CECELIA PEIRANO AND KAREN SPRY: INDIVIDUALS WHO INSPIRE AND ADVOCATE FOR THE BLIND

By Annie Davis

During the 2019 ACB-Ohio/Indiana state convention, I had the honor of helping to recognize extraordinary individuals for some of ACB-Ohio’s prestigious awards. Here are two of them.

Cecelia Peirano, Winner of the Arlene Cohen Teacher of the Year Award

During my first two years at the Ohio State School for the Blind, I was fortunate to have Cecelia Peirano as my fifth and sixth grade teacher. Mrs. Peirano has dedicated over 40 years of service to the blind community, specializing in kindergarten through sixth grades. Under her leadership, I learned how to use the Braille ‘n Speak, became proficient in “Talking Typer,” and an expert in the popular math game “Around The World.” Whether in math, science, spelling, health, or social studies, Mrs. Peirano has always had a unique gift of explaining material in a way that is simple to understand and fun to learn!

Mrs. Peirano is more than an excellent teacher. She is a mentor and friend to all who know her. Whether she is reading stories from Chicken Soup for the Soul to her class, or simply having a conversation with students or colleagues, she has compassion and love for everyone with whom she comes into contact. These are all reasons why we chose her as the 2019 recipient of the Arlene Cohen Teacher of the Year Award.

Karen Spry, Winner of the Ambassador Award

When I became actively involved in ACB shortly after college, I did not have the pleasure of knowing Karen Spry, who has been an active member and volunteer of
It’s hard to believe that this is the first issue in 2020! We celebrate some of our award winners and welcome new board members and staff in this issue, and ACBO, along with many others, will celebrate the 30th year of the Americans With Disabilities Act during the year.

As many of you already know, I plan to retire at the end of June. To prepare for a smooth transition, the board of ACB-Ohio hired Shawn Thiel as the assistant executive director so that he can learn the ropes instead of diving in headfirst. Shawn introduces himself on the next page.

Shawn brings many skills to the office. He is good with people, having spent nine years teaching technology; he is quick to learn and not afraid to ask questions. He has already made his mark, helping to get our new laptops set up and functioning properly. He is gradually learning about the many resources we share with callers and visitors and has had training on and worked with the national membership database. He joined other ACB members at the annual Legislative Seminar in Washington, DC, where he met other executive directors, officers, and ACB members from around the country and visited the offices of Ohio’s senators and several representatives to present this year’s imperatives (read about those on page 3).

You have not seen the last of me; I plan to continue involvement in ACBO and to find...
other volunteer opportunities in the community.

Now, here’s more about Shawn—in his own words.

My name is Shawn Thiel, and I am the new assistant executive director of the American Council of the Blind of Ohio. For those who do not already know me, I would like to provide some background. I have lived in the Columbus area all my life. My initial career was teaching technology, first as a volunteer with the Cisco Academy for the Vision Impaired (CAVI) based in Perth, Australia, at the beginning of 2010. The class was taught entirely online. In September of that year, I was hired to teach assistive technology at Functional Training Services in Columbus, a position I held for the next nine years. I gained many valuable experiences in that time and an appreciation for helping others. My tech background continues to be an asset in this new role, from setting up the Zoom platform (which you will read about in a separate article,) to readying newly acquired office technology.

I have plenty to learn, from the normal day-to-day functions, along with having attended the ACB Legislative Seminar by the time you read this. I might end up speaking with many of you depending on when you call the office. I look forward to serving the organization, the members, and folks with whom we collaborate.

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**LEGISLATIVE SEMINAR 2020**

*By Molly Marcinick*

In February, seven ACB-Ohio members traveled to Washington, DC, to represent Ohio at the Legislative Seminar. The group was comprised of D A and Ann Pimley, Vicky Prahin, Shawn Thiel, Karen Spry, Jill Noble and myself, Molly Marcinick. We met with our 16 representatives and two senators. In most offices we were able to meet with the staffer who was working on one or more of the imperatives that we were supporting.

The first imperative was the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act. This is a re-introduction of the bill that enables the blind and visually impaired community to highlight transportation and infrastructure issues that need to be addressed to allow for access and safety in their communities. We discussed three important aspects of this bill and encouraged our congressional representatives to re-authorize this act,
which is slated to expire in September.

- The importance of safe intersections was our initial discussion item. We explained the importance for access to the leading pedestrian intervals (LPI). This is when the visual walk signal appears several seconds before the traffic light changes. For this reason, Congress should require the installation of accessible pedestrian signalization (APS) whenever LPI signalization is utilized. This will provide blind and visually impaired pedestrians a few extra seconds to enter the crosswalk prior to the walk light being activated.

- The second issue we presented was the need for safer use of micro mobility devices such as e-bicycles and e-scooters. These devices are creating a danger to both the blind and visually impaired, as well as for people using walkers or wheelchairs. The bikes and scooters are dropped anywhere, causing a tripping hazard to pedestrians. One idea that was put forward was continuing to charge the user until the device is returned to a charging station.

- The final issue in the FAST Act imperative is funding for on-demand shared ride services. This type of program would allow disabled passengers to use an on-demand transit service in place of other transportation systems. To use such a system, a blind or visually impaired person can call the transit provider the day of the trip and request a ride. The town or municipality contracts with taxi companies or ride share companies such as Lyft or Uber. The local municipality pays an initial flat rate, and the customer pays any fee that exceeds the initial sum. We advised that the FAST Act should include language to fund such a program at the local municipal level.

The second imperative we discussed was autonomous vehicle (AV) legislation. The AV START Act was introduced in Congress in the fall of 2018. The new law would have affected the advent of autonomous vehicles at the federal level. But, at the end of 2018 and the 115th Congress, the House of Representatives and Senate failed to agree upon a federal framework to regulate autonomous vehicles. First, we asked that Congress ensure that the autonomous vehicles are built with accessibility in mind.
This accessibility must include human-machine interaction, or HMI. HMI includes functions that allow individuals to successfully communicate with the vehicle. We advised that the form of HMI, such as screens, must be made accessible for people who are blind or visually impaired. There must be a way to enable the person to locate the vehicle as well as exit and find the destination. Since the AVs will be built without a steering wheel or pedals, we discussed the need to prohibit state licensing requirements that would still require people to pass a vision or driving test before owning and operating a fully autonomous vehicle.

The third imperative was Securing Independence for Seniors and Medicare Beneficiaries (H.R. 4129). First, we urged all members of Congress to co-sponsor and support the bipartisan Medicare Demonstration of Coverage for Low-vision Devices Act. We explained that this legislation would evaluate a five-year national demonstration project administered by the Department of Health and Human Services, the fiscal impact of a permanent change to the Social Security Act. We advised that the legislation would allow reimbursement for certain low-vision devices that would sustain daily independent living. We also explained who would qualify. Individuals will be eligible to participate in the demonstration project only after completing a clinical evaluation performed by an ophthalmologist or optometrist who would then deem a low-vision device as medically necessary. We further explained how the data from the demonstration would provide valuable insight into how the eyeglass exclusion impacts independence for senior citizens and other Medicare beneficiaries.

I believe the seminar and our time on the Hill was successful. We received great feedback from the staffers we met with.
2020 WINTER SPORTS WEEKEND
By Pete Berg

Attending my first Winter Sports Retreat at Punderson State Park this past January exceeded my expectations. As a member of the Columbus chapter living in Naperville, Illinois, I interact with Ohio members infrequently. I was welcomed by all and that was a great feeling.

I had never participated in a similar event. It was such an incredible experience to hike on multiple days with my new guide, Lloyd, along with the wonderful volunteers. Despite a quick dip in a creek and Lloyd losing a boot during the Sunday hike, I can’t begin to explain how much fun I had.

I had the fortune of being partnered in one of the cabins with Phred and George, a.k.a. Steve and Paul. George kept the place clean and Phred griped about everything—it was perfect. All of the volunteers were incredibly helpful and nice. George provided me with transportation to and from the airport, and the trip back on Monday included a stop at the Original Pancake House, the culmination of a perfect weekend.

I met new friends, I learned new card games, and delighted in Glen challenging Vicky Prahin’s two letter words during a spirited game of Scrabble. I learned that the Noble sisters cheat at cards (only reporting what I heard from Phred). It was amazing to witness the friendship, love, and laughter shared amongst everyone. The folks that volunteer each year make the weekend happen and they are all fantastic. Events like these refuel the soul. I am already looking forward to attending the 2021 event!

ACBO WELCOMES TWO NEW BOARD MEMBERS
By Jill Noble and Vicky Prahin

Don Kalman, who has served on our board in the past, graciously agreed to complete the rest of Shawn Thiel’s term. Don has been involved with ACBO for at least 20 years. He was instrumental in getting 501(c)(3) status for Friends ’n Focus, a local support group for people who are blind or visually impaired in and around Medina County, and establishing this support group as an official chapter of ACB-Ohio. He currently serves as chapter president.

In addition to fundraising, programming for monthly meetings, and collaborating with members from other ACBO chapters, Don started a closed-circuit television (CCTV)
 loaner project. This free program provides a person who is visually impaired with a working CCTV. Don and his wife, Laura, arrange the delivery and setup of each unit; 57 have been placed in the community to date. It is a great way to reutilize an otherwise very expensive piece of adaptive equipment. Don’s success with this program is one of many reasons why he was chosen as one of five JP Morgan Chase Leadership Fellows in 2019. Thanks, Don, for once again bringing your wealth of experience to our board.

At the 2019 business meeting, ACBO members elected someone new to the board of directors. Kelsey Nicolay joined Friends ’n Focus (the Medina chapter) in 2016 and has served on the convention program committee and the membership committee, and has written articles for this newsletter. In addition, she has become very involved with ACB nationally. Kelsey says, “I am currently the secretary of Blind Information Technology Specialists and serve on the board of the Braille Revival League. I am a member of ACB’s employment and membership committees. I am also a member of the Pennsylvania Council of the Blind, as well as the Michigan Council of the Blind, where I currently serve on the technology and convention planning committees. I am currently co-chair of ACBO’s membership committee.” We will hear much more from this lady!

**ACCESSIBLE PRODUCTS HOTLINE**

Consumers with vision loss no longer have to spend hours searching for products that fit their unique accessibility needs, thanks to the launch of the first-of-its-kind Accessible Products Hotline by Envision. The hotline will be operated by the William L. Hudson BVI Workforce Innovation Center, connecting callers with professional advice about purchasing and operating the top home, office and personal use products on the market today. The BVI Workforce Innovation Center is part of Envision Inc. with the objective to train and employ individuals with visual impairments, place them into skilled positions and provide accessibility inclusion expertise to businesses around the United States.

The new hotline, 316-252-2500, is staffed by trained customer service representatives who are blind or visually impaired. Learn more at: [https://www.workforceforall.com/Accessible-Products-Hotline](https://www.workforceforall.com/Accessible-Products-Hotline).
ALL ACB-OHIO MEMBERS AND GUESTS, PLEASE JOIN US FOR OUR MONTHLY PHONE CONFERENCE MEETINGS

By Ann Pimley

Everyone is welcome to join us on our monthly meeting calls. Sometimes we have a speaker and at other meetings we share information and have a group discussion. In February, Clark Rachfal, ACB director of advocacy and governmental affairs, talked about the legislative imperatives for the Legislative Seminar. In January, Debbie Hazelton, from ACB Radio, talked about all the different programs they broadcast and some of the trends in programming. Previous speakers have talked about ScripTalk accessible prescription labels, audio description, the Great Lakes ADA Center, and both the ACBO state and ACB national conventions.

The ACBO membership committee started these conference calls to help connect with at-large members; however, many chapter members and visitors have found our meetings interesting and we highly encourage all to join us. It is a great opportunity to meet new people, share ideas, and learn from speakers and other members.

We hold these calls on the second Sunday of each month from 7:30 p.m. until 9:00 p.m. Here are the meeting dates for the rest of the year, so please mark your calendar: April 12, May 10, June 14, July 12, August 9, September 13, October 11, November 8, and December 13. If any of these dates should change, we will send out an email notification to the ACBO listserv. It will also be on the website (www.acbohio.org), or you can call the office to confirm the meeting.

Please note that our phone conference number will change in April. We will be using a Zoom phone conference line. You can use the link https://zoom.us/j/6142613561, which will either launch Zoom if you have it installed on your computer or mobile device, or direct you to download the app. I would encourage people who have headphones to try this option, as the audio quality is higher. Mobile device speaker phones can create a large amount of feedback when using the app, so please use the dial-in phone option described below if you don't have headphones available.

Dialing in with a touchtone phone is also an option. Call either of these numbers: 646-558-8656 US (New York), 669-900-9128 US (San Jose). Enter the following meeting ID: 6142613561 followed by the pound key. You have plenty of time to enter the meeting ID. If you join before the host starts the meeting, you will be told that the meeting has not yet started and receive hold music if you dial in by phone. If you have any questions or suggestions, please contact Ann Pimley or Shawn Thiel.
MY THREE-MINUTE THESIS EXPERIENCE

By Larisa Nechita

Have you ever had a dream that you kept hidden in a corner of your mind, hoping that one day it would become real? I did, and it happened. It took a combination of hard work, charisma, creativity, and of course, luck.

I am a third-year Ph.D. student at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu in Romania. I am working on techniques to teach conference interpreting more efficiently, a challenging field because you have to translate on the spot in a target language what another speaker is saying. Sometimes, it is not easy to express your thoughts in your mother tongue; now imagine how tricky it is to give voice to the thoughts of others without knowing them.

Last September at the end of my second year, my motivation was quite low. As I studied one afternoon, I took a well-deserved coffee break, checked the newsfeed on my social media accounts, and found the energizer that I was looking for. By chance I discovered Ma Thèse en 180 Secondes (My Thesis in 180 Seconds, or MT180), a prestigious French speaking contest. The challenge consists of building a three-minute speech accessible for a diverse audience that briefly presents your research, its objectives and relevance. The attractive thing about MT180 was that the international final would be held in Senegal. Since childhood, I wanted to visit some African countries and Senegal was at the top of the list.

I had a long road to travel to the big stage at Dakar, Senegal. After a national contest, each country chooses a representative for the international competition. I submitted
my application, and, after being evaluated by the organizing committee, I was invited to take part in the national competition along with 11 other participants from universities across Romania. I was more determined than ever to make my three-minute pitch memorable, but I didn’t dare to dream that I would be chosen as the best Ph.D. student in 2019.

For four years I have been a guide dog user, not such a common choice for mobility in Eastern Europe. My dog, Tina, and I are trying to shape mentalities in the best way we can. We have initiated a few local informational campaigns and we get involved in projects that promote disability rights. We try to combat stereotypes and educate people by developing community organizing workshops. We had traveled abroad in Europe and once in the United States, but I never envisioned myself going with a guide dog to Western Africa.

Before long, I was sitting next to my colleagues in Bucharest, Romania, at the French Institute, nervously awaiting my turn to speak in front of the large audience. I suddenly heard my name and I knew I had to start in a matter of seconds. As I stood, Tina started to wag her tail and shake her head like always, I took the mic and no more negative thoughts, no more worries, no more stress. I finished my discourse in exactly three minutes and happily listened to my colleagues’ presentations. I didn’t care too much about the jury’s choice. I was pleased with my work and delighted that the spectators’ reaction made me feel that I successfully represented my university. When the hosts announced that I was the winner, I was shocked. I lost my words and that almost never happens! In my determination to work on an effective pitch, I didn’t think about preparing a few ideas for a thank you speech. I said, “Merci beaucoup!” and “C’est incredible!” a few times. My family and friends prepared a huge party to celebrate my victory. That night was a long one.

**Adventures in the Kindest Land**

I had all the necessary support from the Romanian representatives of the competition organizers. We discussed the details about documentation and accessibility requests for me and Tina. It wasn’t an easy task. The first suggestion was that I should stay with Tina in a nearby apartment because the hotel doesn’t accept pets. That was an old story that I have heard in Romania as well. Finally, we convinced everyone that it would be beneficial to share the same space with the other participants because the purpose was not only the competition itself but...
socializing and building an international academic community.

To get to Dakar we had to change planes in Istanbul. Arriving safely in Turkey, the assistance aide arrived at the gate with a wheelchair. “Thank you, I am able to walk with the dog!” I said, smiling. He must not have understood, because in the next moment he brought a bigger wheelchair, saying “For the dog as well ma’am!” I never understood why in some airports the word disability is immediately associated with walking difficulties. When I told the helpers from the assistance office that I was going to Senegal they were astonished and wondered how I have the courage to go there accompanied by a service dog. Even in big airports the staff doesn’t often see service animals, that is why I strongly believe that training would be a long-term benefit for the travelers and the airport staff.

After many hours of flight, we safely landed in Dakar. Everybody in the airport was leaving their offices, some of them were looking out of their little windows to see the wonder. I don’t know if they realized Tina’s role. The staff from assistance told me that it was their first time seeing a service dog. At the hotel I had another shock. Everybody was running away from Tina—the receptionist and the staff at the restaurant were terrified of her; they were jumping up and down and talking to me from a considerable distance.

We spent a week in Dakar, a vibrant city with the most welcoming people that I’ve ever met. By the second day Tina’s relationships with the hotel staff considerably improved. They were coming closer and even offered to bring her food. I also met my colleagues from different parts of the world and I quickly made new friends. Some were not so comfortable around Tina at first, but by the end they enjoyed petting her. I can say that she was the most spoiled in the group. “Madame vous avez un joli chien!” (Madam, you have a pretty dog) was a phrase that I would hear often on the streets, in shops, and in public buildings.

The French and Senegalese organizers did a great job. They informed all the places we were
expected to visit that our group included a service dog which has the right to enter and we didn’t encounter major obstacles. I noticed that in countries where there are no laws, it all comes down to negotiations. It depends on how skilled we are in convincing the people that our situation is a bit different from what they face in their daily routine. I was moved by the group dynamic that created around me and Tina. Even if the majority didn’t know that guide dogs exist, they were all helpful, even the ones who feared her at the beginning. Sometimes, in the local shops, when people were forbidding access with the dog, not because they were mean, but because they didn’t know the concept, the whole group was stepping forward by explaining Tina’s role as a service animal.

We visited the University Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar to learn about the research done there. Unfortunately, I found out that few disabled students are continuing their studies at university. The teaching staff was asking me about my integration process, how the professors were able to adjust to my needs, how did I manage to get accessible materials and so on. Maybe the museums from Dakar are not the most accessible places for the visually impaired visitors but the guides that I met during that week were the most talented I ever listened to. Their storytelling techniques are simply breathtaking!

My favorite place was by far Gorée Island. Once considered the largest slave trading center on the African coast, every meter of its 88 acres reminds us about the human exploitation that took place there from the 15th to the 18th century. The Dutch, Portuguese, English, and French took turns ruling it, leaving behind some defining cultural characteristics. The architecture is striking, because there is a huge discrepancy between the imposing houses of the traders and the small, bare slave quarters.

After many exciting adventures, the day of the contest arrived. The final took place at the National Theatre of Dakar. Over 2000 people were expected and the show was broadcasted on the national Senegalese television.

Helped by my new friends, I inspected the stage with Tina. I explained my situation to the hosts. The plan was to go on the stage with one of them and to leave the spot by myself when the speech was over. The tim-
er was another issue—it was only visual. I planned my discourse well in advance. I even worked with a trainer specialized in public speaking, but time passes differently when you are on stage than at home. I told the hosts to count aloud the last ten seconds so that I know how fast I should say the ending phrases, but they forgot.

When my turn finally came, one of the hosts accompanied me on the stage and left me there in front of 2000 spectators I never experienced such a mixture of feelings. I was advancing with my speech, but somewhere in the back of my mind I was thinking: What happens if Tina barks? Not because she does that regularly, but there were so many eyes looking at us. The lights and the sound might have been disturbing for her. The level of stress was huge, and dogs are more aware of it than we are. My worries were in vain. She was looking kindly at the crowd and it was one of her glory moments as a working dog.

Since nobody was whispering that I am running out of time, my voice was becoming more and more confident. Suddenly, I hear 5, 4, 3... I rushed the last phrase and it was over. The frenetic applause conveyed a nice message; I fulfilled their expectations. I smiled, turned, and prayed that Tina would head directly backstage. Seeing my colleagues who were waiting for us, Tina happily headed backstage. We did it! Everybody came to congratulate me for the discourse and was surprised about how seriously Tina took her job that night.

Personally, I didn’t feel the pressure of a contest. I didn’t have an individual goal, but rather our aim together as a group was to promote significant areas of interest all around the world. We felt like a team, supporting, encouraging, and congratulating each other. The participant from France was declared the big winner and this year the competition will move to France. You
can listen to my full performance on my Facebook page by clicking on this link:

https://www.facebook.com/100000072795543/posts/2741330862545980/?d=n

I think that the hosts and the audience didn’t fully understand why I came up on stage with Tina. I am curious about what could have been in their minds. Towards the end of my discourse they might have gotten an idea about what is going on with me because they started counting the last seconds and ran out of words seeing me leaving the stage guided by Tina. The contest didn’t have anything related to being blind or promoting service dogs, that is why I didn’t insist on mentioning this fact in the presentation. I didn’t need any special treatment.

I didn’t expect that my performance would have such an impact in Romania or on my social media accounts. The Romanian press wrote nice articles about the way I represented the university and the country, calling me a real ambassador of education; my university professors sent me messages telling me how proud they are.

Senegal taught me lessons about kindness, happiness, and tolerance. I learned that no matter the obstacles we are facing in our daily lives, we should strive to become the best version of ourselves. This experience meant not only a meaningful professional evolution. It broadened my perspectives about project ideas with and about the visually impaired community. It reactivated a long-lasting dream to start up implement and get involved in informational campaigns that aim to create a bridge between the blind and other social groups. Who knows? Maybe this too will become a reality one day.

Tina and I attending the after party

In the Dakar airport, ready to head home
As always, thanks to the contributors: Pete Berg, Annie Davis, Molly Marcinick, Larisa Nechita, Jill Noble, Ann Pimley, Vicky Prahin, and Shawn Thiel. The Ohio Connection is a quarterly publication of the American Council of the Blind of Ohio. Please submit your material in print or through e-mail, and include your name, address, and phone number. E-mail items to acbo.newsletter@gmail.com or send them to the address below. The summer issue deadline is May 15.

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CORRECTION
In the last issue we had pictures of attendees in the “Convention Roundup.” One of those included Sandra Mollett. We apologize to Sandy for the misspelling of her last name.

ACBO Community Shares Campaign Codes
State of Ohio 19003
City of Columbus 60240
Franklin County 60240
Ohio State University 60240
Columbus State 1061
ACB-Ohio Datebook

April 4
ACBO Board Meeting
Via conference call

April 6
ACBO on the Radio
Voicecorps.org

April 12
Membership Call

May 4
ACBO on the Radio
Voicecorps.org

May 10
Membership Call

May 15
Ohio Connection
Newsletter deadline

June 1
ACBO on the Radio
Voicecorps.org

June 14
Membership Call

July 3-10
ACB Annual Conference
Schaumburg, IL
Acbconvention.org

July 12
Membership Call

July 31-August 2
Summer Sports Retreat