by our Affiliate Leader, President Payne. Other occasions they come from either an Akron Chapter officer or maybe a chapter member, friend, family member or during a chance meeting. It is heartbreaking to hear that many doctors do not refer them anywhere for assistance and they are so happy to find that there are many resources available through NFB. Many will mention that they miss reading books and newspapers and I share with them the phone number or the (?) conference call number that gives them access to the Ohio Library for the Blind and Print Disabled (OLBPD) for National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, Library of Congress (NLS) Talking Book program at (800) 362-1262. Once they get approved for that, they can get NFB-Newsline (?do you want the newsline number here also) and have access for newspapers, magazines, weather, TV listings, NFB publications, state specific blind info and more.

If they are over age 55, I discuss services offered by both Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) and the Independent Living Older Blind (ILOV) programs. And for accessing additional services, I mention 800-282-4536 to obtain Orientation and Mobility (O&M) training for using the white cane for travel and products to help them live independently in the home, including marking appliances and more to increase accessibility.

I also let them know that the same number can be used for limited training for computers and or smartphones. Sometimes they are surprised that the phone they are currently using has accessibility software built into it and that they need only to turn on those features. If it is an iPhone, I recommend they visit an Apple Store for assistance setting up those features or call Apple Accessibility at (877)204-3930.

I talk about how NFB has provided me with support, camaraderie, mentoring and a family

that has people just like me. The Ohio affiliate has 8 chapters and special interest divisions, all that would be happy to welcome them into the family. I talk about the inspiration received from

attending the National and our state convention, always sharing with them the dates and places.

Because I know some of this information is overwhelming, I like either to offer my phone number or a follow-up call, if they prefer. Checking in with them on the status of the assistance they are receiving can sometimes require that several follow up calls happen with these acquaintances. However, it becomes so rewarding to know that people that have previously been struggling to obtain the needed help are now making progress and it becomes an easy segue to possibly get them involved in the Federation.

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# God Taught Tom: The Story of one of the Greatest Pianists of the Nineteenth Century and Why I Will Never Call Him a Savant

**By Christopher Sabine**

The story of Blind Tom Wiggins [Blind Tom Wiggins web article](https://tellersuntold.com/thomas-green-wiggins/) also known as Blind Tom Bethune--began at a slave auction in 1850. His mother, Charity Wiggins was sold at a slave auction to General James Neil Bethune, a prominent lawyer, newspaper publisher and secessionist in Columbus, Georgia, who earned his military title in the Indian wars of the 1830's and 1840's. Because Tom was blind, he was added to the sale as a no-cost extra, as he was believed to be of no value. Given the name Thomas Greene Bethune by his master, he was allowed to roam the rooms of the mansion on the General's plantation. He loved the sounds of nature, and one of his earliest compositions, "The Rain Storm", is based on the sounds of a rainstorm that occurred earlier [on] the day of its composition.

Though he was nonverbal until the age of five or six and could "scarce walk", he was, at this time, developing an extensive musical repertoire that would ultimately consist of 7,000 pieces, according to an 1866 textbook on mental deficiency. His repertoire included pieces by such composers as Bach [wiki on Bach](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Sebastian_Bach) ,Gottschalk [wiki on Gottschalk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Moreau_Gottschalk) ,Liszt [wiki on Liszt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz_Liszt) and Beethoven [wiki on Beethoven](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludwig_van_Beethoven) as well as more popular songs, dances and operatic paraphrases. He could also reproduce speeches and orations of the day--including those in Greek and other languages he otherwise could not understand.

Family accounts suggest that Tom had already begun playing the piano by age 4. This is not unlike other later accounts of blind people with specialized, innate skills such as Leslie Lemke as well as other children with Optic Nerve Hypoplasia and Autism characteristics, including me.

There are several versions of the discovery of Tom's unique talents on the piano. According to the family's account, one of the General's daughters was entertaining company at the Bethune mansion. After playing a difficult piece, lunch was served. Later, the same piece was heard coming from the supposedly empty parlor, and Tom was discovered playing the same piece he had just heard.

In another account reported in a 1957 journal article cited by Dr. Darold Treffert, who has studied people with specialized, innate skills extensively, the family was awakened in the middle of the night by the sound of Tom playing selections he had heard his master's daughters play before he was four. This same article also reported that Tom could reproduce all sounds from early infancy and could sing "fine seconds" [a type of vocal harmony] to anything the family could sing. These are skills that others with specialized innate musical abilities have also demonstrated as well as some other children with Optic Nerve Hypoplasia and Autism related characteristics.

Like nearly all slave children during the Antebellum period, Tom did not attend school and never received formal education. Though he could perform complex pieces, note for note exactly after hearing them for the first time, his communication and vocabulary were extremely limited.

Tom also demonstrated many behaviors typical of children who operate on the Autism Spectrum--including many with Optic Nerve Hypoplasia. Though he was considered legally blind, he demonstrated some light perception. According to family accounts, when he was around 3 or 4 years old, he was observed to spend most of his time staring intently at the sun. He also would pass his hand rapidly back and forth before his eyes. This is a common self-stimulatory behavior and one I exhibited personally.

Tom was highly sensitive to sounds and could repeat other's conversations, likely demonstrating the echolalia many on the Autism Spectrum exhibit to process their environment. He would deliberately drag chairs, bang pots together and provoke his siblings to scream so he could enjoy the sounds. A doctor would eventually declare HIM non compos mentis--not of sound mind. Tom was also known to engage in gyrations and other spasmodic movements while listening to compositions that he was being asked to perform during concerts. He repeatedly gyrated and made grunting noises during his performances and consistently spoke of himself in the third person, a trait not uncommon in some children and adults on the Autism Spectrum. These and other behaviors during performances added to his appeal as an untutored, primitive Black minstrel in the era of P.T. Barnum, [modern performance of Wiggins' Cyclone Galop](https://johndavispianist.com/music-and-books/blind-tom/) It is important to note, however, that Ray Charles, who demonstrated similar movements and gyrations at the keyboard eighty years later, was seen as the ultimate in hip. By the time Rock and Roll emerged, such movements were expected and served as a key feature of many concerts.

Tom began his musical career at age 8 when he was loaned to Perry Oliver, a concert promoter who exhibited him throughout the country. Though his concerts earned the Bethune family more than $1.5 million in today's money, Tom was paid nothing.

At age 11, in 1860, Tom became the first African-American musician to perform at the White House before President James Buchanan. The following day, two skeptical musicians tested him at his hotel by performing two completely new compositions, one 13 pages in length, and the other 20 pages long. Tom reproduced both compositions without error. Ultimately, challenges in which Tom would be asked to reproduce compositions he had not heard would become a signature of his performances.

Tom gave his first European tour in 1866, where, at one concert, he listened to two pianos playing simultaneously while a run of twenty notes was being played on a third. He was able to reproduce the run of twenty notes exactly, proving that he had absolute pitch. He also demonstrated the capacity to carry multiple tunes simultaneously. During one performance, he played "Yankee Doodle" in B major with his right hand and "Fisher's Horn Pipe" with his left--all the while singing "Early in the Morning." Anecdotes of children with Optic Nerve Hypoplasia whose families I have worked with show similar abilities in children with full or partial agenesis of the Corpus Callosum, which separates the right and left hemispheres of the brain. It is as if both ears are able to perform specialized tasks like singing and playing instruments through each hemisphere separately--independently of each other.

Following the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, John Bethune, the general's son, persuaded Tom's parents, Charity and Mingo Wiggins, to sign an indenture agreement binding Tom to the Bethune’s for an additional five years following the end of slavery [NY Times on Wiggins](https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/music/030500ms-blind-tom.html) Though this agreement was challenged in two high-profile trials, John was ultimately granted complete control of Tom and nearly all his earnings.

In 1887, Elisa Bethune, John's estranged widow, was granted custody of Tom after his mother was enticed into signing a writ in her favor. Tom was subsequently separated from his mother as she was moved to her home in Georgia, while Tom lived with Elisa in New Jersey with her new husband, the lawyer who orchestrated his custody arrangements. Disillusioned with his new masters, Tom stopped performing, and most of Elisa’s earnings came from the sales of the sheet music from Tom’s original compositions.

Tom Wiggins died of a stroke on June 13, 1908 and was buried in a neglected corner of Evergreen Cemetery in Brooklyn. There was no monument to his legacy until a commemorative headstone was raised for him in his hometown of Columbus, Georgia in 1976.

There were no existing recordings of any of Tom's compositions until New York Pianist John Davis released an Album of his most well-known works,  [John Davis plays Blind Tom Amazon](https://www.amazon.com/John-Davis-Plays-Blind-Tom/dp/B004KZQAZK) in 1999. This album is available to subscribers of Amazon Music using an Alexa-enabled device.

When I hear of the accomplishments and life stories of Tom Wiggins and those who came after him with specialized innate musical abilities--such as Matt Savage [wiki on Matt Savage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matt_Savage) Rex Lewis-Clack  [wiki on Rex Lewis- Clack](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rex_Lewis-Clack) Anton Sviridenko, whose work is featured on this web site--I generally do not think of the complex historical aspects of their biographies. I think of playing the piano in the preschool class I attended for the blind and visually impaired when I was five and six years old. At that time, I needed music intensely in order to process my environment, and quite honestly, to cope with being in a classroom away from home where I was expected to interact. As a small child, music was more powerful than speech or any other form of communication, and the piano was almost another part of my body.

Those who have written about Blind Tom, Thomas Wiggins, Thomas Bethune, or whatever name you choose to call him, often emphasize the historical background of his life in terms of the slave narrative. Indeed, Tom was a slave in the years prior to the Civil War, and his family used all means possible to maintain his servitude for the rest of his life.

However, as an adult who also has experience with innate skills and had the ability to play the piano as a child, I believe Tom's story is much more than this. Tom was a gifted musician with some very profound life experiences which his compositions, such as the Battle of Manassas and "The Rainstorm" reflect.

From the rumbling cadences in "The Rainstorm" to the interpretations of cannons and variations of "Dixie", “the Star-spangled Banner”, and "Yankee Doodle" representing the Confederate and Union Armies interspersed in "The Battle of Manassas", Tom's music is as much a deep-seated reflection of the sensory environment he experienced as musical compositions in the normal sense. One familiar with the  [Playing with words curriculum link](https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/playing-words/) , I discuss in my previous blog can tie how he might have tried to interpret his environment through his compositions.

Though Tom's ability to function was extremely limited and he lived at a time when access to education was nonexistent, he possessed an innate sense of the rules and structure of musical composition and a gift for harmonies unique to populations of Blind people who came after him. One can only imagine what he would be if his talents were encouraged in an environment where he could learn the skills necessary to speak for himself and plan his future independently.

### A Note on Terminology Used on This Web Site

As you read my blog, you may notice that I do not use the term "savant" to refer to those with extraordinary skills like Tom Wiggins. Instead, I generally use the terms "specialized, innate skills" or "innate, specialized skills." These are terms of my own creation, and I used them for several reasons.

We are pausing here to stage the ultimate cliffhanger and redirect you to Christopher Sabine’s blog to read the conclusion of the story of Blind Tom Wiggins and to learn from his knowledgeable insight on innate specialized skills. Follow this link: [The Story of Blind Tom Wiggins](https://www.onhconsulting.com/article/459/god-taught-tom-the-story-of-one-of-the-greatest-pianists-of-the-nineteenth-century-and-why-i-will-never-call-him-a-savant)

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# My First NFB Convention

**By Sabrina Brashers**

Hello everyone, my name is Sabrina Brashers. As of February 2024, I am a new member of the Miami Valley Chapter of the NFB of Ohio in Dayton. I recently had the pleasure of attending my first National Federation of the Blind National Convention held in Orlando, Florida July 3rd to July 8th, 2024. Let me share a little bit about my experience.

First, as a member with some usable sight, I arrived at the beautiful Rosen Centre Hotel, where I entered into a world that was quite frankly OVERWHELMING to say the least. Thousands of people with guide dogs and canes. I am embarrassed to admit that I had been extremely naïve up to day one of the convention because I never thought about or realized that the blind/low vision community is so vast. Upon this amazing realization I feel as though I am on top of the world. After checking in and taking my luggage to my room I made my way to the pre-registration table and obtained my NFB registration badge, banquet ticket and Agenda Handbook. In doing so, I gained chances for the numerous door prizes given throughout the daily events during the convention. Next I was escorted to one of the Hotel restaurants with friends, Ruth Roessler and Dreema Lance. We enjoyed our meal and retired to our rooms to relax.

Later that evening between 8 P.M. and 9:30 P.M., the Rookie Roundup was a scheduled event for all first time attendees. Myself and Dreema ventured out to find Grand Ballroom C and we ended up lost. We eventually linked arms with a group of guys (Ty, Rasheed and Jim) who were also lost and also looking for the Rookie Roundup. We got our bearings together and all made it to our destination. The Rookie Roundup was an introduction to the Federation, to President Riccobono, to other Federation leaders and also to members of the Jernigan Fund Committee.

### Day Two:

I had the opportunity to assist the Ohio Affiliate at the Exhibit Hall where we sold meat sticks, M&M candies and 40 ounce tumblers. We also sold tickets for two raffles. After working my shift, at our table, I shopped around at other State’s tables. I purchased a laptop computer from Computers For The Blind which was installed with Fusion (Jaws and ZoomText softwares). I donated to the Give $25 drive in support of the White Cane Program.

I enjoyed attending the different scheduled daily events such as:

1. The National Organization Of Blind Black Leaders Division Session
2. The 22nd Annual Showcase Of Talent Show, which was amazing.
3. Devotions (In support of Dr. Carolyn Peters)
4. And it was during the General Sessions 1 through 6, when I enjoyed a mix of party and business, during the marching in of our blind veterans and the live singing and dancing throughout the room. After which, I gained a wealth of knowledge about The Federation.
5. And finally, I enjoyed the banquet, at the conclusion of the Convention.

I would have loved to have attended more sessions/events, however there was not enough time to do so. I truly learned why “BELIEVE, DREAM, CHAMPION, LEAD and INCLUDE” are all words described in our core values. I look forward to next year!!!!!!!

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# My Reflections on the 2024 National Convention

**By Suzanne Turner**

Suzanne Turner wears many hats. One of her greatest roles is that of Convention Coordinator for Ohio, which she has served in that capacity for many years. Here is her reflection on the 2024 National Convention.

“Welcome to Orlando” the United Airline captain said while coasting in for a landing. We were once again in the sunny, orange state of Florida. The hot humid air hit us when we disembarked the large plane. Quickly, I reflected on the last time we were in Florida staying at the Rosen Center Hotel. The heat felt the same when we stood outside in the sun, holding umbrellas to create a mosaic during an attempt to break a world record. That day in 2015, as a collective group effort with members from across the country and beyond, the National Federation of the Blind became an official Guinness World Record holder. It was a proud moment that I will never forget.

The National Convention of 2024 was like no other. Thousands of blind people, vendors, and families embarked upon the most active event for the blind this year. The Ohio Board of Directors was in attendance, Ohio President, Richard Payne, Vice President, Dr. Carolyn Peters, Secretary, Annette Lutz, and Board Members, Andrea Stover, Kinshuk Tella and Suzanne Turner. As President Mark Riccobono reported, there were 2,589 registrations counted but I know that everyone in attendance did not pre-register or register, so I feel certain that there were more attendees unaccounted for.

The convention began on July 3rd and ran through to July 8th, 2024. These dates were pretty odd to start with going from Wednesday through Monday with the banquet on the last day. I think this threw everyone off just a little, especially those who are employed.

The convention started with the first day, giving most of its attention to first time attendees.

They are invited to Rookie Roundup, where new members have an opportunity to meet national leaders and be provided with a snapshot of the upcoming festivities. The second and third days are filled with seminars, committee, and division meetings. These meetings usually focus on education, membership, technology, accessibility, and recruitment. But this year, Artificial Intelligence technology stole the show. Aira, JAWS, Microsoft, Be My Eyes and other companies conducted sessions that highlighted this growing feature in their respective products. Additional technology seminars held were the HIMS Product Showcase that highlighted the BrailleSense 6, BrailleSense 6 Mini, QBraille XL, the SensePlayer, and the new Braille eMotion. Orcan’s latest products, MyEye 3 Pro and Read 3 were presented as well. Target, Amazon, and Google provided training on features accessibility to aid the blind with equal access to their product sales and websites.

Moreover, a host of groups and committees met, such as the National Membership

Committee who had a panel of seasoned members who communicated the importance

of creating camaraderie, how to increase membership and ways to participate through

community outreach events. The employment committee held a seminar on the topics of Seeking Success: Employment, Exploration, and Entrepreneurship. There were opportunities to attend informative group sessions on Adaptive Sports, a free tactile art exhibition, and learn about being

LGBT in the NFB. And more networking opportunities were available with the Blind Latina Women, The Blind Christian Group, The Blind Muslims Group and more . However, the highlight for most convention goers is the Mock Trial. This year was the 24th mock trial presented by the National Association of Blind Lawyers Division (NABL). Each year, it is a demonstration of a fictional case addressing the civil rights of blind people, during which the audience serves as the jury.

The Division meetings serve as the model for carving out the agenda for the upcoming year. All divisions have a President and Board of Directors. Elections are held, along with discussions on past and current division initiatives. There is a question and answer session, and it is standard that member dues are collected at these meetings. New members are invited to join and continue the work of that division, these include the Senior division, the Student division, the Professional in Blindness Education division, the Performing Arts division, Blind Merchants division, the Diabetic Action Network Division and much more. For a comprehensive listing of Groups, Committees, and Divisions go to [NFB Divisions Committees Groups Link](https://nfb.org/about-us/divisions-committees-and-groups)

During the National Board Meeting, President Mark Riccobono named the dates and locations for the next five conventions. We will travel to New Orleans, Louisiana July 8th to 13th for the 2025 convention. We will travel to Austin, Texas for the 2026 and 2027 conventions and then to Chicago, Illinois for the 2028 and 2029 conventions.

Now, my favorite time is spent in the General Session(s) where over 2000 members assemble in one place. This explosive opportunity is usually for three days of the convention. All

52 Affiliates are represented. Each Affiliate President takes the microphone to give their

report and add their spin on exciting news representing their state. President Richard Payne is the Ohio Affiliate President and has served for over five years. Informative presenters are invited to address the assembly and plenty of door prizes are won, before that, the Color Guard presentation is held, and veterans are honored. For the last two years, Jose Centeno, a retired Marine Corps Veteran has carried the flag in the march. Prior to him, our own Robert Pierce has represented Ohio as a retired U.S. Veteran. He was sorely missed this year.

Hence, there were some outstanding speakers, such as the Social Security Administration (SSA) describing more about their new accessible kiosk. Also, Be My Eyes revealed how AI will be able to research with Chat GPT and answer questions in a humanistic manner. Next, the National Council of State Agencies and the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation communicated the importance of having a partnership with NFB to assist with youth transition, and securing additional funding for the Older Blind Service Program. The Department of Justice (DOJ) ensured that transparency is key when it comes to accessibility on websites and applications for the blind to thrive in the world. Thus, the DOJ also affirms and is committed to protecting and monitoring this progress. Lastly, I cannot forget the National Library Services (NLS), which will increase the availability of more ways for the blind to be literate, up-to-date and obtain the latest communication by “any means necessary.”

For those who did not attend the National Convention this year, the Exhibit Hall was one of the most active and largest showings. The area was massive and yet there was not enough room to move about without stumbling over one another while trying to see all of the fun gadgets, latest technology, and food items. Of course, Ohio had M&M candies, meat sticks, tumblers, a gift basket, and Split the Pot tickets. We, as usual, were a hit!

Congratulations Ohio! We ranked 9th in the Pre-Authorized Contribution (PAC) Plan among the 52 affiliates. President Payne and Suzanne Turner won gift cards for their contribution increase. The final ranking should be coming soon.

Then, anticipation was felt by members as the proceedings of the Elections were conducted. Dr. Carolyn Peters served on the Nominating Committee representing the Ohio Affiliate. The results were as follows:

1. President Mark Riccobono of Maryland
2. First Vice President Pam Allen of Louisiana
3. Second Vice President Everette Bacon of Utah
4. Secretary Barbara Manuel of Alabama
5. Treasurer Norma Crosby of Texas
6. Shawn Callaway of District of Columbia
7. Jamie Richey of Nebraska
8. Jim Marks of Montana
9. Donald Porterfield of Arizona
10. Ben Dallin of Wisconsin
11. Sheila Wright of Missouri

Congratulations to the National Board of Directors.

The readings and votes on the Resolutions were conducted. Here are a few that were

Passed:

1. RESOLUTION 2024-10: Regarding the Accessibility of Destination-Oriented and Touch-Screen Panel Controlled Elevators
2. RESOLUTION 2024-14: Regarding Continuous Glucose Monitors and Their Use by Blind People
3. RESOLUTION 2024-18: Regarding the Harmful Namesake of the Perkins School for the Blind

All 22 Resolutions can be found on the website, [NFB 2024 Resolutions](https://nfb.org/resources/speeches-and-reports/resolutions/2024-resolutions)

The final night of the convention was the National Banquet, where members fellowship and partake in a meal. The annual address is given by the National President that leaves us with an inspirational word, and a charge for the new year. During the festivities, thirty Scholarships are awarded to outstanding blind students, yet only one student is awarded a prestigious grant and presented with the honor of addressing the banquet. This year, the honor was awarded to a student from Puerto Rico. The crowd erupted in celebration as she took the microphone as she translated her English speech to Spanish for her peers. It was very inspiring to say the least.

Subsequently, we heard from Dr. Ray Kurzweil who shared that it was his 50th convention. He has provided financial contributions and scholarships for blind students and accessible inventions to the NFB for years. We learned that he is not only an inventor and philanthropist, but Kurzweil is a Grammy Award Winner for his gift to music. He expounded on his thrill at meeting Dr. Martin Luther King and Dr. Kenneth Jernigan, two eloquent and powerful narrators. Dr. Kurzweil is very humble and poised, we need more like him in the world today.

Like Dr. Kurzweil, music is my go-to during all times of emotional seasons in my life. I

intend to source his music to become acquainted with his catalog. As a teenager in Mississippi me and my siblings were exposed to several genres of music. I tend to gravitate toward easy listening. Songs from Air Supply, Chicago, Earth, Wind and Fire and more. Therefore, I often thought about seeking employment with a radio station selecting music that would exhibit events, places, or themes. When asked to write about the 84th National Convention that took place in Orlando Florida, I immediately thought about an iconic song by the great Barbara Streisand, who I adore. It was the lyrics to “Memories” that resonated with how I was feeling while waiting for transportation to go home. I could hear the words over and over in my head. Those words, “When the dawn comes, tonight will be a memory and the new day will begin.” It goes on to say, “All alone with the memory of my days in the sun, if you touch me, you’ll understand what happiness is.” I am happy that the 2024 National Convention has ended so that we can begin the work of the federation, changing what it means to be blind and renewing our

commitment to the mission. I pledge to participate actively in the efforts of the National Federation of the Blind.

I know who I am, and I will never go back.

Never back to earning subminimum wages!

Never back to being discriminated against for employment!

Never back from being left out of obtaining my degree, due to inaccessible websites and applications!

Never back from social workers showing up to take my children because I am blind!

Never back from being denied access to shared rides because I have a guide dog!

Never back from not being able to vote independently!

Never back from medical professionals speaking to me as if I were a child!

I will not go BACK!!!

Let’s go and find those who are blind in the world who need a helping hand, or someone to

listen to them, and others who are willing to teach them. Also, let's form partnerships with community networks who will provide financial support, a safe space to evolve, and a place in the world that will make room for us to grow.

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# Activities Calendar

Every Thursday at 7pm, Community Service music happy hour, Ohio Zoom room

September 16, Advocacy Day with the 14c Task Force, State Capital, Columbus Ohio

September 21, NFB of Ohio Board of Directors Meeting, 11am-4pm, Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CABVI), 2045 Gilbert Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

October 15, White Cane Awareness Day, nationwide

November 14, NFB of Ohio Preconvention Roundtable and Informational Seminar, open to the public, 3pm-5pm, DoubleTree Westlake, Westlake, Ohio

November 15- 17, NFB of Ohio State Convention, DoubleTree Westlake, Westlake, Ohio

February 3-6, 2025, The Washington Seminar