



## **PERISCOPE**

**A Quarterly Newsletter sponsored by the  
Mississippi Council of the Blind, Inc.  
Winter, 2019-2020**

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Tax deductible contributions may be sent to:

MS Council of the Blind

P O Box 31112

Jackson, MS 39286

Anyone wishing to remember the MS Council of the Blind in a last will and testament may do so by including a special paragraph for that purpose. If your wishes are complex, please contact MCB for clarification.

Contributions to the James Doyle Case Memorial Scholarship Fund or to the Carter Gable Memorial Technology Assistance Fund should be appropriately marked, and sent to the above address.

Phone MCB at 601-672-0973.

### **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

***By Ralph Smitherman***

Hello, MCB members and friends! Well, the Holiday Season is upon us. By the time you receive this newsletter, Thanksgiving will have taken place. Yes, all of us have much to be thankful for. Christmas is coming soon, and I hope everyone has a Merry Christmas. 2020 is fast approaching; so, we all know what that means. It is dues paying time. Please send your dues to your

local Treasurer, and in turn, the local Treasurer can send the dues to our state Treasurer, Rene Virden. Make sure that your dues are paid no later than February 15, 2020. I hope everyone will maintain their membership.

To recap for a moment, we had a very successful state convention in April of this year. Several MCB members attended the national convention this past summer and our picnic held in October was well attended. What makes our organization great is members participating on a local and state and national level; so, thanks to you for participating.

Now it is time to nominate people for our awards. As you know, there are five awards that we give. They are listed in another article in this issue of the Periscope. Therefore, review the awards and if you think of someone to nominate, send that information to Terry Shelton, our awards chairman. You may e-mail Terry at [t.e.shelton@comcast.net](mailto:t.e.shelton@comcast.net) Robert Thomas and Eileen Bailey are also on this committee. Nominations need to be sent in no later than March 1, 2020.

Now, I want to thank the Board and all committees for being ready to take action when necessary. It is a pleasure to serve as President of this organization. Remember, it is not about me; it is about us!

## **STATE BOARD HIGHLIGHTS**

*By Wanda Allen*

The MCB State Board met via conference call on Saturday, Sept. 21, 2019.

After establishing a quorum and a word of prayer from President Ralph Smitherman, he called the meeting to order.

The minutes from the June meeting and the Treasurer's Report were accepted as distributed. Chapter and Committee Reports were given and approved.

Chair Kenneth Reed of the Technology Committee reported that since last meeting they have had one application presented, and it has been fulfilled. The committee continues to meet regularly to consider new requests.

Chair Kris McNair of the Service to Individuals and / or Projects Committee reported no request at this time.

Convention and Picnic Committee: Chair Eddie Turner reported that this year's picnic would be at Lefleur's Bluff State Park on Lakeland Drive in Jackson under pavilion #8 on Saturday, October 12, with the grills firing up at 10 AM and go until 2 PM. Mr. Turner requests that members please bring an auction item to help raise money for MCB.

Convention 2020: will be held the last weekend in April at the same Trustmark Park Holiday Inn location as last year. Information on the Convention 2020 will be going out soon.

MCB Storage Unit: President Ralph Smitherman reported that everything is up to date with the Brandon Storage Unit.

Mississippi School for the Blind: Ken Maddox reported that he received an invite from Coach Miller about Goal Ball and wanting alumni to play the goal ball team at the school. Kenny said he would find out more about it and get with the alumni.

Pshon Barrett reported that she was appointed to be on the Advisory Committee for both the School for the Blind and the School for the Deaf, along with a good cross selection of people. They have met once and received general information but encouraged about the opportunity.

ACB Angel Wall: President Ralph Smitherman presented the following information about the Angel Wall. In deepest beloved memory of John Granger that we assist in helping Alabama with the \$500 cost for a plaque to be hung on the Angel Wall and the presentation that will be made at the National Meeting. \$250 was respectably approved.

MCB Business Equipment: Rene Virden voiced her problems and concerns about the outdated QuickBooks and laptop. After discussion, up to \$800 will be provided for the Treasurer to update her QuickBooks and purchase a new laptop computer for accounting purposes.

The Board will meet on January 18, 2020 at 10 AM central time via conference call. If anyone would like to join as a guest, please call 1 515 603 4923 code 299011 pound.

### **CONVENTION/PICNIC COMMITTEE**

*By Eddie Turner*

I hope everyone that attended this year's picnic on October 12 had plenty to eat and enjoyed the fellowship of MCB members from across the state. Our auction raised \$725 this year, which is all profit since the food and pavilion were donated to the Council. Thanks to the Convention/Picnic committee, our volunteers and to the ones that contributed to expenses of the picnic.

Mark your calendars for the weekend of April 24-26, 2020; that's the weekend of our 2020 MCB Convention. Location is Trustmark Park Holiday Inn, 110 Bass Pro Drive, Pearl, MS, 39208 (601) 939-5238. Room rates are \$109, and we will have registration fees and deadline information in the convention notice coming out in early 2020. Hope to see everyone there.

### **NORTHEAST MISSISSIPPI CHAPTER NEWS**

Greetings, fellow Council members, family members and friends from the Northeast MS Chapter of MCB.

We are continuing to have our quarterly penny roll fund raisers and our quarterly canned food drives. As a matter of fact, we will be conducting a canned food drive during the month of December, which is a very special and wonderful time of the year to give to others. In addition, we also have been giving \$1.00 each month that will collectively be placed into the Marie Parish Christmas Child Fund to be donated to a very special child in need which is an honor during this most glorious time of the year.

Furthermore, it's also a great time of year to fellowship with one another while breaking bread together. So, we will be having our annual Membership Drive/Christmas Luncheon on Saturday, December 7<sup>th</sup> at Romie's Restaurant beginning at 11:00 a.m. If you happen to be in town, come on out and join us.

So, the Holiday Season is fast approaching and will soon be here. We, in Northeast MS, wish All of You a Happy, Healthy and Joyful Holiday Season! MERRY CHRISTAS! and have a HAPPY NEW YEAR!!! Until next time...

Sara M. Rogers  
MCBNM

**JACKSON CHAPTER NEWS**

*By Jane Peets*

Hello to everyone from the Jackson Chapter. Our chapter board last met on November 12 at the home of Ken and Ann Maddox. Thanks, Ken and Ann, for the hospitality. The chapter business meeting and Christmas lunch will be held on December 14 at 11:00 a.m. at the Addie McBryde Center. The chapter will furnish sandwich trays from the Subway Sandwich Shop, and we are asking members to bring other finger food to round out the lunch. Also, please bring packages of athletic socks to contribute to Gateway Mission. We will also be having our usual holiday fund raiser of the bake sale as well as a 50/50 drawing.

As you all know, during our business meeting we will hold a chapter election of officers. Please consider if you would like to serve as a chapter officer. I cannot serve as your president next year as I have served in that office for two consecutive years. Since we usually have our chapter board meetings by conference call, there is really no travel or inconvenience in participating in board meetings. To keep our chapter going, we must have members who are willing to give of their time and talents.

I hope everyone has a safe and joyous holiday season, and I hope to see all of the Jackson Chapter members on December 14, no excuses now, just kidding, I do hope most of us can be



there.

## **HAZLEHURST CHAPTER HAPPENINGS**

*By Alvin Daniels*

Greetings from the Hazlehurst Chapter of MCB!

We are looking forward to our annual business meeting on December 14<sup>th</sup>, at which time we will have our election of officers. Also, at the annual meeting, we will hold a drawing for the \$200 gift card that we are raffling off. We anticipate an enjoyable and productive meeting and will let you know the outcome of our officer elections, as well as the raffle drawing, in the next issue of the Periscope.

We wish all of our fellow MCB members a Safe and Happy Holiday Season!

## **PINE BELT CHAPTER NEWS**

*by Phyllis Seyfarth*

Greetings from southern Mississippi and the Pine Belt Chapter! As we approach the end of 2019, the goals and concerns for our chapter are coming into clearer focus.

In September, we met at the home of our president, Kris McNair in Petal, and we enjoyed some delicious home-cooking by Kris

and also Kathy and John Brewer. Unfortunately, the conference call option was not working that evening, but we were able to get in touch with several members by phone.

We're planning an in-house auction for our last meeting of the year, in late November, as one of our main fundraisers, and we'll also collect items at that meeting to donate to a homeless shelter, for our annual service project.

We hope everyone is enjoying the buildup to the Christmas holidays, and the ending of an eventful year – and looking forward to the beginning of a new, and hopefully successful, year for MCB.

### **WITH DEEPEST SYMPATHY**

We lost another MCB member since our last printing of the Periscope. On Saturday, September 21<sup>st</sup>, George Turner, a member for more than twenty years, passed away. Please keep George's family and his fellow Hazlehurst Chapter members in your prayers. He will be greatly missed!

### **MCB AWARDS**

*by Ralph Smitherman*

Hello, MCB members and friends. Traditionally, MCB offers five awards each year, to be given at our annual State Convention. A description of these awards follows.

Icy Day Employer of the Year Award: This award recognizes a company or someone in private business who exercises the practice of hiring a blind or visually impaired individual to perform work skills in their work place.

Jessie Jaynes Employee of the Year Award: This award recognizes an individual who is blind or visually impaired for outstanding work performance in the work place.

Frankie Thames Service Award: This award recognizes an individual who gives of their time, compassion and service to the blind community.

George W. Cantin Humanitarian Award: This award recognizes an individual who has dedicated a lifetime of good will and service to promote and enhance the lives of blind Mississippians.

Annie Denmon Citizenship Award: This award recognizes a senior high school student who exemplifies good citizenship in a leadership role in school activities; someone who is outstanding academically.

**JAMES DOYLE CASE MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP TO BE PRESENTED AT MCB 2020 STATE CONVENTION**

MCB is now taking applications for a \$1,000 scholarship, to be presented at our upcoming State Convention in April, 2020. Scholarship applicant must be an incoming freshman, and be blind or visually impaired or the child of a parent who is blind or visually impaired.

For more information about our James Doyle Case Scholarship Program or to obtain an application, please contact Ken Maddox, Scholarship Committee Chair, at 601-937-0025 or email him at [madpak3@comcast.net](mailto:madpak3@comcast.net). You can also go to our website at [www.msccounciloftheblind.org](http://www.msccounciloftheblind.org) for more details about scholarships.

The deadline for submitting applications for this scholarship is **March 1, 2020**.

### **LOW VISION SCHOLARSHIPS FROM C.C.L.V.I.**

***By David Trott***

Low-vision students have a unique opportunity to receive financial assistance for full-time college studies through the Council of Citizens with Low Vision International (CCLVI) Scheigert scholarship program. Three eligible applicants — an incoming freshman, an undergraduate and a graduate student — will each be awarded a \$3,000 scholarship. The application

period opens Jan. 1, 2020 and closes at 11:59 p.m. Eastern on March 15.

For a description of the program, guidelines, reimbursement policy and low vision certification requirements, go to [www.cclvi.org](http://www.cclvi.org) and click on Scheigert Scholarship. If you have questions, call 1-844-460-0625.

### **NRTC NOTES – NOVEMBER, 2019**

***Submitted by Emily Damm***

***RRTC on Blindness & Low Vision***

***(Edited for publication)***

1. We have two NEW resources: **Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Work Fact Sheets** for youth and parents. These SSI Fact Sheets provide general information about several SSI work incentives, examples of calculations, and links to more detailed information. They are available in two formats on our main website at [www.blind.msstate.edu](http://www.blind.msstate.edu).
2. We have a new course on our [NTAC-BVI](#) Continuing Education tab and [OIB-TAC page](#): **Adaptive Skills & Techniques for Older Persons with Visual Impairments** Service providers in the field of blindness and low vision will discover practical strategies for dealing with everyday tasks. Topics covered include marking appliances, labeling, eating, pouring liquids, caring for personal hygiene, and much more. It is worth one continuing education credit hour (CRC,ACVREP, or NBPCB).
3. We are very excited to have received a long-term training grant from the Rehabilitation Services Administration to provide

training to vocational rehabilitation professionals. We accepted 19 highly qualified and motivated candidates for the [Vision Specialist graduate certificate program](#) for 2020. It was very competitive, and 13 scholarships were awarded. Fifteen states are represented in the program, including individuals working as rehabilitation counselors, vision rehabilitation therapists, and case managers.

4. We had a very successful **White Cane Awareness Day event** with an estimated 250 participants and 71 volunteers. Activities provided a fun opportunity for those to learn about adaptive cooking and eating techniques, braille, various eye conditions, careers in the field, and the white cane as a tool and symbol of independent living. Be sure to check out the photos from the day on our [Facebook photo album](#).
5. We updated our **Resource sheet for job seekers**, which provides online resources for individuals who are blind or have low vision that are seeking employment. It is available in two formats on our main website under [Employment Resources](#).

Want more updates? Check out our Fall 2019 newsletter, Quarterly Connection at [www.blind.msstate.edu/news/newsletter](http://www.blind.msstate.edu/news/newsletter).

***NEW BOOK BY KAREN BROWN NOW AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE***

We are pleased and excited to share with you that Karen Brown, who is no stranger to MCB, has recently published her second book, entitled *Go With Your Dog*. In this book, Karen tells about

the three guide dogs she has worked with over the years. Below is a brief excerpt from the book as well as a bio on Karen Brown.

Let's all show our support for Karen by purchasing a copy of her latest book!

Congratulations, Karen, on your new book, and all the best to you in your future endeavors!

*GO WITH YOUR DOG*

Sandpiper Reflections (pub: October 1, 2019)

Trust is built slowly with a new dog, one day at a time. It's a mutual process—just as the blind person learns to trust the dog, the dog learns to trust the handler.

I now realize how smart and absolutely focused Anna was and remain grateful that she was my first dog. I know she taught me a lot more than I ever taught her.

She built my confidence as an independent traveler and paved the way for successful work with the dogs who would follow her. Her work ethic was astonishing. I know there were many days when she had health problems and

continued to work despite them. She literally worked until the day she died.

KAREN BROWN was born in Charleston, South Carolina, attended elementary and junior high school in North Carolina, and graduated from high school in New Orleans. After graduation from Centenary College in Shreveport, Louisiana, she began her career as a high school English teacher in Brevard County, Florida.

Vision problems leading to total blindness by the time she was thirty dramatically changed her life and led to a career in services for the blind. She was a client advocate for fifteen years and in 2002 was the first blind person named as permanent Director of the Addie McBryde Rehabilitation Center in Jackson.

Along her life's journey she raised a son and worked with three Seeing Eye dogs. In retirement she trained to become a spiritual director. She is a regular contributor to the Upper Room Magazine, a devotional magazine of the United Methodist Church. She has been married to Don Brown for fifty-one years and is a resident of Madison. Karen's memoir *Sandpiper* was published in July 2016.



## **TECHNOLOGY UPDATES:**

### ***AMAZON'S ECHO CAN NOW HELP DESCRIBE GROCERY ITEMS TO THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED***

Amazon.com's virtual assistant just got more intelligent after the company revealed that the visually impaired can now ask it what they are holding.

The new feature, called "Show and Tell," enables customers who are blind or people with low vision to hold an item in front of first- and second-generation Echo Show devices and ask, "Alexa, what am I holding?" or "Alexa, what's in my hand?" The object will then be identified using Amazon's machine learning technology.

That could be especially helpful for grocery items such as tins and boxes that might be hard to identify properly. As Amazon demonstrated in a video, a blind person asked Alexa what she's holding and Alexa replied, "It looks like tea."

"The whole idea for Show and Tell came about from feedback from blind and low vision customers," said Sarah Caplener, who leads Amazon's Alexa for Everyone team.

“We heard that product identification can be a challenge and something customers wanted Alexa’s help with. Whether a customer is sorting through a bag of groceries, or trying to determine what item was left out on the counter, we want to make those moments simpler by helping identify these items and giving customers the information they need in that moment.”

Partnering with California-based Vista Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Amazon worked with visually impaired people to understand the problems they have at home and how Alexa could help.

One volunteer who is completely blind called the technology “revolutionary,” saying with such devices acting as his eyes, he is much more independent. He said he likes to cook, but without the help of a personal assistant, it’s impossible to know what spice he is holding. In another example, Alexa identifies for him a box of macaroni and cheese.

“It’s essential to work with our customers, not just for them, to create something that’s truly helpful,” said Caplener.

***VOICEVIEW ON FIRE T.V.***

***By Kris McNair***

Some months back my husband and I bought a new television for the Livingroom. My beloved spouse is always buying electronic stuff without consulting me, but this time I happened to be with him in Best Buy so I put in my “two cents” and suggested we buy a Fire TV as it would work with “Alexa”.

Of course, getting the TV to work with “Alexa” was easier said than done, but after a bit of googling we got the devices working together. However, Alexa is very particular in how you speak to her when giving her commands to do things with the Fire TV. For example, you “tune to a particular network” not “change to NBC”; while you “change to DVD” not “tune to DVD”. Dear Alexa is also quite prone to saying “I am having trouble understanding”. My early impression of this cutting-edge technology was “where is the accessibility?” And then ... I discovered “VoiceView” while trolling the help sections at Amazon, and here is the accessibility!!!

I am sure there is some variation between different brands of Fire TVs; I believe ours is a Toshiba, but here are some details that I particularly liked. VoiceView is turned on and off by holding down the “back” and “menu” buttons on the

remote. The first time you turn on the VoiceView feature, the TV automatically goes into a tutorial to teach you the remote control's button layout and the functions of those buttons. The tutorial gives the user time to explore the remote without activating the actual functions. At any future time, the user can go into "settings" and select "accessibility", then "VoiceView" and finally "tutorial" at which point the tutorial can be played again.

This television has been in my house since early summer and until I found out how to turn on "VoiceView" I could find and use 3 buttons on the remote: on/off, volume up/down, and the microphone (to speak to Alexa). Now, with "VoiceView" on, I can navigate through live TV (antenna) broadcasts and subscription programming such as Netflix or Prime Video. TV Apps are also available, but I haven't explored those yet.

In addition to providing information about channels, movie and program titles, apps and subscriptions, "VoiceView" also reads the on-screen guides giving access to program schedules. When browsing Prime Video, "VoiceView" informed me who stars in a selected feature, other programs this person has been in, and a brief description of the selected item. "VoiceView" allows the user to turn audio

description on for all programming (where available) and tells the user if audio description isn't available for a selected item. "VoiceView" even tells me when the screen turns off and on. This is a big help for me as there are screens in the new smart TVs which have no audio feedback. I have on occasion thought I had turned off the TV and later found it was still on.

It has been less than a week since I discovered the "VoiceView" feature on this TV, and I have watched more TV during the past week than I have in the whole year prior to the discovery. I had basically given up on television other than the news, but "VoiceView" has rekindled my interest. I may even have overcome my aversion to TV remotes!

### **A WORD FROM THE EDITOR**

*by Alison Smitherman*

As 2019 draws to a close, I would like to take this opportunity to thank each of you, our MCB members and friends, for all the support and assistance you've given, and continue to give, to help make the Periscope interesting, informative, and (hopefully) fun to read. I would also like to thank the staff and volunteers of Talking Book Services for the hard work they put forth in formatting and mailing the

Periscope. Without everyone's help, this newsletter would not be possible.

If you can think of ways we might make improvements to the Periscope, please do not hesitate to share your suggestions with me. I am open to new ideas and would welcome your suggestions. My contact info is on page one of this newsletter.

I wish for each of you and your families a safe, enjoyable, and blessed Holiday Season!

Until next year....

HAPPY HOLIDAYS, ONE AND ALL!!

*“Let us keep Christmas beautiful without a thought of greed.” – Ann Garnett Schultz*