**The**

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**Advocate**

**Winter 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.

## DISTRIBUTION

The PCB Advocate is available in large print, braille, audio cartridge, and email. Send changes of address or format preference to the PCB office. Contents are available to the public via pcb1.org and the PCB Information Line at 773-572-6314.

## EDITOR'S NOTE

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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If you wish to submit articles for consideration, submission deadlines are:

March 1, Spring

June 1, Summer

September 1, Fall

November 20, Winter

Email articles to: advocate@pcb1.org

Address inquiries to: PCB Office, pcboffice@pcb1.org, 717-920-9999

CONTENTS

[President’s Message: PCB is Teeming with Teams By Debby Hill 7](#_Toc184544236)

[Highlights of the 2024 PCB Conference By Sandy Marsiglia 15](#_Toc184544237)

[Come To DC With Me By Chris Hunsinger 29](#_Toc184544238)

[It’s Theme Time By Chris Hunsinger 35](#_Toc184544239)

[Spend and Gain By Chris Hunsinger 38](#_Toc184544240)

[Are You Willing to Share Your Tech Knowledge and Experience With Us? By the Technology Team 45](#_Toc184544241)

[Questions We Are Asked and Questions We May Want to Ask By Jule Ann Lieberman 47](#_Toc184544242)

[“Forward” Into the New Year With PAGDUS By Our Four-Footed Friends at PAGDUS 50](#_Toc184544243)

[Audio Gaming: From Underground to Mainstream By Jason Miller 52](#_Toc184544244)

[A New and More Accessible Shopping Site and More By the Technology Team 55](#_Toc184544245)

[P.A.B. for You and Me By Chris Hunsinger 59](#_Toc184544246)

[Some Phrases Seem Clever but … By Debby Hill 66](#_Toc184544247)

[Holiday Traditions By Ann Chiappetta 68](#_Toc184544248)

[A Retro Look at Thanksgiving By Lisa Busch 73](#_Toc184544249)

[A Community Waiting for You By Lisa Busch 75](#_Toc184544250)

[Underwriting Contributions 78](#_Toc184544251)

[PCB Teams and Staff 79](#_Toc184544252)

[Chapter/Affiliate Presidents 82](#_Toc184544253)

[2024 PCB Board of Directors 83](#_Toc184544254)

# President’s Message: PCB is Teeming with TeamsBy Debby Hill

PCB President

Now that we are coming to the holiday season and the end of the year, it’s time to start thinking about PCB in 2025. Remember that in PCB our important work is planned and presented by our teams of volunteers. Without these industrious teams, PCB would be in bad shape. Before I invite new members to our various teams, I would like to thank all the current team members for their excellent work this year. Your efforts are truly appreciated. I hope you will continue to work with your team or teams, and if you are staying with or leaving a particular team, let the leader know which choice you have made.

If you have not participated on a team or want a new challenge, I hope you will take a look at the list of teams and their descriptions below and choose one or more that interests you and contact its leader and join. We are also looking for two team leaders, so let me know if you would like to be a leader. Here are the team descriptions.

Team Name: Advocacy and Governmental Affairs

Team Leader: Chris Hunsinger

Contact info: 412-881-9328 or cs.hunsinger@verizon.net

Meeting date: 3rd Monday of odd-numbered months at 7:30 PM

(They try to hold an Advocacy for All Call on even-numbered months.)

This team keeps an ear, an eye, and its antennae on anything to do with advocating to make life better for people with vision loss. Some of the work that it does is with both Federal and State Government, helping chapters work with local government, and encouraging personal advocacy among our peers.

Team Name: Communications

Leader: Looking for a Leader

Contact info: If you are interested in being on the team and/or want to be its leader, call Debby Hill 412-742-4288 or president@pcb1.org

Meeting Time: 2nd Tuesday of each month at 7:30

This team creates most of the information that PCB makes available to the public with the approval of the executive team. This information could be the content of the PCB website and social media entries on Facebook, X, and other platforms in the future. Also, this team creates PCB hand-outs, flyers, and best practice documents. This team is responsible for the PCB Announce Line, both for the content, and for making sure that the content gets into the appropriate boxes in that system. The team is responsible as well for assisting with, helping prepare, and reviewing public communications created by other teams.

Team Name: Conference Program and Planning

Team Leader: Chris Hunsinger

Contact Info: 412-881-9328 or cs.hunsinger@verizon.net

Meeting Time: 4th Wednesday of the month at 7:00 PM

This team is responsible for planning the PCB Conference and Convention. The team does everything from determining the theme and the dates of the PCB conference, doing the research and making a recommendation for the location of the conference, and coordinating hotel costs and services when necessary. The team also looks for sponsors and vendors, seeks presenters, develops content and schedules, develops documentation for the conference, and asks other teams to help when those teams have experience that would make them better able to take on part of the job.

Team Name: Finance

Team Leader: Michael Zaken

Contact Info: 412-655-1234 or Michael.zaken@verizon.net

Meeting Time: 3rd Thursday of the month at 7:30 PM

The finance team provides financial support for PCB. The team monitors our bank accounts and PCB’s investment portfolio in cooperation with our investment professional. Currently the team is developing the framework for an endowment fund.

Team Name: Fund Development

Team Leader: Looking for a leader

Contact info: If you are interested in being on the team and/or want to be its leader, call Debby Hill 412-742-4288 or president@pcb1.org

Meeting time: 3rd Wednesday of the month at 7:30 PM

The Fund Development team works to maintain and grow our current fundraising projects. These include PCB Auction, the Calendar Raffle, Terri Lynn Products sales, the MMS program with ACB, and future innovative ideas from peers who want to raise funds for and with PCB. If you have experience in marketing, the team would love to have you to help with advancing the Accessidocs program and any future money-making projects pursued by PCB.

Team Name: Parliamentary

Team Leader: Carla Hayes

Contact Info: 724-941-8184 or lengual@verizon.net

Meeting time: 4th Tuesday of the month at 8:30 PM

The Parliamentary Team creates possible bylaw changes at the direction of the Board of Directors and any PCB peers who would like to see a bylaw change. When constructing bylaw changes the team makes sure that the change requests are matched with the correct article and that the change does not cause a conflict among the other bylaw sections. The team also writes or helps with the writing of resolutions. Any proposed bylaw changes and resolutions are voted on at the business meeting of the next PCB Conference and Convention. The team gives the Board of Directors advice on appropriate interpretation of language within the bylaws. Also, the team offers assistance to chapters when chapters review their own bylaws.

Team Name: Peer Engagement

Team Leader: Suzanne Erb

Contact Info: 215-568-5795 or suzerb1@comcast.net

Meeting time: 1st Wednesday of the month at 7:00 PM

The Peer Engagement team is the team that tries to add and retain peers in PCB and keeps us all interested in being participants in PCB activities. It has created discussion calls on topics of interest to peers, and it has created a bimonthly book club where peers exchange ideas about a book picked based on peer nominations and votes. The Peer Engagement Team is always looking for new activities which make PCB fun and meaningful and keep peers involved. This team also hopes to reach out to the wider community of Pennsylvanians to make PCB a more noticeable actor in the disability community, the wider blindness community, and the state as a whole.

Team Name: Technical Access

Team Leader: Joe Fagnani

Contact Info: 814-940-0270 or joefagnani@atlanticbb.net

Meeting Time: 1st Thursday of the month at 8 PM

This team supports PCB through technology. This includes internet concerns, newly arrived technology, and everyday tech issues.

Team Name: Vision Loss Resource

Team Leader: Jule Ann Lieberman

Contact Info: 610-688-6517 or juleannl@comcast.net

Meeting Time: 3rd Tuesday of the month at 8 PM

The Vision Loss team concentrates on awareness of resources for those new to vision loss or those experiencing changes in their limited vision. This team explains high tech, low tech, and no tech ways to cope with the issues that come up as people lose vision. This team pays attention to information about technology that it can pass on to all of us who might well want to take advantage of some improved low vision technology that the team discovers.

So, there’s a roundup of the nine teams that make PCB tick! If you have talent, energy, and ideas, please contact the leader of the team you want to join! We can always use your help!

I hope everyone has wonderful holidays! Let’s have a Happy and productive 2025!

# Highlights of the 2024 PCB ConferenceBy Sandy Marsiglia

PCB Secretary

The 2024 PCB Conference took place October 17-20 virtually. This was our 90th conference. The theme for this year was “Accessibility: A Buffet of Choices.”

On Thursday evening our President, Debby Hill welcomed everyone to the conference and convention and made a few opening remarks. After Jackie Wissinger, our chaplain, gave the Invocation and Necrology Report, Debby gave her president’s address.

Then we heard from Melissa Carney and Charlie Kinnune who spoke about Accessible Ballots from Democracy Live. Melissa used JAWS to demonstrate filling out an electronic ballot. Charlie and Melissa both stated that other screen readers such as NVDA also work with the Democracy Live software which is called OmniBallot. Melissa stated that in Pennsylvania the mail-in and absentee ballots can be delivered to the voter electronically and are accessible using the Democracy Live software. However, Ballots in Pennsylvania cannot be submitted electronically and can only be submitted by mail or in-person to a drop-off ballot box.

Next, Tony Swartz and Dr. Rebecca Blaha, an audiologist from Philadelphia, discussed hearing aids, both over the counter and prescription. Dr. Blaha discussed the pros and cons of each type of hearing aide. She also explained when it is best to see an audiologist for assistance.

After we heard about hearing aids, the prerecorded Candidate statements were played for the open board positions that would be voted on as part of the Saturday afternoon business meeting. The statements we heard were for Nominees Sherri Rodgers, Lisa Busch, and Blair Wissinger.

That night, our wonderful DJ, Doug Hunsinger, presented “My Three Songs.” Doug played small samples of three songs, and the audience had to guess the common theme of the songs. Everyone had a fun time.

Friday morning began with a presentation by Darren Gladstone called “Creating Accessible Environments for the Blind and Visually Impaired.” He described using the app “RightHear” on smart phones along with the types of beacons the system uses to make environments accessible. If you or your chapter are interested in making a specific location accessible such as a local library, you can go to the RightHear website at

[www.right-hear.com](http://www.right-hear.com).

Our next presenter was Valerie Claire Haven who discussed “Coming Out of the Dark: Emergency Preparedness for Those Who Are Blind, Low Vision, and Deafblind.” She went over the types of emergencies and what to do. For Example: are you staying home (creating a bug in bag,) or are you leaving (creating a bug out bag)? Valerie mentioned that if you move it is a good idea to contact your local fire and police stations to let them know you have a disability. She also gave the website ready.gov as a resource to get anyone started on making plans in case of an emergency.

Doug Hunsinger and the Communications Team presented “High Tech, Low Tech, and No Tech: strategies for self-communication …” This session presented ideas for how to label food, create notes, keep a calendar, reminders, and more. There was time for audience questions.

In the afternoon, Joe Fagnani and the Technical Access team presented “Accessible Appliances: A Menu of Options.” Joe and his team discussed what to look for when you are shopping for an appliance and gave these suggestions: do your homework; go and take the time to touch the items; be careful with touch screens as they are not always accessible; look for knobs, dials, and buttons that you can label for yourself; if possible, have the sales rep demo the product.

The next presentation was “Creating Art as Vision Changes,” with PCB Member Lisa Busch and artists Lynda McKinney Lambert, Carol Farnsworth, and Tara Arlene Innmon. Lisa Busch asked the three participants questions, and each gave their answers on how they continued with art after losing vision. They discussed painting, felt art scenes and clay sculptures. All participants agreed that just because you lose your vision, you don’t have to stop being an artist.

Up next was a presentation by Sherri Rodgers, a PCB Board member and Heather Snyder owner of Step Up Services LLC, concerning the SSP program. To qualify for the program, you must be blind and have a form of hearing loss. The program is funded through OVR and provides each participant with a paid employee for 15 hours per month who will help them with activities such as grocery shopping, dining, banking, doctor visits, etc.

The afternoon sessions wrapped up with “A Resource Toolkit for Empowerment: an in-depth look at Community Resources” with Peer Engagement Team members Suzanne Erb, Cathy Long, and Pamela Shaw. These ladies discussed resources such as the ACB community calls and other ACB activities. Also, there was a presentation by Amy Thrasher-Hanson a staff member from LAMP (Library of Accessible Media for Pennsylvanians) in Philadelphia describing the services that the library provides.

The Friday evening sessions began with “Practical Uses of AI With Your Favorite Screen Reader or Without!” presented by Jason Miller and Anthony Ballou. The presentation described how to use the popular AI GPT software on a smart phone and a computer to research practical information. GPT was also compared to Gemini, another AI program, using a laptop.

Our next presentation featured Sue Lichtenfels and a panel of PCB peers and was entitled “Worship: Recipes for Accessibility.” This presentation was an exploration of accessibility within worship practices. Through questions from Sue the panel discussed how people who are blind or visually impaired are accessing the basics: fellowship, volunteerism, participation, and leadership. They also described their experiences when facing both physical and attitudinal barriers to full inclusion in the worship process. The panel discussed some options of tools and strategies they utilize to make worship accessible to them.

After a full day of learning we had fun with Lisa Busch hosting the game “Who said this: a famous quotes game.” Lisa read a quote, and players had to identify the person who said it. Lisa made the challenge less daunting by letting players choose from multiple choice answers. We had teams, and points were given for correct answers. The audience had fun as well.

Our Saturday morning started with “Caring for Pets When You Have Limited or No Vision” with Debby Hill and veterinarian Dr. DeAnna Moore. Dr. Moore discussed what to think about when choosing an animal for a pet—what about size, care, can the pet be left alone, what about the cost, is there a veterinarian nearby, etc.

Next, Lisa Salinger presented the Meta Ray-Ban smart Glasses. She stated that the glasses only work with either an Android phone or an iPhone, and you need to download the app called Meta View. Lisa demonstrated how the glasses can help blind people in their daily lives. Also, her demonstration showed how important lighting is when using the glasses because it will affect the results you receive.

Our next session was “Adaptive Sports: Blind Tennis” with Debby Hill and Dr. Jen Roth. Jen explained the game and how it is adapted for people who are blind or have low vision. The ball is spongy with a golf ball inside it with sound. The lines are tactile on the court and include a lower net. The court is the size of a basketball court. There are currently three active groups in PA located in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and State College. If you wish, Jen can assist in getting you started with your own team of three blind/visually impaired people and some volunteers. You can contact her by email at jkroth@carlow.edu.

The final presentation of the conference was “Creating and Promoting Your Chapter’s Identity” with Thadeus Graham, PCB Outreach and Engagement Specialist. Thad discussed what to consider when creating an identity for your chapter including, what does your chapter represent--image, values, etc.; what is your chapter’s story; What are your chapter’s goals?

On Saturday afternoon, the Business meeting took place. The team, project, and treasurer’s reports were given.

Last year The Parliamentary Team presented one resolution regarding having invocations before each conference session and the banquet. At that time after much discussion, it was decided to send the resolution back to the parliamentary team for further crafting. This year Carla Hayes, the Parliamentary Team leader, reported that after review of the PCB bylaws, the Parliamentary Team decided that last year’s resolution is covered by bylaw 8 section 6. This bylaw spells out the duties of the Chaplin. Carla also gave a presentation on how to write resolutions.

The business meeting continued with the election of board members. The following members were selected to serve a two-year term, Lisa Busch, Nichole Keck, Sherri Rodgers, and Blair Wissinger.

Saturday evening began with our banquet speaker Karla Gilbride, General Counsel of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The title of her presentation was “We Have the Power: Fighting for Access and Opportunity in the 21st Century.” Karla gave us a brief bio which demonstrated that from an early age her parents taught her self-confidence and that the law is your friend when it is on your side. You just have to be willing to learn how to use it. She went to college, law school, worked for several law firms and justice organizations fighting for the rights of workers, disabled people, and older people. She reminded us to use our individual talents, our blindness super powers of resilience and problem solving, and the community that we are a part of for support when we are struggling with issues of discrimination. She pointed out that she is optimistic about the results that EEOC and its team of more than 300 lawyers should be able to get for the people that it represents. She is also optimistic about what problems technology and AI will be able to help us solve in the future.

The evening continued with award presentations. Betty Homer was presented with the John Horst Champion of Independence Award and Sue Lichtenfels received the Tony Swartz Peer Excellence award. Jessie Slappy was given the Student Merit Award by Suzanne Erb, Peer Engagement Team Leader.

The award presentations were followed by the evening’s entertainment, which was provided by Jason Castonguay who sang and played the keyboards. He sang many old favorites and took requests. He also described his strategies for making audio engineering accessible for those who are blind or who have low vision.

Sunday morning began with an Audio Described play: *To See or Not to See*. This play was written and produced in Canada by group called VocalEye. The play is the story of a blind woman who becomes overwhelmed with life and turns to a Shaman to help her revisit various stages of her life, so she can overcome family trauma and the difficulties of growing up as a person with a disability.

This was followed by a Netflix Audio Described Movie called *True Spirit*, which is based on a true story of an Australian teen who chases her dreams and faces her fears as she sets out to become the youngest person to sail solo around the world. It starred Teagan Croft, Cliff Curtis, and Anna Paquin.

Our conference ended with the auction hosted by the Fund Development team. This year’s auction had 70 items up for bid and was well-attended and successful.

# Come To DC With MeBy Chris Hunsinger

Advocacy and Governmental Affairs Team Leader &
PCB Past President

As the leader of the Advocacy and Governmental Affairs team of PCB, I am making a special request for volunteers. We are looking for peers to join the ACB Legislative Seminar and therefore also volunteers to join in the discussion with legislators to inform them about ACB’s Legislative imperatives and any other issues specific to Pennsylvania after the legislative seminar.

It appears that there will be virtual and in-person activities. For those attending in person, the location of the hotel will be in Arlington, VA, as it was last year. The title of the event is now The DC Leadership Conference, and it will take place from March 15 through March 18. The events will consist of an ACB Board meeting, a Presidents’ meeting, and the legislative seminar before that magical day when we can visit our legislators. Aside from discussing important legislation, we hope to have updates from several Federal agencies concerning additional issues of importance to our peers.

We have been told of several interesting and entertaining activities for those attending in person. On Friday March 14, the day before the Board Meeting, there will be tours of the National Library Service offices which will include some hidden treasures from the past found when NLS moved recently from Taylor Street back down to Capitol Hill with the rest of the Library of Congress after about 60 years in temporary space. There will be at least one evening of dining and networking for those attending in person because another dine around event is planned for one of the weekend evenings. That event is always interesting because all attendees are encouraged to try cuisines that they are not used to and break bread or use chopsticks with people they want to get to know better, rather than with their own small group of participants. There has also been talk of possibly having a Dining in the Dark event to create additional awareness of blind and low vision issues among important people in the DC Metro area.

There will probably be an evening meet and greet reception with hors d’oeuvres and a cash bar along with time to talk to people from all over the country you only hear about or know from Zoom events.

What will we be talking about with legislators? We don’t have an idea yet. When the Advocacy Steering Committee of ACB got together the night before the election, we all felt that strategies might well have to change depending on how likely it would be to pass particular bills. We even talked about asking for support for particular regulations by asking legislators to put pressure on government agencies and not for particular bills. One question that we asked ourselves was: What kind of bills would be more likely to appeal to a Republican led Congress?

We will not be able to speak in person with staff and legislators in all seventeen house offices or the two senate offices on March 18, which would be the day scheduled for our Hill visits, so some of you who would rather do things virtually can join us for additional visits after the meetings. Even if you are going to be a virtual participant, you will be expected to participate in the events and do part of the work contacting offices before our Hill Day.

We will be using the same hotel as last year, and amazingly, the room rate only went from $149.00 to $155.00 a night at the group rate at The Sheraton Pentagon City. We don’t yet have any of the other costs involved in participating either virtually or in person, so this is your chance to tell us that you are interested, but we will understand that how you participate may well depend on how much PCB can help you with the costs, not only for the hotel and meals, but also for the transportation to and from the DC Metro area. We have some PCB budget limitations, so we can’t yet be sure of what portion of any in person activity PCB will be able to reimburse. By the time we create this team of legislative influencers, we will have more information on both costs and the national imperatives.

If you want to join us, you will be able to hone your powers of persuasion, your email and composition skills, your determination and resourcefulness and if you attend in person, you may use additional mobility skills. During the DC Leadership Conference, you will be able to interact with ACB members from all over the country who also have a strong interest in advocacy and the legislative process. You may well learn a few tricks from others from different states.

No one will be expected to do this work alone, but all who volunteer will be expected to support each other’s work during the six weeks before the DC Leadership Conference. ACB will provide us with sample letters to email to appropriate people in legislative offices, background information about all the legislative imperatives which we will be addressing and talking points and short summaries of the bills to give to staff members. ACB expects us to fill out reports after each Congressional meeting and continue the dialog throughout the year.

If this sounds like something that you would like to do, please send a short resume and/or bio to the Legislative Seminar Selection Committee (LSSC) outlining your qualifications as a representative and describing why you want to attend. The resume may be submitted in any accessible format, including, but not limited to, email, braille, large print, or audio. Email applications should be sent to advocacy@pcb1.org and to cs.hunsinger@verizon.net with all other formats mailed to PA Council of the Blind, Attn. LSSC, PO Box 68, Volant, PA 16156. All applications must be received by Friday, January 31, 2025. Applicants who wish to attend in person should be able to function independently using daily living skills and to manage a long day traversing the Capitol complex. Applicants will be notified by Feb. 7 whether their application has been accepted or not. We certainly hope that several of you are interested enough in advocacy to want to take part in this endeavor.

# It’s Theme TimeBy Chris Hunsinger

Conference Program
 and Planning Team Leader and Past
 President

Are you ready for some competition? The CPPT (Conference Program and Planning Team) has just finished all of its work on the 2024 Conference and Convention, but we are already thinking about the 2025 conference. Will you think about it early as well? Help us come up with a theme for the conference. Your idea for a theme may well be the winning entry in the competition. The CPPT usually makes the theme decision very early in the year of the conference and convention, but one of the suggestions from the Peer Engagement meeting at the end of October sounded oh so intriguing to us--have a contest to create a theme for next year’s conference. What a chance to have a more diverse group of suggestions for the 2025 theme. That is why we are asking you, our peers in PCB, to give us your theme suggestions. We hope that your ideas will give us a whole new perspective on what we can do in our Fall conference.

The CPPT will pick the winning theme, and that person will earn bragging rights, a prize yet to be determined, and possible special recognition in the program and at the conference itself. Since the CPPT will be making the decision about this theme, none of the team members will be able to win the contest. That puts the theme idea squarely in the hands of the rest of PCB.

Our themes usually emphasize a positive aspect of what we can do within PCB or what we can bring to PCB to make our lives better. It’s always good to have clever word play in the theme. We hope that any theme which we choose will make it possible for us to present a wide array of programming. It really won’t matter whether the conference is virtual, hybrid, or in person when the theme is being presented. We would like to have all of your ideas before our meeting near the end of January, so get those theme ideas to us by Monday, January 20. Give us your theme, which should be just a few words that create excitement, and some ideas that you think would fit that theme well. It certainly doesn’t have to be complicated. You can email your idea to me at cs.hunsinger@verizon.net. IF you are sending me a suggestion, make the subject of your email “conference theme suggestion” or you can also send a suggestion to the PCB office by mail, in print or braille at PA Council of the Blind, PO Box 68, Volant, PA 16156, or call Autumn with your suggestion at 717-920-9999 ext. 800.

Good luck and may your theme idea win.

# Spend and GainBy Chris Hunsinger

Past President

This is an article about how you can spend money, help PCB, gain enjoyment, some money, and make friends and family happy all at the same time. We think that these two fund-raising opportunities do all of these things.

First: We have the PCB Calendar Raffle. We have been holding this fund-raising event for many years, but we haven’t given a detailed explanation of how it actually works for a long time.

PCB will have calendar raffle tickets available for your buying, selling, and gifting needs some time in December. That could be handy for this holiday season. We will let you know when Autumn has them in the office. Your chapter may decide to manage all ticket ordering centrally or it may decide that each individual should just take care of their own calendar raffle tickets. There are a thousand three-digit tickets available for the raffle period which runs from April 1 through Sept. 30. We know that we are talking about this several months before the first winner will be known, but that gives you time to use the tickets as holiday presents, and it also gives you time to sell tickets through March. The tickets are stapled into books of five to make handling easier. It is probably a good idea to ask Autumn to tell you what the numbers are on the tickets that she will be sending to you. The tickets are each divided into two sections. The named person who gets the ticket has the lucky or unlucky number along with the list of possible ways to win. The PCB office needs the information that is requested on the part of the ticket that identifies the person who got that number. The name, address, phone number, if possible, email, if possible, chapter to credit the ticket to, and the individual who sold it as well are requested. If you find it difficult to fill out the part of the ticket that goes back to the PCB office, we have, in the past, emailed a spread-sheet that you can use to enter the information on and return to the office instead. You do, however, need to include the ticket numbers if you are using that spreadsheet.

Each ticket costs $20. That is 183 possible chances for any number to win. The winning number is the Pennsylvania Lottery Evening “Pick Three” number which is announced at 7:00 PM each evening on television and radio. The result is available in newspapers and on the lottery website as well. Our PCB treasurer makes payments to recent winners a couple of times a month. The fund development team sends out a summary of monthly winners sometime after each month ends.

You may wonder what each winner gains. The most common payment for a winner to receive is $30. However, there are several days throughout the six months when the winner gets more than $30. For the winner on the first or the fifteenth of the month, the prize is $75. We also have several bonus days so-to-speak. On those days, the winning number is worth $125. There are six bonus days. This year those days are Easter, which is April 20, Mother’s Day, which is May 11, Memorial Day, which is May 26, Flag Day, which is June 14, Independence Day, which is July 4, and Labor Day, which is Sept. 1. Therefore, June 15 and September 1 are worth $200.

Once we notify you that tickets are available in the office, you can order them from Autumn. You don’t have to pay for the tickets when you order them, but if the office doesn’t get the information that goes on the ticket stub and the money for a ticket by April 1, that ticket won’t be eligible to win for any time before the office gets the money and the needed information. Once you know that you have tickets that you can’t sell or gift, return those unsold tickets to the office so someone else might buy them. Tickets can be paid for by check or credit card.

You might wonder how the money is divided after PCB pays the costs of running the calendar raffle and pays the winners. There has never been a year when PCB sold all of the 1000 tickets, but we can hope that 2025 will be that year. If we are able to sell all of the tickets, we would start with $20,000 before deducting our expenses. Once we deduct those expenses, PCB gets half of the remaining money, and the other half is divided among chapters based on the percentage of the tickets that were sold by each chapter. Your chapter gains for every ticket sold by a peer.

What do you gain by participating in the calendar raffle? The easiest answer is that your ticket can win. You also might have a happy friend or family member if their ticket wins. Remember that when you attempt to sell a ticket, it gives you a chance to tell someone why PCB and or your chapter matters to you. It gives you a chance to work on your public speaking skills and your powers of persuasion. You get to do a little outreach for everyone who identifies with the blind or low vision community. You will also be doing a little fundraising for your chapter.

Second: Let’s talk about good or bad things to eat, depending on your point of view.

There are still 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. I am particularly partial to the dark chocolate cranberries.

The holiday season is fast approaching, so you ought to order sooner rather than later. It may take a little longer than usual to get your items in the holiday rush.

You can order Terri Lynn products so that friends who drop by in this festive time have something luscious to munch or crunch at your home. You can solve some of your gifting dilemmas by ordering from TerriLynn as well. Although most items from Terri Lynn come in sealed plastic bags, which require additional gift wrap, several of their items are packed in boxes or tins ready to be gifted. Terri Lynn packs the shipments with cold packs to try to limit damage to chocolates when they think that is necessary. Just think you get to eat, gift, or share something tasty and help PCB all at the same time. You can order online or by phone. Just go to:

<https://tinyurl.com/PCBTREATS> or if this link doesn’t work try, <https://pennsylvania-council-of-the-blind.terrilynn.com/>

or call toll-free at: 800-323-0775, and let your customer service representative know that you are part of the Pennsylvania Council of the Blind fundraiser. As a bonus, orders that total more than $30.00 are shipped free, and that saves you a little more money. Happy munching and crunching from all of us at fund development.

# Are You Willing to Shareyour Tech knowledge and Experience with us?By the Technology Team

The Technology Team is proposing to either host and facilitate a periodic tech sharing event by Zoom and phone and or to schedule office hours for peers to call in with their tech related questions. The purpose of these ventures will be to answer tech-based questions, discuss technology news, and in general serve as a PCB tech-based resource. What we on the team readily acknowledge is that we surely don't know it all and sometimes not very much; and that's where you come in. If you’ve had experience with a particular product or technology, subscribe to some kind of tech-based listserv, or belong to a tech-based organization, then would you consider volunteering and adding your name and particular area of knowledge to our peer tech resource list so that we might call on you to share your knowledge and ask you to participate in one of these ventures from time to time.

Please understand that we're just as interested in adding your name to our list if you have experience and knowledge with low tech or alternative tech products. What do we mean by alternative tech? Have you adapted an inaccessible product and have it working for you? Do you have some skill for coming up with methods to adapt inaccessible products, then we surely need you. Our proposed tech-based

gatherings can only work if you are willing to participate and share your knowledge.

If you'd like to be added to our share and learn resource list or have any further questions about our project, please contact Doug Hunsinger by phone at 412-512-4268 or email him at douglashunsinger@outlook.com.

# Questions We Are Asked and Questions We May Want to AskBy Jule Ann Lieberman

Certified Low Vision Therapist, and Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialist

With contributions from the Vision Loss Resource Team

At our most recent conference vision loss resource team member Lisa Busch proposed an interesting idea. She suggested that in this publication we can discuss questions we are asked as a person with blindness or low vision. Also, peers may have questions for the sighted public about low vision or full sight and what it would mean to a peer who has lived all their life blind.

The sighted public likely have some questions about how we live with low vision or blindness. By sharing these questions here perhaps we can provide some indication of how full our lives can be with blindness or low vision. Likewise, our peers might be curious on how we with low vision use sight to perform tasks that perhaps our blind peers perform with alternative strategies or senses.

Some of my favorite questions the general sighted public have asked me include “now that you are blind, has your hearing been enhanced?” Or from a blind peer “What is color?”

Lisa has offered to share her email with you to collect your questions and share with our team, or you can leave a message with the PCB Office with your questions and Autumn can forward them to our team. Please send your questions to for us to consider to Lisa at lisabuschpoet@gmail.com. The Vision Loss Resource Team will provide answers either from our own experiences or shared by our peers. This is an opportunity for a lively but hopefully helpful exchange of ideas.

# “Forward” into the New Year with PAGDUSBy our four-footed friends at PAGDUS

With interpretation, translation and other assistance by Rose Martin, 1st Vice President

The dogs of PAGDUS are taking a break from their winter afternoon nap. Big yawn, deep stretch (as only dogs can do) quick shake, and they’re up and ready. Not for a trip, but to invite you to join PAGDUS in the new year. Are you listening?

Pennsylvania Guide Dog Users and Supporters (PAGDUS) is a special interest affiliate of PCB made up of current, past, and potential guide dog handlers, as well as guide dog supporters. That’s right, you don’t need to have a guide dog to join us. If you’re interested in our topics or our group, you’re welcome to hop into one of our virtual meetings or become a member. Our chapter is also open to residents outside of Pennsylvania. Some of our most popular past meeting topics specific to guide dogs have included situations to bring or leave your guide dog, safe travel in extreme weather with our guides, vaccine practices, emergency preparedness for our dogs, vacation travel with our dogs (including the updated DOT guidelines), and favorite toys and treats for our guides. We’ve also featured speakers from the guide dog field such as instructors, veterinarians, O&M instructors, and advocacy specialists. During each of our meetings, we allow time for our members to share any situations or questions they might have with their guides; the camaraderie of shared experiences from fellow handlers and supporters is valued and special in our group.

Over the past year, we’ve also delved into navigation topics of interest to guide dog and cane users alike. We’ve discussed our favorite navigation apps for both indoor and outdoor navigation and shared tips for navigating unfamiliar spaces. We plan to expand on these topics of assistive technology, using apps and AI devices in tandem with safe traveling with our dogs or canes in the new year. We’re always open to new topics from PAGDUS members and interested attendees alike.

Interested in joining our group? Contact the PCB office for payment details. Our membership dues are $12 per year with PAGDUS as your primary chapter, and $2 if you have another primary PCB chapter. Hoomans are also welcome to join our list serve by sending a blank email to pagdus+subscribe@groups.io. Stay tuned to the PCB calendar in the new year for meeting announcements. In the meantime, we wish you, your guides, and pets (even cats) a joyful holiday season and a happy and healthy new year. Don’t forget to treat yourselves (oh and the hoomans too)!

# Audio Gaming: From Underground to MainstreamBy Jason Miller

In days past, when screen readers like JAWS were the cutting-edge technology and Windows 95 was the height of sophistication, a niche hobby was bubbling up called “audio gaming.” Imagine being a gamer without ever seeing the screen! Audio game developers at that time were “looking into the future,” with early tools to create immersive experiences purely through sound. The pioneers of audio gaming include classics like "Trucker" and Jim Kitchen’s "Football" and "Baseball." But the big game-changer? "Shades of Doom from gMA games." This wasn’t just another game; it was a revolution. Think of it as the blind community's "Doom"—navigating a nightmare lab, battling zombies and mutants, all through audio cues. Groundbreaking, huh?

Fast forward to today, and audio gaming has stepped into the spotlight. Blind gamers are tearing it up on mainstream consoles like Xbox and PlayStation, playing hits like "Madden Football," "Spiderman," "God of War," "Mortal Kombat," and "Forza Motorsport." These games use haptic feedback and accessible controls to level the playing field, ensuring blind players get the full experience. But here’s the kicker—great headphones are a must. They transform your gaming from flat to 360-degree surround sound, letting you hear and feel every bit of the environment. Many games now come with built-in TTS (text-to-speech) systems like JAWS or Voiceover, allowing the blind or low vision user to accurately navigate game menus by voice narration, including while playing the game, for total accessible game immersion.

PC and mobile games are also booming. From simple titles like "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?" to slot games, and even flying virtual 747s across the globe, there's something for everyone. The community is diverse, ranging from kids to seniors, all united by their love for audio gaming.

Mark your calendars! The Pennsylvania Council of the Blind is hosting a presentation on audio gaming coming up in 2025, which will highlight the audio gaming revolution, and demonstrate the range of games available, from simple to complex, there is an audio game for everyone! You do not need to be a computer or tech expert to enjoy audio games, and guess what? You may find one that fits your digital world, get ready to see how audio gaming has moved from underground cult status to a mainstream phenomenon. Now, are you ready to level up and impress your schoolmates, chapter friends and family and maybe even your grandkids? Stay in-tune with the Pennsylvania Council of the Blind, we have our hears focused on audio gaming! 🎮🔊

# A New and More Accessible Shopping Site and MoreBy the Technology Team

With the shopping and gift giving season at hand, we on the technology team would like to share with you an online shopping resource that we've recently discovered. This shopping site, developed specifically for screen reader users, can be reached at www.innosearch.ai. The developers of this site describe it as an artificial intelligence powered platform designed to make shopping easier and more accessible. It was created with a simplified interface and the ability to ask questions of an AI bot regarding products found in your search. The results of product searches are aggregated from a growing list of vendors including Amazon, Target, Walmart, Best Buy, and Wayfair. New vendors continue to be added. The site offers the same customer satisfaction and return policies as the original vendors and distributors selling the product. Purchasing transactions and check out are conducted directly on the site rather than the original product vendor, so accessibility is guaranteed.

One advantage of this site is that it can provide results from vendors whose sites are inaccessible or hard to navigate. A current disadvantage is that specific details about a product such as clothing size or color may necessitate that you go to the original vendor's site to ensure the features of the product you wish to purchase meet your needs. This is an issue which definitely needs to be addressed. The good news is that this site is a work in progress, and its developers are eager to hear from us as to how the site could be improved. To offer comments and suggestions, send an email to info@innosearch.ai.

The podcast "Eyes on Success" edition "2445 Shopping Made Simple with Innosearch AI" featured an interview with the site's developers. Within the interview the developers expressed their intention to develop both an accessible flight booking site and a hotel reservation booking site. The good news is that their intentions weren't empty promises because the flight booking site is already up and is accessed through the site’s main menu, or you can go directly to the flight booking site at www.innosearch.ai/flights. The developers state that the flight booking service allows for searching, comparing, and booking flights from a wide range of airlines around the world. The platform covers all the major airlines, including Southwest, Delta, American Airlines, Frontier, and many more. Simply enter the number of passengers, ticket class, departure and arrival airports, select travel dates, and the site will find the best route.

Our team suggests that you take a look at this site for yourself, and please consider offering the developers your comments and suggest features which would add to the accessibility and usability of the site.

# P.A.B. for You and MeBy Chris Hunsinger

Past President

Thad Graham, our PCB Outreach and Engagement Specialist, attended the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind Conference in State College from Nov. 13 through Nov. 15. I want to share some of the thoughts that he brought back to Debby Hill and me after that event. Some of this information may give you and your chapter ideas about what to do during an outreach event. Some of what he learned may help us all be more aware of what services the PAB offers its customers across the state. One presenter has offered to bring his device to chapters to demonstrate another way to use technology when traveling.

Usually, when Thad attends local events, he brings an ice breaker item like candy which is an excellent conversation starter to encourage interaction with those passing his exhibit table. It gives attendees a reason to approach and talk. However, upon arriving at this conference, he found that the venue provided unlimited snacks and beverages to all attendees. No one would pay attention to his basket of candy when they had those other snacks available.

Faced with this unexpected challenge, he had to change his plan for gaining the attention of those attending the conference. He had to think of a different way to get attention for his PCB table. As soon as he was able to do so, he went to a local store, purchased the necessary supplies, and created a business card raffle. Attendees could drop their business cards or write down their contact information for a chance to win a virtual gift card.

This simple shift was transformative. The raffle sparked curiosity and excitement, and soon the exhibitor table was bustling with activity. Attendees not only participated in the raffle but also took the time to learn more about PCB. Engagements skyrocketed, and he walked away with a wealth of new contacts to add to our newsletter and outreach efforts.

This part of the conference story emphasizes several things we should all remember when we go to an outreach event or, for that matter, work on any kind of project. Stay flexible and observant. Creativity is your greatest asset. Remember to find a way to engage with people. Don’t just expect them to ask you questions or give you information. Remember that what you do now could have long lasting impact.

We might ask ourselves: What was the meat and potatoes of the conference? Who was there? What kinds of services were presented?

Following is Thad’s summary of events at the conference:

Truffles the Kitty, who shows children in a fun but meaningful way, that it is okay to wear glasses, was presented as a way to engage children and, more importantly, their families after failed vision screenings. This is a widely known tool for use in the vision screening process. It gives people who do vision screening a way to encourage people to obtain follow-up care when a vision problem is observed during screening.

Titmus Kaleidos by Titmus Vision is vision screening equipment that was brought to the conference so that PAB Staff could compare it with the Spot Vision Screener which is the popular equipment in use at many facilities. The PAB facilities do vision screenings for children in school. Equipment is always improving and evolving so this was a chance to see something new in the vision screening arena.

Pathfinder by ForSight Assistive Devices. Dr. Lyman Petrosky demonstrated the Pathfinder, an innovative device designed to enhance spatial awareness for individuals who are visually impaired. The demo sparked curiosity and excitement among participants at the conference.

Dr. Lyman Petrosky has generously offered to conduct live demonstrations of the Pathfinder for interested chapters across the Commonwealth. This opportunity would provide a hands-on experience with the device and could highlight its potential to enhance spatial awareness and independence for users. For more information about Pathfinder or to schedule a demonstration for your chapter, please get in touch with Thad at 717-920-9999, extension 900 for assistance.

Jennifer Witkamp, a certified orientation and mobility specialist, delivered a thoughtful guide to working with students with complex needs.

Dr. Erin Kenny of Salus University offered a foundational session on understanding vision terminology and the practical application of eye chart basics.

Dr. William Smith of UPMC shared expertise on managing and understanding low vision in adults, emphasizing the importance of individualized care and support.

The presentations by Dr. Smith, Erin Kenny, and Jennifer Witkamp gave participants a broader understanding of the factors involved in orientation and mobility, understanding as much as possible about an individual’s vision loss needs and treating every customer as an individual not as a category of vision loss. Hopefully, these presentations will make for even better outcomes for those requiring services.

Beyond the formal presentations, the conference fostered a welcoming environment that encouraged attendees to exchange ideas, learn from one another, and forge new connections.

What does this mean for us at PCB? Thad now has had in person contact with staff from PAB offices all over the state of Pennsylvania who serve customers or clients throughout the state. That list of contacts should prove invaluable when you bring a question to him about the PAB services that you have received or would like to receive from a local PAB facility. Several attendees told Thad how invaluable they felt it was to be able to tell people who they serve about a peer support organization like PCB.

Additionally, it gives us several avenues of thought and springboards to ideas for future presenters at our annual conference. Just think, we could possibly even demonstrate the Pathfinder device at a PCB Conference in the future, when we finally have an in person or hybrid conference.

# Some Phrases seem Clever but …By Debby Hill

PCB President

There seem to be many opinions about what words should be used when talking about blindness or low vision when referring to those of us who are somewhere on the continuum from no vision to some vision. According to one organization’s documentation which was debated on national ACB email lists over the summer about appropriate language Blind or Low Vision is the appropriate way to refer to us. Personally, blind or vision impaired is fine with me, but there is one phrase that I have occasionally encountered that has to do with blindness that makes me cringe. Here’s the story.

A few weeks ago, just before the Presidential Election, I decided that I should familiarize myself with all the races that were on my ballot here in Pittsburgh. So, I went to the website of a local radio station that had been promoting a voter’s guide. The guide was actually quite helpful, but on one of the pages there was a short biography of a reporter who contributed to the report. This man had had various jobs during his life culminating with 25 years working as a journalist for several organizations. He has even won some awards for his work. Obviously, he was very proud of what he had accomplished, so as a closing to his bio he wrote “He has won some awards during the course of his quarter-century journalistic career, but then, in an attempt to be self-deprecating, he wrote, “Even a blind squirrel sometimes digs up an acorn.” I was surprised and disgusted. I immediately wrote an email letting him know how inappropriate the phrase was and that the attempt to be funny was neither funny nor clever. The result of my email was no change. The bio stayed on the website. So, on this past Monday November 18, I sent another email asking that the offensive language be removed. Once again, I got no email response. However, on Wednesday November 20, before I started contacting the station’s management, I decided to look at the website, and amazingly the nasty little sentence was gone. I will send a thank-you note.

The reason I shared the story is that I feel strongly that we should not let this type of language stand. There are many folks out there that have the misconception that blind people or people with low vision are helpless and cannot be successful, and a statement like this doesn’t do anything to change that view. So, please don’t let people get away with it. Just because it’s some old adage doesn’t mean anyone should still be using it. Don’t think that these negative usages can’t be changed. People with intellectual disabilities are no longer referred to as retarded, and in many places handicapped parking is now called accessible parking. Many “someones” had to say something before those changes in usage happened.

# Holiday TraditionsBy Ann Chiappetta

The best part about upholding our traditions is that no matter how unique they may be, families around the world will pass them on. Two such family traditions come to mind. Both reflect not only ethnic identity and generational longevity but also our family’s trademark oddities.

Recalling Christmas Eve, after hanging our stockings and putting on our pj’s, Mom would let us set Santa’s place at our table. My dad’s mother, whose maiden name was Hellman and of Germanic descent, kept a place for Santa when Dad was little. But our family and relatives were the only ones who did this, at least in our neighborhood.

It was one of those few times in which my sisters and I didn’t argue over who did what and so on. I got to unroll the handmade, red and green place mat. Lauri, the middle sister, set the matching plate and mug on it. Cheryll, the oldest got to pour the milk and arrange the chocolate chip cookies. Mom would add the finishing touch, a red linen napkin next to the plate. It seemed to be missing something. I got a carrot from the vegetable bin and placed it beside the napkin. Lauri said one carrot wasn’t going to be enough for nine reindeer. I remember feeling scared Santa wouldn’t come if we didn’t have enough for his reindeer. Mom saved the evening by cutting the carrot into nine pieces and arranging them on a napkin near the plate. I was reassured Rudolf and his reindeer friends would enjoy their snack just like Santa.

Waiting for morning was exciting and excruciating. I would fall asleep, usually around two a.m. I was the first one down the stairs, ignoring my gifts and sprinting into the kitchen. The first time I saw the remaining carrot nub on the empty plate, my heart swelled. There was the proof I needed. The ends of the carrot had tooth marks. Glory Be!

Over the years, my sisters lost interest in setting a place for Old St. Nick and it fell to me to set his place at the Christmas Eve table. Mom and I would count out the cookies and wash, dry and cut the carrot into nine pieces. Eventually, I got old enough to pour the milk.

Years later, when my first child was asleep in the bed and it became time for me to set Santa’s place, I used a paper towel, a dessert plate, and a coffee mug. I put out a few cookies, and when I placed a carrot next to the cookies, my new husband looked at me, his eyebrow raised.

“Let me guess, it’s for the reindeer, right?”

When my son was sleeping through his second Christmas Eve, I set the table, but instead of leaving the carrot alone, I snapped off a piece and nibbled the end before putting it back. That evening, after our customary marathon wrapping session, my husband passed the table and pointed to the carrot nub.

“Let me guess, not only did your parents encourage you to put out the milk and cookies for someone who doesn’t exist, they faked the Rudolf evidence, too.”

“You are such a Scrooge. It’s the spirit of Santa that’s important.” I sniffed. Besides, the motivation behind my carrot-crunching was fast asleep in his bed, dreaming of the morning and the magic it would bring.

Our second family holiday tradition was done to ring in the New Year. I’ve been told by my dad that this, too, was inspired by our German ancestors. What mattered to me and my oddball sense of humor was the action of running outside at midnight and banging pot lids with wooden spoons and whooping, “Happy New Year!”, shocking the neighbors. After living in our multi-dwelling unit for fifteen years, an unknowing and curious neighbor would stop me and say, “Do you always do that on New Year’s Eve?” I would smile and say, “Yes, it’s a family tradition.”

# A Retro Look at ThanksgivingBy Lisa Busch

I've had many uneventful holidays but what fun would it be to list those?

For instance, did I ever tell you that I put a ham in the oven and forgot to turn it on, finding out right before we were ready to eat?

What about the day I broke sticks of spaghetti in half over a colander and accidentally breathed a teeny tiny speck up my nose?

I won't dwell too long describing when the apple pie fell upside down on the oven door, of course, before the turkey and stuffing were prepared…

or a Thanksgiving late night after I was already exhausted, when the guy I'd been dating dropped a plate on the floor and I insisted he clean up the mess only to find out later that he had a worse headache than I and threw up in a cab on the way to his house.

Once, believe it or not, a pumpkin pie fresh out of the oven fell right on my foot. I could even show you the scar if you are interested in seeing it.

So, I bet you can't guess how grateful I feel Because this year, I'm dining out for my Thanksgiving meal.

# A Community Waiting for YouBy Lisa Busch

Have you ever dreamed of becoming a writer, but didn't know how to begin? Perhaps you wanted to share poems, stories, or essays with those who already write?

Behind Our Eyes, or BOE as we affectionately call the group, is a nonprofit which strives to support disabled writers. Most of our members are visually impaired or totally blind. Once you've contacted the Secretary to become a member, there are numerous ways to get involved.

Twice a month Sunday night calls on a free conference line provide speakers who will inform you of such topics as how to blog, market, what publishing options exist and so much more. Archive calls are available on our website so you can hear past meetings from as early as 2010.

Writers Exchange will offer you free instruction on subjects like grammar, writing children's books, or lyrics for songs. A web-based magazine called Magnets and Ladders publishes your material on the Net twice a year with contests for the best fiction, nonfiction and poem.

You want more? We have opportunities for participation in creating a book launch for your project in which you can be interviewed by someone or prepare a Zoom presentation of your created work for a virtual audience.

Three anthologies of our members’ writing have been published and all of them are available for download on BARD.

Too afraid to publish? You can practice reading your creation once a month on our Readers Workshop and our email list promises comments and critiques if you desire them. Announcements and schedules of events come through email as well.

Since April is poetry month, we have quite a celebration with a different poet posting prompts each day and special speakers at our Sunday night calls. A prompt is a word or words that are meant to spark creative writing, and also each week a one-word prompt will arrive in our email which then we can use to write a six-sentence piece.

There are three critique groups with five members each that meet once a month and the future promises more of these.

Our newest venture helps those of us who need some accountability and encouragement to keep writing. It's called Write-in Fridays and gives each person a chance to express a goal and, after an hour's work, report on progress of fulfilling that goal.

And last but not least: there are no monthly dues for joining. Check out our website at www.behindoureyes.org to find out more information. Remember, writing doesn't have to be a strictly lonely endeavor. Come join 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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