**The**

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**Advocate**

**Spring Edition 2025**

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

PENNSYLVANIA COUNCIL OF THE BLIND

**PO Box 68**

**Volant, PA 16156-0068**

**(717) 920-9999 or (877) 617-7407**

**Email:** pcboffice@pcb1.org

**Website: pcb1.org**

**Facebook: PACounciloftheBlind**

**Twitter/X: @PCB\_Advocate**

**PCB Information Line: 773-572-6314**

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.

EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor in Chief: Blair Wissinger

Copy Editing: Ann Chiappetta, Debby Hill,

Chris Hunsinger, Irene Rehman,

Lisa Salinger

Audio Production: Tony Swartz

Braille Version: Sandy Marsiglia

SUBMITTING ARTICLES

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Email articles to: advocate@pcb1.org

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

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# A Spring Pep TalkBy Debby Hill

President of PCB

Recently the news has not been kind to people with disabilities, and in one case a man who is blind. But all of it got me thinking about the emotions that can pop up about blindness. When I was much younger and living on my own, a counsellor told me that some of what was going on with me - mainly depression - was that I did not accept my blindness. Huh! I lived with it all of the time, but I was working, paying taxes, and having a life. But I eventually realized that what he was saying was probably true. Back then I had a bit more vision than I do now, and I know that I didn’t really want to be seen as blind. I wanted to show the sighted world that I could get around and be just like them. I was ashamed of being blind because it just seemed as though something was very wrong with me that I thought I should have been able to control. Well, later in life after I lost more vision and I just couldn’t pull off some of the visual tricks I used to depend on, I accepted my blindness. I gave myself a break and said to myself “I can travel and do things like other people, but sometimes I will get in a little trouble or make a mistake, and that’s okay, it is not my fault that I am blind.” I am so glad that I feel more comfortable in my blindness skin. It has made traveling around Pittsburgh so much easier. It is an understatement to say Pittsburgh is not built on a grid pattern, so I have been lost a few times since I arrived here in July 2021. I feel much better about asking a passerby for help or calling Aira and saying to the agent “I’m lost, please, could someone find me.”

The way I see it, the moral of this story is if you have low-vision or are blind, it is just a piece of who you are and it’s all right. And if you are burdened with shame and don’t accept the situation, it will be much harder to do the work that has to be done. That work includes developing basic skills for independence, traveling, finding a job, and keeping up with technology. (Now there’s a full-time job!)

As for the people who were denigrating folks with disabilities and a blind professional, this might sound cruel, but what they should remember is that anyone is just one accident, one illness, or one genetic predisposition from joining the ranks of the very people they were trying to humiliate.

And remember, we do have to put a lot of effort into just living, so if you do run into a time of difficulty dealing with your blindness, please reach out for help to PCB peers, trusted family members or friends, or anyone who can be there for you. You’re worth it!

Have a great spring!

# We’ve Got TalentsBy Chris Hunsinger and the CPPT

Chris Hunsinger here with a message from the Conference Program and Planning Team (CPPT). It’s all about our Conference and Convention.

Who: Anyone who is blind or has low vision, their friends and family, and professionals in the blindness and low vision community.

When: Oct. 16 through Oct. 19.

Where: Anywhere you are if there is phone or internet access.

How: Virtually, Via Zoom or ACB Media

Why: because you want to join PCB at our conference which has the theme of “Harvesting Your Talents and Resources”

Please plan on joining us at the conference. We also need your help as we create a bountiful harvest of talents, skills, and Resources to showcase at the conference.

What do we mean by “Harvesting Your Talents and Resources?” This theme recognizes that there are talents, skills, and resources that we can harvest or collect from our peers and others to give participants ideas that can expand horizons, make life more interesting or entertaining, and give us all ideas about better ways to get things done.

At its February meeting the PCB Board of Directors approved the team’s recommendation to keep the conference and convention virtual for at least another year. We obtained a slot on the ACB Media calendar for October 16 through October 19. That means that our conference Program and Planning team has been hard at work deciding on a theme, brainstorming about presentation ideas, thinking about new ways to alert us to innovations that increase accessibility and availability of services or products, and looking for some fun and interactive events for the conference. As always, we will have a board meeting and the PCB business meeting during the conference.

The structure of the conference has changed a little for this year. The Board Meeting will begin the conference in the late afternoon of October 16. The vender showcase that we held last year on Thursday during the day before the Board Meeting will now be our Thursday evening events. We are looking for exhibitors who are blind or have low vision for that showcase. The actual conference sessions will begin on Friday morning October 17. We are looking for audio described movies, plays, or tours to air during the conference. Of course, we will have our PCB Auction to end the weekend on Sunday afternoon. The fund development team will have an article in this Advocate that gives more details on the auction, and how you can help them make it more exciting.

As friends and peers of PCB, you can help the Conference Planning and Program Team in several ways. First, please spread the word about our dates and theme. Also, You, as an individual or as a member of a PCB team, can help us find presentations which address our theme. If you want to be a presenter, you can complete the Request for Presentation form. That form will be on our PCB website, and it is also in Appendix 1 at the end of this issue of The PCB Advocate. If you know of a person, business, or organization, who might have ideas or products fitting the theme, give them the link to the presentation form. If you would rather the Conference Planning and Program Team get in touch with whomever you have identified, please let us know by sending an email to presentations@pcb1.org or leaving a message by email or phone for me, Chris Hunsinger, the lead for the team. Second, we are looking for ideas for evening entertainment for Friday and Saturday evenings, and we are interested in your ideas for a banquet speaker. Any ideas on those topics can also be sent by email to me at cs.hunsinger@verizon.net or phone at 412-414-1628.

We look forward to your help and can’t wait to see you at the conference and convention.

# 2025 Merit Award AnnouncementBy Suzanne Erb

Peer Engagement Team Leader

Are you or do you know an aspiring blind or visually impaired student who will be attending a post-secondary educational program this fall? If so, then the student is eligible to apply for a 2025 PCB Merit Award. If you are a student attending a vocational training program, an undergraduate or graduate college or university, and are a Pennsylvania resident, then you should apply for this award.

This is not a scholarship. It is an award that is given in order to recognize your achievements and your future commitment to your chosen career or field of study. We recognize that, as a blind or visually impaired student, you will have unique needs, so it is important for you to remember that you can spend this money however you wish—no strings attached.

Recent recipients have hailed from all over the state, so why not join their numbers?

To obtain an application, please contact the PCB Office at pcboffice@pcb1.org. In order to be considered for this award, please send your completed application, along with proof of attendance or letter of acceptance from the school you will be attending and include two references to meritaward@pcb1.org.

If you are selected to receive an award, you will be asked to be present at a short ceremony which will take place during our 2025 Conference and Convention between October 16, through October 19, 2025. The convention will be virtual, and there will be no cost for you to attend. All of this is explained on the application form.

All completed applications should be received no later than September 19, 2025. The two award recipients will be notified on or by October 1st.

Should you have any questions, please contact Suzanne Erb at suzerb1@comcast.net or 215-313-0550.

We at PCB wish you success in all your future endeavors

# Reward With an AwardBy PCB Awards Team

PCB seeks to reward excellence at its upcoming virtual Conference and Convention (October 16-19, 2025) with four prestigious awards: John A. Horst Champion of Independence, TheReImage Leadership Award, Anthony B. Swartz PCB Peer Excellence Award, and PCB Community Impact Award.

Anyone, a PCB peer or not, can make a nomination. Send your contact info, the name and contact info of the person/entity you are nominating, which award you would like them to receive, and an explanation on why you think they deserve the award. The deadline is September 1, 2025. Email nominations to awards@pcb1.org and cs.hunsinger@verizon.net. IF you don’t get an acknowledgement, please call the office to give us the information again. The email ghosts sometimes just don’t get the mail to where it is supposed to go. Current members of the PCB Board are not eligible for these awards.

Here are the four PCB Award criteria:

John A. Horst Champion of Independence

The award will be given to an individual who has performed at least 20 years of professional service in fields related to the rehabilitation or the education of people who are blind or visually impaired or has Dedicated more than 20 years of service to collective advocacy and public awareness efforts that promote independence and opportunity for people with blindness or vision loss, and the recipient’s service contributions must be well recognized in the community in which they live or throughout the state or nation as significant to the betterment of the lives of those with vision loss.

TheReImage Leadership Award

The recipient must have overcome both the real and perceived challenges of blindness or vision loss to achieve an active, multi-faceted life, have proven him/herself as a role model and leader within the blindness community through service, perseverance, empowerment, or achievement, and have demonstrated to the world, through his/her independence and action, TheReImage of people with vision loss.

Anthony B. Swartz PCB Peer Excellence Award

The recipient must be or have been a member of the Pennsylvania Council of the Blind for more than 10 years, have provided a long history of volunteer service to PCB’s events, projects, or chapters, and have demonstrated distinguished service by taking on leadership roles within PCB or regularly going beyond expectations in service to PCB and fellow peers.

PCB Community Impact Award

The recipient of this award shall have made a significant difference in the lives of people with blindness or vision loss through a product, a service, or an employment practice that leads to greater independence and opportunity. This award may be presented to a corporation, agency, or foundation that has provided significant support to the mission or projects of PCB.

# Fundraising FunBy Chris Hunsinger

In another article in this issue, the first details about this year’s PCB Conference and Convention were shared. Therefore, the planning has begun for this year’s PCB Auction, which will be held on the afternoon of October 19th. We all know that one of the most anticipated parts of the conference is our annual auction which raises funds for PCB. During the auction, we always have a good time with a lot of camaraderie and competition. The Fundraising Team is requesting your help. We hope that you will give us suggestions for some items that you might want to see at the auction. I know that everyone has some ideas about what they would like to see and bid on at the auction. Whether your thoughts run to small kitchen items, gift cards large or small, homemade baked goods, clothing, games, or bigger ticket items, bring on the suggestions. What items would you, a family member or friend like to buy or bid on to support PCB? So please put on your shopping caps and send your suggestions to Sandy Marsiglia. We need the suggestions as soon as possible because we want to start sending out ideas for auction items to everyone by the end of May. Sandy’s contact information is at the end of this article.

We have created an auction donation letter for you to use if you want to ask businesses for donated items as well. You can request that form as a hard copy document or as an email attachment from the PCB office. Office contact information is at the end of this article.

But there’s more! … Remember we have some other fun fundraisers. There is our annual calendar raffle. Each ticket costs $20, and you can choose or be given a three-digit number for each ticket you buy. You are a winner if your number is drawn in one of the Pick 3 nightly drawings in the Pennsylvania lottery, from April 1st through September 30th. You will win more cash if you win on a holiday or on the first or fifteenth of the month. Since the 15th of June and the 1st of September are also holidays, they pay out both the holiday rate of $125 and the standard rate for the 1st and 15th of $75. You could be extra lucky on those days with a $200 winning number. Be sure to get in touch with Autumn in the PCB office and order to sell or buy for yourself those lucky tickets. If you are a part of a chapter of PCB, any tickets sold using your chapter and your name will raise the amount that your chapter receives after the raffle winners are paid. We have also decided to give the top ten ticket sellers by March 31 a set of Sony LinkBuds which are Bluetooth earbuds valued at $179 a set. We recently got them from ACB. Contact information for the office is at the end of this article.

Then there are 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. At this time of year near Easter I often think of malted milk balls, and Terri Lynn has those too. 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.

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 buy tickets for our Calendar Raffle or get a copy of the donation form asking businesses for donations:

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.

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) 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 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

Thank you for supporting PCB.

# Just Think About It, for Now!By Chris Hunsinger

Nominating Team Leader

In the spring and early summer, the Nominations Team will begin the quest for the next group of PCB officers and board members. At this time, we ask you to seriously consider whether you want to become more involved in PCB leadership. It’s not too early to start thinking about how you can bring more of your energy to PCB. Take some time in the next few months to think about your future role in PCB. Are you a leader in other areas of your life? Even if you are not a leader, would you like to become a leader who might encourage peers to reach for bigger goals, or bring some new exciting ideas to PCB, or reach outside of PCB to organizations and/or individuals who you think we could work with to create a stronger organization and a better Pennsylvania for blind and low vision individuals?

When the Nominations Team starts looking for peers interested in becoming a part of PCB leadership, you might have an answer if you start thinking about it now. We hope that you will say that you are ready for the challenge, but you might actually tell us that you want to wait another year or so before trying your hand at PCB leadership. You could also say that you like it when others lead, and you follow and participate.

PCB is seeking nominees for both officer and board positions at this year’s business meeting being held on October 18. We will have at least four board positions to fill along with all of the officer positions. 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.

All Officer positions must be filled at this business meeting. Debby Hill will have completed her first term as President of PCB and is eligible to run for another term. Rosemary Martin will have completed her first term as First Vice President of PCB and is eligible to run for a second term. Robert Shingleton will have completed his first term as Second Vice President of PCB and is eligible to run for another term. Sandy Marsiglia will have completed her first term as Secretary of PCB. There is no limit to the number of terms a secretary can serve according to the PCB bylaws. Michael Zaken is up for re-election as treasurer. There is also no limit to the number of terms a treasurer can serve.

Nathan Ruggles and Jason Miller will each have completed their first two-year terms on the Board of Directors. They are eligible to run for a second consecutive term. Donald Dunn and Doug Hunsinger will each have completed their second two-year term on the Board of Directors and cannot run for a third term.

Now let’s talk about the qualifications you must meet for these positions. To be a nominee for the board or officer 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 an officer or 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 board meetings via Zoom will be vital. In advance of meetings, you will receive team reports and the organization’s financial summary in the 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.

Your name is not in the hat for the approved slate just because you mentioned to a Nominations Team member that you would like to run for office. Everyone who is interested in being nominated for either an officer position or an open PCB Board position, including current board members whose terms end this year must do the following. In less than 250 words, share your interests, skills, experiences, and goals to demonstrate your desire to fill one of these positions. 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 and cs.hunsinger@verizon.net by Friday, August 1. The Nominations Team will then contact 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 several questions which will give your peers who may not know you an idea of who you are and what you stand for.

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 Wednesday, 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 being held on October 18.

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.

You might be the change agent that PCB needs so that we can become an even stronger and more meaningful representative for blind and low vision individuals in Pennsylvania.

# Sharing Our Journeys with Low Vision or BlindnessBy Jule Ann Lieberman

Certified Low Vision Therapist and

Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialist

In December 2024, the Vision Loss Resource Team placed an article in The PCB Advocate asking our readers to contribute questions about blindness or low vision. These could be our own questions or those posed to us by sighted individuals, about blindness, low vision, or vision in general. Since we had no contributions, our team decided we would share our own stories to help others better understand and learn how the experiences in those stories influenced our life choices.

As the team leader I offered to share the story of my journey as our first entry. Others on our team will follow in subsequent articles sharing how life choices were influenced by experiences in their life journey. In addition, we encourage you, our readers, to share with us your own stories so we can all better understand each other and our journeys through life.

No story can be fully told without taking into account such factors as history, family dynamics and cultural attitudes that can affect our identity and self-esteem plus how we are perceived by those with typical vision. Our team’s goal is for each of us to gain a better understanding of how our blindness or low vision influenced who we are today.

For the purpose of this article, my story is as follows: I was born fifth of six children in 1958 in a small, blue-collar, working-class town in the coal region of Pennsylvania. Large families were considered the norm at that time and extended families all lived within a few blocks of each other. Our family has a history of hard-working members starting with my paternal grandfather, who was a coal miner, maternal grandfather who worked his way through medical school and my own parents. My father worked three jobs; clerk in the coal industry, Justice of Peace for the town and when he had some free time he sold Fuller Brushes door-to-door. Mom was a registered nurse who worked many long shifts in the hospital in a nearby town. Both of my parents had issues with both physical and mental health which made for some hard economic times for our large family. Treatments and medications were much different at that time and hospital stays were more frequent than they would be today. This of course influenced all my siblings to be self-efficient in many ways. This included studying hard and achieving academic goals throughout elementary, high school and post-secondary education. Our family valued education highly as it seemed the means to have a better life.

I entered first grade in the town’s Catholic elementary school at a time when my classmates numbered 62 in one room with one teacher. Rules and discipline were the norm at that time in education providing little room for a student with low vision. I did not begin to recognize that I did not see the same way others did until I was nine. Print in my schoolbooks was hard to read, requiring me to hold the books close to my face. Also, I could not see the face of my teacher in the front of the room. Frequently I was accused of “faking” my poor vision for attention, which was further complicated by the academic successes of my older siblings. The common attitude of the times was eyeglasses fixed all vision problems.

It was at this time I began my own quest to find a solution. My maternal grandfather happened to be an ophthalmologist, who, you might believe would have the solution. He too was frustrated because all the optical corrections in eyeglasses did not correct my vision. My father at that time was also being treated by a retinal specialist for his diabetic retinopathy and I asked to visit his doctor for the “second opinion” and perhaps for some answers.

At age 13, I was diagnosed with Stargardt’s Macular Dystrophy as an inherited genetic eye condition. No treatment was available, thus my “journey” to seek my own solutions had begun. This diagnosis was later re-defined with genetic studies that my gene located on ABCA4 indicated two eye conditions Stargardt’s as well as Cone Rod Dystrophy. These are both slowly progressive eye conditions that begin with losing ability to see the details of life such as print and faces and gradually extending to losses in the perimeter causing failure to see color and objects beyond a short distance. I find it helpful to describe what I can see as looking through drizzle rain with light sparkles in place of the details of vision.

My school did not believe that I needed any accommodation as clearly, I was doing well as I earned a place on the honor roll for my grades. I received large print books and recorded books in my sophomore year of high school when my typing teacher saw me bringing my head close to the keyboard and book as I did my lessons. This started the entire process of being identified as low-vision and my family was introduced to the Bureau of Blindness and Vision Services of Pennsylvania. It was a conversation with the blind BBVS counselor who visited our home and stated frankly that there was no reason I could not achieve a college education, and he would help make it happen. This not only gave me further encouragement but changed my father’s view of my future.

Fast forward now to my job search. After several interviews where potential employers stated that I would be unable to do their job because of my vision level and after being “fired” because the manager did not like the look of me holding the books close to my face, it was then I sought the support once more of BBVS. This was prior to the protections granted in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). I had no experience attending school or working with others with low vision or blindness and I did not identify with this community. My counselor, at the time, seemed to view me differently and suggested I had some skills to offer in supporting others with low vision or blindness. My career in services for the blind and low vision began with a position with Associated Services for the Blind in Philadelphia as their Director of Volunteers. My role was to train volunteers in support techniques such as sighted guide and reading tips for their clients. I enjoyed collaborating with people like me with low vision or blindness. During this time, I got married and began my family. It was decided that I would be a “stay at home” mother until my children were old enough to attend school.

After 13 years at home, it was time to return to the outside workforce. I knew that office work had rapidly changed as a result of computers, and I sought support to use a computer with magnification and eventually screen reading software. This led me to a position as an instructor at the agency where I was trained. I was then moved to open my own service and store for people with low vision and blindness. Reluctantly this venture was costly and resulted in it being transformed into a non-profit support agency. Funds to continue this work were difficult to obtain. At this same time, I was recruited by the faculty at Salus University, which was formerly the Pennsylvania College of Optometry to join in the graduate study in low vision therapy. A scholarship was available and as my youngest began her college education it was time for me to return to school for professional training in the field of low vision and blindness. Upon graduation I applied and began my work with TechOWL, formerly Pennsylvania’s Initiative on Assistive Technology, where I continue to this day. My search for solutions continues as I learn each year the advancing role that technology plays in our lives with low vision and blindness. Truly my life has been directed by my experience with losing my vision gradually and it is with my friendships at PCB that I continue to learn from you all.

Blindness and Low Vision are a broad spectrum of how a person can see or have limited or no vision at all. By sharing our stories, we hope we can build a strong community of friends and advocates to allow us all to live our best lives. Please reach out to PCB and the Vision Loss Resource Team with any questions, suggestions, or stories of your own journey.

# Now available: Accessible Daisy Edition of Paratransit GuideBy Tony Swartz

Rabbittransit, the paratransit division of the Susquehanna Regional Transportation Authority, a public transportation provider serving eleven counties of Pennsylvania, has just released an updated version of its Paratransit Shared Ride Guide. AccessiDocs, a project of PCB, has completed the conversion of the Guide into an accessible Daisy edition. The Daisy format provides the reader with the ability to navigate back and forth through the main sections and subsections of the Guide, similar to the navigability of NLS talkingbooks.

The Guide describes every facet of the paratransit service. This includes how to apply for service, how to place an order for a ride, information regarding each of the county area offices of the service, the various funding programs for which a rider may be eligible, advantages and limitations of the shared ride system, rules and regulations of the service, and fare and travel guidelines tables. The eleven counties served by Rabbittransit are: Adams, Columbia, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Montour, Northumberland, Perry, Snyder, Union, and York. Even if you are already a frequent user of Rabbittransit paratransit services, it's a good idea to have the Guide available to you to understand more fully what the service offers. Your request for this guide will help the agency realize the value of this project.

You may order a daisy or MP3 edition of the Guide on thumb drive directly from Rabbittransit by contacting Hillary Griffie, the Marketing Manager of Susquehanna Regional Transportation Authority. She may be reached by phone at 717-233-5657 ext. 5147, or by email at hgriffie@rabbittransit.org.

The thumb drive you receive can be inserted into the USB port of NLS talkingbook players or copied from the thumb drive to an SD card for play on a Daisy reader such as the Victor Stream series of players. Alternatively, The Daisy edition will be available as a download from the AccessiDocs website once PCB has migrated over to a new web host. In the short term, it is possible to listen to an MP3 stream of the Guide at <http://www.accessidocs.com/rabbit-transit/>.

At this address, you’ll find that the main body of the Guide is presented as a single audio file, and the fare and travel guidelines tables presented as separate audio files for each of the counties served by the Rabbittransit system. My opinion is that you’ll be best served by ordering the thumb drive, either the Daisy or MP3 version directly from Rabbitransit.

Should you have further questions regarding the contents or audio formats of the guide, you may contact Tony Swartz at 610-799-4565 or at tbswartz@ptd.net.

# The Power of Speaking Up: Why Self-Advocacy Matters for EveryoneBy: Thadeus Graham

PCB Out-Reach & Engagement Specialist

Imagine you are at your favorite restaurant, eagerly anticipating your usual order. But when the server brings out your plate, it is not what you expected. Maybe they mixed up your meal, or perhaps you just do not like pickles, and yet there they are, stacked high on your sandwich.

At this moment, you have a choice. Do you speak up and kindly ask for your order to be corrected, or do you sit in silence, unhappily pushing the pickles aside, convincing yourself it is not a big deal?

This seemingly small decision is an example of self-advocacy, which is the ability to express your needs and preferences. While pickles on a sandwich might not be a life-changing issue, the ability to speak up for yourself in all areas of life absolutely is. For individuals who are blind or have low vision, self-advocacy is not just about comfort. It is about ensuring equal access, inclusion, and independence in everyday life.

The Art of Asking for What You Need

Many people struggle with self-advocacy because they do not want to be seen as difficult or demanding, but advocating for yourself does not mean making unreasonable requests. It means ensuring that you have the same access, opportunities, and respect as everyone else.

Let’s say you recently started a new job and quickly realized that the company’s software was not compatible with your screen reader. What do you do? At first, you may hesitate to say anything, worried that you would be perceived as a burden. Do you continue to struggle, allowing work to stack up while you are unfairly perceived as an underperformer?

No, you are not a burden, and you are not a slacker! The barrier is not your ability to do your job, the burden was not being provided with the proper tools to do your job properly. If you do not speak up for yourself, no one will.

Confidence Without Conflict

A lot of people assume self-advocacy means being pushy, but it is really about confidence. What if you were back in college? You are taking a class that relies heavily on printed materials, which you cannot access without digital or braille alternatives. Instead of just hoping for the best, you reach out to your professor early in the semester, explaining your needs and offering solutions. By being proactive, you prevent frustration later and ensure that you have what you need to succeed.

These scenarios highlight a common theme. Self-advocacy is not about asking for special treatment. It is about ensuring fairness. Whether it is requesting accessible technology at work, speaking up for accommodations in school, or reminding a friend to send a text instead of an unreadable handwritten note, every act of self-advocacy reinforces the idea that accessibility and inclusion matter.

Why It Matters for Everyone

Even those who do not have a disability can relate to the need for self-advocacy. Maybe you have been in a meeting where someone took credit for your idea, or perhaps you accepted an unfair workload just to avoid conflict. These situations, like accessibility challenges, require the same skill. Having the confidence to speak up and set boundaries is just as important in everyday life.

For individuals who are blind or have low vision, self-advocacy often goes beyond everyday inconveniences. It is about ensuring fundamental rights.

Public spaces, technology, education, and workplaces are not always designed with accessibility in mind. Speaking up becomes a tool for change, not just for one person, but for the entire community.

The Ripple Effect of Advocacy

The more people advocate for their needs, the more awareness spreads. When you speak up at work, your company does not just help you, they improve accessibility for future employees. When you ask for accessible material, it reminds people to consider the needs of all people, present and future.

Self-advocacy is more than a personal skill. It is a catalyst for change. Every time someone speaks up, they help pave the way for a more inclusive and understanding world.

So, whether you are requesting an accessible document, advocating for workplace accommodations, or simply asking for a sandwich without pickles, remember that your voice matters. The more we use it, the more the world listens.

# Advocacy Can Be EasyBy Chris Hunsinger

We are all advocates, and we probably don’t even realize we are advocating on a daily basis. Not only are we advocating with people we know about, but we are advocating to the watchers around us who wouldn’t think of actually saying anything to us. Believe me, there are watchers, who just shake their heads in amazement, if they see us, for example actually changing a tire, putting groceries into the car, using an ATM, or cooking food on an outdoor grill.

I’m not talking about advocating for self-driving cars, or for new laws about accessibility, or for best practices at medical offices. I am talking about demonstrating personally how those of us who are blind or who have low vision live in this complicated 21st century world. I am talking about our ability to show people that we are so much more like them than they might think.

We show them every day that we do not have to stay shut away at home unable to enjoy the world around us. We show them that we can stop into a Starbucks for a delicious coffee drink or a bar or restaurant for a beer, glass of wine, a cocktail, or a full meal.

When we stop into the bank to make a withdrawal or deposit and pull out our signature guide, we only have to ask if we be shown where to sign. We show both the teller and everyone who might notice us at the counter that we are competent aware people.

Whether we do our banking and bill paying with requests for braille statements, keep track of our information using a telephone system, do most of these activities online, or arrange for sighted assistance, we show anyone we contact about these items that we make our own decisions. When we fold our money in our own distinctive way, or put each denomination in its special place in a wallet, that person who asks, “How do you keep track of money?” can get a lesson in self-advocacy showing them that we are not helpless. IF we and they have time, we can show them either the government issued Money Identifier, or the app on our phone that can help us identify the denominations.

If we go to a movie theater or a play and ask for the Audio Description equipment, making sure that it isn’t tuned to Assisted Listening, we are demonstrating that we are a part of the wider community and able to enjoy a movie with the rest of the watchers. When we go to a local library event, whether it is a book club, movie, lecture, or some other event, we remind everyone there that we are a part of the community.

When we ask at a restaurant for a braille menu, and then offer to get the manager information about how to obtain braille menus if the restaurant doesn’t have them, we are showing everyone concerned that we just like eating out as much as the next person. Every time we walk into a restaurant and use our phone to figure out the menu, we surprise both the wait staff and those at nearby tables with our ability to cruise the internet. They could get another surprising lesson in 21st century hardware when they hear us say “Hey Meta, Look and tell me about the salads on this menu.” They wouldn’t actually hear the reply because the sound would be coming right out of the earpieces of our Meta Ray-Ban glasses.

When we go to the polling place on election day and use the accessible voting equipment, we remind people that we can vote with minimal assistance. If we tell a fellow patron at the bus stop how long it will be until their bus comes because we checked the app on our phone, that shows the individual that not only are we not helpless, but we can help them. When we volunteer at a local food pantry or animal shelter, we are giving help not taking help. Any time we receive assistance crossing a street, we usually show the person assisting us how to use the sighted guide technique so that they are better equipped to help the next blind or low vision person they encounter.

When we are out and about and confused about our surroundings, we might use AIRA, Be My Eyes, Meta Ray-Ban glasses, GPS apps, or Seeing AI to help us quell the confusion. If those tools are not available or they just don’t work, we have learned how to ask questions in such a way that we actually get the answers we need to sort out the situation. Those folks watching us from a distance are probably baffled about how we figured out whatever confused us.

Every time we participate in an athletic endeavor, whether it is Beep Baseball, Goal Ball, bowling with the use of guide rails, skiing with a sighted guide, or just taking a long walk on a spring day, we tell all who see us that we don’t just hear about athletic activities, but we participate in them. Some of us ride Tandem bikes, row competitively, swim competitively, hike in the woods, and participate in many other adaptive sports activities.

When we participate in activities in our place of worship, we quietly remind all involved we bring skills and energy to those activities and that we are participants, not missions for the organization or people to be pitied or prayed for.

We could make a list of the common place things we do that would surprise the fully sighted population. We just take what we can do for granted and think little of it, but we don’t realize how many myths and misconceptions we are debunking just by living our lives. There are so many more ways that we advocate for ourselves that we might want to just pat ourselves on the back occasionally and take a bow.

# A Poet, Who Me? Understanding CreativityBy Jacqueline Wissinger

Let me begin by saying that I have never considered myself to be a creative person. After all, I reasoned, creative people are writers, artists, composers, and inventors. They imagine wonderful dreams in their minds and hearts and then produce them for others to revel in and enjoy. I love to bake and knit, and except for a few minor alterations, (my Zucchini Banana Deluxe Bread being one of them), I usually follow knitting patterns and recipes as they are written.

Imagine my surprise when over 30 years ago, I wrote a song, with a little help, for our infant son. I was further amazed when about 15 years later, I wrote what I assumed to be 2 haiku poems, one for my husband and one for our son. I learned in school that haiku poetry consists of 3 lines, the first line consisting of 5 syllables, the second of 7, and the third of 5. I later learned from a dear Japanese friend that haiku poetry deals with nature and that I was writing senryu poetry, which deals with emotions.

Years passed, and for the most part, my muse deserted me. Furthermore, I lost the 2 precious poems that I had written for the 2 people that I loved most in the world. I searched and prayed but to no avail. I could remember pieces of the poems but just could not fit them together as they once were. Then one day, I began working on them again. I could not duplicate the original poems, but the thoughts and feelings were definitely there.

I have continued to write mostly senryu poetry and consider this newly found ability to be a gift. Although I do not enjoy writing, this poetry form appeals to me because it is short, and it is fun to see how the words and syllables fit together in my mind as I endeavor to express the emotions that I feel. My understanding of what it means to be creative has also changed. It is all of the things that I previously mentioned and so much more. Our talents can be used to build up or to destroy. I choose to concentrate on the positive aspect of it. I believe that our creativity can be demonstrated in any way that we show our love for those with whom we come in contact. It can be expressed in many ways. Whether it be in baking a cake, writing a poem, painting a picture, or by listening to and laughing with someone when it is needed, it is the loving that says it all.

I am including 2 poems, a haiku and a senryu.

Night Sky

Stars, sky diamonds,

Creations of The Master

Glitter from afar.

Jesus

Lover of my soul,

The beginning and the end,

My Lord and Savior.

# A PartBy Lisa Busch

You are part of an epic poem:

every word counts, amounts

far more than you will ever see,

like a tree:

roots unknown to leaves,

leaves stranger to flowers.

hours you may labor

in sick thick ego shell

as if in an empty well,

no way out,

no one near.

But here on another edge of the poem,

anything could arise:

butterflies for instance

and maybe they can heal.

A wheel speaks not of its motor

but shrieks joy in its own movement.

Perhaps you are shown deep inside a marvelous work,

thinking yourself a jerk

when even if you're just a tiny bolt,

what a jolt

to the poem without you.

# Two New Books Have ArrivedBy Lisa Busch

Elisa Busch, known by most as Lisa, is happy to announce the publication of two of her books by Amazon. The following is a synopsis for each book. She is planning to make them available on Bard in the future.

Close Calls: Voices of Love and Fear is a creative nonfiction memoir spanning the life of a blind woman from childhood to middle age.

Lisa, the main character, undergoes a shock when separated from her family at age five. Totally blind since her birth in 1954, well before mainstreaming in classrooms is accepted, only a special school in Pittsburgh, a hundred miles away from her rural hometown, is suitable for her education. This separation, along with her shyness at school and her mother's preoccupation with housework when Lisa is at home, creates in Lisa a feeling of sadness that comes to permeate her life. At age seven, her grandfather dies on Good Friday. When he isn't resurrected on Easter as she innocently expects, Lisa's disillusionment with God sets her on a course of mistrust that intensifies years later after a failed love affair.

By the time she meets Jerry, who showers her with the attention she has always craved, Lisa cannot feel secure. The book describes their marriage, Jerry's struggle with diabetes, the joys and challenges of being a wife and mother, and Lisa's spiritual highs and lows.

Throughout the narrative, Lisa keeps asking the question: If God loves me, why does He allow me to suffer such loneliness and loss? This inquiry haunts many a heart and mind, but Close Calls delves into its depth in surprising ways. The author dares to imagine voices of those who travel with her on this journey as well as the voice of an unseen narrator.

Conquering Silence is a chapbook of poems voiced by a wife journeying through an imperfect marriage. Her adoration and frustration toward her husband ebbs and flows throughout the narrative, capturing the struggles and triumphs of many couples. Ultimately, she answers her own questions: "Is love stubborn always, strong? Ready to sprout though ash stings the soil dry, though time chills strength early before death?" and "Can poems and memories from 49 years of needlework be ripped from our souls?"

Her examination of threads beneath silence that keep the fabric of a relationship supple invites readers to join in their own search for similar connections.

# Appendix 1

# Request for Proposals Form

Pennsylvania Council of the Blind (PCB)

Conference & Convention

2025 Request for Session Proposals

Theme: “Harvesting Your Talents and Resources”

Location: Virtual Conference on the Zoom platform

Dates: Thursday, October 16 – Sunday, October 19

WHY PCB?

With its virtual platform, this year's PCB Conference promises to be the state's largest conference for people impacted by blindness or vision loss. Attendees will include:

• Blind Students & Adults of all abilities and interests

• Individuals and family members newly adjusting to vision loss.

• Professionals in various industries including blindness services and education.

• Consumers of both general and blindness specific products

• Active and involved members of the community

Sessions are tentatively scheduled for:

Friday, October 17, 2025, Morning, Afternoon, & Evening

Saturday, October 18, 2025, Morning

Sunday, October 19, 2025, Morning

The theme for the 2025 PCB Virtual Conference is

“Harvesting Your Talents and Resources”

An important consideration for individuals who are blind or in the process of losing vision:

Your presentation should include talents or skills that attendees will find valuable as you explain how the talents and skills can make a difference once they are learned or mastered. If your presentation contains resources that attendees can take advantage of, concrete examples of their use would be helpful.

PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS:

The following items must be included in each submission:

• Contact Information for the Session Organizer - the session organizer is the person submitting the application and will be the primary contact for all information pertaining to the session.

• Brief bios. of all session presenters

• Proposed Session Title - Titles should clearly describe the content and relevance of your presentation/workshop, i.e., which theme (e.g., type of Talents, Skills, or Resources being offered,) is addressed by your presentation/workshop.

• Session Audience - Who will find your session content valuable?

• Description of the Proposed Session - The description explains the focus of your presentation. It should be written to market the session and attract attendees.

• Three Learning Objectives of the Proposed Session Topic - The objectives should describe what the session attendee will learn and take-away from the discussion.

• Proposed length of session: 30, 45, or 6

minutes

• Preferred first and second choices of availability for the day/time of session.

• AV Needs

Proposals should be composed electronically in either .doc or .txt format and submitted by July 1, 2025. Send all proposals to: presentations@pcb1.org.

Selection Criteria:

The PCB Conference Planning Team will review the proposals and decide based on the following criteria:

• Educational Value

• Relevance

• Practical Application

• Overall Quality

• Target Audience

• Presenter Qualifications and Expertise

• Originality and Inventiveness

Timeline:

• March 15, 2025, Open Call for Presentations

• July 1, 2025, Submission Deadline

• July 31, 2025, Notifications to Accepted Proposers

• August 15, 2025, Publication of Speakers

POLICIES GOVERNING ACCEPTED PROPOSALS:

• All sessions may be recorded and used by PCB. This includes internet streaming and downloading.

• Speakers must agree that any material presented during their session may be reproduced and that the material presented does not infringe any copyrighted material.

• Due to preparation time for alternate formats, all handouts must be provided to PCB in electronic format by September 19, 2025.

• If selected, sessions MAY NOT include any promotional material for an individual, a specific company or product.

• PCB is a non-denominational, nonpartisan organization. Submissions geared to promote a specific political or religious agenda are prohibited.

• Sessions should not be used as a platform to discredit or attack another organization or individual

• The Conference Program and Planning Team reserves the right to request status and assist presenters in structuring their presentation.

• Sessions are monitored by PCB representatives. PCB reserves the right to terminate broadcast of any session that violates this or any other PCB policy. In addition, any presenter in violation of these policies may not be permitted to present at future PCB programs.

Pennsylvania Council of the Blind (PCB)

2025 Virtual Conference and Convention

Session Proposal Form

All fields must be completed. Only fully completed forms will be reviewed. Email forms to presentations@pcb1.org by July 1, 2025.

Presenter Information

Session proposed by:

\_\_\_Community organization

\_\_\_PCB Chapter/Affiliate

\_\_\_PCB Team

\_\_\_PCB Peer

\_\_\_Private Individual/Professional

Name of session leader:

Address:

Email:

Phone Number:

Bio

Co-Presenter 1 Name:

Email:

Phone:

Bio:

Co-Presenter 2 Name:

Email:

Phone:

Bio:

Session Information

Type: \_\_\_Workshop/Breakout Session

\_\_\_Lecture \_\_\_ Panel Discussion

Time Required: \_\_\_30 Mins. \_\_\_45 Mins. \_\_\_60 Mins.

Session Title:

Target Audience:

Session Summary/description:

Expected Lessons – Provide 3 audience take-aways.

1.

2.

3.

Check all dates/times you would be available to present:

Friday, October 17, 2025

\_\_\_ Morning\_\_\_\_\_Afternoon \_\_\_\_\_Evening

Saturday, October 18, 2025

\_\_\_\_\_Morning

Sunday, October 19, 2025

\_\_\_\_\_Morning

Indicate any A/V requirements (i.e., screen sharing, assistance with pre-recorded audio, etc.):

Will handouts be provided? \_\_\_Yes \_\_\_No

Please note: Handouts must be emailed to PCB by September 19 in order to make sure they are provided in accessible formats.

Would you like information about becoming an exhibitor? \_\_\_Yes \_\_\_No

All forms must be submitted electronically by

July 1, 2025, in Word or Text. Submit to presentations@pcb1.org.

## 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.

## PCB Teams and Staff

Advocacy: Chris Hunsinger

cs.hunsinger@verizon.net, 412-881-9328

(Meets Third Monday 7:30 p.m. in odd months and Advocacy for All Calls in even months.)

Awards: PCB Executive Team

awards@pcb1.org, 717-920-9999 ext. 800

(Meets as needed for a couple of months before a convention)

Communications: Nikki Keck, 484-655-2435

(Meets Second Tuesday at 7:30 p.m.)

Conference Program/Planning: Chris Hunsinger

Cs.hunsinger@verizon.net, 412-881-9328

(Meets Fourth Wednesday at 7:00 p.m.)

Finance: Michael Zaken

Michael.zaken@verizon.net, 412-655-1234

(Meets Third Thursday at 7:30 p.m.)

Fund Development: Chris Hunsinger

Cs.hunsinger@verizon.net, 412-881-9328

(Meets Third Wednesday at 7:30 p.m.)

Peer Engagement: Suzanne Erb

suzerb1@comcast.net, 215-568-5795

(Meets 1st Wednesday at 7:30 p.m.)

Parliamentary: Carla Hayes

lengual@verizon.net, 724-941-8184

(Meets Fourth Tuesday at 8:30 p.m.)

Technology Access: Joe Fagnani

joefagnani@atlanticbb.net, 814-940-0270

(Meets First Thursday 8 p.m.)

Vision Loss Resource: Jule Ann Lieberman

juleannl@comcast.net, 610-688-6517

(Meets Third Tuesday 8 p.m.)

PCB Administrative Secretary:

Autumn Imhoff

pcboffice@pcb1.org 717-920-9999 x800

PCB Outreach & Engagement Specialist:

Thad Graham

pcboutreach@pcb1.org 717-920-9999 x900

## Chapter/Affiliate Presidents

Golden Triangle, Chris Hunsinger, 412-881-9328

Cs.hunsinger@verizon.net

J. F. K., David Lee Shaw, 215-747-4886

Keystone, Mervin Keck, 484-425-1543

Blind5sparrow@fastmail.com

Lehigh Valley. Frank Gasper 484-995-6093,

Oil Valley, Ron Montgomery, 814-365-2475, ronaldmontgomery49@windstream.net

PAGDUS, Mike Gravitt, 412-725-9634, mgravitt2@gmail.com

Philadelphia Regional, Shirley Brotman,

215-745-5873

Washington County, Carla Hayes,

724-941-8184, lengual@verizon.net

## 2025 PCB Board of Directors

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