



# ***OHIO CONNECTION***

American Council of the Blind of Ohio

## **ACBO HONORS FOUR WHO ALWAYS GO THE EXTRA MILE**

By Melody Banks

ACB-Ohio gives awards to show appreciation for the work individuals and groups do, the time and energy they expend, and the caring they demonstrate. Here are this year's awardees.

We presented the Arlene Cohen Art of Teaching award to Judy Harpley, an O&M instructor from the Medina area. Throughout her career, Judy has demonstrated a strong commitment to student success. Kelsey Nicolay, who has worked with her extensively, says, "She goes the extra mile to ensure her students acquire a solid foundation in orientation and mobility skills, as well as making sure her students feel comfortable navigating a new environment, sometimes meeting students during nontraditional hours. She also gives sound advice to students on the best cane and other aides to use in order to travel as independently as possible."

Shawn Thiel received the Ken Morlock award. Shawn has dedicated his personal and professional life to educating, encouraging, and improving quality of life for people living with blindness or visual impairment. He uses his wealth of interest



***Kelsey Nicolay, Arlene Cohen Art of Teaching Award winner Judy Harpley, and Melody Banks***



***Ken Morlock Award winner Shawn Thiel***

and knowledge of technology and personal experience to teach others how to use mobile devices, computers, notetakers, braille displays, applications, and other innovative technologies as accessibly and efficiently as their capabilities allow in order to enhance independence, productivity, safety, and well-being. Shawn has incredible people skills, a calm and patient nature, and a positive outlook. He has worked as an assistive technology specialist and served as executive director for ACBO. He facilitated a national ACB community event called Technology Learning Lab to offer advice and answer questions on a wide spectrum of topics. He is always willing to help with new technology and believes that "No question is foolish unless it goes unasked."



***Ambassador Award recipient Brant Adams***

Brant Adams received the Ambassador Award. He has been part of ACBO for many years, serving as president and vice-president of the Appleseed chapter for a while and eventually joining the board of directors of ACB-Ohio. He now serves as the first vice-president of the organization. He has also been part of many committees during his time on the board, including technology, budget, program planning, and nominating. Brant is always willing to give a helping hand where needed. Setting up and running sound equipment during the convention, hosting Zoom meetings, offering advice and support to the president, and finding presenters for convention sessions are a few examples of

his penchant for cheerfully pitching in to help. This year he participated in most of the contacts with legislators, providing personal experiences with technology and answering questions about websites that the rest of us could not have handled. Brant Adams is a major asset to ACB-Ohio.

Marybeth Donelan, receiver of the Ruth Davidson award, has been a member of the Greater Cincinnati Chapter of ACBO for about ten years. She joined eager to work and never stops. She is the chair of the Flying Pig committee, helping to get sighted guides for participants and organizing practice runs. She heads the Flying Pig Health Grants, which gives grants to members to get them up and moving for a healthier lifestyle. She is not afraid to jump in wherever needed and serves on several other committees.

She provides transportation to meetings and will wait until everyone has been picked up to go home. Melody Banks says, “Marybeth is a great asset to the chapter and we are hoping she will stay with the chapter for a long, long time.”

Congratulations to all of our award winners. If you know someone who goes the extra mile, dedicates significant time to improving the quality of life for blind and visually impaired Ohioans, send your nomination to us at any time. If you need help putting your nomination together, use the template provided on [acbohio.org](http://acbohio.org).

## **CONGRATULATIONS, SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS!**

By Tonya Adams

This year, ACBO awarded scholarships to three remarkable students. The JoAnn Fischer/Linwood Walker Scholarship went to Jon Stricklen of Columbus. Legally blind and a certified teacher of the visually impaired, Jon currently teaches English and Spanish at the Ohio State School for the Blind. In January, he will start classes to obtain his CATIS (certified assistive technology instructional specialist) license through Western Michigan University. He hopes to use his CATIS certification, along with his experiences as a teacher of English and Spanish, to provide bilingual services for the visually impaired community locally and beyond.

The Max Edelman/David Newmeyer Scholarship was awarded to Caroline Mizer. Originally from Akron, Caroline has been blind since age three due to gliomas in both eyes. She attended Revere High School where she was very active in Girls on The Run, Teen Institute, and Kids4Kids. She is currently working on her first year of a bachelor’s degree in health communications at Otterbein University.

The Friends of Freshman Scholarship was awarded to Brennan Lasson. Brennan is from Beavercreek, Ohio, and is pursuing an associate degree in cybersecurity at Clark State University. He has been visually impaired from a young age due to multiple eye issues. He was active in the National Technical Honor Society in high school and hopes to maintain his skills and educate himself to keep up to date in his chosen career path. We are excited for our winners and look forward to watching them succeed in their upcoming endeavors.

# INTRODUCING OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS

By Vicky Prahin

This year we welcomed four new members to the board of directors at the convention in Bloomington, Indiana. Those of you who have been involved for a while will probably recognize two of the names; we will feature Kelsey Nicolay and Linda Wyman in the next issue.

Caleb McKinsey has lived in the Cleveland area, specifically in Lakewood, for 21 years. After graduation from Lakewood High School, he earned a bachelor's degree in English with a concentration in multicultural studies. He currently works for Medical Mutual of Ohio in the claims department. He joined ACB in 2016, thanks to friends who told him about the organization and the work the group has done. Caleb says, "Everyone seemed close and looked like a team to me and I wanted to be a part of that. ACB has shown me the many great things that have been accomplished by those who are blind or visually impaired, along with things being done to help them succeed."

As a board member, he looks forward to networking with others around Ohio and around the country. Caleb said, "I want to use my skills and experiences to help the blind and visually impaired community."

A few fun facts about Caleb: He loves cooking anything from chili to Mediterranean meat pies; he rows competitively with a local team on the Cuyahoga River and in surrounding states; he has his second guide dog, Hamish, from The Seeing Eye; and his favorite genre of music is symphonic metal, especially the band Nightwish. Caleb says, "I'm an open book. I'm here to learn and to help."

Kate Morse grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio, where she became involved with the Greater Cincinnati chapter. She says, "I want to serve on the ACBO board to make a contribution to the Ohio affiliate of ACB." Some things she enjoys are tandem bike riding, reading, and going out to different restaurants.

I think we will hear much more from both of these new board members!



***The 2023 ACBO Board of Directors—front row: Katie Frederick, Karen Spry; middle row: Kate Morse, Molly Marcinick, Vicky Prahin, Tonya Adams, Rachel Densmore, Caleb McKinsey, Kelsey Nicolay; back row: Shawn Thiel, D A Pimley, Melody Banks, Brant Adams, Alex Densmore (not pictured: Malaina VanderWal, Kathy Gerhardt, Linda Wyman)***

## **2022 CONFERENCE AND CONVENTION RECAP**

### **By Katie Frederick**

In November, individuals gathered in Bloomington, Indiana, and on Zoom for the 2022 conference and convention. Staff members at the host hotel, the Hilton Garden Inn, were great to work with and ably met conference needs throughout the weekend.

Friday afternoon activities began with a twist. ACB of Indiana organized a walking tour of the square in downtown Bloomington. Following the walk, many attendees browsed the exhibit hall, while others enjoyed 45-minute mini sessions presented by conference sponsors including HIMS, I Can See, and Vanda Pharmaceuticals, to name a few. That evening, Kathy Nimmer, the 2015 Indiana Teacher of the Year recipient, gave the keynote

address, reminding us that we all have a voice—it's up to us how and when we use it.

Following a tasty breakfast on Saturday morning, ACB-Ohio's annual business meeting was the first item on the schedule. Minutes and the 2021 treasurer's report were read and approved, then outgoing president Vicky Prahin gave a brief report, and the membership heard from executive director Ting Chiu. Following the reports, members elected our 2023 officers and board. Katie Frederick will serve her first term as president; Rachel Densmore will serve her first term as second vice-president; D A Pimley was elected to his second treasurer term; and Caleb McKinsey, Shawn Thiel, Tonya Adams, Kate Morse, and Kelsey Nicolay were elected to the board of directors. Linda Wyman, former board member and past president, returns to the board to serve a one-year term. Thank you, Don Kalman, Deborah Lori Woodall, Dana Metcalf, and Marilyn Allison for your service on the board. The business meeting concluded with chapter representatives sharing their activities over the past year. Chapters are using Zoom for meetings and some chapters are also meeting in person.

After the business meeting, representatives from the Indiana ABLE program facilitated a Saturday morning session, explaining the program and how individuals can set money aside for expenses. During lunch, Earl Harrison from HIMS shared information about product updates. Thank you, HIMS, for sponsoring this year's conference. A lunch tradition many attendees look forward to is the awarding of ACB-Ohio scholarships, and this year was no exception. See elsewhere in this issue for profiles of our 2022 recipients.

Saturday afternoon workshops included updates on eye care research, the ADA, exercise and wellness, the braille Literacy Project, and a focus group discussing autonomous vehicles. Attendees took advantage of the last call to visit the exhibit hall between the Saturday afternoon sessions.

ACB-Ohio presented four awards during the banquet Saturday evening. You can read about our award winners in the following pages of this issue. Military veteran and extreme sports athlete Lonnie Bedwell, who lost his sight as a result of an accident, shared his story, challenging us to keep pushing ourselves even when things get tough. Saturday activities concluded with the annual auction.

A memorial service for members who passed away this year and an audio description update closed out the conference Sunday morning. Thank you, attendees, exhibitors, presenters, sponsors, and volunteers, for making the 2022 joint conference and convention a success. A special thank you to Tyson Ernst for his audio setup expertise, ensuring virtual attendees could hear conference sessions. Be sure to read upcoming editions of the *Ohio Connection*; planning for the 2023 conference is just around the corner.

## **IN MEMORIAM**

By Vicky Prahin

In 2022 two long-time members of ACB-Ohio died. Both were in their nineties and inactive for several years, but they contributed much to the Columbus chapter when they could.

Jane Spillan was 97 when she passed away in July due to complications from dementia. She was born and raised in Newcomerstown in Tuscarawas county in the eastern part of the state. She moved to Columbus to attend OSU, where she earned a master's degree in social work. She had a long and fulfilling career in social work. Early in her career, she traveled around the state helping families with blind or visually impaired children, and worked in family counseling for many years after that. Jane was a Columbus chapter member for over 20 years, serving on the board of directors during part of that time. She was a "people person" who enjoyed the many friends she made through ACBO.

Jackie Giles, born on June 8, 1929, grew up on a farm in Marion, and was the youngest of seven children. At 13 she became blind. Jackie went to school in New York City, where she learned braille. Jackie had many dogs from The Seeing Eye. Her first dog, Suzy, was the first non-human member of Delta Gamma Sorority. Jackie attended Denison



***Jane Spillan***



***Jackie and Al Giles***

University and later The Ohio State University. She worked at Ohio Bell as a switchboard operator. She joined ACBO in the early 1980s and served as president for several terms. Her backyard was the site of many summer picnics for the Columbus chapter. She died on September 13, 2022.



**Jackie Giles graces the front page of The Columbus Evening Dispatch in 1960. The caption reads “A PERSONAL CALL — Although Columbus Safety Director Albert Giles’ fiancée operates a braille switchboard for the State Division of Social Administration, the safety director pulls a switch himself and calls on Miss Jacqueline Forry, who will become Mrs. Giles on Saturday.”**

## HELP WITH AT-HOME COVID TESTING

Beginning on November 28, Ohio residents can call the Ohio Department of Health support line through Be My Eyes Specialized Help to receive real-time assistance with at-home COVID-19 testing! The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends at-home COVID-19 tests for anyone experiencing symptoms or exposed to the virus. Ohioans who are blind or low vision can receive guidance through taking the test and learning the results, working with a volunteer of the free Be My Eyes app. Ohioans who are blind or have low vision can get support with:

- Reading small print on packaging and instructions
- Completing each step of the test accurately
- Verifying completed test results



Support is available Monday through Friday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. ET. If you are an Ohio resident and have questions about how to protect yourself and your community from COVID-19, you can also contact the Ohio Department of Health COVID-19 call center at 833-4-ASK-ODH (833-427-5634) Monday through Friday from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. ET.

# GETTING TO KNOW THE MICHIGAN COUNCIL OF THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

By Malaina VanderWal

As a member of ACBO and the Michigan Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired (MCBVI), I was asked to share a bit about my home state affiliate.

In October 2022, we held our third virtual convention where we had a variety of presentations such as Democracy Live, En-Vision America, Paralympian Tyler Merren, vocal confidence coach Debra Anderson, and Dan Spoons, who was our keynote speaker, to name a few.

Our theme was “A New You In 2022, with Access, Advocacy, and Attitude.” It was important to us to find presenters who we had previously and to bring in those who could provide information or share stories and experiences that would empower our convention attendees. During our convention we elected a new president, Casey Dutmer, and I look forward to working with him during his term.

One thing we continually strive for is greater membership involvement. Over the last two years, some of us worked on the issue of accessible absentee voting and how to get an accessible solution available in Michigan. We now have the Omni ballot system developed by Democracy Live since the fall of 2020. There is still much work we hope to accomplish in this area. Currently we can fill out the ballot electronically, but we cannot utilize electronic returns. As not everyone owns a printer, this is one of the things we want to continue working toward.

Other issues include accessible prescription labeling which we have worked on prior to the pandemic, and we hope to begin strategizing ways to pass a state law requiring it.

These are just a few things MCBVI is working toward. As we continue to grow and change, we welcome any ACBO members who are currently an MCBVI member to reach out and join a committee. You may be able to offer your experience as I hope to do for ACBO. Feel free to reach out to me at [mvanderwal78@gmail.com](mailto:mvanderwal78@gmail.com). I hope everyone has a blessed holiday season!

# A COOL THERMOSTAT IDEA

By Robin Altland

For this to make sense, I have to first explain that when I first moved down to Georgia, we had what I would call a pretty good air conditioning unit. It had buttons, and though they weren't labeled, there were clicks telling us whether we had heat or air selected, and we knew how to set the thermostat. My roommate has some vision, so she was able to benefit from the lights that would come on. Back in September, this air conditioner decided that it was time to die. No matter what we did, it kept pumping out warm air. Even before that, at the beginning of the summer, it had a leak that needed repair. The leak wasn't really that big, but had we not caught it in time, there would have been an awful mess.

Of course, the unit died on a Sunday and we couldn't get ahold of our maintenance man until Monday. He told us that there was nothing he could do for that particular unit, that it had been here for 10 years, and that those things will happen.

They ordered another unit which came a few days later. It was a good one, no doubt, but we couldn't use it. The new thermostat had buttons, but no clicks or anything to let us know what was what. At first, our maintenance man told us to call on him whenever we wanted to change settings. We felt uncomfortable with that, so we asked him if there was a way for us to get a talking thermostat. He was flabbergasted! He'd never heard of one. I had, but the ones I'd heard about weren't very good according to people I knew who had used them.

We were frustrated because we didn't want to have to get maintenance, or someone who just happened to be around, to help us with the thermostat. A few days later, though, we learned that there was a possibility that we could get one that worked with our Alexa devices. We didn't really see how that could happen, since we each have our own devices and we keep them in different places.

All we needed to do was get a note from our doctor saying that we could have the talking thermostat. Two weeks later, they came back with one that had its own Alexa. Now, all we do is tell her if we want it on the heat mode or the cool mode, tell her what we want the temperature to be, and then

walk away. It does everything else. We were both really surprised and had no idea this could happen. It's so nice not to have to ask someone else to do this for us.

Sure, there are times when she acts like every other Alexa device and does what she wants to do instead of what we tell her, and sometimes we have to say something more than once before she gets our drift, but on the whole, we get along fine! Once when I'd asked her what the room temperature was, she gave me a weather report, but I finally got the answer I wanted. She'll also play music, and do anything and everything every other Alexa does, which is also neat.

Here's an extra bonus: It's not just blind user friendly. If someone has arthritic hands and can't push buttons, it's great! If someone has vision but can only read really large print, she gives you the information there as well.

I'd recommend the Smart Thermostat to anyone. Ours came from Amazon. If you have a smart phone, all you have to do is connect it to your wi-fi, and you're all set. We don't own smart phones, so that had to be done for us, but we do the rest. It's awesome; no more fooling with knobs, buttons, or touch screens. All you need to do is talk; it's that easy! That's certainly a cool idea—or even a hot one!

**Michelle Spillan, Editor / Newsletter Committee: Katie Frederick, Irwin Hott, Dana Metcalf, Vicky Prahin**

As always, thanks to the contributors: **Tonya Adams, Robin Altland, Melody Banks, Katie Frederick, Vicky Prahin, and Malaina VanderWal.** 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 spring issue deadline is **March 1. ACB-Ohio, 3805 N. High St., Suite 305, Columbus, Ohio 43214, Phone: 614-261-3561**



**ACBO Community Shares  
Campaign Codes**

State of Ohio 19003  
City of Columbus 60240  
Franklin County 60240  
Ohio State University 60240  
Columbus State 1061



American Council of the Blind of Ohio  
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## ACB-OHIO DATEBOOK

**JANUARY 7**, ACBO BOARD MEETING, 9 A.M., VIA ZOOM

**JANUARY 8**, MEMBERSHIP CALL, 7:30 P.M., VIA ZOOM

**JANUARY 9**, ACBO ON THE RADIO, 11 A.M., VOICECORPS.ORG

**FEBRUARY 6**, ACBO ON THE RADIO, 11 A.M., VOICECORPS.ORG

**FEBRUARY 12**, MEMBERSHIP CALL, 7:30 P.M., VIA ZOOM

**FEBRUARY 15**, MEMBERSHIP DUES DEADLINE

**MARCH 1**, ACBO NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

**MARCH 6**, ACBO ON THE RADIO, 11 A.M., VOICECORPS.ORG

**MARCH 12**, MEMBERSHIP CALL, 7:30 P.M., VIA ZOOM

**APRIL 3**, ACBO ON THE RADIO, 11 A.M., VOICECORPS.ORG

**APRIL 9**, MEMBERSHIP CALL, 7:30 P.M., VIA ZOOM

