

Bay Lines

Spring, 2019

Bay State Council of the Blind

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Message from the Editor by Bob Hachey

At the end of March, 2019, I was diagnosed with endocrine cancer. I had been dealing with major stomach problems for over a month at the time. I am now in chemotherapy treatment for the cancer and it appears to be working well. Dianna Leonard has graciously volunteered to become acting editor while I seek to beat this darned thing. She did the lion's share of writing and editing in this issue. Hopefully, I will be able to resume the duties of *BayLines* Editor in the near future. Meanwhile, Dianna will become a permanent part of the *BayLines* editorial staff. Dianna will also be working on social media issues along with Cory Kadlik. Welcome Dianna! Enjoy the rest of *BayLines*.

Never Forgotten by Brian Charlson

It is so easy in the hustle and bustle of everyday life to forget those who paved the way for us to have such richness in our lives. Many of those who improved our circumstances we never met and others we only met in passing. Then there are those who played a major part in our lives: our parents, teachers, mentors, and friends.

From the moment we wake up in the morning until the moment we fall asleep at night, our lives are impacted by the direct and indirect actions of others. That clock that woke you up didn't just magically appear on your headboard. Someone decided to measure time; someone found a way to make a personal device to alert someone to a moment in that time; and someone decided to manufacture that very clock you rely on each workday morning. The fact that the clock you use is accessible to you as a person who is blind or visually impaired may have been intentional but probably not. Nonetheless, you benefit from all of these ideas and actions.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all of those who have positively affected my life. From my parents who provided me with their protection but not so much as to weaken my ability to take care of myself; to my teachers who taught me not only how to read, write and do arithmetic, but to think imagine and consider; to my mentors who gave me tasks to perform and the space to learn from my mistakes; to my friends and family who always had my back and sometimes picked me up and set me back on the path to success.

To those who I don't know or who I only met or interacted with for a short time, know that I think of you from time to time, and thank you for what you did for me even if you didn't know it yourself. I am, at this moment, writing on a computer that has made my life so much richer than it would have been without it. To those who made this device a part of my life, I thank you. To the men and women who invented, standardized, and created devices to write the braille I use every day, I thank you for the gift of literacy and the doorway to both knowledge and entertainment. As for those who had any part in placing a white cane and a guide dog harness handle in my hand, or a part in providing me with the ability to use these tools to explore my world, thank you so much for providing me with the freedom to independently navigate an astounding planet.

Now I ask all of you to give some time and thought to who has made your life all that it is. Who was it who took the time to teach you to cook a meal, to be kind in your every action, to take public transportation to school, work, and the mall? Who is it that continues to be there for you when you need a shoulder to cry on, or a swift kick in the pants when you screw up? Pick up the phone and give them a call, send them an email, or text them and let them know that you know what they do for you and that you appreciate it. Better yet, send them a small gift with a note that shows your appreciation and just how well you know them. Most of all, let them know you care about them and that you stand ready to help them any time and any place.

We can all benefit from a little introspection. Who are we, how did we become who we are, who helped us along the way? Don't wait for a day when you are feeling up and happy, try doing this when you are down and wondering why things are not working out as you wish. I think you will find yourself feeling better about life. Feeling gratitude is a wonderful remedy for the blues.

Highlights from the 2019 BSCB Convention by Dianna Leonard

The 2019 BSCB convention was held at the Burlington Marriott Hotel on the weekend of Saturday, March 9. The Friday afternoon session began with an interactive Tae Kwon Do demonstration led by Yanni Sholla, where attendees learned the proper fighting stance, how to block oncoming attacks, and how to properly throw a punch. I thought it was very informative, and having taken martial arts in the past. Tae Kwon Do offered a slightly different perspective from what I'd learned previously.

We then heard from Michelle Ellicks, a speaker from the Registry of Motor Vehicles, on the topic of Real ID. Real ID is a federally-compliant identification card used for entering federal buildings and air travel within the United States; it will be federally mandatory for residents by October 1, 2020. Valid Military IDs or passports can also be used in place of Real ID cards for air travel and entrance into federal buildings. The application process of obtaining a Real ID card starts online at the RMV's website, which is accessible: <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/massachusetts-registry-of-motor-vehicles>. From there, the

applicant would fill out the form and print it to bring with them to the Registry; they would also have to bring documentation that proves their lawful presence in Massachusetts: such as an original U.S. passport or passport card, valid, original birth certificates or marriage licenses from the municipality, or a valid Green Card or Employment Authorization Document. Documentation providing proof of address is also needed, such as bills or bank statements. By law, the RMV cannot accept expired documents.

A Real ID is valid for five years, just like the standard Mass ID card. The cost of obtaining or renewing a Real ID is \$25, which is also the same as a Mass ID. Michelle also explained that if you or a family member have AAA Insurance, you're able to get a Real ID through them as opposed to the Registry.

Our third speaker was Karen Santiago, editor of *The Blind Perspective*, which is an online newsletter located at <https://www.theblindperspective.com/>. All of their writers are volunteers who are blind or visually impaired. Karen writes the "Movers and Shakers" segment, where she interviews people or companies who are either in the process of developing, or have developed, a product or service for the blind/visually impaired community. Her favorite article that she's written was a three-part segment on Perkins School for the Blind, where she and her daughter went for a fun tour.

Karen also writes the "International Perspective" segment, where she interviews somebody from another country to find out what life is like for a blind person living there. Karen took the time to go through all the writers for *The Blind Perspective*, and we learned that the newsletter contains a team of people who live all over the world. Each one of them has a segment or two that they write articles for. *The Blind Perspective* covers a wide variety of topics such as cleaning, technology, beauty tips, guide dog travel, and gardening to name a few. People who opt to get emails from *The Blind Perspective* will get them once a month for each new issue; the email subscription is not a chat list so it won't clutter inboxes. All of the newsletters and articles are archived on their website, so anyone can feel free to go back and read older posts. Karen also gave information on how to access *The Blind Perspective* through Newline, by selecting the Massachusetts option. The newsletter is also available in an audio format via their website.

Our next speakers were Amber Valencort, and Chris and Kelli Jarosz from Veterans' Affairs in the Central/Western Mass area. Kelli is the Visual Impairment Services Team coordinator, helping visually impaired veterans navigate the VA and offering annual eye and ear exams, as well as the ability to see the VA doctor. She also assists with getting the proper home health care services, should they need it.

Amber and Chris are Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialists, training the veterans who are in the outpatient program. She works out of the VA's Worcester clinic. They assist blind and visually impaired veterans with O&M skills, cane travel, assistive technology, daily living, and any other needs they may have as outpatients. They provide those services at the veteran's home, workplace, or at the VA itself. If there are veterans who are unable to go to a rehab training center (such as The Carroll Center, for example), Amber and Chris provide those same services locally, to the best of their ability. They also work with the families of veterans, giving them any support they might need throughout the process. Chris briefly touched upon the VA's Inpatient Blind Rehab Program. It is much like The Carroll Center, where the veterans stay at the VA for four to six weeks, and are trained in independent living, O&M, etc. If someone who is blind or visually impaired needs to contact the VA, Kelli advises that they'll always want to start by contacting someone who has her job (the Visual Impairment Coordinator), as they will help get the paperwork where it needs to go and can point the veteran in the right direction. If a legally blind veteran goes to the VA, all of their inpatient and outpatient services, as well as their medical

appointments, are free (as long as they go to the VA for those services). Any medical equipment is also provided by the VA, should someone need it (such as hearing aids, or even a CCTV).

The local blind rehab center is in West Haven, CT. If a veteran needs any inpatient services for rehabilitation, they will either be sent there, or to the other locations in Tucson or Palo Alto. Kelli stated that it's never wrong to give the VA a call. The vision coordinators are there to assist veterans with their needs and with navigating the VA's system.

Next, we had Dean Vasile and Richard Keyes, who spoke about opportunities through the Randolph-Sheppard Vending Facilities Program. These types of business enterprise programs aren't just available in Massachusetts — they're all over the country, and they've been around for quite a while.

We started off with Richard, who was a vendor for thirty-five years and was able to use that income to support his family. He also gave us some history on the program. It was first proposed and sponsored by Jennings Randolph of Congress, and Morris Sheppard from the U.S. Senate. The Randolph-Sheppard Act was actually made into law by President Roosevelt in 1937. The law states that all Federal property must have space for a blind person to have their own business there, which would be sponsored by the state, as well as different licensing agencies.

Some things have changed over time, though. At one point, Richard recalled there were five vending locations in the area he once worked; now there's only one, in the Worcester Courthouse. Richard told us of the requirements to be a vendor: You have to be a citizen of the United States, you have to be eighteen years or older and legally blind, and you have to pass a training program. The training program Richard had gone through lasted twelve weeks.

The process of getting a vending stand starts with the vendor working for someone for a while and building a good rapport. The vendor would then bid on a stand (there would be an announcement sent out; obtaining the location up for bid is purely based on seniority). He then explained the different types of stands: dry stand (usually newspapers), wet stand (drinks, typically coffee), and sandwiches. Full-service wet stands are described as making sandwiches and serving drinks, and some of them may have seating. The vending program also has full cafeterias that serve meals. Every facility has a permit for the vending stand that outlines the stand's hours of operation and what they're permitted to sell. Certain stands are required to sell certain things (for example, a dry stand can't sell coffee).

Dean spoke next, revealing he has been in the vending program for thirty-one years so far. His first location was in Greenfield, MA. Initially, he got himself off the ground by living at his vending location for a period of time, as he had just moved to the area. Dean moved back to Boston and set up his next vending location at 10 Park Plaza, where he worked for about three years. That location had never been opened before, so he had to do some outreach to drive foot traffic. He ended up turning that location into a small video rental store, in addition to selling coffee. He eventually moved to the Probate Courthouse in Cambridge. As opposed to being on the second floor of a building like at 10 Park Plaza, this location was in the lobby, with everything out in the open, so it created a bit more work in terms of moving inventory back and forth. He was able to maintain the location for nine years, and his business did very well there.

He stated that business in general went down significantly after the September 11 attacks, so he ended up moving to the Chelsea Soldiers' Home, which was a constant, 365-day job. Unfortunately, he caught

one of his employees stealing. He left Chelsea for a location at the Air Force Base, which he loves. He's made lasting relationships there and he's getting a lot of foot traffic.

Dean believes his enthusiasm and work ethic are what drives everything forward. He has fun with his employees and his customers, and he's constantly driving people in the door. He advised to try to make your customers feel special, which can only be done in about the thirty seconds it takes to talk to them. If a person is interested in the vending program, they should start by talking to their Vocational Rehab Counsellor through MCB, as mentioned here: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/vending-facilities-program>. Dean indicated that there aren't enough vendors to run locations, and more are needed to open new ones. Currently, some vendors are even running two locations due to the shortage.

Richard closed with this thought: while being a vendor can be challenging sometimes, it is ultimately rewarding in making good connections with customers and employees, as well as the people who provide the inventory. He retired due to wanting to spend more time with his family, but echoed that the vending program is a wonderful opportunity.

Our next speakers were Carl Richardson, DeAnn Elliot, and Jennifer Harnish, who held a panel on employment. Carl said that we shouldn't be afraid to tell people that we're looking for employment. If we can't see or hear someone when they're interacting with us, and have trouble understanding what they're trying to say, it's best to ask if they can repeat it. We shouldn't be afraid to put ourselves out there; people don't get jobs if they just keep to themselves.

He then described an important concept called an elevator speech. He wanted us to imagine we were in an elevator with someone and only have thirty seconds to talk to them, explaining why you want to work or why you're seeking employment, etc. You should be clear and concise, and to the point. You need to make sure that you're memorable, which isn't easy to do. The next step is to always have a business card. Carl explained that, even if you're not working, it's always good to have one with some contact information on it.

The next step is to follow up with whoever you gave the card to. Even if it's a quick email saying it was nice to meet them and letting them know you're looking for employment. He also said we shouldn't be afraid to ask for an informational interview, just to gain some knowledge and pick someone's brain, as everyone has some piece of information they're willing to give out in regards to employment.

It's always important to listen and learn while on an interview. That way you can learn from the interviewer, as they're almost always in a higher position and you can gain some knowledge of how they got to where they currently are. Employers want to see that there's something current on your resume, so it's very important not to end up with a time gap. So, the next step is to be patient. Carl implored that being patient is probably one of the most important things; gaining employment doesn't happen overnight. It takes time.

Carl said some of the things you don't want to do, in terms of networking, is to not be timid and talk only to people you know (in other words, branch out). Another important thing is to avoid being overzealous; no one likes a braggart.

Networking isn't just for an employment. It can also be used in everyday life, such as getting medical or rehabilitation services. It can also help circumvent some of the stress that comes with the job application process mainly being online nowadays. DeAnn has found that volunteering has been a

wonderful opportunity for her in terms of meeting people in the blindness community, as well as giving back. She also reminded us that if we are Aira subscribers, we can use Aira to do anything related to job searching for free, and that the agents can even take over a computer to assist in filling out an application.

In terms of disclosing that you have a disability, Carl told us that there really is no right time. There are arguments that can be made for both sides: to disclose or not to disclose. It depends on the job, the situation, and the person you're working with. One helpful tip is to disclose your disability with the Human Resources person once you get the job, as they can help with any accommodations you may need.

Jennifer Harnish mentioned that it's good to try and guide the conversation when it comes to disability, whether it be showing how you use assistive technology during an interview, or politely offering to show someone the correct way to be a sighted guide. Social media can also be beneficial, like following companies you want to work for on Twitter and replying to some of their posts in a knowledgeable way. Jennifer implored that it's always good to have a Twitter handle that is your real name, as opposed to something unprofessional.

The Saturday session opened with a President's Report given by Brian Charlson, who thanked the members of the board for all their hard work, as well as the Convention Committee members for putting on yet another successful conference. He continued his report by urging current members of BSCB to try and bring in at least one new person as a member this year.

Brian's report was followed by Chris Devin, Chair of the Constitution and Bylaws Committee, Carl Richardson, Chair of the Nominating Committee, and Bob Hachey, Chair of the Resolutions Committee. They read their reports which would be acted upon later in the day.

We then heard from Ray Campbell, our national speaker. Ray is the secretary of ACB. He explained that there are three initiatives ACB is currently working on. The first one, is making sure that autonomous vehicles are going to be made accessible for people who are blind or visually impaired. That includes the regulations involved with licenses and other parts of the process. Through their advocacy, they've been able to partner with GM in order achieve that goal.

The second initiative is to make diabetic monitoring equipment accessible for people who are blind or visually impaired. Through their advocacy, they're hoping to reach Congress, as well as the manufacturers of those devices, with the hopes of forming a partnership to make that equipment accessible.

The third initiative is getting coverage for low vision devices under Medicare. They're hoping to introduce this piece of legislation into Congress so people with low vision are able to get the devices they need to live independently, through their Medicare insurance.

Ray then briefly mentioned the Monthly Monetary Support system, and how to sign up through ACB so a portion of your monthly contribution goes back to Bay State, as a way to raise money for the affiliate. He also plugged the Brenda Dillon Memorial Walk, now in its eleventh year, which takes place during the National Convention in the summer. Affiliates can form teams where their members will ask people for pledges, and a portion of their proceeds will go back to the affiliate. Participants can also sign up to be a virtual walker, if they want to join the event but are unable to physically attend.

Ray then briefly discussed the national auction, and how it will once again be held this summer during the Convention in Rochester. He also said Braille Forum raffle tickets can be purchased for \$50 a ticket, with the grand prize being \$5,000. People can split the cost of the ticket with friends, or an affiliate can purchase one and if they win, the money will go back to the affiliate.

Our next speaker was Deputy Commissioner John Oliveira, filling in for Commissioner David D’Arcangelo. The first thing he talked about is the Employment Now initiative, which is a program similar to Project Search, a national employment training model. This model is a year-long program including internships, job training and coaching. After two internship rotations, the participant will work with a job coach to make sure everything is going well. Meanwhile, MCB will still continue to provide technology, O&M, and other services to the participant as needed. He then briefly touched upon the MCB’s summer internship program, where they have generated about 900 internships over the last sixteen years of its run. MCB is also collaborating with Perkins, National Braille Press, and The Carroll Center for their upcoming employment fair.

Another project that MCB is working on is called Visions of Collaboration, which is a conference in its second year, targeted toward Teachers of the Visually Impaired and their pre-employment transition services providers. The goal of the conference is to give resources to the TVIs so they can inform and encourage their students about the employment and transitional opportunities available to them.

MCB has tried to increase awareness of the white cane, and in doing that, they collaborated with the Registry of Motor Vehicles. The RMV has billboards where they’re running various public service announcements, and during September and October, they’ll be running PSAs about the white cane law. They’ve also been putting this information in mailing inserts that are sent out when driver’s licenses are up for renewal.

They are also working to get more training out to consumers on various smart technologies such as iPhones and iPads, as well as Amazon Echo devices. MCB has even started a pilot program where they’re placing Echo devices in the homes of some consumers, compiling data on how they use the device to better understand how it may be helpful.

Next, we had Kim Charlson, who updated us on the programs and services of the Talking Book Library. She opened by discussing the Talking Book Library in Worcester; BSCB’s own Nona Haroyan serves on their advisory board. Kim went on to thank the volunteers that have been so vital to the Perkins library, in assisting with tasks such as book inspection and helping out in their recording studio and Braille Production Program. Altogether, the library uses about 6,000 hours of volunteer support.

In FY 2018, the Perkins library sent out about 478,000 books to its patrons in Massachusetts; that number includes all formats that they circulate. They also have a DVD program, touting it as the best audio described DVD program in the country. There are approximately 1,500 DVDs with description that are available to borrow. If you’re interested in getting audio described DVDs, you can reach out to the library and they will activate you as a part of the DVD program. They send out two DVDs at a time.

Kim recalled that the library’s budget for FY 2018 was roughly \$2,855,000, and that 7,717 patrons called in to request specific titles. They had 98% of what was requested. Kim also mentioned that the library has a new program with Bookshare where they’ll pay for your subscription. She said to contact either herself (kim.charlson@perkins.org) or Cory Kadlik (cory.kadlik@perkins.org) to get set up with the

Perkins-sponsored membership. So far, there are about 110 active users who are, on average, downloading roughly 900 books a month from Bookshare. The numbers continue to go up as time goes on. Kim closed by saying that the Perkins campus is a free Aira access location, as of January 2018.

The general contact numbers for the Perkins Library are (617) 972-7240, or 1 (800) 852 3133. Their general email is library@perkins.org.

Next, we heard from a panel led by Carl Richardson on guide dogs and cane use. The panel also included Jennifer Harnish, and Jeanie Fairley. At the time of this panel, Carl mentioned that GDUM currently has 63 members; they are an affiliate of Guide Dog Users, Inc. Carl, as a person who's not only blind but has hearing loss, talked about how helpful a guide dog has been from his perspective. As he's unable to hear certain things such as the ding of an elevator, the noise an escalator makes, and some traffic, he said having his dog is incredibly helpful in situations where he can't hear as well. Although his dog hasn't been trained for someone with a dual sensory loss, he has picked up on it; his two previous dogs did as well. He does tend to still use his cane during situations where it wouldn't be feasible to take his dog.

Jennifer Harnish is completely blind, and although she is primarily a guide dog user, she does use her cane fairly often. One of the reasons Jennifer loves having her dog, is that it's a good icebreaker when out in public. She's an introvert, and has found that people will usually approach her and talk to her when she's with her guide dog. She's also able to travel more quickly with her guide dog as opposed to her cane.

Jeanie Fairley is a first-time guide dog user, and her dog has helped her a lot in her new work environment, as well as giving her good companionship. She also said she feels more confident walking home from work at night with her dog, as it is a source of protection.

Carl pointed out that while a cane gives you tactile information about your environment, a dog takes you around everything until you get to where you're going. He also believes that the public generally has a different perception of guide dog users versus cane users, in that guide dog users usually aren't asked if they need help as often. One of the things to keep in mind if you're wanting to get a guide dog, is to keep up your cane travel skills. You also have to make time to take care of the dog. Sometimes, the dog may not always work out and they may need to be retired earlier than planned. There are a lot of different variables and the guide dog schools can always help.

Next, we heard from a panel led by Daisy Russell. The panel also included Lina Coral, and Jalys Ortiz. They discussed the importance of assistive technology in a college setting. Daisy is currently in her final semester of undergrad at Boston University, and she is President of the BSCB Students chapter. The technology she uses the most are her BrailleNote Apex, iPhone with VoiceOver, and laptop with JAWS. She is also teaching herself NVDA. The main apps that she uses on her phone are Seeing AI, and Be My Eyes. Seeing AI uses artificial intelligence to describe what the phone sees through its camera, while Be My Eyes pairs up a blind user with a random, sighted volunteer to assist via video call through the app. She has also used Aira as a guest while on Capitol Hill at the ACB Legislative Seminar. To learn more about these apps, check out <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/seeing-ai>, <https://www.bemyeyes.com/>, and <https://aira.io/>.

Lina Coral is a graduate student at Lesley University, getting her Masters in Clinical Psychology and Mental Health Counselling. The technology she uses most often are her BrailleNote Touch, iPhone with VoiceOver, and laptop with JAWS. She explained how she uses JAWS to upload and download

schoolwork online via Blackboard. When running into inaccessible PDF documents, she said Blackboard has a link to click for a more accessible version which she is then able to download as a BRF and read it on her notetaker. She usually switches between her notetaker and laptop when writing papers.

Jalys Ortiz is currently in her second year at UMASS Lowell but should be finishing her Bachelor's in Psychology in about a year and a half. She eventually hopes to work with children who have Autism. Similar to Lina and Daisy, Jalys uses a laptop with JAWS and is teaching herself NVDA. She also uses a Mac and iPhone with VoiceOver, as well as a BrailleNote Touch. She's been delegating a lot more tasks to her BrailleNote Touch as opposed to doing them on the computer, as she finds it easier to access information. These tasks include browsing the web, and using Google Docs with her peers for group assignments.

Despite all the technology available, Daisy and Lina do still use Perkins Brailers and slates and styli depending on their situations. Lina, for example, said she finds it easier to do math on her Brailier as opposed to using a BrailleNote Touch or computer.

We then had a panel discussion led by Jerry Berrier on what brings us joy. The panel also included Sharon Strzalkowski, Nona Haroyan, and Jennifer Harnish. Jerry started off by saying there are many things that can bring us joy, however we may sometimes have more difficulty finding joy than our sighted peers. Jerry finds joy in various sounds and smells, especially when he's outside; one of his enthusiasms is listening for various birdcalls and identifying them. He said if he hears a bird that hasn't been around in a long time, such as a crow, he finds that joyful. He also pointed out that, as human beings, we typically find joy in being of service to and interacting with others.

Sharon finds joy in her personal connections. The first one coming to mind is the connection she shares between herself and God, as well as the connections she has with people in her life. She also enjoys making music with her choir, as well as playing the recorder. One thing that she tries to do at the end of the day is think about the little interactions she had with people she may not see again, such as cab drivers or coffee shop employees.

Nona finds joy in the simple things, such as reading a book. She mentioned her involvement in the Worcester Talking Book Library, which stems from her love of reading. She also finds joy in being with friends and family, whether they're at a restaurant or someone's home. She mentioned the larger joyful moments in life such as marriage and children, but she really finds joy in the quieter, simple ones. She also mentioned that it's important to try and focus on joyful moments when dealing with sorrow, to help pull us out of those trying times.

Jennifer then weighed in from the perspective of a psychologist. The two chemicals that are related to joy and happiness in the mind are dopamine and serotonin. For example, when we smile or laugh, or even pet an animal, those chemicals increase. Jennifer finds joy in eating chocolate and pasta. On the other hand, cortisol is the chemical that increases when we're under a lot of stress. Jennifer touched on the previous night, when she was stuck in traffic and late to her panel. The panel closed by telling us all to try and find joy wherever we can. More often than not, we can be caught up in a lot of stress and may find it difficult to pick out the joy in life.

The Saturday afternoon session concluded with a BSCB business meeting. We adopted two resolutions which appear later in this issue of *BayLines*. Finally, we voted to re-elect the current slate of Directors: Rose Miller, Mary Haroyan, Dianna Leonard, and Cheryl Cumings. The business session concluded with a lively discussion of the future format and financing of the BSCB Conventions. A number of options were

brought to the table; there was significant support for keeping close to the current format, while others recognized the need for change due to financial considerations.

Saturday ended with the annual BSCB banquet, emceed by Brian Charlson. He regaled us with tales of his and Kim's move to Massachusetts about thirty-five years ago, and all the opportunities they've had over the years.

Kim Charlson, BSCB Awards Committee Chair, presented the 2019 awards along with her committee members, Mary Haroyan and Jerry Berrier. Kim mentioned that 2019 had more nominations in one year than the last four years combined. Jerry started off by presenting this year's Betty Gayzagian Advocacy Award to Bruce Howell. Bruce has had many careers in the past, ranging from a bank teller to an eBay power seller. Currently, he manages the Accessibility Department at The Carroll Center, where he attended a course back in 1998. Bruce helps agencies realize what they need to do in order to make their websites and other public content more accessible. After becoming legally blind, he also became a sailor, and served for nine years on the Needham Commission on Disabilities. He is also Chair of the Rehabilitation Council, which monitors MCB; Jerry also serves on that council, and says that Bruce does a wonderful job as Chair.

There were two recipients of the Community Access Award: Meg O'Brien from the Huntington Theatre Company, and Dan Manning and Alexa Rosenbloom from Greater Boston Legal Services, Inc. Kim presented the first award to Meg, citing the easy access we have to audio described theatre performances in Boston. Meg is really the one who makes it happen. Not only are there audio described performances, but they also provide discounted tickets, and playbills in accessible formats. Meg was very grateful for receiving the award, and wants everyone to be able to come and enjoy the art that the Huntington Theatre has to offer.

Mary presented the second award to Dan and Alexa, who unfortunately were unable to be here this year. They've worked with BSCB on a number of advocacy issues. As DeAnn Elliot, our Legislative Chair, said: "It takes a village to create accessibility." It takes the commitment and action of private companies, as well as the support of our issues by lawmakers; it also takes people with disabilities to advocate. Dan Manning is the Director of Litigation at Greater Boston Legal Services, and has been a strong supporter of working with BSCB. They helped lead our structured negotiation process with Mass Eye & Ear Infirmary, and remain involved even now, in the five-year implementation of the agreement. They've been very generous with providing referrals to BSCB and our Legislative Committee, and are doing this at no cost to the organization. In 2017, Dan, along with GDUM, sent a letter to the City of Cambridge that resulted in changes to taxi ordinances, which made it easier for guide dog users to access taxis. Greater Boston Legal Services has been a real ally in working with us to help improve the lives, and quality of living, for those with vision loss. Mary said she hopes we can have a more formal awards ceremony in the future to present the Community Access Award to Greater Boston Legal Services.

Last but not least, Kim presented the Outstanding Service Award to Sassy Outwater-Wright. Since 2017, Sassy has been the Director of the Massachusetts Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (MABVI). Prior to that, she started the VIBRANT program. Sassy grew up in both Southern California and Arizona, and lost her sight in early childhood due to retinoblastoma, which is a rare childhood cancer of the eye. Her cancer returned when she was twenty-five and she has since faced multiple brain surgeries and tumors. Sassy made her vocal debut at Carnegie Hall at the age of twenty. She also plays a multitude of instruments, and has sang and recorded with a number of musical artists. She studied the physics of acoustics and sound engineering at Arizona State University, finding the music industry largely

inaccessible. She has spent sixteen years in the digital accessibility field, consulting with small businesses to make their websites and products digitally accessible. Her specialty is in the user experience and how people with multiple disabilities use technology. Sassy has also been an advocate for children and families struggling with rare, pediatric cancer for nineteen years. Currently, she's studying to become an interfaith care hospice chaplain and trauma event response advocate. Sassy currently lives in Salem, MA with her husband and her guide dog. Her hobbies include reading, cooking, skiing, yoga, and sailing. She has been an advocate for people with disabilities who are also in the LGBTQ community, and women with disabilities. She believes there is no one right way to do vision loss.

Our banquet speaker was Robin Sitten. She worked at WGBH in the early days of audio description, from 1996 to 2000, and has worked for what is now known as Learning Ally, mainly reading aloud and recording textbooks. Currently, she is the Perkins eLearning Program Manager. She loved making her own radio shows with her friend in middle school, using a portable Panasonic recorder. Eventually, she was able to learn how to mix sounds together. The first film Robin ever described was *Rocky*, when she was twelve years old. She praised ACB for spearheading the move to push for audio description on Netflix and other streaming services. I myself am very glad to be able to access descriptive content on Netflix, and to live in a state where movie theaters providing audio description are in abundance.

Her work with audiobooks not only benefits people with visual impairments, but also those who have learning disabilities. Robin implored that technology is there to benefit everyone, no matter their ability. It also creates jobs, and Robin said she hopes more and more of those job roles will be filled by people with disabilities.

The evening ended with the BSCB auction, where over 70 donated items were sold. This year's auction generated \$3,075. Thanks to Nina Kagan for coordinating the auction, and thanks to all who donated.

Sunday morning began with a brief memorial led by Sharon Strzalkowski, to those we have lost or have been suffering illnesses since the 2018 convention. The two members we lost this year were Pat Mitchell, from the Boston area; and JoAnn Mszanski, who was very active in the Worcester area. We also lost Susan Laventure, among others. Susan was very much involved in ACB, and did some work with National Braille Press. Joanne was very intrepid. She did a lot of work with Catholic Charities over the years and was very much an advocate for transportation. She was also a bird enthusiast. She moved out to Western Mass for the final years of her life to be with her family.

Next, we heard from Tanja Milojevic, who spoke about her experience doing voice work for audio dramas. Tanja defines audio drama as "a play for the ears." Audio dramas have actually been around since the 1920s, and Tanja noted that we've come full-circle now by having smart devices in our homes such as Amazon Echo, or Google Home, where we can listen to things like podcasts. Podcasts are, more or less, the modern radio drama.

Tanja had her first experiences with audio drama when she was in high school. She'd checked out some audiobooks from her local library, and was surprised that they weren't just a single narrator, but an actual production complete with multiple voices, and even music. This piqued her interest, causing her to do some online research into the matter. Eventually she became involved with amateur voice acting. She's done both live shows and satellite work. She's even created various strategies of reading scripts, such as having them in braille on her Apex, or even using her screen reader as a teleprompter, which she said works surprisingly well.

Audio drama has become such a large part of Tanja's life. Even when she's doing something mundane, she'll put one on and just get lost in the stories. She also plugged ACB's phone system, where you can press 2 to access the audio drama channel, which streams 24/7. In terms of Tanja's equipment, she plugs her microphone into a preamp, which then goes into a computer. Her preferred recording software is Goldwave, but she will also use Sound Forge or Reaper. She mentions that Audacity is a great program to start out with, if you're interested in something that's both free and accessible with JAWS, NVDA, and VoiceOver. She was also involved in MCB's Voice Program, where she learned how to interview, edit, and produce radio recordings for air. The skills she learned have positively impacted her work in audio drama.

Tanja portrays Kora Reznik on Edict Zero, located at <https://edictzero.wordpress.com/>, as well as on iTunes and Spotify. You can even find them on your Amazon Echo device via TuneIn, or by enabling the AnyPod skill. She is also Whitney on What's the Frequency, which can be found at <https://wtfrequency.com/>. Her website, which has samples of her work, is at <https://tanjamvoice.wordpress.com/>.

Our next presenters were Carl Richardson, Karen Campbell, and Jerry Berrier, who held a panel on vision and hearing loss. Carl started off by explaining his definition of dual sensory loss, which is those who are both hard of hearing and visually impaired, even if both are minor. When combined, the dual loss is significant. Carl also shared some academic insights on the Deafblind community, mainly that there's a higher rate of depression compared to those with a single sensory loss. Communication access, travel, and daily living skills can also be more difficult with a dual sensory loss. There is also a sense of isolation. He mentioned that, long term, there's a higher rate of cognitive impairment over time.

Carl stated that if you have a dual sensory loss in Massachusetts but aren't yet legally blind, it's very difficult to find services. The Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing doesn't have the funding for rehabilitation training like MCB, as they're not a rehab agency. Unfortunately, people who are deaf/ hard of hearing but not yet classified as legally blind, tend to fall through the cracks. Carl hopes to lobby for more services in the future. Currently, he is in the process of learning braille, and is thinking of starting to learn sign language.

Karen Campbell is Chair of the Sight and Sound Impaired (SASI) Committee, which is affiliated with ACB on the national level. Some of their programs include sessions on mobility and Deafblind people, sessions on hearing aids and how to go about choosing them, and sessions on various coping strategies. They try to provide programming that they believe would be of interest to their members, and have worked with other affiliates to assist when asked. She also agreed with Carl on mobility being a huge issue for those with a dual sensory loss. Communicating with someone in a noisy room, for example, can be difficult.

Carl then mentioned DBCAN (Deafblind Community Access Network), of which he is on the advisory board. If you're hard of hearing and legally blind, and registered with MCB, DBCAN provides support specialists who have been trained to work with the Deafblind community. These support specialists can meet with you for sixteen hours a month, to help complete daily tasks: Whether it be running errands, shopping, reading the mail, social events, etc. If you are interested in applying, he recommends talking to your counsellor from MCB.

Jerry then spoke on some of the technology available to those with a dual sensory loss, as he has worked with individuals in the Deafblind community on this topic for quite a few years. He started off

with the iPad and Android tablets, which have become extremely popular among those with usable vision but no hearing; they have large screens, they're portable and have a long battery life, and they can be used to text and send emails. He then went on to mention Bluetooth hearing aids, which have been a huge help to those who have some usable hearing. When it comes to people who are completely Deafblind, nowadays they'll typically use an iPhone with a braille display to text and send emails. It's not perfect, but it's doable. Computers with braille displays are also often used. In terms of notification devices, Jerry mentioned vibrating signalers that can notify you of an incoming call, if the smoke alarm is going off, or if a baby is crying. Overall, the technology available now has been very advantageous to those who are Deafblind.

We then heard from David Morrison, who has spent the last ten years volunteering his time in the Assistive Device Center at Perkins. David became legally blind in 2001, and owes a lot of his success to MCB and the Massachusetts Association for the Blind peer support group in Quincy. Unfortunately, he was laid off in 2008 from his job of twenty-five years, but that led him to volunteer at Perkins. David currently lives in Watertown.

He told us he applied to the Assistive Device Center by accident, mistaking it from the Assistive Technology Center. The Assistive Device Center makes adaptive play tables and chairs for Perkins' Infant/Toddler program and their Elementary and Secondary programs, as well as people in the wider community. All of their work is done by a combination of paid staff: two occupational therapists, a part-time engineer, and about twenty-five volunteers. Volunteers include retirees like David, some parents of Perkins students, people who are interested in design, and those who may be between careers. They're also a teaching facility where occasionally occupational therapy grad students will intern for forty hours a week, for three months, in order to learn about the various devices.

The materials they use are a three-layered cardboard, wood, plastic, metal, foam, PVC pipe, fabrics and sewing materials, and paints and brushes. Play tables and chairs are mostly made from the aforementioned cardboard. The raw edges are taped, the cardboard itself is painted, and it's also decorated. The Assistive Device Center makes about 1,700 items a year for those in the community who need them.

In addition to the play tables and chairs, the center also makes bead curtains and sensory trays; the trays consist of squares with various textures. They also make pre-canes for toddlers. David closed by telling us that he finds his work at the Assistive Device Center both challenging and rewarding. He's worked there for eleven years and, although he loved his previous job, he loves volunteering all the same.

Our next presenter was DeAnn Elliot, Chair of the Legislative Committee. She very much emphasized that the committee's work has been a group effort. She updated our members on their progress with making the Common College Application accessible; unfortunately, they were unable to enter into structured negotiations. The Common App told the committee they would find another way to make it accessible by August 1st of this year, and the committee will follow up on that with their attorney.

DeAnn told us that the committee is in the second year of their five-year contract with Mass Eye & Ear Infirmary. She reminded us that we have the right to ask for materials in the format of our choice when making appointments with them. This includes discharge directions for surgeries. DeAnn encouraged us to reach out to her with any feedback on legislative or advocacy issues. Her phone number is (617) 576-2703, and her email is deann.elliott@gmail.com.

We then heard from Cheryl Cumings, who started off by telling us about the upcoming census. It's going to be online, and people should be receiving some sort of notification to complete it when it's available. Cheryl was also glad to have been one of the six people from Massachusetts in attendance at ACB's Legislative Seminar in D.C. She briefly recapped the three initiatives ACB has been lobbying for, which Ray Campbell mentioned earlier in this article. The last thing Cheryl touched upon is the voting survey that was sent out after the 2018 Midterm Elections. They're still working to compile a report, but they've found that people do truly appreciate the opportunity to vote independently, even though the machines could use some updating.

Next, we heard from Bob Hachey, who updated us on some bills in relation to past resolutions. The first bill deals with discrimination against disabled adults in family and juvenile court proceedings. As we're starting an odd-numbered year in a new legislative session, the bill has to go through the refiling process. The Senate number for this bill is S.983. The second bill is S.660, which is the health disparities bill. Should it pass, this would require the office of health equity to look into disparities against minorities and people with disabilities.

Finally, we heard from Carl Richardson, who mentioned the Architectural Access Bill (H.2029), which is being filed by Representative Moran. Should it pass, this bill would streamline the ADA architectural guidelines and the Massachusetts guidelines, making them the same and hopefully rid any confusion. Housing and places of employment would have to comply with the ADA, making them more accessible to people with disabilities.

We then heard from Rick Morin, who gave us an update on the BSCB Treasury. He informed us that we're currently carrying a deficit of \$5,000, which is consistent with years' past. He stated that he and his fellow board members will do everything in their power to mitigate financial impacts and make the best decisions they can.

Rick then moved on to give a transportation update. He plugged the website for the new Riders' Transportation Access Group (R-TAG), which is at <https://mbta.com/rtag>. Rick is also a co-chair of R-Tag, and BSCB has been instrumental in restructuring how the organization works. The board is made up of half consumers, and half organizations. The organizations represented are Mass Senior Action Council, Boston Center of Independent Living, Disability Policy Consortium, and, of course, BSCB. R-TAG usually meets every other week, and they had a general meeting on February 28th, which had a good turnout. One commitment that Rick is making to everyone, is that R-TAG isn't going to get "hijacked" by The RIDE; however, R-TAG will have a strong and powerful committee and presence when it comes to The RIDE. They don't focus exclusively on The RIDE, but they do spend a good amount of time on issues concerning it. Rick projected that, by the summer, we'll be seeing new Sedans on the road when taking The RIDE, as they had enough in their budget to purchase 118 of them. R-TAG members were consulted during that process. Rick invited us all to attend an R-TAG meeting. Transportation is something he is very passionate about.

The Better Bus Project currently has 47 proposals which affect 63 bus lines. Any of those proposals may impact ADA or premium paratransit service. Rick urged us to take a look at those proposals at <https://betterbus.mbta.com/proposals>. Unfortunately, the time to provide feedback has closed prior to writing this article. He then touched upon the fare increase. The MBTA is actually applying different percentage increases across different modes; local and outer express bus aren't increasing, for example. Where the commuter rail is concerned, the increase is fairly high. The RIDE's fare increase, Rick noted, is the highest of any in terms of out-of-pocket pay. An ADA ride is going up 20¢ one-way, or 40¢ roundtrip.

Premium service will increase 35¢ one-way, or 70¢ roundtrip. Rick also directed us to <https://afc2.mbta.com/>, which is a website that lists the various means of fare collection used by the MBTA. Rick's contact information can be found in the Board List at the back of *BayLines*.

David Kingsbury, Chair of the Publications Committee, gave a brief report on what they're up to. He mentioned Council Connection, which is a great source of information and will hopefully soon be offered as a podcast. *BayLines Express* celebrated its third anniversary in February of this year; David joked about having a staff party where he celebrated with a cupcake and some candles. The BSCB website is up and running, and has a good amount of content on it. The link is <https://acbofma.org/>. The committee is also hoping to have a glossier brochure available to distribute to potential donors, such as Lions Clubs. David's contact information can be found in the Board List at the back of *BayLines*.

Mary Haroyan, Chair of the Membership Committee, spoke next. What they've been doing recently is some outreach to BSCB members-at-large, gathering their thoughts. She hopes to eventually hold a conference call for members-at-large to come together via phone, which has generated some interest. They hope to plan something like that for later in the year.

BSCB has two new chapters: Central Mass, and Boston. All other chapters are doing well, and Mary hopes to eventually develop a Western Mass chapter. She has also offered to do outreach to potential members, if someone knows a person who would be interested in BSCB or learning more about the organization.

Mary also reminded us of the Philmore phone system, where contact information for BSCB's chapter Presidents are listed. The number is (773) 572-6312. Chapter contacts are under option 4. Mary's contact information can be found in the Board List at the back of *BayLines*.

We then heard from Rose Miller, Chair of the Social Committee. The committee is currently planning a trip to the Clock Museum in North Grafton, which may have already happened prior to this issue's release. We hope they had a wonderful time! Rose said the committee hopes to plan another bowling trip. Rose's contact information can be found in the Board List at the back of *BayLines*.

We then heard from Frank Ventura, Chair of the Convention Committee. Frank thanked his committee made up of Rick Morin, Nona Haroyan, Sharon Strzalkowski, Howard Sumner, Tim Cumings, Nina Kagan, Steve Dresser, Jerry Berrier, Lee Berrier, David Kingsbury, Ann Donna, and Dianna Leonard. He also thanked the volunteers who helped make the convention run so smoothly. He hopes to get feedback from those who don't attend the Spring Conference, as the committee is looking into the future of the event going forward. Frank's contact information can be found in the Board List at the back of *BayLines*.

Our final presenters were Frank Ventura, Tim Cumings, and Jeanette Kutash, who spoke on VIBUG (Visually Impaired Blind User Group). VIBUG is the oldest technology group for visually impaired people in the country. They have monthly meetings at MIT, hosting various presenters. Every month, VIBUG holds a question and answer session, where they pose questions that anyone in the audience can answer. It's the collective knowledge in the room that allows people to be successful in using technology. Members may attend meetings online, and the cost of membership is \$20 per year. To learn more about them, visit their website at <https://vibug.org>.

Frank started off by talking about the ever-changing landscape of screen reading and magnification software. He pointed out that it's much better nowadays in terms of operating systems being accessible right out of the box; there isn't as much a need to install third-party software such as JAWS, Window-

Eyes, or ZoomText, as there may have been ten years ago. Both Mac and Windows computers are pretty accessible right from the beginning, with VoiceOver and Zoom (Mac), or Narrator and Magnifier (Windows). However, this ends up benefitting us in the long run, as there is more pressure being put on the third-party companies to improve their software.

We then heard from Jeanette, who talked about braille displays. She advised us to research the price point and what the display could do to benefit us before jumping in and buying one. Don't just buy a product based on someone else's recommendations. She started off by talking about Braille Me; it's a 20-cell display made by Innovision, that NBP is currently selling. This is unique in the braille keyboard being in front of the display, as opposed to behind it. It's also based on a six-dot cell, and includes panning keys. The controls for navigating such things like file menus are a little different than the average display; it uses micro-USB for a power source and has an SD reader. It's priced at \$595. Unfortunately, it doesn't currently support BRF or BRL files. Jeanette's personal favorite is Actilino, a 16-cell display produced by HandyTech Products and sold by HIMS. It allows for USB and Bluetooth connections, and is based on an eight-dot cell. Jeanette praised its Active Tactile Control, which allows the user to move their hands across the display; when you're at the end of a line, it will automatically move to the next line and start at the beginning. It is priced at \$2,795.

Jeanette also touched on the Focus Blue 5th Gen, put out by Freedom Scientific. It's available in 14, 40, and 80-cell displays, and based on an eight-dot cell. It's a refreshable display that Jeanette doesn't believe is the best for notetaking, but can get the job done. She uses it primarily for braille music files. It is priced anywhere from \$1,295 to \$7,995.

The final display she talked about is the Polaris, which is a 32-cell display sold by HIMS. It works with Android files and has both USB and Bluetooth support. It is priced at \$5,795.

We then heard from Tim Cumings, who updated us on iDevices. Tim currently works at Perkins, teaching people how to use an iPhone. He praised the iPhone for being an incredibly user-friendly, accessible device, and also noted that Android is striving to try and keep up. The iPhone is great in that there are a lot of apps available for it, such as BARD Mobile, Seeing AI, Aira, Be My Eyes, etc., all of which provide helpful tools and resources to those in our community. For new iPhone users, Tim suggested taking it slow, asking yourself what you want to accomplish in any given day and learning one step at a time, as it makes the process less intimidating. He said VIBUG is constantly talking about the iPhone and new, useful apps.

Finally, David Kingsbury plugged the SR training available through the Commission. This program will only be available up until the end of June, and is a rare opportunity for consumers to have MCB provide them with free iPhone training. MCB doesn't consider the iPhone eligible under regular VR training. David Morrison also plugged VIBRANT, the free, peer-support group for technology. VIBRANT can be found through the Brookline Senior Center. They also meet once a month at the Watertown Public Library, as well as in Natick and other locations. To learn more about VIBRANT, visit <https://www.mabcommunity.org/mabvi/living-with-vision-loss/assistive-technology.html>.

BSCB Resolutions for 2019

BSCB RESOLUTION 2019-01: Massachusetts Commission for the Blind Budget

WHEREAS, assistive technology such as screen readers, computers, SMART phones, and portable reading devices allow blind and visually impaired persons greater independence and improved quality of life, and;

WHEREAS, the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) provides assistive technology equipment and training through its Community Services Account, and;

WHEREAS, this account continues to serve an ever-expanding population of blind and visually impaired residents of the Commonwealth, most of whom are senior citizens, and;

WHEREAS, the FY2019 final state budget included a provision whereby at least \$300,000 was to be appropriated for assistive technology services, and;

WHEREAS, the Governor's FY 2020 budget failed to include this appropriation in the Community Services line item and the total appropriation for Community Services was reduced from an FY2019 total of \$6,711,917 to an FY2020 proposal of \$6,074,905;

NOW, THEREFORE: BE IT RESOLVED that the Bay State Council of the Blind in convention assembled on this 9th day of March, 2019 in Burlington, Massachusetts requests the Massachusetts Legislature to appropriate an additional \$250,000 over and above the Governor's proposal in MCB's Community Services Account (line item 4110-1000.)

Resolution 2019-02: Braille and Talking Book library

WHEREAS, the Perkins Braille and Talking book Library (Watertown), and the Worcester Talking Book Library, provide vital reading materials to people who are blind and have other print disabilities in Massachusetts, and;

WHEREAS, The Perkins and Worcester Libraries provide access to audio, braille, and large print books and magazines, newspapers by phone and online, and other accessible reading materials of local interest, not available from any other source, and;

WHEREAS, operational costs for the Perkins and Worcester Libraries continue to increase due to usage and demand, and;

WHEREAS, the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners has recommended a three percent funding increase for the Perkins Braille & Talking Book Library and the Worcester Talking Book Library for FY 20 which would allow continued service delivery to the existing 25,000 borrowers and increased outreach to the estimated 100,000 eligible borrowers who are not aware of the program;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Bay State Council of the Blind in convention assembled this ninth day of March 2019 in Burlington, Massachusetts, asks that the legislature appropriate an additional \$90,806 in the Perkins Braille & Talking Book Library and the Worcester Talking Book Library accounts as follows:

Line Item 7000-9406 (Watertown) \$77,645; and

Line Item 7000-9402 (Worcester) \$13,251; resulting in an FY2020 appropriation for the Perkins Library of \$2,665,800 and for the Worcester Talking Book Library of \$468,217 -- to enable the two libraries in Watertown and Worcester to continue to conduct important outreach and meet the accessible reading needs of the current 25,000 patrons utilizing this specialized service.

So I Wrote a Book by David Kingsbury

In April, I had a book published on formatting Word documents using screen reader programs. Entitled *Format Your Word Documents with JAWS and NVDA: A Guide for Students and Professionals*, it was jointly published by my employer, The Carroll Center for the Blind, and the National Braille Press. The whole experience of writing it, having it professionally edited, and published has been gratifying and fun. I enjoy writing and love my work at The Carroll Center as an assistive technology instructor. So about a year ago, I put two and two together and thought it might be an interesting challenge to attempt writing a book on some tech topic.

I train people on the use of screen readers to work in association with the Microsoft Office suite, web browsers, and a few other programs. I also do VoiceOver training with iPhones and iPads. I wasn't interested in writing about VoiceOver because this is already well covered in books and podcasts.

Indeed, for some time, I have thought it curious that there is no shortage of tech books and podcasts on all-things-Apple for blind and vision-impaired audiences, while there is significantly less material on PC-related topics. I'm not sure why this is. Maybe Apple stuff is inherently sexier than PC stuff. Maybe iPhones are more strongly identified with fun things like music and movies, while PCs are mired in the humdrum worlds of work and school.

Whatever the reason, I perceived a gap and have tried to fill it. I chose to write about formatting Word documents for a few reasons. I often instruct vision-impaired adults who have been composing Word documents for years, but are unsure whether their documents look right. I lost my vision 15 years ago, have been in a learning process ever since, and understand what they are talking about. I know what mistakes they are making because I have made them myself.

I also train high school and college students. Back in the horse-and-buggy days when I was a student, I had a manual typewriter, a tube of white-out, and a few rudimentary formatting rules. Nowadays, composing and editing a document is a million times easier on a computer, but formatting requirements are more complicated. Students have an alphabet soup of style guides they need to know about. When a college freshman I was working with a few years ago asked me how to format an APA paper, my response was "What is an APA paper?" Clearly, I needed to catch up with the times. When I started looking into this, as well as the other two most common style guides (MLA and Chicago), I couldn't find anything on how blind students could "translate" sighted guidance into something they could do on their own.

As I write in the book, "Lack of 'translation' can be a major stumbling block. If you are blind or vision-impaired, the guidance on how to format documents using one of the style guides is often maddeningly just beyond reach. A YouTube video presenter will instruct you to 'click this and drag it here,' or tell you

'here's how your APA table is supposed to look.' End of explanation." A major objective of this book is to level the formatting playing field for vision-impaired students.

So what topics does the book cover? First off, no previous knowledge of Word is needed, while rudimentary knowledge of JAWS or NVDA is assumed. Among the topics: using ribbon menus; font, paragraph, and margin settings; adding headers that adhere to academic style guide requirements; headings and styles; constructing tables; footnotes and endnotes; managing citations and bibliographies; and tools for proofreading and review. An appendix with a list of keystrokes is included for reference. You can also download a set of files with practice exercises. The book is available in Braille, eBraille, DAISY, and Word formats.

One other reason I wrote the book: I never want to stop learning. It's one way to remain in denial that I am getting old. I refuse to ask for senior discounts at Appleby's or Dunkin Donuts. Maybe if I could market this book as a font of eternal youth, I could achieve blockbuster sales on the scale of Harry Potter or "Game of Thrones." If you too seek eternal youth, the price tag of 18 to 20 dollars is a real steal. Order now before it's too late at <http://www.nbp.org/ic/nbp/WORD-FORMAT.html?id=M8Kz6eGi>

Beware Energy Scams **by Bob Hachey**

(Editor's note: We received the following advisory from attorney Alexa Rosenbloom of greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS). BSCB and GBLS have a long history of working together on a wide variety of accessibility issues.)

If any energy company representative calls your client, shows up at their door, or approaches them in a store parking lot offering to save them money on gas and electric bills, strongly urge your client to turn them away.

In 1997, the state deregulated the electric utility market and allowed for a competitive supply. The traditional utility companies — National Grid, EverSource, Unitil — still deliver the electricity and send out bills but the supplier can be another company (known as a competitive energy supply company or CES). Examples of such companies are SFE Energy, Provider Power, and Xoom Energy, among many others.

While competition sounds like a good thing, in reality it has not been. As the AG's office has found, Massachusetts consumers in the competitive supply market paid \$176.8 million more than they would have paid if they had received electric supply from their electric company during the two-year period from July 2015 to June 2017. Moreover, low-income customers make up a disproportionately large share of the competitive supply market and have lost even more from competitive supply than other consumers.

Not only are low-income customers losing more from this industry, they are being targeted along with people of color and immigrants. The CES companies are using aggressive and deceptive sales tactics to sign up these individuals, sometimes without their even knowing so. For example, they are going door-to-door and pressuring vulnerable consumers into contracts based on misinformation and false

promises of lower prices. Worse, they are making it extremely difficult (and expensive) for consumers to get out of their contracts.

Please make sure the individuals and families you work with are on the lookout for unscrupulous solicitors. If someone comes to an individual or family's door asking to look at their utility bill, they are almost definitely from an alternative supplier rather than from a traditional utility company, and your clients should be very wary.

Households that think they may already have been switched should look at their bill (it'll have a spot where it lists a customer's supplier) or contact their utility company to ask. If you learn of any low income households who have been affected in any way by this industry (pressured to switch, have switched, etc.), you can take the following steps:

- Refer the family or individual to Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS), which is currently open to taking cases in their service area. Call GBLS' main number: 617-371-1234.
- If outside of the GBLS main service area, have the family or individual contact your local Legal Services or call the Department of Public Utilities: DPU's main number is (617) 305-3500.

For more information (but not for direct client referral), contact Alexa Rosenbloom at ARosenbloom@gbls.org.

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