**The**

****

**Advocate**

**Summer Edition 2024**

**PCB- A Peer Network for All Impacted by Vision Loss**

PENNSYLVANIA COUNCIL OF THE BLIND

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MISSION

To promote independence and opportunities for all people with vision impairments.

VISION

To continue to be recognized as the leading advocacy organization for people with vision impairments in Pennsylvania. The aim of all our efforts is to encourage and assist people in achieving their potential as valued members of society. PCB assistance, advocacy, and encouragement will be carried out in such areas as, but not limited to, all aspects of accessibility, transportation, education, employment, entertainment, recreation, and quality of life.

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Articles in this publication reflect the views of the individual writers. They do not necessarily represent the views and policy of PCB.

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# Thinking About Problem SolvingBy Debby Hill, PCB President

Recently, I had a strange issue with the accessibility of a website (more on that later), and it reminded me of the philosophy of an education professor I had in college. He said that if we wanted to be good teachers, he wanted us to approach teaching with a problem-solving mindset. He said that when you are teaching, if one way of getting your information across to students doesn't work, don't just keep trying the same things. You need to take a step back and try a different approach. At the time, it felt like new thinking to me because my young self was sure there were strict rules on how to teach or do most anything in life.

But over the years, I have realized that problem solving in this way works for me, and as a person who is blind, it is an essential overarching tool in my toolbox of life.

The incident that brought the memory of my professor to mind is a good example of how my professor's technique works. I had been emailed a link to a questionnaire for an upcoming medical appointment. When I used the link to open the web page, I was startled to find a list of answers but no questions. Whew! What to do? I was using JAWS, so my first try at a solution was to use the OCR (optical character recognition) feature of JAWS to find out if there was more text on the screen than what JAWS was reporting. Yes indeed, the results of the OCR showed that there were questions on the screen, but from what I could read there was no easy way to match the questions with the correct answers. I was starting to seethe and getting ready to call the doctor's office and complain about the lack of accessibility of what seemed to be a simple questionnaire; however, before I made the call, I decided to try another solution to the problem. I unloaded JAWS and loaded NVDA, a free open-source screen reader. To my surprise, NVDA was able to read the questions with the answers. Quite frankly, I don't know why NVDA could read the screen correctly and JAWS couldn't, but that is a problem to solve on another day. So, I was able to complete my appointment paperwork.

While the couple of steps I took to problem solve did remind me of the words of my professor from long ago, it also reminded me that for people with vision loss or blindness, having a problem-solving mentality is how we have to live. Yes, all humans benefit from this mindset, but if we can't be flexible in thinking about solutions to issues, we are stuck. Yet another aspect of all of this that we have to keep in mind is that if we are going to be problem solvers, we have to have a well-stocked toolbox of options, in order that we have a range of solutions for the issues we encounter. So be sure to fill your toolbox with any techniques, technology, family, friends, PCB peers, and whatever other resources you can find to be a possible solution.

One good way to continue to fill your toolbox is to attend PCB's fall conference from October 17 - 20. The theme this year is "Accessibility: A Buffet of Choices." We are going to have sessions on a variety of topics which will showcase various options to put in your toolbox for getting a job done. These will include both low-tech and high-tech solutions. Keep watching for all the details. And as I see it, if you have an attitude of problem solving, you won't be stuck for very long!

I hope you have a wonderful summer!

# The 2024 ACB Conference and Convention A Little Bit of Something for EveryoneBy Debby Hill, PCB President

If you are interested in all aspects of living with vision loss, if you want to know more about technology including AI, or if you are very committed to being a member of ACB and enjoy being involved in the business of ACB, then the upcoming ACB Conference and Convention has something for you. The convention has two parts. The first part is from Monday, June 24 through Saturday, June 29 and is all virtual on Zoom and ACB media. That week there will be business meetings from Monday through Friday evenings starting at 7 PM. Monday’s meeting will be held to adopt the standing rules for the remainder of the convention. There will also be a meeting of the Nominations Committee to adopt the slate of candidates for office that the committee will announce at the first General Session on
July 7.

Tuesday through Friday evenings are reserved for debate and voting on proposed ACB resolutions and debate on proposed ACB constitution and bylaw amendments. During this week, the resolutions will be voted upon unless a record vote is requested for a particular resolution. See the article in this Advocate entitled “Let’s Support ACB by Voting During the ACB Convention” which provides all you need to know about voting at the ACB convention.

In addition, during each day starting Wednesday the 26th and lasting through Saturday the 29th there will be many virtual presentations. Some of these will be business meetings for special interest affiliates within ACB, but there are also other presentations on a variety of topics that you might find interesting.

Wednesday, June 26

11:00 am – 2:00 pm, ACB Exhibitor Open House

2:00 PM – 4:00 PM Mock Election, practice with your ACB Voting Credentials

Thursday, June 27

11:00 am – 12:15 pm, Amazon Devices Accessibility Overview

11:00 AM – 1:45 pm double session, Guide Dog School Updates

Friday, June 28

2:00 – 3:15 pm, Learn About streaming Services and Audio Description

5:00 – 6:15 pm, Match Wits with Next Gen and the Boomers

Have fun listening to the face-off of these diverse generations in a trivia contest.

Saturday, June 29

11:00 am – 12:15 pm, Understanding Trauma

12:30 – 1:45 pm, Managing Those Workplace Technology Hassles

The second portion of the convention runs from July 5th through July 12th and the format will be hybrid. If you are going to the convention in Jacksonville, FL, then you probably already have registered for the convention, have your transportation arranged, and have your hotel room. But for those of us who will be participating in the convention at home there are still plenty of presentations to tune into. First, the ACB business meetings are scheduled as follows:

Sunday, July 7

7:00 PM – 10 pm, Opening General Session

Tuesday, July 9

8:30 am - noon, General Session

Wednesday, July 10

8:30 am - noon, General Session

Thursday, July 11

8:30 am – 1 pm, General Session

Beyond the business meetings, here is a sampling of sessions that will be both in-person and virtual:

Saturday, July 6

8:00 AM – 9:30 am, The Flight to Freedom: Stories About the Southbound Underground Railway that Led to St. Augustine

1:00 – 2:00 pm, How a Visually Impaired Entrepreneur Created and Launched Her New Business, Motivational Speaker: Tricia Waechter, CEO, Blind Girl Designs

Sunday, July 7

8:30 – 9:30 am, From high school to full-time Internet radio - how The Radio Storm, a free-form home-based radio station, came to be

1:00 PM – 2:15 pm, Planning Your Final Arrangements (AAVL)

Monday, July 8

9:00 AM – 10:15 am, All Things Legislative (federal legislation)

9:00 PM – 11 pm, Poetry and Prose with Friends in Art

Tuesday, July 9

1:00 PM – 2:15 pm, Meet the Talking Book Narrator, Mare Trevathan

5:30 PM – 6:45 pm, A Conversation on Blindness in Trinidad and Tobago

Wednesday, July 10

2:30 PM – 3:45 pm, Advocacy Bootcamp 101

Thursday, July 11

7:00 PM – 9 pm, Convention Banquet

It’s more than dinner. It will include Keynote Speaker: Judge David S. Tatel, announcement of awards, and of the Braille Forum raffle winners.

A few quick notes: If you are registered for the convention and staying at home, then you are all set. IF you have Email, you will be getting a convention program and get messages from the ACB Convention 2024 listserv and will have all the information you will need to join sessions by Zoom and if you like, listen to them on ACB media. If you chose a hard copy program, remember that it may not have the latest information about events since there is a cut-off date to allow for printing and shipping.

If you are not registered and you would like to be able to join sessions on Zoom, then you have until 11:59 pm on June 17th to register on line at <https://members.acb.org/>. Those who register are eligible for door prize drawings which are a part of the General Sessions. If you prefer to register by phone, call 651-428-5059. Leave a message with your name, phone number, time zone, and whether you plan to attend the convention in-person or virtually. Calls will be returned as quickly as possible. If you don’t register by June 17th, you can register starting July 5th; however, at that point the cost will be higher.

If you don’t register and if you are a member of ACB, you will be able to vote on the resolutions, the amendments to the constitution and bylaws and the open ACB Board of Directors and Board of Publication positions. If you don’t register you can listen to available sessions on ACB Media, but you won’t be able to actively participate in them.

If you do miss a session that you wanted to hear, or you just want to hear a session again, the sessions will be recorded and later be available as podcasts.

And don’t forget that before the convention, there will be the ACB summer auctions. The live auction will be on Saturday June 22nd from 6 to 10 pm. But, before the live auction there will be two appetizer auctions. The first is from noon Thursday, June 20 to noon Friday, June 21, and the second one is from noon Friday the 21st until noon Saturday the 22nd.

Whether you attend in person or virtually, I hope you have a good convention!

# A PCB Peer Gets Quite an HonorBy Debby Hill, PCB President

About a month after my term as PCB President began, I got an interesting request. Jason Miller, a peer in the Philadelphia Regional Chapter, asked if I would write a letter of recommendation for him as part of his application to receive the Durward K McDaniel (DKM) First-timer award at the 2024 ACB Conference and Convention in Jacksonville, FL. I hesitated, not just because I didn’t know Jason, but also, because although I have done many things in my life, I don’t think I have ever written a letter of recommendation. I was trying not to succumb to those self-defeating thoughts such as maybe my letter would shut Jason out of the competition. I told him that I wanted to wait for a month before writing the letter. That gave me time to quell my fears, and it also gave me additional time to work with Jason. That meant that I would write the letter after the ACB mid-year meetings which Jason attended in person with me.

I met Jason by Zoom at my first Board of Directors meeting as President, and then he worked on the team that was tasked with contacting Pennsylvania U.S. Representatives and Senators about the ACB Legislative imperatives. As they say, the rest is history.

When it came time for me to write the letter, I was ready and here is what I wrote:

“As President of the Pennsylvania Counsel of the Blind (PCB), I am writing to recommend Jason Miller to be one of ACB's Durward K. McDaniel (DKM) First-Timers. I feel Jason is a good candidate to be a DKM First-Timer because he is enthusiastic, determined and he has impressed his peers with his can-do attitude. Jason joined PCB and our Philadelphia Regional Chapter two years ago, but he has already made an impact. He is now a member of PCB's Board of Directors, our Long-Range Planning team, the Advocacy team, and the Technology Team. At the beginning of this year, he readily volunteered to help contact Pennsylvania Congressional representatives to schedule visits both in-person and to discuss the ACB imperatives. Also, Jason was an enthusiastic member of the PCB contingent who traveled to Virginia for ACB's midyear meetings. On March 5th we visited seven congressional offices, and without hesitation, he participated in our presentations and provided valuable input.”

Here is the portion of my letter that gives a brief description of Jason’s back story.

“Jason's back story is one of tragedy and courage. In 1999 he was blinded as a result of a drive-by shooting. However, his vision loss did not stop him from living a full life. He readily learned the skills he needed to succeed as a visually impaired person, including using the computer and other technologies. In the following years after Jason lost his sight, he worked as a tele-recruiter for the American Red Cross, and he operated a vending stand as part of the Business Enterprise Program. Then he joined the company Virtual Vision Technologies and became an assistive technology instructor. This company had contracts across the country and Jason independently traveled wherever he was needed to train people with vision loss. He trained clients for Verizon, the CAP program based at the Pentagon and other government agencies and companies. In 2017 he established his own company, Paschall Access Solutions, which provides technology instruction to visually impaired people throughout the state of Pennsylvania.”

On April 26th we found out that Jason Miller did receive the DKM First-Timer’s award, which means that he gets an all-expenses paid trip to the ACB Convention in Jacksonville. Congratulations Jason, enjoy your trip, learn a lot, and then tell us all about it in the Fall edition of the Advocate.

# Let’s Support ACB by Voting During the ACB Convention, Before the Big Vote in NovemberBy Debby Hill, PCB President

The 2024 ACB Convention is a two-part hybrid event. There will be lots of informative sessions devoted to dealing with low vision or blindness, but in this article my focus will be on the voting process. The first thing to know is you do not have to be registered for the ACB conference and convention to vote. You just need to be a dues paying member of ACB in good standing.

It’s All Zoom

The first week of the convention is being held virtually using Zoom and will start at 7:00 p.m. each evening from Monday, June 24 through Friday, June 28. It will focus on the 2024 resolutions and ACB Constitutional and Bylaws amendments. The only individual voting done during this time is on the proposed resolutions. Vote by raising your hand on whatever device you are using to access Zoom. Voting to pass or not pass resolutions or amendments to resolutions will start on Tuesday and will most likely be completed Thursday evening. After a resolution has been voted upon, if twenty-five or more people request a record vote, sometimes referred to as a roll call vote, the resolution will be scheduled to be voted upon on July 1.

Proposed ACB Constitution and bylaws amendments will be read on Tuesday, June 25 and Friday, June 28. Also, on Friday the amendments will be debated and any minor changes to them will be made. The membership, however, won’t vote on them until Monday, July 1, which will also be when any record votes will be taken for resolutions. At this point, things will get a bit more complicated.

Individual and Delegate Voting

ACB record voting ballots include both individual votes from ACB members and delegate votes for each affiliate. On Monday, July 1 from noon to 4:00 p.m. you will be able to cast your individual vote for constitutional and bylaw amendments and any resolutions requiring a record vote. Once again, ACB is using the Vote-Now system. To use the system, you will need a link or phone number to Vote-Now and a unique code used for voting. If you have an email address on file with ACB you will receive an email on June 25 and July 7 containing your unique voting code and the link and phone number used for submitting your vote. Additionally, the subject line of the Vote-Now email will be “Ballot-ACB unique voter code” and the email will be from “ACB ballot code.”

If you do not have an email address on file with ACB, you should have received the information via regular mail on May 15 in a large print and braille letter telling you how to obtain your unique voting code and the information for accessing the Vote-Now system.

If you don’t have an email address on file with ACB and did not receive a letter about getting your code, call the ACB Minnesota Office at 612-332-3242 by Wednesday, June 19 to get the voting information.

As I mentioned earlier, as an affiliate of ACB, PCB gets delegate votes, and based on our membership this year, we get seven votes. I am the delegate to the convention and Nicki Keck is the alternate delegate. On Monday, July 1, we will need to know how you want us to vote by 4:30 on the constitutional and bylaw amendments and any resolutions that require a record vote. If you would like to vote by email, send your choices to president@pcb1.org. If you would like to vote by phone or text, contact Nicki at 484-655-2435.

Other voting opportunities

The in-person portion of the convention is being held in Jacksonville Florida and will include hybrid meetings and voting sessions which will be held simultaneously in the hotel and over Zoom. The general sessions of the convention start at 7 p.m. on Sunday, July 7. ACB has five board of directors’ positions and three Board of Publications positions to fill during the convention. These positions will be filled starting Sunday, July 7. The nominating committee will have selected a candidate for each of the positions, and if no one is nominated from the floor for a particular position, then the nominee will be elected by acclamation. If any of the positions do have nominations from the floor, meaning they are contested, then we will once again need to put on our voting hats. As it is now published, here are the possible voting times for any contested positions.

First contested election

Individual vote using Vote-Now:

Monday, July 8, 2:00 – 6:00 p.m.

Delegate Voting by roll call

Tuesday, July 9th, 8:30 a.m. - noon, during the general session

Nicki and I need your vote by 8:30 a.m.

Second contested election

Individual vote by Vote-Now

Tuesday, July 9, 2:00 – 6:00 p.m.

Delegate Voting by roll call

Wednesday, July 10, 8:30 a.m. – noon, during general session

Nicki and I need your vote by 8:30 a.m.

Third contested election

Individual vote by Vote-Now

Wednesday, July 10th, 2:00 – 6:00 p.m.

Delegate Voting by roll call

Thursday, July 11, 8:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m., during general session

Nicki and I need your vote by 8:30 a.m.

If it turns out that more voting is needed, I have been assured by the ACB President, Deb Lewis, that we will receive plenty of prompting for continuing the process.

I think the easiest thing to do would be for each time you cast your vote in the Vote-Now system, email, call, or text your vote to Nicki and me. Remember if you want to email your votes send them to president@pcb1.org. To phone or text your vote, use 484-655-2435.

During the election process, on ACB Media 8 there will be information about resolutions having been past, resolutions requiring a record vote, constitutional and bylaw amendments to be voted on and candidates for open ACB Board of Directors and Board of Publications positions. The information will also be available in Spanish on ACB Media 9.

Thanks for taking part in PCB’s support for ACB by submitting your votes. And I hope you will vote in November as well.

# More Fun with PCB FundraisingBy Fund Development Team

In our last issue of The PCB Advocate we offered you a chance to add suggestions for the auction prize list that our fundraising team will start sending out in June. You can still add your suggestions.

Now, in this issue we are adding information that you can refer to when you are ready to contribute a prize. All items to be contributed to the auction will be sent to the PCB administrative secretary's home at least three weeks prior to the auction. The only exceptions will be for perishable or fragile items, and for gift cards that a company wants to send directly to the winning bidder after payment by the contributor. Be sure to notify Autumn Imhoff about what and when you are shipping something so she can be on the look-out for it. The shipping address for auction items will be at the end of this article.

Next, we have an additional fundraiser in conjunction with ACB for the next few months.

It’s time to register for the 2024 ACB Brenda Dillon Memorial Walk! This year’s theme is “Walking into A Brighter Future.” In recognition of ACB’s 63rd birthday, ACB’s goal is to raise at least $63,000.00 for ACB and its affiliates.

PCB has its team participating in the walk. The team’s name has not changed from earlier years. It is still the Keystone Cane-Ables. We will probably all be virtual so your only physical exertion may be that of your fingers on a keyboard or a phone screen. **No matter which way you get to the donation form, your money will be split equally between PCB and ACB. ACB would like to see $63,000.00 raised to honor its 63 years in existence. PCB is shooting for $1,000.00, of which we would receive $500.00. However, if we earn more than that, we won’t complain. In past years, the walk page has accepted contributions until August 31 long after the end of the convention but make your donation early so that you won’t forget about it.**

Third, there are still the Terri Lynn treats to buy. When you buy some of those yummy things like giant salted cashews, sweet and salty trail mix, or milk chocolate pecans, PCB gets 20 percent of the proceeds. Just think, you get to eat something special and help PCB all at the same time. The ordering information is at the end of this article.

Finally, there is the Monthly Monetary Support Fund (MMS). This program operates through ACB, but if you donate an amount monthly to ACB, you can designate PCB to receive up to 50 percent of your donation. So, contact ACB with the information at the end of this article and have fun making a donation to two top-notch organizations which advocate for folks with vision loss. ACB will probably have some prizes for new contributors during the convention.

Contact information for our fun fundraisers:

To suggest items for the auction contact Sandy Marsiglia at sdm240@comcast.net or call her at 717-676-2349.

To contact the office about shipping an auction prize:

Call Autumn in the PCB office at 717-920-9999 ext. 800, or if needed, toll free 877-617-7407 ext. 800. You can email her at pcboffice@pcb1.org.

Remember, don’t ship those auction items to the PO box. Have them shipped to Autumn at her home address which is:

PA Council of the Blind

993 State Route 956

Volant, PA 16156

To raise funds with Terri Lynn, go to:

[https://tinyurl.com/PCBTREATS](https://pcb1.us15.list-manage.com/track/click?u=d5eb9a98d8892113686a744a1&id=86adb447c5&e=ea16bad5ff). If this link doesn’t work try
<https://pennsylvania-council-of-the-blind.terrilynn.com/>,

or call toll free 800-323-0775 and let your customer service representative know that you are part of the Pennsylvania Council of the Blind fund raiser. As a bonus, orders that total more than $30.00 are shipped free.

To join or add to your ACB Monthly Monetary Support plan go to:

<https://www.acb.org/acb-monthly-monetary-support-program>

or call the Minnesota office at 612-332-3242.

There are three ways to get to the Keystone Cane-Ables donation page. You can go directly to our donation page for the walk by using this link: [Donation Form (donorperfect.net)](https://interland3.donorperfect.net/weblink/weblink.aspx?name=E144393&id=93&cfifid=36)

The link to the full walk site is:

[**http://weblink.donorperfect.com/AmericanCounciloftheBlind/2024BrendaDillonWalk**](http://weblink.donorperfect.com/AmericanCounciloftheBlind/2024BrendaDillonWalk)

**Once that page opens, you can then go to the Top Fundraiser tab or link, and then you can choose Keystone Cane-Ables from the list of teams to make a contribution.**

**You can also go to the Keystone Cane-Ables Walk page from the PCB web page at pcb1.org.**

Thank you for supporting PCB.

# Make A Mark on PCBBy the Nominations Team

PCB is seeking nominees to participate on the Board of Directors. During our business meeting on October 19, we will have four board positions to fill. We’re asking current board members whose terms are ending, past board members who might want to serve again, and peers who want to expand their work within PCB to consider these positions.

George Holliday will have completed his first two-year term on the Board of Directors. Nichole Keck, Sherry Rodgers, and Blair Wissinger will have completed one-year partial terms on the Board of Directors. To be a nominee for board candidacy, you must be a paid member of PCB and ACB with a record of active engagement and an understanding of Council values. Since all work at the state level is done virtually, it is imperative that candidates have access to email.

As a board member, it is expected that you will make a two-year commitment to be a role model among peers and be an ambassador in the community. Attendance at quarterly and ad hoc meetings via Zoom will be vital. In advance of meetings, you will receive team reports and the organization’s financial summary in expectation that they will be reviewed. You will work voluntarily on two to three leadership teams and might be asked to lead one. Attendance at your monthly team meetings will also be required. Ideally as a leader, you will participate actively in all aspects of the organization including visiting with changemakers, educating the public, offering a hand to those new to vision loss, promoting PCB events, and supporting fundraising efforts as you are able. You will be eligible to request reimbursement for board-related travel and approved project expenses.

Everyone interested in being nominated for an open PCB Board position, including current board members whose terms end this year must do the following. To demonstrate your desire to fill one of these positions, in less than 250 words, share your interests, skills, experiences, and goals. Be sure to tell us how you expect to assist PCB in future activities on the PCB Board of Directors.

Send your self-nomination email to nominations@pcb1.org by Wednesday, July 31. The nominations team will then get in touch with you for a personal interview.

In early August, the Nominating Team will work with each declared candidate to record a three-to-four-minute personal statement which will include answers to two of these three questions:

What knowledge, skills and abilities do you have which would be an asset to the Board of Directors?

What are your interests outside of PCB which you believe could be useful to the Board of Directors?

How do you think your board activity can contribute to your own personal growth?

In early September, the Nominating Team will publish your oral statement on the PCB1.org website, the PCB Information Line, the PCB-L listserv, and cartridge editions of The PCB Advocate. On Tuesday, October 1, the Nominating Team will notify peers of the team’s slate of endorsed candidates. Any other candidates not on the endorsed slate are eligible for nomination from the floor at the business meeting.

If you have any questions about the nominations process or board member responsibilities, reach out to Chris Hunsinger, this year’s Nominating Team Leader, at 412-414-1628 or cs.hunsinger@verizon.net.

Make a mark on PCB with your ideas and thoughts. Remember the PCB Board of Directors makes decisions affecting all current and future peers.

# Conference remindersBy Conference Programming and Planning

What’s a conference without a theme? It’s a little like a trip without a destination. You have been hearing about our theme, “Accessibility: A Buffet of Choices.” By the time you get this summer edition of The PCB Advocate, the conference Planning and Program Team hopes to have a large group of presentations to consider for the conference. Our aim is that those presenters will have all kinds of Accessibility solutions for us to choose from. We have even asked that presenters think in terms of multiple solutions within each presentation.

We are still working on gathering exhibitors, sponsors, and underwriters for the conference. We aspire to have enough virtual exhibitors to satisfy our peers’ and friends’ curiosity about accessibility and the many choices that we all can make in that area.

The Conference team hopes to bring an exciting banquet speaker to our Saturday evening. We think that any speaker we are asking to participate will be an accessibility inspiration.

Remember that this conference and convention belongs to all of us, and we would appreciate your help with the following items.

The Conference Planning and Program team is scheduling entertainment in the evenings, but we will need attendees to participate to make those events really interesting. Keep an eye open so that you can join in when we announce those evening plans.

As you have seen in another article, the fund development team is hard at work on the PCB Auction. Not only are you a part of the auction as bidders, but you can also be a part of the auction by contributing items or by asking businesses to contribute items. Help make the auction bigger and better this year.

All of you can help us with part of our Saturday evening activity. What is a banquet without awards? There was an article in the last issue of The PCB Advocate asking for award nominations for the four PCB awards which can be presented each year. Please think about nominating someone deserving of an award. Just to refresh your memory I am repeating the titles of the awards. They are:

John A. Horst Champion of Independence, TheReImage Leadership Award, Anthony B. Swartz PCB Peer Excellence Award, and PCB Community Impact Award.

If you didn’t keep your copy of the spring issue of The PCB Advocate, I am sure that you will receive reminders via email or you can get the qualifications from the PCB office.

You can also help us to spread the word about the PCB Merit Awards for post-secondary students residing in Pennsylvania. Although the Peer Engagement team and our Outreach and Engagement Specialist, Thad Graham, are hard at work trying to spread the word about these awards, all of us can help by letting students who can qualify know about these awards. Students can get more information about these student merit awards by writing to the PCB office email at pcboffice@pcb1.org or by looking at that article in the spring edition of this newsletter which can be found on the PCB website at pcb1.org.

Together we can make this year’s conference and convention exciting and meaningful.

# Summer Travel and Social MediaBy Thadeus GrahamPCB Outreach and Engagement Specialist

Peers, as the sun shines brighter and the days get longer, summer provides the perfect backdrop for creating vibrant and engaging social media content. This summer, the PCB would like to host a “PCB Travels Campaign.” We want to see your photos and videos enjoying our beautiful summer weather, shopping at the local farmer’s market, attending ACB’s National Convention, taking a walk in a local park, cruising to the Bahamas, attending a local sporting event, even participating in a sporting event or having a night out on the town with friends. Wherever life takes you this summer, remember a photo for PCB’s social media campaign.

Photo Secured! Now what?… The hard part is over. Once you have taken your photo or video, contact PCB Outreach at pcboutreach@pcb1.org or call 717.920.9999 ext. 900 or if needed, toll free 877-617-7407 ext. 900. Please include all the details that you can. Remember the 5 W’s. Who is in the photo? What is the photo of? Where was the photo taken? When was the photo taken? Why was the photo taken, that is why is the photo a good fit for the “PCB Travel’s Campaign?” The more information you can provide, the better the post will be.

Thank you all in advance! I am excited to see what our peer virtual summer scrapbook will look like by the time the leaves begin to change, our days begin to shorten, and the temperatures begin to drop.

# Nothing is better than home baked meals and dessert from the oven!By the Vision Loss Resource Team

How does a person without vision cook and bake independently?

Let’s start with a great main dish.

Cooking from a Blindness Perspective

By Sherri Rodgers

My sister, Susan, and I have lived together since 2020 after living separately for 40 years. We take turns cooking dinner each day. Prior to my move, I made my own modifications for household chores and cooking with gas. I learned shortcuts when I went to the Greater Pittsburgh Guild for the Blind and in 1992. I went to the PABT, (Personal Adjustment to Blindness Training) which is a program of the Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh.

Now since moving in with Susan, we have been cooking with electricity. This was quite an adjustment for me. Each day we decide who is cooking and what is on the menu.

For Instance, I take two frozen chicken breasts which require thawing out a day ahead in the refrigerator. First, I turn on the oven to 375 degrees (We use bump dots on each level of temperature.) I set the knob at or between the appropriate dots. Then I set the timer for the preheating time. Next, I take a small baking tray and line it with foil. I usually like to bread our chicken, so, I would get the breadcrumbs, spices, and a sandwich baggie. I put approximately ⅔ cups of breadcrumbs and about ¼ teaspoon each of the different spices in the bag. After taking each chicken breast out of its frozen chicken pouch, I add it to the breadcrumbs and close the baggie. I shake the baggie vigorously until the chicken is thoroughly covered. I place the chicken on the baking tray and put them in the pre-heated oven. While the chicken bakes, I make my rice and cranberries with ½ cup of water and microwave for 1 - 2 minutes. I then let this sit for 5 minutes. Next comes the vegetables. I put them in a bowl and microwave for 5 to 6 minutes. When the chicken is done, I put 1 chicken breast, a scoop of rice and a scoop of vegetables on each plate to take to the dining room table. I also do the same with fish; however, the fish does not require thawing.

For making pasta and sauce, start by boiling the pasta with water in the microwave for between 7 and 7 and ½ minutes. After draining the pasta, add the sauce and microwave for another five minutes.

Dinner Bell!

And Desserts?

By Cathy Long

I have been blind since just after my birth and grew up in a loving home with parents who expected as much of me as they expected of my sighted siblings. As a result, I expected and set high standards for myself. I credit my success in life to the education I received at the Overbrook School for the Blind, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and the training I received after graduating high school from the Greater Pittsburgh Guild for the Blind, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

I love to cook, bake, and eat. Here are some guidelines:

I have a braille recipe that I follow for whatever it is that I desire to bake. First, I must determine if I have all the items needed. I do this by feeling the various canisters I have, and if I am unsure, I put a finger in the object and taste it, then wash my hands. Then, I get out all the things needed, including the pan, or baking sheet to be used. Next, I read the recipe and understand it thoroughly. On the counter I have measuring cups and measuring spoons. It is important to follow the recipe. Carefully measure and add to the mixing bowl as recommended. After ingredients go in, I set the oven as directed. As others may do, I use bump dots to mark control buttons or knobs. I start the oven by pressing the bake button and up arrow which are marked with bump dots and the oven goes to 350 degrees and beeps. For every degree higher than 350, I must press up arrow. If I want the oven to be at 375 degrees, I press the bake button and then the up arrow. I hear the gas turn on to heat up the oven. I then press up arrow five more times to reach 375 degrees.

I carefully pour the batter into the loaf pan or cake pan, or if making cookies, I make little balls with my hands and place one on the surface of the cookie sheet. I place my pointer finger, long finger, and ring finger beside it. Then along the side of the ring finger would go the next cookie. I use my fingers to keep rows straight and the space between rows as well.

When getting out of the oven a cake or a loaf of bread after the recommended baking time, I put on oven mitts and remove it with both hands, put it on the stove top and place a thin metal kitchen utensil in the middle to determine doneness. For this, I take off one oven mitt. If there is batter on the metal implement, I put the glove back on my hand and again back into the oven it goes.

One more thing I do while baking: I have two sinks, so the right-hand sink is ready with soapy water and when an item such as a measuring cup or spoon is used, it gets put into the soapy water. This really helps with clean-up. After the item is in the oven, I wipe down the kitchen counter where I inevitably have spilled at least something!

Feel free to reach out to me if you would like to talk. My email address is long.cathy1223@gmail.com and I would love to hear from you. To get my phone number, call Autumn Imhoff at the PCB Office at

717-920-9999 ext. 800 or if needed, toll free 877-617-7407 ext. 800 to get her on the phone. Ask for my cell phone number. When you call me and you get voice mail, which you will get if you are not yet in my contacts, I promise to call you back.

Happy baking! It definitely is possible to make scrumptious desserts and dinners as a person without vision.

# Achieving Reading Accessibility in our OutreachBy Thadeus GrahamPCB Outreach and Engagement Specialist

While sitting at a local coffee shop with close friends, I had an epiphany. We were discussing the end of the school year, our children and what their plans were for the summer. While discussing these topics and sipping our coffees, an individual came in who caught my attention. It was a middle-school aged boy, one of the students that I coach in football. He rode his bike down to this local coffee shop to spend some of his allowance. Eli, walked over to the counter, looked up at the menu behind the barista’s head and immediately was lost… he knew what he wanted but the menu written in “coffee shop speak” was a foreign language to this poor child. Here is when I had my epiphany, and where I often fail myself. Are we making our writings accessible to the public? What does accessibility look like when it comes to reading comprehension? How can we as an organization “be better” at making sure our materials are accessible for everyone? In PCB we are so conscious of accessibility when it refers to how to make information available to people using screen readers. But we don’t often think of the term when referring to people in general who might not read at a high grade level. So, I began to research and put together the article below to help us make our writing more accessible. And remember, you can always bring chapter flyers, hand-outs, or informational brochures to me, your outreach specialist, for review.

The Importance of Writing at a 5th Grade Reading Level

In the realm of communication, clarity and accessibility are key. Writing at a 5th grade reading level is an effective strategy that ensures your message is understood by the widest possible audience. This approach is not about dumbing down content but about making information clear, concise, and inclusive. Here’s why writing at a 5th grade reading level is important and how it can make a substantial impact.

1. Broadening Accessibility

Writing at a 5th grade reading level ensures that your content is accessible to a larger and more diverse audience. This includes children, non-native speakers, and adults with varying literacy skills.

• Example: A public health announcement written in simple language can be understood by more people, ensuring that vital information reaches those who need it most, regardless of their reading ability.

2. Enhancing Comprehension

Clear and straightforward language enhances comprehension. When information is easy to read, it is easier to understand and remember. This is crucial for effective communication in education, public safety, healthcare, and more.

• Example: Instructions for medication or safety guidelines written at a 5th grade reading level help ensure that all individuals can follow them correctly, potentially preventing accidents and saving lives.

3. Supporting Literacy Development

For younger readers and individuals working to improve their literacy skills, content written at a 5th grade level provides material that is challenging yet comprehensible. This supports their learning and development.

• Example: Educational resources that are accessible to children help build their reading skills and knowledge, fostering a love for learning and improving literacy rates.

4. Ensuring Legal Compliance

Many organizations are required by law to provide accessible information. Writing at a simpler reading level helps meet the standards set by regulations such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act.

• Example: Government websites and legal documents that are easy to read ensure that all citizens can understand their rights and responsibilities, promoting fairness and inclusivity.

5. Increasing Engagement and Retention

Content that is easy to read is more likely to engage readers and keep their attention. When people can quickly grasp and retain information, they are more likely to act on it, share it, and return for more.

• Example: Marketing materials written at a 5th grade level can boost customer engagement and conversions, as the message is clear and compelling.

Tips for Writing at a 5th Grade Reading Level

Use Simple Language

* Choose Common Words: Opt for everyday language and avoid jargon or technical terms.
* Instead of "optimize," use "improve."
* Instead of "implement," use "start."

Short Sentences and Paragraphs

* Keep it Brief: Shorter sentences and paragraphs are easier to read and understand.
* Long: "The comprehensive guide provides detailed instructions on how to utilize various tools effectively."
* Short: "The guide shows how to use different tools well."
* Clear Structure
* Organize Content: Use headings, subheadings, bullet points, and lists to break up text and highlight key points.
* Use headings like "Why It Matters" or "Easy Tips."

Active Voice

* Be Direct: Use active voice to make sentences clearer and more direct.
* Active: "The teacher explained the lesson."
* Passive: "The lesson was explained by the teacher."

Conclusion

Writing at a 5th grade reading level is an important practice that promotes accessibility, comprehension, literacy development, legal compliance, and engagement. By using simple language, short sentences, clear structure, visual aids, and active voice, writers can create content that is easy to read and understand. This approach not only benefits a diverse audience but also fosters a more informed and connected society. Ensuring that everyone can access and comprehend information is a step towards a more inclusive and equitable world.

Resources

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Writing for Readability - Spectrum. https://spectrum.adobe.com/page/writing-for-readability/.

# Please Don’t Use the H WordBy Ann Chiapetta

A mixed group of blind and sighted members gathered one night at a restaurant for a dinner meeting. The H word was uttered, referring to the people at the table who happen to be blind. Once the word was out, I found myself cutting the other person off, saying, “Please don’t use that word.” Then the second person in the conversation used it. I repeated the request to not use the word again, explaining person-first language and the negative association.

I am referring to the word “handicapped.” The origin of it means to beg with a cap and alternatively stating the advantage or disadvantage of competitors. A more contemporary definition is an individual who cannot care for themselves, like a hospice patient. When I think of a person who lives with a handicap, I picture a person who is in a coma state or something like it. I am friends with people who are wheelchair users, worked with a client who relied on a trach tube and did not ever view them as handicapped.

I hope the H word is struck from our current global vocabulary. I do not identify with it and hope it is relegated to the lexicon trash bin like the R and N words.

While it is my opinion, I do realize folks might not realize just how insulting it is to be labeled by a word that means one is so impaired that one cannot take care of oneself or presents as having a severe disadvantage. It does not describe me nor the majority of the people living with disabilities. After reading the word origin, thanks to [dictionary.com](https://www.dictionary.com/browse/handicapped), I am even more convinced the H word should remain as a betting reference in a horserace or round of golf. I don’t hear it as much as I used to, like back in the 1990s, but there are still examples like “handicapped parking” or “handicapped entrance” signs.

I like the idea of cancel culture shaming the word from our vocabulary. I would love a national or global shift to replace handicapped with accessible or disabled when referring to a parking placard or license plates.

I do question why the objects are labeled. It isn’t grammatically correct. The parking spot, placard or license plate provide accessibility. It confounds me these inanimate objects are given a label; it isn’t the parking spot that is “handicapped.”

I believe the push to continue the grass roots advocacy efforts to remove the H word should be tirelessly pursued. The disability community and allies should not relax until the need to call attention to it or write articles about it is no longer required.

On a related note, we were reading over a contract, having sold our cooperative apartment unit. The attorney provided a basic template. We read through it and one phrase stood out to us, the phrase “servants’ quarters” was still being used. I could not believe it. It was crossed out probably as a matter of habit, yet I could not stop thinking about it. We no longer refer to our employees as servants. But there it was, in print in a contract in 2024.

In a perfect world, people with disabilities would not need to be singled out or pitied, but since we live in a world of imperfections, why can’t we all dispense with the negative, stereotypic labels and adopt more respectful terminology for others? I don’t walk around calling a person out over their choice of language. If it is not directed to me or those I am with at the time, I do not engage; in today’s world of hypersensitivity, I keep my own council. More importantly, I respect an individual’s First Amendment rights.

And yet, it took one hundred years to strike out a phrase like “servants’ quarters” and will take another hundred to eliminate it and others like it from the contract text; we have a long and tedious road ahead of us. Don’t give up, keep pushing for change.

# Catching Zzz'sBy Lisa Busch

If catching your Zzz's is as hard as catching a baseball from the stands of a professional baseball park, you might want to keep reading—not just this article but a book available on Bookshare, Audible and Libby by the journalist, Kim Jones, entitled: Trick Yourself to Sleep: 222 Ways to Fall and Stay Asleep from the Science of Slumber. Although it's tempting, I don't plan to list all 222 suggestions here, but instead, clue you in on a few of the possibilities.

The book focuses on two main factors that can interfere with slumber: anxiety and lifestyle habits. Familiar ideas that can help calm a tense body and unwanted thoughts are relaxation exercises, breathing techniques, meditation, mindfulness, herbal teas and essential oils. But have you ever tried these tricks? Singing yourself a lullaby? Listening to the sound of frogs or a washing machine? Hugging someone or yourself? Using walnuts as a source of melatonin? Abstaining from naps, caffeine, and spicy meals after 2:00 p.m.? Lying on your left side to avoid acid reflux? Slowing your heart rate by folding towels or brushing your hair? Saying to your worry: "Thank you for popping in to my mind. I can't do anything about you at the moment, so I'll deal with you tomorrow?" Letting your mind meander where it will?

Of course, I could go on and on, mentioning the writer's insistence to stay away from phone, computer and television for two to three hours before bed because screen light suppresses the production of melatonin. Or I could give you more of her advice about keeping a sleep journal so you can find out patterns of what works for you and what doesn't. But I think one of the best parts of self-improvement is to make your own discoveries.

In short, this is a good book—not only for its wealth of material, but because the author often mentions studies done by professionals that support the truth of each suggestion.

So, if you have a sleep problem, take your time to read this book, and you probably will fall asleep—either because you've found good solutions to your insomnia, or boredom will conquer your wakefulness. Either way, how can you lose?

# Starting With a Glimpse of the SkyBy Tony Swartz

Psst, just between us, for a while I've been wondering what's the fascination among our fellow blind and low vision compatriots for snapping pictures with their phones and even learning photographic techniques. Oh sure, I got it about the doting grandmother wanting to be able to take some pics to show off that adorable grandchild, or maybe for a vacationer to show an idyllic scene to a friend, but for me it just seemed a process for passing on an image without really sharing in the experience; in other words, low life that I am, "what's in it for me?"

For a good while I've been using iPhone apps like "Be My Eyes" and "Seeing AI" to identify products in my refrigerator and pantry, or to read my PC's screen when it stopped talking. But never being noted for being the sharpest tool in the tool shed, I hadn't ever stopped to think that these apps could supply me with the "what's in it for me" answer regarding photography until on a very recent vacation trip.

Just off the mid-Atlantic coast, a thin strip of barrier islands and sand bars stretching about two hundred miles form the Outer Banks of North Carolina. The weather might be best described as changeable, fair and sunny at one spot, while several miles to the north or south vacationers may be deluged by a quickly passing rain shower or be shrouded in a blanket of almost impenetrable fog. I've learned that on the Outer Banks while weather forecasts present a general view of the day’s weather, they certainly can't be specific as to the local weather conditions of the next hour or for that matter the next moment. I've learned that someone's glimpse of the sky trumps my weather app every time.

On a recent trip to the Outer Banks with my family, up one morning before anyone else in the house, I wondered how the current weather was looking. It dawned on me to go up and out on to the upper deck and point my phone's camera up at the sky to see if "Be My Eyes" would describe the sky. The description I got back was:

"The picture shows a clear blue sky with no clouds. In the bottom part of the image, there is a small portion of a building's roof visible, which appears to be white with a triangular shape. The rest of the image is dominated by the blue sky."

"Ok, blue sky, that answers the weather question. But what about that mention of a portion of a roof in the picture." I adjusted the phone's position a bit and got back:

"The picture shows a clear blue sky with no clouds. Below the sky, there is a dense area of green trees and foliage. In the background, partially obscured by the trees, there is a house with a light-colored roof. In the foreground, there is a black metal fence and a grassy area. The overall scene appears to be a peaceful, natural setting."

"That's interesting, so that's the house next door.” Then curiosity begins to set in. I got to wondering how it would describe our yard and pool area?" So down stairs to the back deck and pointing at the pool I got back the description:

"The picture shows a backyard swimming pool area. The pool has clear blue water and is surrounded by a concrete deck. There are two lounge chairs and a small side table on the deck. In the background, there are several colorful pool floats, including a flamingo and a unicorn, floating in the pool. The area is enclosed by a black metal fence, and there is greenery beyond the fence. The pool has metal handrails at one end for easy entry and exit."

Later that day, a bit bored on a long drive to a nature preserve for a hike, I got to wondering whether it would be possible to get a still image and description from moving scenery from out the car's window. I snapped a picture and got this description:

"The picture shows a clear, sunny day with a bright blue sky. In the foreground, there is a road with a median strip. On the other side of the road, there is a grassy area with some bushes and small trees. To the left, there is a building with a gray roof and blue trim around the windows. A white van is parked in front of this building. To the right, there is a utility pole with power lines extending across the sky. In the background, there are more buildings and parked cars."

Yes, I could get a description even from a moving car.

In to my hike, I took several pictures getting descriptions of the foliage, its color and density and further along descriptions of marshy land with short green vegetation. I even happened to get a description of a bird flying low over the marsh, its plumage yellow and perhaps black or dark brown. These images certainly added to the experience of the hike.

The next day I walked down to the beach, and from the top of the stairs I took several pictures, first pointing my phone somewhat to the right and then to the left.

"The picture shows a beach scene. The sky is clear and blue, and the ocean has small waves coming in. There are two people walking along the shoreline. On the right side of the image, there is a blue canopy tent with some beach chairs underneath it. In the foreground, there is a sandy beach with some patches of dried seaweed. A pole with a rope wrapped around it is visible on the left side of the image. There are also shadows of two people and a fence in the lower part of the picture."

"The picture shows a beach scene with a clear blue sky and the ocean in the background. The waves are gently crashing onto the sandy shore. In the foreground, there is a blue canopy tent set up on the sand with several blue beach chairs underneath it. The beach appears to be relatively empty, with no people visible in the image. There are some patches of seaweed or debris scattered on the sand. The overall atmosphere is calm and serene."

Several of the image describing apps provide the facility to ask specific questions of the image, drilling down for greater clarity. also, through snapping and repositioning the camera it's possible to learn how to focus in on scenes.

So where am I going with the above? My conclusion is that while I still might not get the fascination for snapping pictures and preserving them to show to others, I've come to understand through the dabbling with my phone's camera and the use of the "Be My Eyes" app the ability to enrich life experiences, getting descriptions when I want them and on my own terms. That is what's in it for me. I'm also coming to see how the potential of using my phone's camera and image description apps may help with orientation and mobility. For example, it could be very helpful to me while traveling on my own to get a description of a complex intersection or the layout of a hotel's lobby.

A reminder to us all that the "Be My Eyes" app is not only available on iPhone and Android phones, but also available on the BlindShell Classic 2, one more reason to consider having some form of accessible cell phone. Perhaps some of us can think and write about how to use image describing apps and how they can personally be of benefit to us.

# Underwriting Contributions

Contributions are encouraged to support the accessible formatting of The PCB Advocate in braille, DAISY audio cartridge, large print, and electronic Word file. Donations are tax deductible. Gifts can be made by credit card either online at pcb1.org or by phone to 877-617-7407. Donations by check can be mailed to PCB, PO Box 68, Volant, PA 16156-0068.

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