



American Council of the Blind

ANNUAL REPORT 2015

ACB State Affiliates

Alabama Council of the Blind
Alaska Independent Blind, Inc.
Arizona Council of the Blind
Arkansas Council of the Blind
California Council of the Blind
ACB of Colorado
Connecticut Council of the Blind
Delaware Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired
D.C. Council of the Blind
Florida Council of the Blind
Georgia Council of the Blind
Hawaii Association of the Blind
Idaho Council of the Blind
Illinois Council of the Blind
ACB of Indiana
Iowa Council of the United Blind
Kansas Association for the Blind & Visually Impaired
Kentucky Council of the Blind
Bluegrass Council of the Blind
Louisiana Council of the Blind
ACB of Maine
ACB of Maryland
Bay State Council of the Blind
Michigan Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired
ACB of Minnesota
Mississippi Council of the Blind
Missouri Council of the Blind
Montana Blind and Low Vision Council
ACB of Nebraska
Nevada Council of the Blind
New Jersey Council of the Blind
ACB of New Mexico
ACB of New York, Inc.
North Carolina Council of the Blind
North Dakota Association of the Blind
ACB of Ohio
Oklahoma Council of the Blind
ACB of Oregon
Pennsylvania Council of the Blind
ACB of South Carolina
South Dakota Association of the Blind
Tennessee Council of the Blind
ACB of Texas
Utah Council of the Blind
Vermont Council of the Blind
Old Dominion Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired
Virginia Association of the Blind
Washington Council of the Blind
Mountain State Council of the Blind
ACB of Wisconsin
Wyoming Council of the Blind

National Special-Interest Affiliates

Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss
American Association of Blind Teachers
American Association of Visually Impaired Attorneys
ACB Diabetics in Action
ACB Families
ACB Government Employees
American Council of Blind Lions
ACB Radio Amateurs
ACB Students
Blind Information Technology Specialists
Blind LGBT Pride International
Braille Revival League
Council of Citizens with Low Vision International
Friends-in-Art of ACB, Inc.
Guide Dog Users, Inc.
Independent Visually Impaired Enterprisers
Library Users of America
Randolph-Sheppard Vendors of America
Visually Impaired Veterans of America

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President's Report

By Kim Charlson



KIM CHARLSON
ACB President

I have much to report to you since our conference in Las Vegas last year. ACB continues to address many issues and challenges of all types since last we gathered together.

Capacity Building

ACB has been very busy constructing our support system this past year. One example of this expanded capacity is due in large part to the generosity of JPMorgan Chase, who enabled ACB to bring 21 additional members to the 2015 mid-year presidents' meeting and legislative seminar in Washington, D.C. in February. Due to this grant, those 21 members, many of them first-timers, were able to advocate in person for ACB's legislative imperatives on Capitol Hill, and were able to network and learn from other affiliate leaders and take back best practices to their state and special-interest affiliates.

JPMorgan Chase also sponsored the production of an informational video entitled "BlindAbility." It features four ACB members, who are all working, discussing their lives, their goals, and how important advocacy is to each of them. It will be available on ACB's YouTube channel for anyone to share with their organizations, potential employers, rehab agencies, or other civic groups.

Our capacity-building continued into the spring. This year, Google has worked with

ACB to build and expand our capacity through their active engagement with us in Google for Nonprofits. These are powerful tools that will increase our ability to be more visible online and to become a destination for people or media who Google for blindness-related resources.

Structured Negotiations

In early January 2015, ACB announced a structured negotiation settlement with CVS/caremark. CVS Health has started offering talking prescription labels, braille, and large print labels to customers who are blind or visually impaired through its mail service company Caremark. They are using the accessible label system provided through En-Vision America's ScripAbility program. New or existing Caremark customers can order the new labels by calling their Caremark call center or Caremark's general customer care toll-free number at 1-800-552-8159. En-Vision America can be reached at 1-800-890-1180. Ensuring that all of our members have access to important information about their prescriptions is a critical component in assisting people to independently manage their health care needs on their journey to better health.

Continuing Advocacy

In my report last year, I shared audio of a taxicab sting operation conducted by a

team of investigative journalists from WUSA Channel 9 in Washington regarding access to taxis by blind individuals using guide dogs. Over the past year, official complaints were filed with the appropriate D.C. agencies; mediation was attempted but not successful. In early March 2015, the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs and Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP filed a lawsuit on behalf of Eric Bridges and the American Council of the Blind against four taxicab companies in the District of Columbia for discriminatory practices against blind and visually impaired individuals accompanied by guide dogs.

The complaint alleges that Yellow Cab of D.C., Grand Cab, Elite Cab, and Pleasant Taxi all engaged in discriminatory practices when their drivers failed to pick up Eric, who was hailing a cab with his guide dog. The incidents alleged in the complaint are just a few examples of the systemic discrimination that blind individuals with guide dogs face on a daily basis. Equal access to public transportation and transportation services is a fundamental right under the D.C. Human Rights Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

We continue to work with Jeffrey Lovitky, our pro bono attorney, on the Bureau of Engraving and Printing case. In an article in "The Washington Post" in late June, "The big change to the new \$10 bill that no one's talking about," it was confirmed that the new \$10 note will be the first bill scheduled for release with tactile features to benefit people who are blind. Treasury Secretary Jack Lew told reporters that tailoring the \$10 bill to the blind was in keeping with the new design's theme of democracy. Our understanding is that the new note is slated to be unveiled in 2020.

In another case with the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs and Sutherland Asbill and Brennan LLP, a class action lawsuit was filed on behalf of blind federal contractors and ACB against the

General Services Administration (GSA), the federal executive branch agency responsible for administering the government's non-defense contracts. The lawsuit seeks to force GSA to make its web site accessible to blind federal contractors.

Accessible Television

We saw a major development from Comcast as they rolled out Voice Guidance for the X1 platform last fall. Several people from ACB were involved in beta testing of Voice Guidance, including my household, and I can assure you that it has continued to grow and evolve. As a corporation, Comcast has invested fully into accessibility at a level that few other corporations can rival. The leadership provided by Comcast and Thomas Wlodkowski is beginning to make an impact on other providers to begin their work to deliver accessibility by the required December 2016 regulatory deadline.

I am very excited to announce the development of an ACB Access app for iOS devices that will enhance communication with affiliates, connecting users with ACB key publications, ACB Radio, ACB Reports, and other useful features. The ACB Radio management team has taken on the coordination of this project under the capable leadership of Jeff Bishop of Arizona. Thanks to the Arizona Council of the Blind for their initial funding of the development of the app for ACB.

The American Council of the Blind has much work to do over the next several years, not simply to advance programs and services for blind and visually impaired people, but to preserve what we've worked so hard to obtain during previous decades. Working together, we can make change happen. I look forward to working hand in hand with all of you to make sure our dreams for people who are blind become realities.

Executive Director's Report

By Melanie Brunson



MELANIE BRUNSON
ACB Executive Director
2004 – 2015

Most of you have probably heard by now that I have decided to leave my position as ACB's executive director at the end of September. I hope you will indulge me for a few minutes while I share some thoughts with you about some of the events that have stood out in my mind as highlights of our work together.

One of the things that I've had conversations with several staff members about is how frequently we leave home in the morning thinking, "The day ahead will be pretty routine and uneventful; it'll be a great day to catch up on all the ordinary office work," only to have that routine shattered. One example of that happened earlier this year. Eric got a phone call from a reporter that totally changed the course of his day, to some extent mine, and even to some extent Kim Charlson's. The reporter wanted comment from ACB about a news story that none of us had yet heard. The story was that a blind child who was about 8 years old had been disciplined for allegedly hitting another child with his white cane while on a school bus. The discipline that the school principal had decided to impose was to take the child's cane away and give him a pool noodle in its place. Later the principal said that the child only had to use the pool noodle while sitting on the bus. But that information was not available when the story was broadcast. When we received the call, we all started reading the various accounts of the story, and Eric gave comments to the reporter,

after which he and Kim and I conferred about a statement.

ACB issued a press release, which explained to the news media and the general public both the purpose for which white canes are used by people with visual impairments and their value to the user, both of which had led us to the conclusion that the punishment that was issued to this particular child was greatly out of proportion to the nature of the offense that he had allegedly committed. Very few other children would be required to give up their means of independence for engaging in the conduct that he had engaged in. That afternoon, the school principal issued a statement to the press announcing that the child's white cane had been returned to him, and that he would be able to use it during school.

We've seen many other instances throughout the past year where we have had an opportunity to influence, for good, the lives of other people in both small and large matters. Some of those opportunities are still ongoing, and the results are yet to be determined. But it is that sort of occurrence that has made all of our lives so exciting and so rewarding.

I recall the first time that I reported to a convention in 2004. And I remember making reference to a famous statement that was made by Sen. Robert Kennedy when he was

running for the Democratic nomination for president of the United States in 1968: "Some men see things as they are and ask why. We dream things as they ought to be, and ask 'why not.'" I noted on that evening that one of the things I liked about being a part of ACB was that we're not afraid to be among those who ask "why not." Little did I know what amazing results our willingness to ask that question would bring forth over the next 17 years.

When the federal court in Washington, D.C., said the Federal Communications Commission could not mandate audio description on television, ACB asked "why not?," and the eventual result was the passage of the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act. When the Social Security Administration said they couldn't send correspondence to people who can't read print in alternate formats that they could read, we asked "why not?" and the result was a court order requiring them to do exactly that. And when the United States Department of the Treasury wouldn't even talk to us about ways to design bank notes in a manner that would enable people with visual impairments to tell which denomination of bank note they were holding in their hand without assistance, we asked "why not?" and so did several judges of the federal court system, both at the district court level and the appellate court level. We've seen the first step toward provision of meaningful access to bank notes

in the launch of the money reader distribution program during our convention in 2014, and we've just learned that we could have accessible currency by 2020.

These are just a few examples of some incredible things I've gotten to see ACB accomplish during my time as your executive director. It is that kind of tenacity, commitment and love for doing the right thing that I've seen demonstrated throughout this organization over and over again. From the phone calls concerning tenants of apartment buildings who come home with their first guide dog all excited and ready to go only to find a notice from their landlord saying there will now be extra charges added to their rent because of the presence of the dog, and the help that you have given to those people, to the calls to Congressional offices you have made seeking support for legislation, we've gotten results because many of you have joined with us and been willing to help bring our message to people all over the country and around the world.

As I prepare to leave my professional role in ACB, I want to thank each of you for all that you have done. All of you have a role to play that is vital to ACB's future.



**ACB members
applaud a speaker
at the 2015
convention.**

ACB Announces New Executive Director



ERIC BRIDGES
ACB Executive Director

The American Council of the Blind (ACB) is pleased to announce the appointment of Eric Bridges as the organization's new executive director effective Nov. 1, 2015.

In June of 2007, Eric joined the ACB staff as the director of advocacy and governmental affairs, representing ACB's legislative and regulatory priorities on Capitol Hill and in the executive branch. His contributions were critical in the passage and implementation of such key legislation as the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010, the Pedestrian Safety Enhancement Act, and the Prescription Drug Labeling Act that was incorporated into the FDA Safety and Innovation Act in 2012.

Since 2013, Bridges has served as ACB's director of external relations and policy. In this role, he has cultivated countless key relationships with representatives of business, industry, ACB members, and the general public, as well as government officials, policy makers and agency staff. These types of relationships have become essential to ACB and its success in advocacy and legislative arenas.

"The ACB officers and board of directors are thrilled to welcome Eric Bridges into this new role for the organization. His knowledge and experience with ACB, his commitment to membership services and advocacy, his enthusiasm, energy, and dedication to ACB all make Eric the right leader for our organization," said ACB president Kim Charlson. "Eric's experience, depth of understanding of the critical issues of the blindness community, and his ability to collaborate with key players from government and industry, all make him the right leader for ACB in these changing times."

ACB and its affiliates look forward to working with Eric to build on the solid foundation he has carved out, continuing to work with him to forge new alliances to advance ACB's advocacy and public policy agendas, as well as partnerships with industry, for a stronger and more accessible future for all people who are blind or visually impaired in the country or around the world.

About the American Council of the Blind



ACB of Ohio member Karen Spry raises her hand during general session.

Established in 1961, the American Council of the Blind (ACB) is a national organization of people who are blind, visually impaired and sighted whose mission is to increase the independence, security, equality of opportunity, and improve quality of life for all blind and visually impaired people. With 71 state and special-interest affiliates, its thousands of members have a long history of commitment to the advancement of policies and programs which will enhance independence for people who are blind and visually impaired.

ACB's national office is based in Arlington, Va., and is supported by hundreds of volunteer-members from throughout the United States who donate their time and effort to assist the organization in meeting its goals. ACB works through a variety of programs and services to enable blind people to live and work independently, to become active in their communities and to participate fully in the democratic process. The Council has influenced positive change in areas such as:

- Education
- Employment
- Rehabilitation
- Pedestrian Safety
- Civil Rights
- Social Security
- Transportation
- Recreation

ACB has state affiliates in virtually every region in the United States and 20 special-interest affiliated organizations which focus on the unique concerns of various professions and special populations such as blind lawyers, teachers, families, information technology specialists, library users, business owners, and users of guide dogs. Like the national organization and state affiliates, these special-interest organizations offer their own newsletters, become involved in specialized projects and host annual meetings for their membership.

Programs and Services

ACB's National Information Hotline

ACB's National Information Hotline helps thousands of people each year who are looking for answers to questions about blindness, low vision and vision-related services. For the newly blind person, the opportunity to talk with someone who is blind can make a significant difference in how quickly and how well that individual adjusts and accepts the vision loss. For a family member, questions can be answered regarding services available and the potential for their family member to learn skills to regain independence. For a business owner, information regarding laws pertaining to accessibility can be provided to avoid issues related to discrimination. Whether the call is of a crisis nature or more purely informational, this hotline provides people with an opportunity to get answers to questions that are not readily available elsewhere.

ACB Scholarship Program

Many blind and visually impaired students have needs beyond those faced by fully sighted students, such as the need for reader services for textbooks not already recorded or transcribed into braille; specialized equipment such as talking computers or adaptive equipment for science courses; low vision aids, etc. The expenses associated with meeting these needs added to tuition, board and other costs can make it extremely difficult or impossible for otherwise capable blind students to remain in school.

In 1982, ACB established a scholarship program to provide financial assistance to outstanding blind and visually impaired post-secondary students. Since that time over \$1 million in scholarship aid has been awarded to outstanding students.

In addition to ACB's own program, we administer many other scholarships and awards to assist students who have visual impairments, including National Industries

for the Blind Grant M. Mack Memorial Scholarship, Alexandria, Va.; the Dr. S. Bradley Burson Memorial Science Scholarship funded by Ms. Phyllis Burson in memory of her late husband; the William G. Corey Memorial Scholarship for Pennsylvania residents funded by the Corey Trust; the John Hebner Memorial Scholarship funded by the family of the late John Hebner; the Arnold Sadler Memorial Scholarship funded by the Sadler Trust; the Eunice Fiorito Memorial Scholarship funded by a trust set up by James Fiorito; the Duane J. Buckley Memorial Scholarship funded by the Buckley family; and the Ross N. Pangere Foundation for the Visually Impaired Scholarships funded by the Ross N. Pangere Foundation for the Visually Impaired.

Affiliate-sponsored scholarships administered by ACB are: the Dr. Mae Davidow Memorial Scholarship, funded by the Pennsylvania Council of the Blind; the ACB Students Brenda Dillon Memorial Scholarship, funded by the ACB Students; the Bay State Council of the Blind Scholarship for residents of Massachusetts; the Oregon Council of the Blind Scholarships for residents of Oregon; ACB of Colorado Scholarships for residents of Colorado; the Delbert K. Aman Memorial Scholarship for residents of South Dakota, funded by the South Dakota Association of the Blind; the Richard Bennet of Maine Memorial Scholarship for residents of Maine, funded by ACB of Maine; and the Alma Murphey Memorial Scholarship, funded by the Braille Revival League of Missouri.

"Receiving the ACB scholarship has helped me in many ways over the course of the last year. The scholarship definitely eased my financial burden for college. In addition, the contacts I made with both the ACB convention attendees and the ACB Students organization provided emotional and academic support throughout the school year. The ACB student community assisted me several times last year in brainstorming solutions to different college

situations. I am especially grateful to Mr. Tony Stephens, who provided some in-depth subject material for a paper I was writing in my pre-law English class about Section 501(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act. The ACB scholarship was the gateway for financial and moral support, which I am very grateful for. And I made some lifelong friends too!" (From Tommy Woodyard, an undergraduate student at the University of Georgia)

In 2015, 19 scholarships totaling \$46,800 were awarded to 18 highly competent blind and visually impaired students from throughout the United States.

The 2015 Scholarship Winners



James R. Olsen Memorial Scholarship

Michael Griffin, Associate of Arts in Information Technology, State College of Florida, Bradenton, FL

Bay State Council of the Blind Scholarship

Sarah Wiles, Juris Doctorate, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA

Kellie Cannon Memorial Scholarship

Hunter Jozwiak, Bachelor of Science in Computer Science, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA

William G. Corey Memorial Scholarship

Elizabeth McKay, Bachelor of Science in Theology, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA

Floyd Qualls Memorial Scholarships

Michael Coughlin, Bachelor of Business Management, St. John's University, New York, NY

Sherrie Lilley, Bachelor of Science in Psychology/Counseling, Pillar College, Franklin Township, NJ

Lauren Long, Master of Science in Counseling and Psychology, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX

Jessica Minneci, Bachelor of Science in Communications, Seton Hill University, Greensburg, PA

Andrew Shaw, Bachelor of Business, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI

Arnold Sadler Memorial Scholarship

Thomas Woodyard, Bachelor of Science in International Relations, University of Georgia, Athens, GA

Eunice Fiorito Memorial Scholarship

Christiane Steele, Bachelor of Science in Special Education, Western Governors University, Salt Lake City, UT

ACB Students Brenda Dillon Memorial Scholarship

Elaine Phillips, Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA

The Ross N. Pangere Foundation for the Visually Impaired Scholarships

Hamid Hamraz, Ph.D. in Computer Science, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY

Cassandra Mendez, Bachelor of Science in Computer Engineering, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH

Michael Rouillard, Bachelor of Science in Information Technology, Western New England University, Springfield, MA

Norma Shecter Memorial Scholarship and Duane Buckley Memorial Scholarship

Stephanie Zundel, Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Development, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN

ACB Link

Brand-new this year is ACB's iPhone app, ACB Link! Released in October, the app will assist ACB staff, members and friends to readily communicate news of relevance to the blind community.

ACB Link will give access to valuable resources offered by ACB, and users will receive notifications of news relevant to ACB's work and the blindness community at large. The app will allow each user to be easily and quickly connected with the nearest ACB state affiliate, and be informed and entertained by the wide variety of Internet radio programming offered by ACB Radio. ACB Link will bring blind people, their friends and families together in a new and exciting way.

For more information about ACB Link, go to link.acb.org.

The ACB Braille Forum

“The ACB Braille Forum” features organizational news on both the national and state levels, national legislative updates, reports from the president and the executive director, human-interest stories, occasional poetry and book reviews, plus columns featuring new products and services, obituaries, letters to the editor, and “for sale” and “wanted” high-tech items (and the occasional “free to good home” item). It is available in braille, large print, four-track cassette, data CD, via e-mail, and an ever-growing number of individuals (approximately 3,000 per day) are accessing the online version of the publication.

In 2015, “The ACB Braille Forum” was published six times during the year and provided to 8,600 subscribers, including ACB’s members, businesses and overseas readers. “The ACB E-Forum” was also published six times during the year, and sent via e-mail to more than 3,075 subscribers, including ACB members and overseas readers.

Advocacy and Governmental Affairs

The advocacy and governmental affairs staff and membership of the American Council of the Blind advocate on a wide variety of issues for people who are blind and visually impaired. In 2015, ACB national staff provided consultation on issues related to access and discrimination to approximately 300 individuals from throughout the United States.

ACB and Microsoft jointly announced a partnership on efforts to advance the accessibility of information technologies. Through this partnership, the council and Microsoft will work together to enable planned updates to various Microsoft products to better meet the needs of people with visual impairments. The partnership will provide a more consistent flow of information and dialogue between Microsoft and ACB.

In March, ACB filed suit against four taxicab companies in the District of Columbia for

discriminatory practices against visually impaired individuals accompanied by service animals. The complaint, filed in the Superior Court of the District of Columbia, alleges that Yellow Cab of D.C., Grand Cab, Elite Cab, and Pleasant Taxi all engaged in discriminatory practices when their drivers failed to pick up Eric Bridges, an ACB employee and member, who was hailing a cab with his service dog, General. Among other remedies, the lawsuit seeks to establish an annual random testing protocol for taxicabs in the District of Columbia. It cites recent operations run by the D.C. Taxicab Commission, the Anonymous Riders Program, which revealed systemic discrimination against blind individuals with service animals in the District.

In November, Sutherland Asbill & Brennan LLP, in conjunction with the Washington Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs, reached a settlement with the General Services Administration (GSA) on behalf of three blind federal contractors and the American Council of the Blind (ACB). The settlement will benefit all blind federal contractors. The settlement requires GSA to make significant changes to SAM.gov that had prevented blind federal contractors from accessing the website and maintaining their status as federal contractors. The accessibility issues were identified by the plaintiffs and confirmed by a web accessibility expert. Following GSA’s implementation of the agreed-to changes, the website will undergo review by another independent accessibility expert. In addition, the agreement creates a process by which members of the blind community will test and provide feedback on future changes to SAM.gov.

The Washington Connection

The Washington Connection is the American Council of the Blind advocacy and governmental affairs department’s recorded legislative and information service. It is updated as vital information regarding blindness issues, pending legislation, regulations, and news is available. Updates

also occasionally include hot news that cannot wait for publication in "The ACB Braille Forum." Callers can access this service toll-free (1-800-424-8666) in English daily, except weekdays between the hours of 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. Eastern time, when it is answered live by ACB staff members. In addition, the Connection is updated regularly on ACB e-mail discussion lists and the ACB web site.

ACB Radio

ACB Radio, our Internet radio station, showcases and nurtures the creativity and talents of the blind/low-vision community from many parts of the world. ACB Radio is heard by a global audience via the Internet, having visitors from more than 60 countries during fiscal year 2015. Broadcast streams include "Mainstream," for entertainment and information; "ACB Radio Café," the place to hear blind musicians; "Treasure Trove," where you can hear classic radio dramas; "Interactive," a wide variety of music presented by DJs from around the world, including requests; "World News and Information," featuring several news sources including but not limited to BBC, CBC, Public Radio International and Pacifica; and "ACB Radio Live Event," featuring live coverage of ACB affiliates and other blindness-related special events. ACB Radio is one of the most innovative services for people who are blind to have come along anywhere.

During fiscal year 2015, ACB Radio received an average of 2,600 visitors per day from throughout the United States and from more than 65 foreign countries. Included this year were live broadcasts of the ACB national conference and convention, and a number of affiliate conferences that were held throughout the year.

ACB Reports

In 1985, the American Council of the Blind began distributing a monthly radio program to radio reading services. These radio stations provide readings of newspapers, magazines,

books, and other audio information to an audience of blind and print-impaired individuals throughout the country.

This half-hour radio program was christened "ACB Reports." It is now carried by more than 60 audio information service radio stations each month. The program also airs on ACB Radio Mainstream, and is distributed as part of the audio edition of "The ACB Braille Forum."

Now produced for ACB by the Radio Reading Service of Mississippi Public Broadcasting, ACB Reports is a monthly combination of legislative news, interviews with interesting individuals, information about current fashion trends, new technology, and highlights of the ACB annual conference.

ACB's Audio Description Project

The purpose of the American Council of the Blind's Audio Description Project (ADP) is to boost levels of description activity and disseminate information on that work throughout the nation. Its major goal is to sponsor a broad range of activities designed to build awareness of audio description among the general public as well as its principal users, people who are blind or have low vision.

In 2015, ADP's activities included:

- Conducting the first-ever Audio Description Project "Mini-Conference" during ACB's annual conference and convention in Dallas — it consisted of a half-day of sessions providing information on description-related topics (the ADP sponsors a major conference for describers, description producers, broadcasters, and AD consumers every other year — in "off" years, we plan on building on the 2015 gathering and continuing to focus these mini-conferences on issues of particular interest to AD consumers).
- Screening the 2015 "Best Picture" Academy Award-winning film "Birdman" with description during the Dallas conference and convention.



Attendees of the Audio Description Project mixer at the 2015 Annual Convention in Dallas, Texas.

- Establishing the first-ever Washington, D.C.-based Audio Description Institute (ADI —three days of intensive training for audio describers) in conjunction with ACB’s mid-year meeting of affiliate representatives (each summer we also present an Audio Description Institute during the conference and convention — in 2015, we presented the seventh annual ADI).
- Offering description at every performance of the Arena Stage production of “Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike,” supported by a grant from the Aid Association for the Blind of the District of Columbia. Work continues with support of another Aid Association award to develop an audio-described tour for a major museum in the Washington, D.C. area — talks continue with the United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum.
- Planning for the publication of “The Visual Made Verbal: A Comprehensive Training Manual and Guide to the History and Applications of Audio Description” — published this year by ACB — in Portuguese and Polish (Swedish and Spanish versions are in early stages of development).
- Reaching over 1,300 “likes” on the ADP Facebook page and broadening the ADP reach on Twitter.
- Expanding ADP web site listings of performing arts and museums nationwide which offer audio description.
- Encouraging the National Endowment for the Arts to ask state arts agencies to improve and expand awareness of audio description throughout the nation.
- Recognizing individuals and organizations who have demonstrated leadership in audio description in four categories: media, performing arts, museums and international activity.
- Presenting the Dr. Margaret R. Pfanstiehl Achievement in Audio Description for Research and Development, and the Barry Levine Memorial Award for Career Achievement in Audio Description.

ACB Enterprises and Services

ACB operates three thrift stores under the auspices of a wholly owned subsidiary corporation known as ACB Enterprises and Services (ACBES.) The profits generated by these stores each year are contributed to ACB in order to defray our operating expenses. The stores are located in Amarillo, Texas; Lubbock, Texas; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Day-to-day operation of the stores is overseen by our finance office in Minnesota, and the ACB board appoints the members of the ACBES board. Current members are: Michael Garrett, Missouri City, Tex.; Mike Godino, Malverne, N.Y.; George Holliday, Philadelphia, Pa.;

Carla Ruschival, Louisville, Ky.; Dan Spoone, Orlando, Fla.; Jeff Thom, Sacramento, Calif.; and David Trott, Talladega, Ala.

ACB Officers (as of July 22, 2015)

President: Kim Charlson, Watertown, MA
First Vice President: Jeff Thom, Sacramento, CA
Second Vice President: John McCann, Tucson, AZ
Secretary: Ray Campbell, Glen Ellyn, IL
Treasurer: Carla Ruschival, Louisville, KY
Immediate Past President: Mitch Pomerantz, Pasadena, CA

American Council of the Blind Board of Directors (as of July 22, 2015)

Jeff Bishop, Tucson, AZ
Berl Colley, Lacey, WA
Sara Conrad, Grand Rapids, MI
Katie Frederick, Worthington, OH
Michael Garrett, Missouri City, TX
George Holliday, Philadelphia, PA
Allan Peterson, Horace, ND
Patrick Sheehan, Silver Spring, MD
Dan Spoone, Orlando, FL
David Trott, Talladega, AL
Ex Officio: Doug Powell, Falls Church, VA

Board of Publications (as of July 22, 2015)

Denise Colley, chair, Lacey, WA
Ron Brooks, Phoenix, AZ
Tom Mitchell, Salt Lake City, UT
Doug Powell, Falls Church, VA
Judy Wilkinson, San Leandro, CA
Ex Officios:
Katie Frederick, Worthington, OH
Bob Hachey, Waltham, MA
Berl Colley, Lacey, WA
Carla Ruschival, Louisville, KY

ACB Staff

Melanie S. Brunson
Executive Director
Eric Bridges
Director of External Relations and Policy
Sharon Lovering
Editor, "The ACB Braille Forum"
Kelly Gasque
Executive Assistant
Lane S. Waters
Controller



Michael Garrett, member of the ACB Board of Directors with Kim Charlson, ACB President.

ACB Annual Convention



Resting guide dogs at the 2015 convention.

The 54th annual ACB conference and convention was held in Dallas, Texas from July 3-11, 2015. Hosted by the ACB of Texas, the theme of the 2015 conference and convention was "ACB: Where the Stars Shine Bright," a theme which highlighted both the geographic location and ACB's successes throughout the year.

This year, there were 1,181 attendees, including students, teachers, parents, professionals, retirees and a group of kids who had fun in ACB's Kids' Explorers Club. In addition to holding sessions to conduct official ACB business, the conference was packed with an incredible array of workshops, seminars and programs on a seemingly endless variety of topics. Attendees found their days filled with information and new ideas, exploring new products in the exhibit hall; receiving tips on adaptive technology; and discussing issues related to rehabilitation, transportation, education, health, and much more.

Our thanks go to the 2015 corporate sponsors, our Texas gems. Their continued generous support of the American Council of the Blind is much appreciated.



Janet Dickelman, convention coordinator for the American Council of the Blind.



Lori Scharff, President of American Council of the Blind of NY.

ACB Convention Sponsors

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Law Office of Lainey Feingold/Linda Dardarian, Goldstein, Borgen, Dardarian & Ho – Scholarship Reception

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ACB Families – Monday at Kids’ Explorers Club

Dallas Convention & Visitors Bureau – Braille Menus / Local Restaurants

HIMS, Inc. – ACB Café, Sunday

Lighthouse for the Blind Seattle – Career Development Workshop

LUA – NLS Talking Book Narrator

Maxi-Aids – ACB Café, Monday

Financial Reporting



ACB members listen at the 2015 Convention in Dallas, Texas.

Balance Sheet	2015	2014
Current Assets:		
Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$ 233,260	\$110,694
Accounts Receivable	\$9,217	\$20,074
Accounts Receivable- Other	\$51,800	\$51,800
Inventories	\$56,852	\$62,876
Prepaid Expenses	\$11,968	\$14,621
Total Current Assets	\$363,097	\$260,065
Investments	\$2,082,856	\$2,306,884
Property and Equipment	\$45,171	\$67,029
Other Assets	\$29,655	\$20,039
Total Assets	\$2,520,779	\$2,654,017
Liabilities and Net Assets		
Current Liabilities:		
Accounts Payable	\$162,392	\$185,677
Accounts Payable- Other	\$0	\$0
Accrued Expenses	\$103,679	\$124,002
Deferred Revenue	\$99,129	\$0
Total Current Liabilities	\$365,200	\$309,679
Total Liabilities	\$365,200	\$309,679

Net Assets:	2015	2014
Unrestricted	\$1,058,196	\$1,128,354
Temporarily Restricted	\$568,687	\$689,788
Permanently Restricted	\$528,696	\$526,196
Total Net Assets	\$2,155,579	\$2,344,338
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$2,520,779	\$2,654,017

Operating Statement

Revenue, Support and Gains:

Contributions from individuals and organizations	\$332,497	\$463,128
Legacies and bequests	\$163,486	\$459,727
In- kind contributions	\$9,695	\$20,700
Assessments and dues from local member units	\$58,417	\$65,088
Program fees	\$300,853	\$285,432
Other activities	\$116,101	\$108,161
Miscellaneous income, including interest income	\$181,199	\$29,900
Gain on investments	\$-70,265	\$101,370
Thrift store activities, net	\$22,966	\$ -140,504
	\$1,114,949	\$1,393,002

Expenses by Function

Program Services:

Scholarships	\$87,541	\$80,187
Convention	\$219,074	\$203,579
Audio Description Project	\$83,204	\$69,857
ACB Radio	\$63,430	\$53,546
Telephone Hotline	\$50,162	\$52,251
Advocacy and Government Affairs	\$104,698	\$110,584
Program Consultation	\$126,733	\$104,573
Membership Services	\$90,492	\$85,263
Public Awareness	\$224,666	\$240,125
Liaison with External Organizations	\$65,007	\$64,622

Support Services:	2015	2014
Management and General	\$92,343	\$91,600
Fundraising	\$96,358	\$107,979
Total Expenses by Function	\$1,303,708	\$1,264,166
Changes in Net Assets	\$ -188,759	\$128,836
Net Assets Beginning of the Year	\$2,344,338	\$2,215,502
Net Assets End of the Year	\$2,155,579	\$2,344,338
Total volunteer hours:	9230	8534
In kind value:	\$212,936	\$192,444



ACB Officers and Board of Directors:

Front row, seated: David Trott, Jeff Bishop, Carla Ruschival, Denise Colley, Kim Charlson, Katie Frederick, John McCann, Melanie Brunson, Berl Colley.

Top row, standing: Jeff Thom, George Holliday, Dan Spoons, Ray Campbell, Allan Peterson, Michael Garrett, Mitch Pomerantz.



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