

“Sightings”

Wyoming Council of the Blind

<https://www.wycb.info/>

307 629-1916

Summer, 2023

President’s Message

From Cheryl Godley, PhD

Greetings WyCB Members,

Since being in the position of President for WyCB (beginning September, 2022), much has happened. In this message, I will update you, and tell you where we’re headed.

We were active in getting the word out about White Cane Awareness Day by contacting news outlets describing the purpose and importance of white canes. Two articles were published in Oil City News, one of which featured Melissa Walker, an Orientation and Mobility instructor in Casper. Our thanks go out to her for the wonderful job she did in explaining white canes and their importance to BVI (Blindness/Visual Impairment), as well as for the general population and drivers.

Immediately following that event, we were notified that we were on the list for a major fundraiser event with Thankful Thursday on April 6, 2023. Since the time we found out about it, our Board and WyCB members have been working hard to put together an incredible array of baskets of great merchandise for auction. We were all geared up and ready to go when Casper received record amounts of snow on April 3 and 4. This blizzard forced us to postpone our Thankful Thursday event to some date in September, or maybe in October of this year. When we have the date set we will immediately post it on our website WyCB.info. The list of the merchandise baskets we will be auctioning off is also on our website. Take a look. It's pretty impressive!

I am happy to announce that Debra Thompson of Rock Springs has agreed to take on the task of managing our scholarship this year. As you know, granting a scholarship to an individual with BVI has been an important focus for our organization for years. We look forward to getting the word out about its availability. Please let others know about it. The application will be posted on WyCB.info. However, if you or someone you know would like a paper application, don't hesitate to contact us at our phone number 307 629-1916.

Thank you Debra!

A change in our Board is that D'Anna Feurt of Cheyenne resigned from her position as Treasurer in June. D'Anna has served our organization since 2018. She has done a fabulous job for us and we will miss her. She assured us that she will remain a part of the organization, but we are not yet certain whether she will remain on our Board.

Thank you D'Anna, for all of your hard work and expertise.

Tom Smyth, of Casper, will be stepping in as interim Treasurer until our convention this September. If someone else is interested in being Treasurer, please let us know. We are happy to consider any candidate. We will hold our vote on who becomes Treasurer at our convention in September. And while I am on the subject, if anyone is interested in being on the Board, please don't be shy and let us know. We would love to welcome new leaders. Even if you do not want to be on the Board, we are always eager to have help on our committees.

As for where WyCB is going, our goal is to Revive, Strive, and Thrive. We will do this by continuing to increase our membership and by supporting the activities of WyCB: scholarship award, conference, advocacy, and fundraising. Also, we seek to expand our reach to the BVI community

through creating a Resource Page on WyCB.info that identifies resources and available services through private and state programs. These may include resources for learning canine and/or dog guide mobility training, education/programs for learning living skills for the blind, learning Braille, identify sources for the latest and newest Assistive Technology, and so on. Additionally, we would like to expand our reach to the younger community with BVI through potentially developing a Facebook platform with hopes that younger people may find it to be an effective means of communication and support between individuals.

Above all, the focus of our organization is to get the word out there that we are here, and to encourage membership.

We are hoping to start a group that meets regularly to socialize, learn, support, and encourage each other, and whatever else the group decides to do. The hope is that this group will build a stronger community of individuals with BVI within Wyoming, and hope that this may also lessen feelings of isolation that people may experience. Also, it is hoped that in having these laid-back get-togethers, other activities may sprout from interactions and conversations. It would be fun to get activities going wherever they take us in Wyoming, so that we may build our community. Anyone is welcome.

I am pleased to announce that our annual convention will be held on September 9, 2023 at Wyoming Independent Living in Casper. They have generously offered their space for our meeting. We have a great line-up of informative and interesting speakers this year. Read on to learn more.

If you know other individuals who have a visual impairment or who are blind, please invite them to join us! Or if you know anyone who has an interest in the purpose and activities of WyCB, please invite them to join us.

WyCB Announces New Program

The Wyoming Council of the Blind is proud to announce a new program. This program is in the form of a teleconference chat call and has been appropriately named “WyCB Roundup.”

This teleconference call will be initiated on July 26, beginning at 7:00 PM and will last an hour. It is our intent to hold “WyCB Roundup” on the fourth Wednesday of each month at the same time. Our goal is to provide another means of reaching out to the 12,000 or so BVI individuals within Wyoming, thus allowing them to get/stay connected and informed.

The “WyCB Roundup” can be accessed by calling 605 472- 5395 and then entering the Access Code of 569373 when prompted, followed by the “#” sign.

Each call will be facilitated by one of the WyCB Board members. We will try to provide some structure to the calls by initiating each session with a suggested topic, but any and all subjects will be welcomed. It is our intent to provide attendees with new and useful information each time we get together. We are excited to begin this new program and welcome the opportunity to connect with as many BVI Wyoming residents as possible. Please mark your calendars and plan to join us and participate on the 26th of July!

Overview of 2023 Convention

Our annual convention is scheduled for Saturday, September 9. It will be an all-day affair (8:30 AM to 5:00 PM with a lunch break 12:15 to 1:00) featuring presentations which will explore this year’s theme of “Challenging Ourselves.”

As with our get together last year, we will again be presenting this year’s convention in a hybrid format, with some folks attending in person and others via a virtual Zoom Call. Those attending in person will gather in the conference room in the

Wyoming Independent Living office located at 305 W. 1st Street, Casper, WY. Those choosing to attend virtually will be provided the Zoom link information upon receipt of their registration form.

The registration fee for this year's convention will be the very reasonable amount of \$20.00 per attendee. Those attending at the WIL office will be responsible for their own lunches, whether brought from home or from nearby eateries. Light refreshments and gift bags will be provided. Attendees will also be treated to four raffle drawings during the day-long event.

After the opening pledge, prayer, and brief housekeeping announcements, emcee Tom Lealos, WyCB VP, will introduce the speakers who will provide us with very interesting and useful presentations following our convention theme of "Challenging Ourselves."

It is our intent to encourage attendees to embrace new ideas and to think outside the lines as they confront the challenges of being blind or visually impaired in today's society.

Our first presenter will be Jennifer D'Alessandro, a Vision Consultant for Vision Outreach Services (VOS) who works out

of the Powell office. She began her career of 23 years as a Special Education Teacher and has been with VOS for the last five years. She provides services to the BVI community in northern Wyoming with a tremendous amount of energy and passion.

Jennifer will give us an update on the various services that VOS provides, including the Senior Blind and American Printing House programs.

Our next presenter will impress upon us the importance and the mechanics of Orientation and Mobility (O & M) training. Melissa Walker began her career as a Certified O&M Specialist (COMS) in Washington DC and now resides in Casper. She balances her career with being a full-time wife and mom of three youngsters. Melissa focuses on creating accessible opportunities for BVI individuals and educating society on the needs of the visually impaired.

Our third presenter is Ryan Rausch, an Occupational Therapist and Co-Manager of Wyoming Assistive Technology Resources (WATR) in Laramie. His broad range of positions as an Occupational Therapist and his passion for Assistive Technology allows him to focus on improving the everyday lives of BVI individuals and others in Wyoming. It must be

mentioned that he is also a Certified Assistive Technology Professional (ATP) who provides technology and services in accordance with the highest degree of International Standards.

Ryan will discuss some not-so-techy alternatives for some of the devices we might use every day. It is NOT mandatory that we keep up with the latest technological bells and whistles. He will provide some options.

Our Scholarship Chair, Debra Thompson, will present our annual scholarship to a worthy recipient during the lunchbreak.

The first presentation after lunch will provide an opportunity to learn about some other ACB Affiliates. WyCB is just one of over 70 state and special interest affiliates within our parent organization American Council of the Blind. You may want to check out some of these groups and consider becoming a member. This presentation will spotlight only two.

Zelda Gebhard from North Dakota, will describe the Council of Citizens With Low Vision International (CCLVI). Zelda is the Vice President of this premier Low Vision group and is a Director of ACB's Board of Publications (BOP), the group that oversees the production of "The Braille Forum" each month.

Terry Pacheco from Maryland will explain what the Alliance for Aging and Vision Loss (AAVL) is and does. She is very involved with AAVL and sits on the ACB Board as a Director. Both of these organizations are well respected within the ACB community and are very active throughout the year. Additionally, both Zelda and Terry are well versed in ACB activities and have many years of experience as leaders in their respective state affiliates.

Our last presentation of the day will allow you to learn about Safety Education Empowering Defense (SEED), a Strive4You Program. This presentation will explore the many aspects of maintaining our personal safety while in a public setting. Laurel Henry, the VOS Vision Consultant in Casper, with her “cowgirl-up” childhood as a Wyoming ranch girl, a seventeen year career as a social worker, vision consultant, and O&M Specialist, combined with her strong belief in high expectations and positive view of vision loss and blindness makes her ideally suited to give this presentation.

We will close the convention with our annual Membership Business Meeting facilitated by our President Cheryl Godley. This will feature short reports by the various committee chairs, a financial report, and an election of some officers and

directors. An open post-convention discussion will follow our adjournment.

Please mark your calendars and plan to attend this year's convention, either in person or virtually. Feel free to bring along family members and friends. All attendees will be asked to register and pay the \$20.00 fee.

Registration packets will be sent out separately in early August. Please watch your mail.

“Challenging Ourselves”

By Sherry Leinen, WyCB Board Member and also a member of the amazing blind/visually impaired community.

I've been thinking a lot lately about our convention theme “Challenging Ourselves” and what that really means. My vision loss was very sudden, basically there one minute and almost gone the next. Both of my eyes had massive strokes due to uncontrolled high-pressure, which was caused by the medication used to treat another eye disorder. After several surgeries and being put on every glaucoma medicine available they were able to stabilize my eyes. I was now considered

legally blind and my life had been completely turned upside down. I definitely went through the stages of grief. I really didn't know what I was supposed to do now.

The hardest thing for me was that I had to give up the thing that I loved, which was my job. I worked for Headstart as a preschool teacher and a home visitor. I had 12 different families from two counties that I worked with. The kids went to preschool twice a week and then I did home visits with each family twice a month. Since I worked in two different counties a large portion of my job involved driving. One of the hardest parts about losing my vision was that I was unable to drive.

Wyoming Child and Family Development would not provide me with the accommodations I needed. They basically told me that it would be easier for them to find somebody to take over my position. This sent me into a little bit of a downward spiral and I really didn't know what I was supposed to do now. I didn't really know how to function with low vision.

Before I left my job a friend of a coworker asked me if I'd ever heard of Wyoming Council of the Blind. I hadn't, so I decided to look them up. I found out that they were having an upcoming convention with speakers and vendors and decided to go check them out. Going to that convention and meeting

people who were blind and visually impaired changed my life. I don't remember the speaker's name but I do remember the message. They basically said that your life isn't over when you become blind or visually impaired, you just have to learn how to do things in a different way.

Start with the small things and continue to build your confidence until you feel like you can do anything. To this day not only am I a board member for Wyoming Council of the Blind, but I am also an advocate for people with disabilities in the state of Wyoming. I do everything that I did before, sometimes I have to make little adjustments to make it work. I've even tried a few new things like rock climbing. It was a little scary and hard at first, but now I absolutely love it. I tell people that "The only thing I can't do is legally drive."

I try to challenge myself every day. Don't stop doing the things that you love just because you think you can't do them anymore. If you don't think you can do it by yourself then ask a friend or family member to help you. There are organizations here in Wyoming that can help you. WyCB, VOS, and WIL are always ready to help. I have learned a lot of great coping skills from all of them and met some amazing people.

I want to share with you some of the most well-known visually impaired athletes and their stories. Marla Runyan is a legally blind marathon runner. She has won three national championships in the women's 5000 meters.

Erik Weihenmayer became the first blind person to reach the summit of Mount Everest. He also wrote his autobiography, "Touch the Top of the World: A Blind Man's Journey to Climb Farther Than the Eye Can See." He maintains an active lifestyle as an acrobat skydiver, long-distance biker, marathon runner, skier, mountaineer, ice climber, and rock climber.

Trischa Zorn is a US swimmer who has been blind since birth. She has won 55 medals (41 gold, 9 silver and 5 bronze), making her the most successful athlete in the history of the Paralympic Games.

Craig MacFarlane lost his vision at age 2 ½. His athletic instinct kicked in at an early age and by age 8 he had won his first wrestling tournament. Craig went on to compete in a wide variety of sports and earned a whopping 103 gold medals in wrestling, track and field, swimming, snow skiing, water skiing and golfing.

Craig Aucoin was always active in sports. Upon losing his sight at age 16, he turned to sports as a way to regain his confidence and independence. He now participates in triathlons and has completed a bicycle trek across Canada. Now I'm not saying that you have to go out and climb a mountain. What I am saying is that if there is something that you love to do and you stopped because you didn't think you could do it anymore, maybe give it another try. Cook your favorite food, plant a garden, or just go for a walk.

We need to continue "Challenging Ourselves." Never give up!

Interim Treasurer's Message

My name is Tom Smyth and I look forward to helping WyCB serve the BVI community of Wyoming. I have lived in Casper for thirty years and have worked with Cheryl Godley for twenty of them. I have enjoyed helping Tom Lealos put together the last few issues of "Sightings." I accepted serving as Treasurer to lend a helping hand. As President Cheryl Godley stated in her President's Message, if someone else wants to be Treasurer please let the board know in time for our vote on officers at our September convention. I am not trying to unload my duties, I'm committed to helping WyCB, but I would willingly step aside if someone else wants to be Treasurer.

A Call For Articles

If you have an idea for an article for our semi-annual newsletter “Sightings” we would love to hear about it. We have set up an email link at the top of our website WyCB.info. Just submit your article or article idea to Editor@WyCB.info and we will review it for possible inclusion in our next newsletter. Topics could be upcoming events, solutions to challenges of living with BVI, important vision related news, or anything you may think would be of interest to the WyCB community. We will promptly get in contact with you regarding your submitted article idea.

In closing we want to remind you to save our phone number, 307 629-1916. Feel free to contact us with any problem, idea, useful comment, or even a constructive criticism you have relating to your vision loss. We will do our best to help you.