# National Federation of the Blind

# 2022 National Convention

# General Session II

## July 8, 2022

## 1:30 p.m. – 5:41 p.m. CT

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MARK RICCOBONO: The afternoon session is now in order!

[Applause]

BENNETT: We want to give a door prize away. How about that? Does anybody want a door prize?

Okay. We got another Federation fights inflation door prize of 200 bucks. And it is Gaylon Tootle of Georgia! Stand up if you're here! No Gaylon. Okay. We'll draw another one.

Christine Boone of Nebraska. Christine, you better be here. We know you.

Okay. We got her.

MARK RICCOBONO: You got her! Okay. Great!

(Gavel pounds).

We will now move to the presidential report. During the past year, the strength of our determination and the power of our togetherness in the organized blind movement has transformed our challenges into opportunities. The blind of America have faced continued discrimination, limited access to critical information, and overwhelming barriers throughout society. These obstacles have persisted in a nation where all people have been isolated and where many systems have been significantly disrupted.

But in the midst of these difficult times, the element that has made all the difference to the success of blind people has been our continued commitment to working together.

[Applause]

We have not given up; we have continued to connect. We have not settled for second-class status; we have continued to protect our rights and responsibilities as Americans. We have not let others define us; we have continued to raise expectations.

We are the National Federation of the Blind!

[Applause]

[Cheering]

Cower collective action has been essential in providing blind people with equal access as responses to the coronavirus have been developed. A primary example this year has been our effort to overcome the complete lack of accessibility to the federal government's COVID-19 at-home testing program. Nonvisual access to COVID testing has been a persistent disappointment since March of 2020. But when the President of the United States announced government support for free at-home tests in December 2021, we recognized an opportunity for change. We initially reached out to government agencies to determine if, for once, accessibility had been planned in advance. When we found that no agency had been given responsibility for the program, we wrote directly to the President on January 3, 2022.

In the meantime, we utilized Federation resources to provide immediate support to blind people. We quickly put government testing information on NFB-NEWSLINE along with other COVID resources we had curated over the past 2 years. We purchased and evaluated the majority of the tests being distributed by the government, as well as other commercially available tests, and shared objective reports detailing the inaccessibility with the relevant government and industry officials. Only two companies built some degree of accessibility into their products and actively worked with us to make additional improvements. Let's raise a cheer for Cue Health and Ellume!

[Applause]

Cue Health also made free testing units available to each of our Federation training centers and national headquarters so our blind staff could independently manage COVID testing in our programs.

[Applause]

We subsidized the use of Aira service for COVID at-home testing during the spring of this year. In addition, we assisted affiliates in leveraging resources of local Health Departments to advocate for accessibility.

Our letter to the White House was followed by many others that we sent to key federal agency officials and all of the federal contractors that we found were contributing to the program. Federation members and our partners also raised awareness of the issue in social media. The White House got the message.

[Applause]

And they began regular confidential meetings with us to seek our proposed solutions for blind Americans. The first public statement from the White House on this topic was one released exclusively to the Federation for the Great Gathering-In of our virtual Washington Seminar in February. Our organization was asked to be a partner in the disability information and access line to guide their response in assisting with the free, government-provided at-home tests. One direct result of this work was that we evaluated and assisted with the launch of the first effort targeted specifically to blind Americans related to the distribution of at-home tests, which was made public just a couple of weeks ago.

We have also been invited to serve as an expert contractor in the Rapid Access Rehabilitation of Diagnostics, RADx program, at the National Institutes of Health, which seeks to speed innovation in the development, commercialization, and implementation of technologies for COVID-19 testing.

Due to our efforts, accessibility is now a key value of their work.

[Applause]

We can all be proud of these very positive results from our COVID-19 advocacy efforts. By working together, we have forever enhanced the accessibility of at-home testing products through the National Federation of the Blind.

[Applause]

When we join together, we accelerate the pace of progress, and we often shatter the perceived limits. Dan Parker is a member of the Federation who lives in Georgia.

[Applause]

He was enjoying life as a race car driver until March 31, 2012, when the car he was driving hit a wall at racing speed, which resulted in his blindness and a traumatic brain injury. Fortunate to have survived the crash, it was not long before Dan wondered if sitting at home was all that he could do. Learning about the Federation's blind driver challenge kindled his dreams and encouraged him to get training in the skills of blindness. On March 31, 2015, he received his Freedom Bell, signifying his completion of the rigorous training program at the Louisiana Center for the Blind.

[Applause]

Dan's Federation training and previous experience led him to imagine the possibilities for racing blind. He imagined setting a new Guinness world record for fastest car driven blindfolded. He imagined the car and how he would build it. He learned from our previous work and developed a nonvisual interface that would work for him at high speeds, and he assembled a team to help transform his dream into reality, a team that included the National Federation of the Blind and our partners at Cruise.

Through our work during the past dozen years, we have gained influence with many of the companies in the autonomous vehicle industry. Among those who have aligned with our message of early access for the blind, none have been more enthusiastic than Cruise.

This spring, Dan arrived at Spaceport America in New Mexico with the car that He personally crafted for his mission and the team who believed in him. On March 31, 2022, exactly 10 years to the day that an accident threatened to crash his dreams and 7 years after being empowered with the philosophy of the organized blind movement, he represented all blind people as he clocked an average of 211.043 miles per hour driving his car with no sighted assistance!

[Applause]

[Video]

[Applause]

In case you wanted to know what it sounded like.

This significantly shattered the previous world record. Congratulations to Dan for putting the Federation philosophy into action and living the life he wants!

[Applause]

We now have a second world record that is displayed proudly at our national headquarters, but more importantly, we have the renewed energy that comes from once again raising expectations and transforming a dream into reality. This is the effect of working together in the National Federation of the Blind.

[Applause]

Our national leadership on equal access to voting for blind individuals continues. In the year leading up to the 2020 election, we worked to secure equal access to absentee ballots by the blind in 19 states. Despite our ongoing efforts since that time, a number of states have continued to deny us equal access to our right to vote.

Another election year has arrived, and we have not given up on delivering the access blind people deserve. During the past year we have reached agreements with New York, New Hampshire, and Illinois to implement remote accessible vote-by-mail ballot systems, which we are now monitoring.

We have also filed complaints in federal court against Bexar County, Texas, and against the state of Alabama. We have further filed complaints with the United States Department of Justice against Connecticut, Iowa, and Missouri. In addition, we continue to support Federation affiliates that are pursuing voting reforms through state legislatures and boards of elections.

Through our Help America Vote Act project, we continue to monitor voting efforts around the nation, provide objective feedback on voting accessibility, and offer training to elections personnel. Central to this work is our effort to ensure that all blind voters are aware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. During of the past year our technical assistance and outreach activities have included meeting with voting system developers to ensure their technologies are accessible to us, creating videos to educate all voters and poll workers about the accessibility features of ballot-marking devices, conducting trainings to improve poll worker interactions with blind voters, and continuing to share data we collect from surveying blind voters. We will leave no blind person behind in our quest for equality.

[Applause]

Our work together to confront the many persistent and unnecessary barriers that prevent blind people from full participation in education also continues. One example is a matter I first shared in my 2020 report to this convention. We filed suit against Duke University on behalf of Mary Fernandez for its failure to provide her with timely access to Braille, electronic, and tactile materials. In December 2021 we reached a settlement that commits Duke to retaining a consultant with expertise in providing accessible materials to blind students in higher education and to revising its policies and guidelines regarding the provision of these materials.

In another example, we continue to struggle with the Los Angeles community college district. Our efforts go back to 2017, which is longer than most students would take to graduate. Why do they continue to fight equal access for their blind students? In August 2021 the United States Court of Appeals for the ninth circuit reaffirmed that disparate impact disability claims are enforceable through a private right of action under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

[Applause]

This decision preserves the right of blind students at the LACCD to seek relief for discrimination they are suffering at the school and has broader impacts for people with disabilities. In the balance of its opinion, the ninth circuit reversed the trial court's decision in favor of the blind students and the Federation, citing various other legal errors in the trial, and sent the case back to the district court. LACCD responded by threatening to file a petition to the United States Supreme Court. Their hostility toward blind students sparked a vigorous campaign from the disability rights community with a clear hashtag #BackOffLACCD.

[Applause]

In March the LACCD board of trustees did back off, and we are now completing the final steps in this journey. Blind students in Los Angeles and across the nation deserve an equal opportunity to benefit from all of the best educational institutions, and we will not let them settle for second class status!

[Applause]

We are the National Federation of the Blind!

[Applause]

[Cheering]

Some educational systems choose to work with us rather than against us. Just last month we amicably resolved a case I shared with you last year involving a blind elementary school wild who we referred to as KW from the Berkeley California school district. During the pandemic KW struggled to access inaccessible remote learning and digital classroom technology used by the district. With the support of the Federation, Berkeley Unified has agreed to implement a new model accessibility policy pertaining to the procurement and testing of instructional technologies. The agreement and the model policies are available on the Federation's website as an instructional resource to other school districts across the nation. We hope that others will follow Berkeley's lead. All of this is another lesson about the power of working together in the National Federation of the Blind.

[Applause]

Many testing entities put barriers in our way that challenge our determination to overcome adversity rather than measure our aptitude. An example from Florida is Jermesa Lee, who has sought licensure as a mental health counselor. This license requires her to pass the National Clinical Mental Health Counseling Examination, NCMHCE. In 2021 and in 2022, she requested a version of the NCMHCE compatible with screen reading software. The National Board for Certified Counselors denied her accommodation request, each time offering her use of a human reader and a scribe instead.

The Federation has intervened on behalf of Jermesa and other members planning to take these counseling licensure exams in the near future. We have demanded that NBCC provide a screen reader compatible version of the test. Due to our work together, they agreed to make the exam available in screen reader compatible form this fall, and we will ensure their deadline is met.

[Applause]

We are working with blind people to overcome discriminatory barriers on other tests. These include the Massachusetts tests for educator licensure for music, the Federation of state massage therapy boards massage and body work licensing examination, the uniform securities agent state law examination, the society for human resources management's certified professional exam, and online exams administered by PSI for the California department of insurance. Let there be no doubt: We will pass the test for effective advocacy, because when we work together as blind people, we cannot fail.

[Applause]

Healthcare is another critical place where we are denied equal access to information. For more than a decade, NFB member Tim Miles has repeatedly asked his healthcare providers at UNC Health Care for all documents to be provided in large print. Similarly, Federation member John Bone asked for Braille documents during ER visits at a hospital affiliated with the UNC Health Care Network. Only standard print was provided. When our attempt to establish a collaborative solution failed, we filed suit against UNC Health Care to require it to ensure effective communication with blind patients through the consistent and timely provision of accessible formats.

[Applause]

In January 2022 we received a favorable decision from the magistrate judge finding that UNC had violated the law, both directly and by failing to ensure that its contractors and affiliated hospitals provided effective communication. This decision should send a strong message to other medical providers: You must plan for and ensure the timely provision of accessible formats to blind patients throughout your entire enterprise!

[Applause]

In 2020 we established an agreement with the Internal Revenue Service to create a new process for providing automated and timely notices in accessible formats. As of January, that system is operating, and blind people can establish an alternate media preference for all IRS notices by completing the new form 9000 or by calling the IRS.

Additionally, since our agreement was signed, the IRS has granted more than 8,000 requests by blind taxpayers for abatement of interest or penalties accrued because of the agency's previous failure to provide documents in accessible formats.

[Applause]

As blind people, we know that working together pays.

We are unwavering in our work to secure full access to information on websites and mobile applications for blind people as a matter of right. Unfortunately, the federal executive branch has failed to provide leadership in this area, giving businesses an excuse to shut the blind out, and the judiciary branch frequently gets it wrong, requiring us to take action. In the Robles v Domino's Pizza case, the federal court in California initially held that businesses need not have their websites and mobile apps comply with the ADA due to a lack of federal website accessibility regulations.

Concerned about the ruling, we intervened in the case. In 2019 we secured an important favorable decision from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the ninth circuit, confirming that the ADA applies to websites and mobile apps and making clear that businesses must ensure that their digital assets comply with the ADA.

[Applause]

After Domino's unsuccessfully attempted to appeal the decision to the Supreme Court, the case went back to the trial court where we helped support the plaintiff's legal team. Last summer we received another victory: The court held that the Domino's website was inaccessible and in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act and California law. The parties have now amicably resolved this matter. Domino's has confirmed its commitment to maintaining the accessibility of its website and mobile applications to individuals with disabilities through compliance with WCAG 2.0 level AA and by utilizing policies, procedures, and internal training. We will continue to use our expertise and our lived experience to argue the need for equal access in the courts across the nation.

[Applause]

The time has come for us to put significant pressure on the federal legislative branch to demonstrate the leadership needed to secure our right to equal access in the digital economy. We have crafted the Website and Mobile Applications Accessibility Act, which would codify in law a mandated accessibility standard applicable to employers, public accommodations, and public entities. Our leadership in this work is informed and supported by nearly 20 disability advocacy groups.

[Applause]

We expect this bill to be introduced before the end of the month, and we intend to use all of the tools to encourage Congress to act swiftly, including social media campaigns, visits to Capitol Hill, letters to the editors of the nation's top news outlets, and, if necessary, assembling the largest informational protest ever held by people with disabilities.

[Applause]

It is time for equal access, not extraordinary excuses! Both the Americans with Disabilities Act and the worldwide web have passed their 30th anniversary. We demand our right to equal access, and we will continue to work together to secure the protections we deserve from each branch of the federal government!

[Applause]

While this is our most important priority, it is only one of many in our advocacy program. A full report of our advocacy and policy work will be featured later in this convention.

More than 40 years ago, we established Baltimore, Maryland, as the home for our national headquarters. Known as the National Federation of the Blind Jernigan Institute, this center of innovation belongs to blind people. While many components of Federation work happen at the building, the bulk of the work is implemented in local communities in every diverse part of this nation. The coordination and synergy that is found in all of these components working together is what makes us unstoppable.

Through our center for employment opportunities initiative, we bridge the gaps leading to unemployment and underemployment among the nation's blind. Examples include the NFB career mentoring program, which provides transition-age blind youth with empowering training experiences, career resources, and a network of role models. During the past year we have delivered virtual preemployment training sessions three times each month, on 35 different topics. During October, now branded as Blind Equality Achievement Month, we released the self-advocacy and employment tool kit and launched a new Where the Blind Work webinar series, featuring blind professionals in a range of careers.

In February we held a successful career fair during the virtual Washington Seminar that brought together 181 blind job seekers and 19 employers. An extensive career fair and related activities are also part of this convention.

This year we were a founding ambassador in the global launch of SmartJob, LLC, and the SmartJob Fund hosted by Impact Assets.

[Applause]

SmartJob is a unique global company dedicated to closing the disability wealth gap by catalyzing employment through innovation. We will hear from its founder later in this convention.

In addition to serving as a trusted adviser to SmartJob about the blind community, we have made initial investments in raising the expectations for blind entrepreneurs. One example is Synergies Work, a one of a kind program designed to support microbusinesses run by and for people with disabilities and to provide business development support to entrepreneurs. Through our partnership with SmartJob, we have opened applications for a 10-week training program to incubate and provide business development support to a cohort of blind entrepreneurs. An additional example is our support to develop a 6-week vent tour capital readiness course for blind founders to learn the critical concepts for effectively securing financing for an early stage company.

[Applause]

Through our partnership with SmartJob, this course will be available later this year and will strengthen the capacity of blind entrepreneurs to compete in the investment community. We anticipate other innovative impact projects by working together with similar strategic partners in the future.

Through our Center of Excellence in Nonvisual Access, we have concentrated expertise, best practices, and resources that enable businesses, governments, and educational institutions to more effectively provide accessible information and services to the blind community. A long-term partner in this work continues to be the Maryland Department of Disabilities. We continue to produce monthly 90-minute boutiques and quarterly 4-hour presentations on a variety of accessibility topics as part of our outreach and engagement strategy. Our staff continue to perform technology evaluations and engage Federation members in providing feedback to manufacturers of hardware and software. Our technology efforts serve as a critical resource in carrying out policies passed by this convention.

One example is our hosting a summit for overlay companies and access technology experts to establish strategies to move forward more collaboratively and eliminate the use of detrimental marketing tactics. In addition, we continue to work closely with product producers in the blindness field to evaluate and provide guidance on the development of their specialized tools.

Through our educational initiative, we seek to create the strongest opportunities for the next generation of blind people. Our largest program is the NFB Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning Academies!

[Applause]

These powerful in-person educational sessions were converted to in-home virtual sessions in 2020, and our success allowed us to continue the in-home training in 2021.

Last summer we provided instruction to 232 participants from 40 states during three 2-week programs and, significantly, half of those youth were completely new to the program.

[Applause]

In addition to Federation staff, nearly 100 Federation members worked directly with the youth as mentors, coordinators, or program volunteers. Per our extensive youth program protection policy, all of these individuals were background checked and supported to ensure the highest level of appropriate engagement in our programs.

[Applause]

This summer, for the first time, NFB BELL will be offered both in person in more than a dozen of our state affiliates, as well as in home, allowing virtual participation from any state.

[Applause]

While the in-home model allows us to connect with families that we might otherwise not be able to serve, many are energized by the opportunity to work together in person. For example, last month our Arizona NFB BELL academy generated so much joy by bringing people back together that a spontaneous conga line broke out while the blind students and blind mentors were decorating their canes!

[Applause]

This is the power of our commitment to working together in the National Federation of the Blind!

We are also strategically investing in the development of the next generation of teachers of blind students. Through our NFB Teachers of Tomorrow program, we provide enrichment to early career teachers of blind students. Our goal is to connect participants with a professional community of practice through the blind people's movement. In 2021 we had 22 educators from 13 states in the program, with most interactions happening through virtual monthly sessions. Shortly before this convention, we invited 20 more teachers to our next cohort, which will start in the fall and will include more in-person interaction.

We have also launched an innovative teacher training model in partnership with the professional development and research institute on blindness at Louisiana Tech University.

[Applause]

With support from the Maryland State Department of Education and the American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults, we established a cohort of individuals in the state of Maryland to receive coursework leading to licensure in teaching blind students. The cohort of 13 individuals began online courses with Louisiana Tech University earlier this year and will continue through next spring before beginning their internships in the fall of 2023. Some of these individuals are here at this convention.

[Applause]

It is our hope that this pilot project might be a collaborative model that we can use to develop outstanding educators of blind children in other states.

There are many other programs and services driven by the blind people of this movement that we do not have time to discuss in detail. Just a few of these include our work to train and certify Braille transcribers and proofreaders; our distribution of thousands of long white canes to encourage independent travel; and hundreds of slates to support Braille literacy. We have continued development of the most extensive access to information system available, NFB-NEWSLINE, including the launch of parental controls to allow a more customized experience for blind children. However, our most important work is to build a movement of blind people.

[Applause]

We continue to invest in tools to onboard members, strengthen our network of chapters, and cultivate a diverse leadership across each of our state affiliates.

Led by our committee on diversity, equity, and inclusion, we continue to identify strategic opportunities to develop resource and forge a welcoming environment for broad participation in our movement. One example of a new resource is our 5-year diversity calendar to assist in planning events at times that do not conflict with major holidays observed by those in our community. The Federation's board of directors has initiated a strategic planning process that will take place over the next year, and our DEI commitment will be an important component of this planning. However, we are continuously reviewing all of our programs to determine if we can make them more reflective of our collective values. Examples include our December 2021 expansion of our Braille letters to Santa program to provide a version in Spanish and an option for a Braille winter celebration letter for those who do not observe the Christmas holiday.

[Applause]

The effect was more than a 60% increase in participation over 2020 and more than 50% of participants being completely new to the program.

[Applause]

Similarly, for a number of years we have been evaluating our Federation scholarship program and its effectiveness. Upon review, the Federation's board of directors substantially increased our investment in the program. We have raised the minimum amount of our merit scholarships from $3,000 to $8,000 and eliminated the previous tiered structure in order provide each of our 30 finalists the same award.

[Applause]

This change is particularly invaluable in the intense time of inflation that we are currently experiencing. Most importantly, the program changes are intended to emphasize even further the mentoring and community building that has always been the core value of the program. Investing in the blind leaders of the future and supporting their dreams is among the most important elements of our movement.

[Applause]

Our work to strengthen our safety and support efforts have continued to make our organization better. After our last convention, we established our NFB blind survivors group, the Federation's special committee completed its detailed investigations and produced a final report released publicly by our board in December 2021, and we updated the organization's Code of Conduct based upon thoughtful feedback from members. We continue to administer these procedures and regularly review their effectiveness.

We offered additional training to members on sexual misconduct, including updated scenarios that are more relevant to the Federation community. We are currently developing additional training modules to further increase the competency of elected leaders in a variety of critical topics related to power dynamics, organization culture, consent, and inclusive leadership. At the direction of this convention, the board established the survivor assistance to facilitate empowerment, SAFE Fund to assist anyone we find has been harmed by members of our community. Before this convention, 66 individuals were invited to utilize the resources of this fund based upon our prior work to identify and heal the impact of misconduct by members of our movement.

Although we hope that no person is harmed in the future by members of our movement, the SAFE Fund will remain as our standing commitment to anyone who might be. Let there be no doubt: We expect our community to be a respectful, open, and safe space for all blind people, and we will take the actions necessary to make that a reality.

[Applause]

Federation SAFE will be the result of our commitment to working together.

Ed Federation's hopeful message reaches further every year. Some highlights from our communication effort there's year include launching new English and Spanish radio PSAs in October with a new landing page at blind.org to welcome people unfamiliar with our movement; participating in the initial launch of the .day domains by offering Braille.day and whitecane.day, to promote independence and literacy; and establishing the nations\_blind TikTok account on the world's most popular microvideo sharing platform. As of June, our TikTok presence includes 35 videos, and our most successful had 4.8 million views.

[Applause]

We use our communications tools to lift up blind people in many ways, and the most important of the past year was mobilizing our movement in America to benefit blind people affected by the war in Ukraine.

[Applause]

In partnership with Jonathan Mosen, founder of the online station Mushroom FM and the World Blind Union, we collaborated on a global benefit concert of blind performers held on April 16, 12022. Through the "We're With U!" effort, 114 performers provided almost 12 hours of powerful and loving entertainment including a cappella, three-part harmony, Mozart and Chopin, Cole Porter, and rap. By the end of the livestream of the concert, we had raised more than $80,000. And after an additional 2 weeks, over $100,000 for the WBU's Ukrainian unity fund!

[Applause]

In addition to the many contributions from individual Federation members, our organization donated staff time and absorbed all of the transaction fees in collecting donations so that every dollar went directly to helping blind people affected by the war.

[Applause]

We are proud to provide global leadership to the blind people's movement in other parts of the world. We continue to send a message of love to the blind of Ukraine: We are with you!

[Applause]

At the center of our work are the individual stories of blind people and the power of bringing those lives together for collective action. Since 1940 we have been collecting the historical record of the blind people's movement. We have refreshed these efforts by asking each Federation affiliate to have a designated historian to ensure we preserve the stories and the actions of the blind community. We have increased our efforts to capture oral histories, and this year we granted an internship to an American University undergraduate specifically to capture the stories of some of our Black leaders.

[Applause]

Our ever-growing collection of historical archives now occupy 20,500 square feet of space at our building in Baltimore.

Now is the time for us to do even more. Our history is rich, but our stories are rarely known. Our actions are highly impactful, but our struggles to overcome society's low expectations are often overlooked. Our progress has been great, but our future must be greater. America has no cultural institution that centers the experience of blind individuals of diverse backgrounds and celebrates how those people worked together to rise above centuries of misconceptions. Who lives, who dies, who tells our stories? We do!

[Applause]

Who tells our stories?

We do!

[Applause]

Who tells our story?

AUDIENCE: We do!

MARK RICCOBONO: And we must! Now is the time for us to pursue the Museum of the Blind People's Movement!

[Applause]

We must do this while continuing to do all of the other work that advances our movement. We must do this because it is critical to our future. Our integration in society on terms of equality demands that we be elevated and celebrated for our contributions to the human experience.

[Applause]

Our normality in society requires us to open our stories to the public in powerful ways that affect both the hearts and minds of those who experience them. The Museum of the Blind People's Movement will be challenging to achieve, but we have never backed down from working together achieve our dreams!

[Applause]

In this year when we have lost some of the most outstanding voices from our previous generations, the most meaningful action we can take in honoring their contributions to us is to celebrate and share that bond of service and use it to forge the future. Imagine a museum that is ours, that teaches all other institutions about inclusion and equal access, and that extends our message wider than we have ever imagined. We are calling on every blind person, Federation member or not, to bring your story, your aspirations, and your talents to the preservation of our shared history and the advancement of our future by participating in the development of the Museum of the Blind People's Movement. You are all cordially invited to come to the grand opening of this museum before this decade is over. Imagine the celebration of the power of working together in the National Federation of the Blind!

[Applause]

I attended my first convention in 1996. I have observed the spirit of the Federation for more than a quarter of a century. The methods used by the Federation to conduct its business are fascinating to me, but the spirit is the heart of the organization. The overwhelming central element in the spirit of our organization is a precept in our constitution that declares that the convention is the supreme authority of the organization. The people of the movement who come together in convention assembled decide what the policies shall be and determine who will be selected to carry them out. The people of the movement are the deciding voice. You are the ones who determine what we shall do and where we shall go.

In our movement, with its extensive scope, the broad array of its demanding programs, and our determination to bring into being an understanding of our principles in all segments of our society, we inevitably encounter complexity. However, some principles of our movement remain straightforward. If we are to create the plan to make of our organization what we want it to be, we must have faith in each other. We must know that we can and will find the determination to change the negative factors that face us. We must know that we can muster the fortitude to believe even when challenged. We must know in the depths of our souls that Federation members are willing to share the burden and to give all that is necessary to make our future our own. I know from the innermost part of me that I trust this convention. We will not fail you. We will prevail.

We will not permit doubt to deter us from our purpose.

I know you, and I have faith. We will prevail!

[Applause]

I have had the honor of serving as your President for four terms, and it continues to be the greatest privilege, challenge, and joy of my life. At every moment I have given to you, our members, all my best effort. I strive to reflect all of the high expectations that you demand of our leaders, and to make each of you proud. The members of this movement, my chosen community of friends, will always have my deepest gratitude for the effect that you have on making me better and on making the changes that will ensure a brighter future for my own family.

The decision as to whether I continue to serve you in this capacity is entirely yours. I am prepared to rise to your high expectations and represent you in all that we do together, if that is your choice.

[Applause]

I will never ask of you, I will never ask of you anything that I am not completely willing to do myself. This movement will continue to have the best of my efforts regardless of where you want me to serve. This is the blind people's movement, and you found me when I did not even recognize that I was a blind person. First and foremost, I am a member in this movement. And my commitment will always be to link arms with you, share the bond of faith that brings us together, and march confidently in the direction that this convention sets for our future! This is my commitment to working together for a brighter tomorrow! My Federation family, this is my report for 2022! This is our progress in coming back together again!

[Applause]

This is our bond as the blind people's movement!

[Applause]

This is the future we build with love, hope, and determination, by transforming dreams into reality!

[Applause]

[Cheering]

(Audience chanting "Riccobono! Riccobono! Riccobono!")

[Applause]

[Cheering]

I really missed you guys..

BENNETT: That deserves a door prize. Your report is always so positive and excellent, Mr. President. In these times of all kinds of negativity, this is really a tremendous uplift to all of us in the National Federation of the Blind.

We have 100 bucks here that we're going to give to Elizabeth Campbell of Texas. And while we're giving that away, we're giving a gift certificate to the people on the virtual platform.

MARK RICCOBONO: Did we find her?

BENNETT: We're giving an Independence Market gift certificate to Trina Brown of California who is listening on the virtual experience.

MARK RICCOBONO: Send an email to prize@NFB.org.

EVERETTE BACON: Federationists, should we give $20 to this movement that the President reported on?

[Applause]

Now, we can do this one of two ways. There's tables in the back of the room. You can just walk on back to those tables and give $20 and you'll be entered into the contest. You could go online www.NFB.org/give20 and you can also be entered into the contest. That's how I did it yesterday when I donated Tracy Soforenco $100 to the white cane fund. That's right. So we can do this, folks. We can give this money. You can also call (410)659-9314 extension 2430 and you can leave a message there and someone will call you back to take down your donation.

Now, our excellent Give 20 team has sent me a text that tells me we are now over $23,000.

[Applause]

We're almost halfway to the match that was so generously given to us by HumanWare. Thank you, HumanWare. I have so many friends at HumanWare. We're halfway there. So we have two and a half more days to build this up, folks.

Okay. Everybody with me, let's say it one two three Give 20!

Give 20!

All right. And hey, President Riccobono, those who want to go to Netflix tonight, we're having a screening of Stranger Things and it will be at 7:30 p.m. at the Britannia Theater. Free concessions and free Stranger Things swag.

MARK RICCOBONO: 7:30, bring your wristband or your badge to get in if you have registered.

Do we have Scott LaBarre?

We don't. Okay. We're going to move on.

The next program item is about the power of partnerships. We talked about and we celebrate partnerships. We just talked about some of them, but I left this one out of the report report because it's one we will be talking about long into the future. This partnership has to do with a really big idea. In order to beat this big idea, we've brought together a longstanding technology company in the blindness field, and even longer standing organization that's been committed to raising expectations in the education realm for the blind, and of course America's transformative membership organization of blind people. And together we will give new wings to literacy for blind people.

Here to talk about the power, the magic, of partnerships are the President of HumanWare, Bruce Miles, and the President of the American Printing House of the Blind, Craig Meador.

[Applause]

SPEAKER: All right. We'll just tag team on the mics up here.

Good afternoon, for those who don't know me, and that's probably many of you, I'm Dr. Craig Meador, American Printing House for the Blind. And I am in my 7th year there. That's not important. What is important is about 6 years ago we decided at American Printing House we had to do business a little different.

Many of you grew up using products in school that helped you get through your education. We're very proud to have been a part of that. We decided to go back to our original mission at APH which says you have a responsibility not only to school-aged students but to adults and families.

With that we changed our vision a little bit. We created this tag line about an accessible world with opportunity for everyone. But the reality in being so bold in that vision is we knew we could never achieve that vision without having solid partners. So as President Riccobono has said, I am honor the stage here with one of our great partners, and that is Bruce Miles and the team at HumanWare, so I'm going to hand this over to Bruce right now.

[Applause]

BRUCE MILES: Thank you so much, Craig.

Good afternoon, NFB. It is good to be back here in person. The last time I had a chance to present and see everybody was in 2019 in Las Vegas. So thanks to President Riccobono for giving us this opportunity to speak with everybody again. This is my third time doing this in front of this large crowd. I guess the first two went okay or I wouldn't be back a third time. But I'll tell you, it doesn't get any less intimidating. So it's quite a sight to be up here.

Congratulations as well to NFB, the organizing team, for choosing another amazing location in New Orleans.

[Applause]

Yeah! Woo!

This is my first time here in New Orleans, so I did a little bit of exploring, and I guess I was initiated pretty heavily on Wednesday where I had to have this hurricane drink in the French Quarter.

[Applause]

What I found after, I think there's 4 ounces of rum in each drink, so if you haven't had one yet, be careful.

[Laughter]

So my name is Bruce Miles. I've been with HumanWare for 6 years. I was appointed CEO last September, and I'm thrilled to work for HumanWare. It's a company that has had a very clear and powerful mission for 34 years to provide the tools that blind people use to accomplish their life goals or, as the NFB says, live the lives you want.

This is a mission that can only be accomplished with the support of the membership of the NFB and the very committed people that I work with at HumanWare. We've been very fortunate to have some grade leaders at HumanWare. Some of the names you may know. Russell Smith, Jim Holiday, and Jill Pippen who outside of Quebec is pronounced differently. I'm truly honored to continue the journey of these amazing leaders.

I'm sure many of you knew Jim Holiday, who unfortunately passed away in May of this year. Yeah. That's kind of sad. Jim was a great person. He dedicated his career to the field. He created the HumanWare name and he built the culture of HumanWare. It's a culture that puts the human before the technology, and that's how he used to talk about the company.

So we want to make sure now that Jim and his legacy will be remembered. So we're pleased to announce that HumanWare will rename our NFB scholarship program in his honor, and we're going to double the amount of annual scholarships that we have from two to four.

[Applause]

Thank you.

So every success at HumanWare has been made possible by working with others. Whether it's including the voice and the experience of blind people or partnering with organizations that have strong knowledge of blindness. And there's no better example that I can think of than our recent work with APH. In the past 5 years we've been creating great products together. The Braille trail reader, the chameleon Braille display and the mantis Braille display. These are really nice products.

We've also worked with APH on other initiatives like good maps.

We work well together in partnership. We play off of each other's strengths, I would say, and HumanWare has a very strong understanding of technology and customer needs, and APH has huge experience in Braille and education.

So I'm going to have Craig talk a little bit about the partnership.

CRAIG MEADOR: Hang on to that word "partnership," because that will be very important in just a second. Because we're here to talk about partnerships and why they are so important. We like to say partnerships are magic. We're going to talk specifically about the partnership that we have formed with NFB and with HumanWare. We've had very successful partnerships with NFB. We love working together with this group. Helped out with the Braille Monitor, with cojumper technology, with a lot of technology testing. You are our main line testers, and we appreciate that, because you let us know when we get it right and you have let us know when we have really missed the mark. And that is so important.

We also appreciate the advocacy of the NFB. We have so many projects in the works. Including we're really excited about the new museum that's coming to the NFB because APH also has a museum that we are getting ready to start on a multi-year remodel. We look forward to this partnership to be able to support the NFB's museum of blind people movement and we look forward to that synergy that will exist between these sister museums, and we're hoping to share exhibits and promotions and programming. And I think it's really going to tell this beautiful story about the movement as well as the education that went alongside of it.

The partnership we're talking about today is for a very specific dream. And it's a dream that we've had at APH. It's been at NFB. It's been at HumanWare. And it's been with many other companies and groups out there in the field of education and rehab. But it's going to need partnerships in order to make this magic happen.

So we have passed out these wands. Some of you have wands sitting next to you. All right. So if you haven't already, towards the base of the wand, that's the fat part, there is a little piece of plastic sticking out. Feels like a piece of paper. Go ahead and pull that out. That will activate your battery. There's a button on the side of the wand, and it's really obnoxious. And that's okay. I'm an educator, state of Washington. So we are going to use this obnoxious wand and you're going to keep us honest. Every time we use the word "partner" or "partnership," international button and wave your wand. If you've got a wand, hold it up high. I want to see the wand. Oh, my gosh. 10 points for Gryffindor!

All right. Partnerships are magic. I'll be honest. It's easier to go alone. It's faster, more convenient. Partnerships are not easy, because you have different ideas. You have different philosophies. And you have egos.

But we decided 5 years ago at APH that we will never get to where we need to be as an agency until we get rid of that idea and commit to the idea of partnerships -- (wands beeping) oh, I love that. That's wonderful. AG Bell said that great discoveries and improvements involve the cooperation of in minds.

Partnerships defy math. It's more than just addition. It's a multiplication. The algorithm is huge. When you collaborate, it divides the task. It multiplies the success. Partnerships make the impossible possible. Only through teamwork can common people achieve uncommon results. Partnerships create new knowledge. When you cooperate with others, you learn more from others than you knew you thought you could. And partnerships make dreams a reality.

We know that. The only way you can take an idea and manifest it in this world that we have is through partnerships.

So we're talking about partnerships. We're talking about magic. But what is the magic we're talking about? We are talking about the holy Braille.

[Applause]

The holy Braille. A tablet with both multiline Braille and graphics.

[Applause]

Now, this is not a new idea. You've heard about this from many people for many years. We owe a great debt to every company, individual, that has thought of this, has talked it over with their colleagues. I think of companies like Bristol Braille in U.K. which proved it could be made and it could be made affordable. Years ago we partnered with Orbit on the graffiti and had some good results. But we knew that stop and start is typical in the development field. This has led us to now.

The world has not gone backward from remote technology. Pandemic changed all that. So why as a field and society have we told our students, our people, go back, go back to the way things were. This technology is not for you.

We've got to change that ideology. We've got to move things forward.

[Applause]

A year and a half ago we went out looking for a technology partner who was willing to invest their money, go 50/50 with us on the research and development of this device. HumanWare came calling, and we were excited. Because this is a scary proposition.

We also wanted an agency to partner with us that represented the blind and all the interests of the field of blindness and low vision.

So we partnered with NFB.

[Applause]

And that is huge.

So I'm going to let Bruce come up and talk a little bit more about the specifics, the technology, which I don't understand. I have people who do that for me. But I'll keep listening. I have my wand.

[Laughter]

BRUCE MILES: Great. Thanks, Craig.

So why is HumanWare interested in this project? When APH released the request for information, the dynamic tactile device project, this sound like an incredible challenge. Something that fits perfectly within the DNA of HumanWare. I mean, our company was excited when we read this. We said this is incredible. We have to get involved. As you probably know, we have a long legacy in innovation in Braille. In the year 2000, like 22 years ago, if you can believe it, we introduced the first version of the all in one Braille notetaker. Today the Note Touch continues to be used by thousands around the world. We also continue to innovate with our new line of Braille displays that we just recently updated. And they were initially launched 18 years ago.

We could see clearly the future that APH envisioned in their proposal, and it was really nothing short of a revolution in electronic Braille that would transform the Braille experience for everyone around the world. So of course we wanted to be part of this.

We also knew that the technology was now available to build this game changing product, and we found the right partners to be able to do it. So we've developed our own powerful Braille technology platforms and software, but then we also went and found new partners, and innovative partners like Dot, a company from Korea, that built like a really brand new type of Braille cell technology which I'll talk about in a second. They really allowed us to move forward with this as well.

I'll tell you a little bit about the dynamic device. The device will have 10 lines of 32 cells of Braille.

[Applause]

It's going to be capable of combining tactile graphics on the surface to. Put this in perspective, this is 320 characters of Braille on one device that's going to weigh less than a typical gaming laptop. So very portable. And like I said, we can achieve much of this because of the technology innovations of our partner. So Dot has a new Braille cell that's much smaller, thinner, and lighter than anything that exists today. And the tablet is going to be a smart device. So all the functions that you will need will be included on the tablet. It will be connected to the internet and other devices wirelessly.

So then we looked at, well, how will we use this device. With APH as our partner, one of the priority use cases is with students with immediate access to textbooks. And this is an issue that I was quite shocked to learn about but I'm sure many of you experienced challenges when you were in school of not getting your textbooks on time, you know, they're difficult to navigate, and you have to carry around these huge Braille volumes. Has anyone here experienced that?

[Applause]

Yeah. I figured.

APH actually gave me an example of this. They created an algebra textbook last year that cost over $30,000 to make and it took 13 months to put it together, which is not unusual, apparently, and it ended up like in 41 volumes. I saw a picture of this. And if you stack up the 41 volumes, it's actually taller than the student. It's really quite daunting to have to carry that around.

So to make these books available on the dynamic tactile device, we have to solve a number of other problems. APH is working with Braille authorities around the world along with the NFB to define a new electronic Braille standard called EBRF, which will provider properly formatted Braille with the same navigation capabilities that you have with your books. So if the teacher says turn to page 42 or chapter 7, it's as simple as pressing like a go to command on your device.

[Applause]

But the most exciting aspect of the EBRF file type is that it will be able to combine the text of the book with the graphics created by a tactile graphics artist. So when the text says review figure B, for example, it will be right there. You just double tap on the feature and you immediately see the tactile graphic.

[Applause]

And there's more. Where the dream really comes true is as soon as the Braille transcriber has finished a section of the book, it doesn't have to go through this time consuming process of embossing, binding, packaging, and shipping. The transcriber pushes a button and it becomes immediately available to the TVI or student.

We will be sure it can be used in your work environment as well. You'll be able to send images from a smartphone or computer to the device, and be able to create and author your own tactile graphics. If there's musicians in the audience, you'll be able to read multiline Braille music. And for any software engineers, you'll be able to read multiple lines of code at once and be able to kind of feel the user interface they're creating.

So what else can you think of? We're really interested in hearing more from you. We've heard other ideas like maps and floorplans for navigation, PowerPoint presentation, board games, spreadsheets, multiline math, interactive sports games, viewing an amoeba under an electronic microscope, or planets through a telescope. Can you imagine how cool that would be?

We still don't know all the possibilities, and frankly, the possibilities are endless. That's why in the spirit of partnership (wands beeping) -- you're still with that? Okay.

[Laughter]

In the spirit of partnership, we will be inviting software engineers to build apps and experiences for the device, and we can't wait to partner with future innovators to create experiences we haven't even thought of.

Now I'll turn you back over to Craig.

CRAIG MEADOR: All right. Simple question. Do we need a multiline Braille display?

[Applause]

Do we need a tactile graphics display?

[Applause]

And finally, do you really need a display that supports you as a professional or student or musician or artist or people engaged in all aspects of life?

[Applause]

All right. That's a trick question. We call that rhetorical. Of course we do!

So let's talk a moment. That's the holy Braille. But a tablet by itself does us no good. We need to have a holy Braille highway. Technology is one piece. We're committed -- and this is where NFB comes in big time. APH and HumanWare are committed to our roles that we play within the field. We can rally the field. But we are not representative leaders of blind people. NFB does that.

[Applause]

NFB represents all blind people, and as President Riccobono said today, even those people that are not yet members. That's a partner we need at the table as we go forward, and these partnerships are important to all of us.

My promise to you at APH, and I'm echoing this for Bruce as well as HumanWare, is we can't and we won't develop this without the input of blind people.

[Applause]

And not just the technology. Or the development. And the testing. But every aspect. Electronic Braille ready file, which is being developed, with partners from all over the world, electronic tactile graphics standards, the training that will be developed, the software involvement, the testing, customer support, and advocacy through our funding will be a partnership.

[Applause]

Because this device will require an ecosystem of support, and we need the blind movement to make that happen. Our goal is to get these into your hands, but I'm telling you right now that they will not be cheap. So we're going to need help in advocating for funding, both for students and voc rehab, for starters, but our goal is to create and find a way to provide low cost and perhaps even free available public access to devices like these.

[Applause]

We need to make sure these devices get into the hands of our students who are beginners, and so as a result, we are going after additional federal funding and we are hopeful that our community and our partners will join us in advocating for additional appropriations to make that a reality. We're going to Congress. We're going to the Department of Ed. And we're going to the administration to make that happen.

[Applause]

So this isn't, even though this is three wonderful partners this, isn't just about three partners, because the partners are many. This is a worldwide movement, and everyone around the globe is watching and depending on us to make this happen.

BRUCE MILES: I'll start the sentence with, "in closing," and I think President Riccobono wants to hear that. The end is near. So that's good.

I would say in closing that I know you have heard all of this before, because I've heard it all before. You know, I know you've seen many impressive videos and tablet prototypes before. I know many promises have been made before. And I know there's been disappointment before.

The difference this time though is no one is trying to do this alone, and most importantly, we will not do it without you. This is about all of us working together to achieve this dream and giving you, the user of this technology, the power to guide your own destiny. And that's why this time it will be different.

[Applause]

I can give you the assurances that the technology is possible. And in fact, tomorrow from noon-1:45 p.m., you can see examples of the technology at work and you'll be able to experience this at the APH booth or the HumanWare booth or the Dot booth in the exhibit hall. And of course we're interested in your feedback as you try this. And we've also been connecting folks throughout the week so we've gotten lots of great feedback. It takes more than technology to make a project a success. It takes a movement of people committed to success, to breaking barriers, to finally transform ideas into reality. So with you as our partner and our guide, we can deliver the holy Braille technology that you have been promised and have been waiting for.

So thank you so much.

[Applause]

(wands beeping).

MARK RICCOBONO: Partnership! Yeah. Give us a door prize from the pig over there.

BENNETT: The door prize pig gives us a prize of a mixed bag. We have a wooden plaque from Touching Word. We have 25 bucks and a cane case to Eleanor Chapman of Louisiana!

[Applause]

Are you here, Eleanor?

MARK RICCOBONO: Find her?

Not here.

BENNETT: Madison Turner of Georgia?

MARK RICCOBONO: Reminder that the NFB Muslims will offer holiday prayer on Saturday, July 9, at 7:30 a.m. in the Marriott studio 9.

BENNETT: How about Isaac Shapiro of Pennsylvania? Where is everybody? Out by the pool? Come on!

Monica Vasquez of Florida?

Are you here, Monica?

SCOTT LaBARRE: I don't think anybody is here, Bennett.

[Applause]

BENNETT: Andy Brandeis of Colorado?

SCOTT LaBARRE: I hope she's here! Andrea!

BENNETT: Is she here? We found her! All right.

SCOTT LaBARRE: Thank you, Mr. President. I want to echo what everybody is saying: It was an awesome report. It was an awesome feeling to be in the room with all my sisters and brothers. And you know, I really had a lot of fun in my basement the last couple years doing the PAC program, but this is even more fun. And I do want to share a little news with you. Normally I would be teaming with Ryan Strunk of Minnesota, my fellow PAC man, and he is in the hotel. He is in his room. Because unfortunately he has tested positive for COVID-19. And he is isolating. I know this has affected a lot of people, coming to the convention who are here. So I want you to join me in something. I'm going to dedicate this specifically to Ryan, my co-PAC man, but this should go out to everybody affected by COVID-19 or something else. Why don't we say, "We love you, we miss you, get better soon!" One, two, three! We love you, we miss you, get better soon!

Thank you for doing that.

Okay. Now, Corbb O'Connor, are you out there? Well, Corbb gave me this great idea. Instead of talking about PAC activity, he wants me to talk about PACtivity. At the end of my report, Mr. President Riccobono --

MARK RICCOBONO: He wants you to talk about it quickly too.

[Laughter]

SCOTT LaBARRE: I have some big, big news. We do have some winners in our first drawings, and this is what I want you to do. By the way, those of you who are online, you can get in all of these contests. And if you win, we will second you your gift card. Okay? So please don't think if you're online you can't participate in the PAC. You absolutely can.

So if I call your name, I want you to go back to the PAC table and get your gift card. Now, I want you to know also, these gift cards should be used as credit cards. They won't work in an ATM for cash.

So Ryan Falcon of Texas. Jordy Stringer of Ohio. Tracy Gould of North Carolina. Rosy Batheia of North Carolina. And Robert Sellers of Washington. If you are here, go back to the PAC table. If you are one of our online guests, call me at my extension at the national center which will ring through here. (410)659-9314 extension 2424.

Okay. We're doing well on the PAC plan, Mr. President. We've increased our annual giving just under $5,000. That's a good start. Of course, I'm greedy. I want more. Get back to the PAC table. And of course you can go to www.NFB.org/PAC to participate in one of our major fundraisers that helps us fund the movement, helps us do those things that President Riccobono so eloquently spoke about this afternoon.

Now, here is the big news. I didn't talk to you about this. I don't know if you have a drum roll over there or anything, but this is really, really big news. You see, Maryland is suffering -- Mr. President, I'm sorry -- but from complacency. You've been on top all of these years and you think you've got it. And it's easy. In fact, you know what, Mr. President, not you, you are a wonderful human being, but your affiliate is so complacent, Ronza, that nobody from Maryland has been back to the PAC table. You came into this convention at $4,589 a month on the PAC plan. Colorado came in at $4,154 a month on the PAC plan.

I got news for you. Maryland ain't number one no more!

[Applause]

Colorado at 4 us that $680 a month on we're number one! We're number one!

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you, Scott LaBarre. Kind of a weird thank you, but thank you.

I have an announcement that people are using the dog relief area by the pool. And not cleaning up after their dogs. So this is a plea to clean up after your dogs, but I thought it was cute that it starts with people are using the dog relief area. Seems fitting after Scott's report. I don't know why.

[Laughter]

Anyway, Maryland, good time to get back to the PAC table. I won't spend too much time introducing this next item, but before I introduce the speaker, we have a short audio presentation.

[Video]

SPEAKER: This is just the beginning. This is the start of it.

SPEAKER: Out to the race track.

SPEAKER: Officially amazing.

SPEAKER: Race car is ready. Race car is ready.

SPEAKER: Is the track clear?

SPEAKER: Course is clear.

SPEAKER: So part of the excitement is there's an important chain of history and mentoring happening here. The founders of the National Federation of the Blind in 1940 could not have really even imagined that we would be standing here today. They laid a foundation of blind people organizing, working together, self-determining our own future, taking control of our own destinies.

PAM ALLEN: I'm Pam Allen, director of the Louisiana Center for the Blind and we are so proud of Dan as a graduate of our program.

SPEAKER: The thing that really brings me here is not just the job. It's just being able to be part of something this dynamic, this mind blowing.

SPEAKER: As a racer, this is just another day. But we only have one chance to set history. The pressures get enormous.

SPEAKER: Just made our first pass with Dan driving. Top speed of 187 on this pass.

Dan asked the tuner to delay just a little bit longer to get more miles per hour and that helped make the car more stable. Next round will be faster.

When Harold got out of the truck, he sedan made the call. I did what he asked and he hit 205. He's such a racer.

(Race car accelerating)

SPEAKER: Dan, today you hit a speed of 211.043 miles per hour, a new Guinness world record! You are officially amazing! Great job!

[Applause]

Amazing.

MARK RICCOBONO: You know, I think the only other thing to say, Dan, is let's go build the Federation.

DAN PARKER: Let's do it together.

(Video ends)

[Applause]

MARK RICCOBONO: During the presidential report, you heard the sound outside of the car and in the audio piece you heard what it was like for Dan inside the car. I don't know that there's too much more to say to introduce our next speaker except here is Dan Parker!

[Applause]

(Music playing, "Kryptonite")

DAN PARKER: Thank you, everybody. I think I want to hear that replay of the motor. That's pure music to my ears.

I'm honored to be here today. It's been a special occasion. It's been a special year. And I ask everybody the question, who here has seen the movie The Field of Dreams?

[Applause]

It's a good movie. For those who haven't, you need to go back and watch it. And in the movie, the character Ray played by Kevin Costner is an Iowa corn farmer on the verge of bankruptcy, and he hears a whisper while he's working in the fields "If you build it, they will come."

And against all odds, and family ridicule, on the verge of bankruptcy, baseball legends from the past appeared. Today I want to share with you my field of dreams.

I was born into a racing family. I Getty motional thinking about it. I'm sorry.

[Applause]

I was born into a racing family. Early on I realized I actually sucked at ball sports but I was attracted to anything with wheels. Anything with an engine, after high school I started racing under my father's guidance, talking about how to maximize efficiency of combinations to be a true racer, to be a sportsman. In late 1999 I became the official driver Bill George Motor Sports and we won the world championship.

Pro modified cars are the fastest cars on the planet earth with a working left door. 0-100 miles per hour in a little over 1 second. 3.1Gs out of the starting line. On March 31 we were testing a new motor combination, and on the first full pass the car made a hard right turn into the wall, tore it down, went to tumbling, and cut the car in half. They tried to life flight me out of there. They couldn't because there was a storm between the University of Alabama hospital and the race track. So they put me in an ambulance with my girlfriend riding shotgun trying to keep me alive. They did something I never heard before nor since. I was in such bad shape they called ahead and had another ambulance meet mine on the side of the highway for that EMT to get in to the ambulance and help my EMT keep me alive.

I suffered collapsed lungs, broken ribs, my right arm was destroyed, I have numerous other injuries. I came home with a traumatic brain injury, which is by far the worst injury. But when I woke up, my family noticed that my eyes didn't look right. My pupils stayed dilated. They weren't constricting. When somebody would walk by my hospital bed, it would startle me. The neuro ophthalmologist was called in the next day and I was given the news that I was now 100% blind for life. My optic nerve being compressed while my brain swelled cut it off. That was it.

I spent another 2 weeks in the hospital and came home into my New World of darkness broke, beaten up, and blind. I fell into a deep depression. I did not want to live. I don't say that to be tragic today or dramatic. But somewhere here today I know someone newly adjusting to blindness or may be new at a training center and you're scared. I promise you one thing, you are right where you need to be.

[Applause]

In your family of blind brothers. Today is your opportunity to network with other blind individuals, successful blind individuals, and those who have achieved great things: Lawyers, teachers, musicians, whatever it is. You're in the right place.

So after about 6 months of depression, one night I went to bed thinking about my late brother, my late mother, and my brother absolutely loved the salt flats, a dry lake bed 120 miles west of Salt Lake City where people have been setting land speed records since 1914. So my field of dreams came in the middle of the night. I woke up at 2:00 a.m. with a complete vision that I would become the first blind man to race the salt flats.

[Applause]

So I had my vision. I had my dream. But I didn't have a path. I didn't know what to do or how to accomplish this.

Needless to say when I proudly announced to my family and some of my friends what I was going to do, that went over like a whoopee cushion in church.

[Laughter]

And so here I was, broke, blind, and trying to build a motorcycle after almost dying just 6-7 months earlier. But I started doing research and I found the blind driver challenge. And I listened to that video so many times on my phone that I just got and started to use.

One day I called the national headquarters in Baltimore. And I told the receptionist what I wanted to do and what my ideas was, and she put me on the phone with Joanne Wilson. That day changed my life forever.

[Applause]

So Joanne listened to my story. And about every month or so, she would call and check on me and I would give her a progress report. I would call her and give her a progress report. And the motorcycle was coming along. And we decided with my friend Patrick Johnson that we were going to be able to get a guidance system with audible feedback so I knew how to correct my steering, following the philosophy of the National Federation of the Blind and the blind driver challenge, we would do this independently. Joanne invited me to come to Baltimore, meet Dr. Maurer, President Riccobono, and share with them my project and my goal and my vision. They agreed to sponsor me.

So in 2013 we went to the salt flats. President Riccobono was there with us. We made history together, becoming the first blind man to race independently with a speed of 55.31 miles per hour.

[Applause]

Something special happened that day. Right before I made my historic run, President Riccobono handed me a Braille coin that Dr. Maurer handed him when he drove in Daytona. I returned it to him after that significant day. I returned the next year and set my class record for the first blind man to ever hold class record with no exemptions for blindness as I raced against my sighted peers with no human assistance. 62.05 miles per hour.

[Applause]

During that time I was enrolled into the Louisiana Center for the Blind, go LCB. I graduated March 31, 2015, exactly 3 years to the date of the wreck I had my Freedom Bell.

Once I came home, I knew there was more fruit on the land speed tree. The title for the world's fastest car driven blindfolded, also known as the world's fastest blind man, held by Mike Newman in England. So I set out on a 4-year journey to prove that blind people can design a race car. We can be involved in STEM, science, technology, engineering, and math. And we can control our own destiny.

[Applause]

I did not choose the easy path. The easy path would have been to go rent a Lamborghini or Ferrari or whatever it is and go for the record. But I designed a car 100% myself with friends and volunteers and we built it over the course of 3 years. The car is a 2008 Corvette. It's painted bright red. It has a full undercarriage belly painted for aerodynamics, full safety cage, dual steering wheel, so while we're testing the guidance system, I have a passenger. On board fire extinguisher, nitrous oxide system, with over 1,000-horsepower.

The fall of 2019, the car was getting close, the producers of Jay Leno's garage approached me, intrigued by my story, wanted to film. The latest they could film was February 2020 and luckily the east coast was having an event at Spaceport that was invitation only. We finished the car. And on the final pass, I went 153.8 miles per hour filmed by Leno's crew.

[Applause]

Then COVID hit. As everything we know in our lives, including me, racing stopped. Everything came to a halt. And I didn't know what the future of my car was.

But late 2020 I got the call that changed my life forever. President Riccobono called me and asked me if we wanted to get the band back together for one more run.

[Laughter]

And we wanted to go for the Guinness Book of World Records for the 10-year anniversary for the blind driver challenge.

So March of 2020 I brought this car to the Arkansas east coast association to try to test it. I had two horrible runs and I knew I had to go back and figure out a plan. So I knew just like anything, cane travel, etc., practice makes perfect. I knew I needed a car that I could practice with on a weekly basis because the race car is like a thoroughbred. You can't just take her out around the block.

So a friend sold me a 1994 Corvette cheap. We built a second guidance system. Put it in. Patrick flew in from Huntsville. We took it out 2 hours at a time. Then Patrick would fly home.

We were hoping to set the record in November 2021, the 10-year anniversary. But sadly, Steve Struck, the owner of the east coast time association that would provide the timing and insurance got COVID and was on a ventilator. He was in bad shape, but by the miracle of God, he came home.

[Applause]

So we postponed it to March of 2022 as the weather reports for January February was not conducive to racing between snow and extreme cold. We could only rent the track Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, so we chose the end of March for the best chance of weather.

Prior to the race, 3 weeks, the car had no motor, no transmission, and a hole in the transmission tunnel about a foot big to prepare for the new transmission I felt was going to be more reliable for us. We worked 24 hour days some days, but we got it done. Headed out on a 28-hour nonstop path to the Spaceport. The team conveyed on Monday, the 26th, as our team's consisted of volunteers who sacrificed their vacations from all over the country, engineers, gurus, engine specialists, anything in between. So we went over the car and we found a problem. I had ordered the torque converter too tight, which means the motor wants to stall. So Tuesday the winds were horrible. 50 miles per hour side winds, typically land speed racing you have to stop at 17 miles per hour. So we couldn't practice on Tuesday. I took the test car out, made multiple runs around 110-120 miles per hour, 10-foot wide path with 50 miles per hour side wind. So I knew I could do it. We just needed a little luck on our side.

On Wednesday, the car was getting closer. I made a half mile pass at 158, turned it around, started it at the three quarter mile mark, went 176 miles per hour. When the dust settled Wednesday afternoon, I had not been 200. I did not sleep at all Wednesday night. I woke up at 1:30 in the morning, I designed a push bar in my head that we could build with what tools and material I had in the trailer so if I couldn't get the car to leave the start line, we would push it with the practice Corvette up to 30 miles per hour drop it in gear. We were going to do whatever it took to come home with a Guinness book of world records.

[Applause]

So as the sun was rising on that Thursday, the last day, me and the team were grinding. I was in the trailer grinding on parts when Jeff was out with blankets covering the welder because the wind was messing up the welding. We finished the push bar. Jason continued testing. At 12:00, I had still not been over 200. And I was getting really worried. The weight of the world was on my shoulders. But I felt no pressure from my brotherhood from the Federation. Everybody was there supporting me. They knew they had faith. They said we know you can do it. We're here for you. And that gave me peace of mind that we were in this together.

At 12:30 or so, Jason came to me and said, it's ready. The car is yours.

We took the car to the top of the runway. Next pass was 205.

[Applause]

The clock was ticking. We only had the Spaceport rented to 5:00. I said, listen, I know our lease supervisor at 5:00 but we have insurance. What are our options? They said, just keep going, we'll worry about this.

I felt something not right with the car. It had bump steer. When I hit a bump, the car wanted to move to the right. I told Jason, take it back to the pits, jack it up, put three rounds of compression on all four shocks, we worked on the steering, we installed a wheel cover that gives you more top speed. We put a fresh nitrous bottle in it and it was show time. We towed the car to the top of the runway. We wanted to go against the wind on our first run so we would know how to adjust for the backup run. For the Guinness world records, you have to do one pass, turn the car around within one hour opposite direction, and do another run. The average is your world record. First pass was clocked over 210 miles per hour.

[Applause]

As the team jumped on packing the parachutes, changing the water in the cooling system, I sat in the car trying to maintain my calm. I didn't take off my helmet or take off my seat belt or racing gloves. I told my fiancée, just try to be my gatekeeper. This is show time. Don't let anybody distract me.

So the coolant cart lost its prime. I had no idea. The team were back there drastically frying to change 15 gallons of water for one tank. They were using Solo cups, water bottles, anything they could do. So when we cranked up the car, we had 12 minutes left on our one-hour turnaround time. So I ease into the throttle at about the 300-foot mark, able to go wide open. Sound of RPMs was music to my ears. Went through the finish line. The guidance system calls out parachutes. We were running out of run way because the brakes were heat soaked. They were fading fast. But we brought it to a stop with only about 300 feet left in the run way. Immediately the Guinness officials came up. They had to prove the in-car shot that I was the one in control going for the record. Immediately we took the car to the trailer, to the applause from all the NFB family there cheering me on. Guinness official looked at all the go pro videos and laptop and certified our record, 211.043 miles per hour.

[Applause]

That record, the racer side of me recognized that 211.043, but that's just a small part of this record. This record is about every one of us in this room. Everyone watching on livestream. Everyone there is in the blind community. To prove what we can do if we're given an accessible world. We can compete with our sighted peers in the workplace, at school, or on the race track.

[Applause]

We all have our own field of dreams, something deep in our heart we want to accomplish. As we all start going our different ways on Monday, know that your Federation is behind you. Take it one day at a time. Surround yourself with supporters. Take the doubters out of your life. And anything is possible.

[Applause]

I know we will continue to work for the National Federation of the Blind and the blind driver challenge, and together we will build the Federation.

[Applause]

So when President Riccobono earlier was talking about the museum, a little while back, I called him and told him that when the museum is built, I will donate the motorcycle for the blind driver challenge.

[Applause]

We still have more records to set with that Corvette.

[Laughter]

One day hopefully it will be there too. But it ain't over with yet.

So today I want to present President Riccobono and the NFB one of the moon disks, one of those aerodynamic moon covers, that made the difference between the 205 and the 210 passes that came off the car. And in it is an inscription much I'll have Beth read it to us. But also have the tuner of the car, his son, 3D printed a plaque with all the wording on the moon disk in Braille. So when they hang --

[Applause]

So when President Riccobono takes it back to Baltimore and they put it on the wall, right beside it will be the Braille inscription of exactly what the significance is of that wheel cover and the meaning and historical part of the blind driver challenge it played. So Beth, are you here?

BETH BRAUN: I am. Do you want to hold it? And this one also, President Riccobono.

DAN PARKER: This wheel cover is spun aluminum with a dome shape to it with six holes where it bolts to the wheels so we can take them on and off to service the wheels and brakes, etc.

BETH BRAUN: On March 31, 2022, Dan Parker representing the National Federation of the Blind, the blind driver challenge, and tragedy to triumph racing set the Guinness world record for the fastest car driven blindfolded, 211.043 miles per hour. And then there's the blind driver challenge logo, the National Federation of the Blind logo, and the Guinness logo. And it says this moon disk was a race to use wheel cover providing an aerodynamic improvement on the record runs.

[Applause]

DAN PARKER: Thank you so much for everybody. I know we're so blessed to be back in person at convention. And the energy here this week has been great. As I sat her behind President Riccobono listening today, it's just amazing what we have accomplished together. And I'm a proud member of the NFB and we're going to continue working for everything we have to do.

[Applause]

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you, sir! Great job. Great job.

[Applause]

Dan Parker, everybody.

BENNETT: How about a door prize for that tremendous job? We have a plaque, we got a pair of socks with 50 bucks in it. How about that? Really great socks. And a thermometer. It goes to Tom Lavinski of Canada. Tom, are you here?

MARK RICCOBONO: We have him.

Okay. We have a few more presentations so don't go away. And some more business to do.

First let me tell you on the heels of that presentation that the Dream Maker Circle members, please visit the table in the back of the room to get your ribbons for the Dream Maker Circle and join us at the special event tonight at 7:00 with Dan Parker, and you will get your special souvenir as part of that. I didn't know Dan was bringing gifts tonight, but very nice to contribute to the Museum of the Blind People's Movement before we even have it! It's great!

So come by and visit the table, and of course you can still sign up for the Dream Maker Circle real quick to get into the 7:00 event.

I do want to say that John Olsen of 3D Photo works has put together a 3D photo from the experience at Spaceport America, in the presidential suite if you want to come by and check it out. That display will be given to the Louisiana Center for the Blind to be displayed there.

[Applause]

And there will also be one at our national headquarters.

Okay. A couple other items of business real quick. First of all, we had the nominating committee that was appointed by the states this morning. It's my responsibility to appoint a Chair for the nominating committee. I would like to announce that Pam Allen of Louisiana will serve as Chair of the nominating committee. The meeting will start 15 minutes after this event closes. I don't quite think we'll make 5:00. So shortly after this, the nominating committee. The nominating committee is a closed meeting only available to those who have been appointed to the nominating committee.

Also an amendment to the Federation's constitution has been offered by the board of directors of this convention. We will have discussion of it tomorrow, but we wanted to read it at this session prior. So we're not going to take discussion on it now. But I'm going to ask Beth Braun to read the document that we published in the Braille Monitor.

BETH BRAUN: National Federation of the Blind proposed constitutional amendment 2022. The following proposed amendment to the constitution of the National Federation of the Blind as amended 2014 was approved for recommendation to the 2022 convention by the Federation's board of directors on May 12, 2022.

Under article 3, membership, the current constitution, reads: Section E, any member, local chapter, state affiliate, or division of this organization may be suspended, expelled, or otherwise disciplined for misconduct or activity unbecoming to a member or affiliate of this organization by a two-thirds vote of board of directors or by a simple majority of states present and voting at a national convention. If the action is to be taken by the board, there must be good cause and a good-faith effort must have been made to try to resolve the problem with discussion and negotiation. If the action is to be taken by the convention, notice must be given on the preceding day at a session of the convention or open board meeting. If a dispute arises as to whether the board made a good-faith effort, the national convention as the supreme authority shall have the authority to make final discussion position of the matter. Until or unless the board's position is addressed, the ruling of the board shall continue in effect.

Proposed amendments to article 3 membership section E. Remove the word "member." This section will now pertain to local chapters, state affiliates, and divisions.

Section E would then read as follows: Section E, any local chapter, state affiliate, or division of this organization may be suspended, expelled, or otherwise disciplined for misconduct or activity unbecoming of this organization by a two-thirds vote of the board of directors or by a simple majority of states present and voting at our national convention. If the action is to be taken by the board there must be good cause and a good-faith effort must have been made to try to resolve the problem by discussion and negotiation. If the action is to be taken by the convention, notice must be given on the preceding day at an open board meeting or a session of the convention. If a dispute arises as to whether there was good cause or whether the board made a good faith effort, the national convention acting in its capacity as the supreme authority of the Federation shall have the final authority to make disposition of the matter but until or unless the action is reversed, the ruling of the board shall continue in effect.

Proposed addition of the new section F to article 3, membership. Section F. Any member of this organization may be suspended, expelled, or otherwise disciplined for misconduct or activity unbecoming of a member of this organization, and any nonmember may have their engagement in the organization restricted through standards and procedures established, maintained, and regularly reviewed by the board of directors. These standards will be publicly available as a Code of Conduct for the organization and members will be provided with opportunities to give feedback on the code on a periodic basis set by the board. While considering disciplinary actions taken by the board, there must be good cause and a good faith effort must have been made to hear the concerns of all parties involved. With regard to handling reports or violations of the code, the board will establish policies and procedures for how these will be resolved and investigated. Any person subject to these rulings may appeal to the board, which may elect to have a subcommittee handle that appeal. However, any three members of the Board may initiate a full review under the Code of Conduct. The procedures maintained by the board must provide individuals with clear guidance regarding their right to an appeal the process for requesting an appeal, and the standards used in the board's review of the appeal. Any person subject to disciplinary action by the board issues through the policies and procedures authorized by this section may appeal the board's final decision to the national convention. Such an appeal must be filed in writing and within 30 days of the board's decision. The written request shall be submitted to the President and must be signed by five delegates to the next convention who support hearing the appeal. Notice of the appeal hearing must be given on the preceding day at an open board meeting or a session of the convention. Due to the sensitive nature of certain matters, any disciplinary action will only be considered in a closed committee meeting consisting of the delegates, President voting, and the Federation's President. The committee shall be chaired by the President unless there's a conflict of interest, in which case the delegates shall elect one of the other delegates present who does not have a conflict to preside over the meeting. All efforts will be made in any disciplinary meeting to protect identity of any individuals who are harmed. A matter that has not been fully investigated shall never be considered by the convention. If a dispute arises as to whether there was good cause or whether the board made a good faith effort, the national convention as the supreme authority of the Federation will have the power to make final disposition of the matter, but until or unless the action is reversed by the national convention, the ruling of the board shall continue in effect.

That is the end.

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you, Beth.

[Applause]

So we will consider the constitutional amendment including discussion tomorrow during one of our business sessions.

Okay. The next item is owning our future, continuous revolution in training through the organized blind movement. We thought this item would be important to talk about the training centers that participate as specifically as part of the National Federation of the Blind. These are our training centers. Now, these training centers are independently managed, and they have boards that are independent from the National Federation of the Blind that are responsible for their operation. However, they make a specific commitment to link to the National Federation of the Blind through a memorandum of understanding, and it's not just the written piece of paper. Not only do they bind their operations to be guided by the Federation and subject to the Federation policies, which means that they're inevitably shaped by us, but they also make a significant contribution to this convention by shaping the expectations for blind people all over this nation. They shape the future that many blind people have the opportunity to experience.

What do I mean? Well, how many of you like me are a graduate of a Federation training center?

[Applause]

Tell me they don't have an influence on the convention.

Here we have our current directors of our training centers, but also we are honored to have with us on this panel the founder of the Louisiana Center for the Blind. So please welcome Joanne Wilson, Pam Allen, Julie Deden, and Jennifer Kennedy!

[Applause]

JOANNE WILSON: Good afternoon! I am Joanne Wilson, and as usual, I'm going to begin with one of my favorite stories. This story is about fleas. Now, if you take fleas and you put them in a jar, and you put the lid on the jar, the fleas will try and jump out of that jar. They'll jump once, twice, three times, each time banging their head on that lid and then falling back down into the jar.

Now, if you take the lid off of the jar, the fleas will continue to try and jump out, but this time they will jump just right below where that lid used to be. They never realize that with one more push, they would be free of the jar and would have freedom!

The real problem with blindness is not the loss of eyesight. The real problem with blindness is the misconceptions, the misunderstandings, the stereotype notions that exist about blindness. And these misconceptions exist within blind people and the sighted public. We are often kept in the jar.

Now, in 1940 there was a group of blind leaders who said, you know, if we are ever going to get out of this jar, we need to organize and we need to speak for ourselves. We need to tell what the new truths are about blindness. And so the National Federation of the Blind was started.

In the 1950s, some of our Federation leaders, Jacobus tenBroek and Kenneth Jernigan, and others, said we have these beliefs about blindness. Now we need to put them into action and show that they really work so that the sighted world can see that our ideas work and the blind can see that.

So in 1958, Kenneth Jernigan took over the worst agency for the blind in the country, in Iowa, the Iowa department for the blind. And it was there that he started our first NFB center. It had high expectations. It believed that blind people could live normal lives, that we can live the lives that we want. He put our philosophy into action with conviction, with passion, and with real belief.

I was a student at Dr. Jernigan's first NFB center in 1966-1967. Dr. Jernigan used to have a lot of his students over to his apartment when he was entertaining public officials, state legislators, so that we could mix and mingle with them and educate them about blindness. I was at one such dinner one night, and the dinner was over and I was hanging around the kitchen. And someone came up to me and said, Joanne, would you go refill the coffee cups of the state legislators? And I said, um, let Marge over there do it. She has a little more eyesight than I do.

So Marge took the coffee pot and went and refilled the coffee cups. And I thought, whew! Got out of that one.

The next morning Dr. Jernigan called me into his office and said, Joanne, what do you want to do when you leave this training center? By then I knew all the right answers. Well, I'm going to go to college, I'm going to become a teacher, I'm going to get married and have children, live a normal life as a blind person.

He said, Joanne, you really believe that?

I said, I do.

He said, but you wouldn't refill the coffee cups last night?

I thought, that doesn't make any difference. What's that all about.

He said, Joanne, I want to tell you something. If you start saying no to filling the coffee cups, pretty soon you'll start saying no to crossing a busy street or cleaning your house or taking a college class. He said, life is made up of a series of little things. And if you say no to the little things, pretty soon the days will pass, the weeks will pass, the months will pass, and the years will pass, and you'll never achieve the big things.

Dr. Jernigan always said, philosophy bakes no bread, but without a philosophy, no bread is baked.

Now let's fast forward to the 1980s. Diane McGeorge and the Colorado affiliate were running around trying to reform sheltered workshops in the state of Colorado. Joyce in Minnesota was trying to run around closing homes for the blind in Minnesota. And I and the Louisiana affiliate were trying to kill an awful piece of legislation for the blind.

And then suddenly simultaneously, almost like spontaneous combustion, in 1985, the Louisiana Center for the Blind was started. And in 1987, on the same day, the Colorado Center for the Blind and BLIND, Inc. were started. We did not compare notes on this, you guys. We did not know what each other was doing. We had no idea. There was no thinking ahead about it. It just happened because it was meant to happen. And of course these three centers had the same expectations, the high expectations, that our first NFB center had. It had the same belief in the normality of blind persons. It had very, very rigorous courses in skills training. But the most important thing our centers have is that we help our students develop their own personal defined philosophy about blindness. Our students are pushed by words and deeds. Old notions that they have about blindness, the old stereotype misconceptions are taken out of their heads and hopefully replaced with new truths about blindness.

In 1998 there was the reauthorization of the federal Rehabilitation Act. In this reauthorization, there was a new amendment called the choice provision. It was introduced by congressman William Jefferson from Louisiana because members of the National Federation of the Blind asked him to introduce that.

What did this mean to us, this new provision? It meant that disabled people that receive federal funds could choose where they wanted to go for training and what kind of rehabilitation centers they wanted to go to. In this case, in this country right now, there are probably 90 residential training centers for blind people. But we had the right to choose, even if it is not in our own state, where we want to go for rehabilitation training.

In 2001 the National Blindness Professional Certification Board was started. This is a board that now certifies what we now call structured discovery centers or NFB centers. It is the centers still certified based on methods and philosophy. There are six such centers now certified in our country. There are three state ones and our three private centers.

I have one more very important and critical element that needs to be part of our NFB centers. The centers need to connect our students with the NFB. Why? Because when the students leave the centers, they will have a support group, a structure, to continue to mentor them, give them role models, give them advocacy, give them a network so that they can keep going the rest of their life as blind people.

Our students also need to be shown how to give back. And why not? We're blind people. So a logical thing to give back is to the NFB. Giving back is often thought as one of the secrets to happiness and true equality.

You know, I think each of us desire to give our lives to something bigger than ourselves. You here in this audience right now that are listening to these words are part of our training. You are part of it because you are part of the National Federation of the Blind. Yes, you can be the force that pushes other blind people out of their jar and into new freedom.

Thank you.

[Applause]

I now want to pass the mic on to Julie Deden, the director of the Colorado Center for the Blind.

JULIE DEDEN: Good afternoon. Good afternoon to my Federation family. I am honored to be part of this panel, to be up here today to talk to you about how our NFB training centers have transformed the lives of blind people across the country and the world.

In 1978, 44 years ago, I attended my first convention of the NFB in Baltimore, Maryland.

[Applause]

I cannot believe that it was so long ago, because in so many ways, it seems like it was just yesterday. I was 18 and had just completed my first year of college at the University of Colorado in Boulder. I was so scared that year because I did not use a cane and I did not feel good about myself as a blind person. I was even afraid to go down for breakfast by myself. So I skipped it. Walking across campus one day, I fell into a drainage ditch because I thought it was a sidewalk. I tried hiding my blindness, my identity. I attended my first chapter meeting in April, and even though I did not know very much about the NFB, I picked up on everyone's passion and caring and their excitement to teach me about being proud to be blind.

In May we watched a film entitled "We Know Who We Are." At the end of the film, Dr. Jernigan says, we know who we are and we will never go back!

[Applause]

This sparked something inside of me, and I began thinking that I did not need to feel ashamed about being a blind person. Life for blind people in 1978 was very different than it is now. There were no NFB training centers. Most of the training that blind people received was limiting. We the blind were not in charge, but rather, had sighted professionals dictate to us what we could and could not do. At my first convention, I observed that blind people mostly did not travel on their own. Blind people were not using canes. And they latched on to each other fairly often because they didn't have the training they needed.

The Teamsters union came to that convention to help us organize as hundreds of blind people were being paid subminimum wages and being abused in sheltered workshops. We demonstrated at the FAA because blind people were getting their canes taken away on planes. As you can only imagine, I loved my introduction to the National Federation of the Blind!

[Applause]

I wanted to be part of this. I wanted to make a difference. But first I had to figure out myself as a blind person.

Today when I look back on my journey in the NFB, I can only thank all of you from the bottom of my heart for taking me in, for believing in me. I have learned and been mentored by so many and continue to always learn.

Diane McGeorge and her husband Ray took me under their wings. Ray encouraged me in his gentle way to use a cane. Diane took me to North Dakota and to Wyoming to teach me about building the NFB. In Wyoming, she told me that I would need to be the emcee at a banquet. I was really scared and nervous about this. And she said, "Julie, you can handle this." It is often the case at our NFB training centers that we believe in our students long before they come to believe in themselves as blind people. Diane believed in me. This belief and the high expectations that we have for our students at our centers built them up and propelled them forward so that they will believe in themselves.

In 1988 Diane became the first director for the Colorado Center for the Blind. Her love, commitment, passion, and understanding of the NFB along with her strength and tenacity were key to the center's success.

I never had the opportunity to be a student at one of our training centers. My training came from the National Federation of the Blind. I would not have had the understanding, passion, or belief to direct the Colorado Center for the Blind if I did not have a solid grounding and love for the NFB.

Several years ago we had an opportunity to visit each other's centers. In Louisiana, I felt right at home. Pam began the day with announcements just like we do in Colorado. She encouraged one of the students who had a challenging travel route. The energy at LCB felt just like the energy that I am lucky to experience every day in Colorado.

When we visited Minnesota, one of their students was serving her meal for 40. And there was so much celebration around this accomplishment. Students were playing air hockey, and we could hear the fun throughout the building. Blind people teaching blind people. This concept was not accepted in the blindness profession 30 years ago. Still, many feel that it is dangerous and that the blind that have blind instructors truly can't learn anything.

We have worked tirelessly to change this attitude, and we'll continue to do this.

We have come a long way.

Most of our staff members at our centers have been students themselves. They have the passion and the caring and the dedication that it takes always encouraging, teaching, and working right alongside each student. Our centers have the best staffs in the world, and we applaud them!

[Applause]

We never take what we do for granted. We enjoy working with the wide variety of people who just happen to be blind. We want every student to feel welcome and secure and excited to take on challenges. We know that skills alone are not enough. That extra edge, confidence, is the key to jumping into life and not letting blindness stop us.

Just the other day a student came into my office and said, "Julie, I really do not have time for rock climbing. I need to practice my Braille."

I said "I know you might feel a little nervous about climbing, but I know you can do this." The student went climbing and came back to my office the next day to thank me. She told me that getting on the rock face and figuring out how to get to the top was exhilarating. And somehow she felt changed.

This is what our training is about. What do we want the future to bring for us as blind people? We have revolutionized the training center landscape. We still have a long way to go. Most of the agencies in the country are still run by people who have degrees but do not have intrinsic belief in blind people. We in the organize the blind movement have shaken down many of the barriers that we have faced. We still have much work to do. Remember this: We know who we are and we will never go back! Let's keep building!

[Applause]

Let's look forward to our future, where we are in charge of our training and our destiny. Thank you.

[Applause]

Next, it is my true, true honor to introduce to you Pam Allen, director of the Louisiana Center for the Blind. And I just want to say that we in our three NFB training centers, we work really closely together, and I love Pam and I love Joanne and Jen. And here is Pam.

PAM ALLEN: Thank you so much, Julie.

Once upon a time, a long, long time ago, in 1991, I was very new to the blind community. I had been selected as an NFB scholarship winner and had the opportunity to travel to this great city to attend my first convention. Luckily I have amazing parents and family, but I needed to hear the positive message about blind people from blind people themselves.

I could never have imagined where this path would lead all these years ago to today.

The year prior to receiving my scholarship, when I first came to the Louisiana Center for the Blind, I thought I was going to New Orleans. But what I experienced at the Louisiana Center for the Blind was like no other blindness program I had ever seen. Joanne Wilson was the director. She also had five kids. Somehow she juggled it all, making it look easy. Incredibly, Jerry Little, Ruth Sager, Suzanne Mitchell, and Arlene Hill were also blind and managing their lives and families effortlessly.

When I came to that center, Barbara Pierce told me I would be immersed in the heart of NFB philosophy, and I could not have been nurtured in a more loving and challenging environment. LCB was a place where people who barely knew me gave me opportunities to grow and learn so many lessons. Joanne and the staff and my peers believed in me and had high expectations for me.

At the Louisiana Center for the Blind, I met incredible people who changed and enriched my life, and many of them have become my closest friends and mentors. Roland Allen and I worked together and ultimately fell in love and got married, and I could not imagine my life without him or this work we do together.

[Applause]

Today has been the dedicated staff at the Louisiana Center for the Blind and BLIND, Incorporated and the Colorado Center for the Blind share the journey with students to build rapport, model independence and respect, and cultivate lasting and meaningful relationships. Our NFB training model has transformed the landscape of our field. We believe in the fundamental abilities of blind people, and that with the right training and attitude, blind people can live productive, independent lives, the lives we want. Our philosophy was perceived as radical at first and in some spaces still is. But as our students went out into the world and did remarkable things previously not done by the blind, the expectations in our field correspondingly changed. Once we proved that it could be done, others began following our lead. The result is higher expectations, better training, better philosophy across the country, and brighter futures for all blind people. We partner with various entities throughout the country to ensure high quality adjustment to blindness training. Among the most impactful partnerships is that of the Louisiana Center for the Blind and the Louisiana Tech University and our professional development and research institute on blindness. The idea that blind people could run a university program and train both blind and sighted people who had our philosophy, who believed in what we did, was unheard of. Just like our centers, many waited for the Louisiana Tech program to fail, but it not only succeeded; it has flourished. The dream Joanne Wilson began and that our dedicated team continues has revolutionized our field and changed the lives of thousands. Now so many of our center graduates and Louisiana Tech graduates are teaching others, determining policy, serving as change makers, and leading in the field of rehabilitation.

The consumer based structured discovery model sets our graduates apart. Our alumni come from diverse backgrounds, life experiences, many have other disabilities, but they all are seeking hope, possibility, and connection to other blind people, which is the greatest gift the National Federation of the Blind can give. This hope and sense of possibility, this culture of shared connection with other blind people is not fostered by one person alone or even a handful of people. It is cultivated through all of us, including every single person in this room and listening to us, and those who came before us to make our training centers possible.

This hope and sense of possibility and culture of shared connection is the embodiment of hopes and dreams of blind people themselves who have experienced the life changing impact of training. Those who never had the opportunity to attend training but believed in its power to transform the lives of others, those who may never get the opportunity to attend training, and yet know the difference that it can make and help and advocate with others to receive it. It is about the countless people at this convention who are serving and leading and connecting in big and small ways to demonstrate the power and the message of hope and resiliency. I see the tangible impact of our philosophy and our training centers. When I encounter students heading out to find the theater this week to see Hamilton or hear about a new job that someone just accepted in corporate America whore we ring the bell for someone who used their cane around their family for the first time, or when we witness someone beginning to view their blindness in a more positive way, or when I learn that someone was elected to their child's school parent teacher organization or local city council, or when we hear stories of how people travel abroad, the list goes on and on.

Someone who worked at a non-NFB affiliated training center once visited our center and asked, "I hear everyone talking about this positive philosophy. What is this philosophy? We do not have a philosophy of blindness at our center."

I thought, oh, but you do. And therein lies the problem. Our philosophy is steeped in generations of advocacy, transformative thinking, and love that gives us the freedom from fear, low expectations, and isolation. We embrace and amplify this philosophy, and reject the limitations society tries to place on blind people each time we ring our Freedom Bells at our centers. Our centers work. Our students succeed. And our philosophy transforms because of our shared story regardless of when we became blind. The analysis and critical thinking we cultivate through structured discovery, the high expectations we set, the communities we build, the safe and inclusive spaces we cultivate, the transformation we engender, not only changes the lives of the individuals who attend our programs but it changes the landscape for the blind and the communities where we live, work, contribute, and thrive.

The Federation remains invaluable in guiding us as we continue revolutionizing and shaping the next generation of adjustment to blindness training. Our shared philosophy on blindness was informed by Federationists who had an unshakable belief in the inherent abilities of blind people. That positive philosophy serves as the heart beat and cornerstone of everything we do in the Federation, including at our three training centers. Success of our National Federation of the Blind training centers is attributable to the importance of the philosophy regardless of a person's individual learning style, the sincere unwavering belief in blind people, and their diversity and abilities, the power of the ongoing connection with the National Federation of the Blind. For those contemplating training, please know that we meet you there and we start where you are and we meet you there. Blindness may feel overwhelming, but it does not have to stay that way. You will be challenged to grow but also supported in the process. Training will open doors. Blindness does not define you. And you are surrounded by people who care and by thousands who are there for you. You are not alone. We and the world need your ideas and contributions. You can be successful, productive, and independent. You do have choices about who and what you become. You are the author of your story, and the possibilities are limitless. The journey I began in 1991 is not my journey alone and it is not a unique story. Our several thousand graduates from our three centers share this journey and story. They give the gift of our philosophy every day as they interact with their families, friends, colleagues, and communities. It is the greatest and most humbling honor in my life to serve and be part of our shared story. And I am so excited to be part of the journey as we write our next chapter together.

Let our freedom bells ring. (Bell ringing).

[Applause]

I am so fortunate to work with dedicated colleagues here with me. It is now my pleasure to introduce to you director of BLIND, Incorporated, Jennifer Kennedy.

[Applause]

JENNIFER KENNEDY: As you have heard from my colleagues, many of us have impacted the abilities within the rehabilitation field. For me, my journey in blindness began by not knowing anyone. At the age of 14 I decided it was no longer a journey that I felt the medical professionals could make. They couldn't change it. The only thing could change was what my future would look like.

My family and I struggled to understand why, why had this happened, what would my life be like, who would marry a blind woman, what kind of work would she do.

I had no idea that when Karl Jacobsen called know summer 2001, those dark cloud that's had surrounded us for 4 years as we grieved vision loss were about to part. I entered the hotel in 2001 at the Philadelphia National Federation of the Blind annual convention as a scholarship winner. Never before had I seen so many blind people moving about happily. Not being concerned about the tools they were using, where they were going. They were just out living.

I couldn't figure it out. There were people who had less vision than me who were kicking my butt! They were finding their mentors in the audience with no problem. They were not hunting through the hotel to find the perfect lighting to read their large print agenda.

How did I get to be that kind of blind person? They also called themselves blind no matter how much vision they had. I realized, the hierarchy of sight, the idea that your value is based off of how much vision you had. I had internalized that in the 3 years that I was a blind person. I didn't know it, but I really believed that I would only be successful based on that residual vision.

The people who called themselves blind with that residual vision did so proudly. How did I get to become that person? Well, Pam already mentioned my training at the Louisiana Center for the Blind.

[Applause]

I took a year off between my first and second year of undergrad and spent 8 months working through rainstorms similar to the one we had yesterday, suffering through handmade pasta, transcribing Michael J. Fox's very first autobiography, and walking 7 miles for a hamburger down a little road we call I-20. I figured if I could do all of that, then crossing a college campus probably shouldn't be that hard.

I gave consideration as to what I would do next. I even considered moving to Louisiana and starting my college career over. But what would that mean? Did I really have the skills to continue as a blind person? I knew I couldn't do that. And back to Kent State University in Ohio I went. Going back out into the sighted world meant taking a risk. It meant I had to face the demons of not being able to keep up with the work. It also meant that I to leave my dorm room and not order pizza three nights a week as the prisoner I had become.

Over the next 4 years I did indeed live the life I wanted as a college student. I stayed up late cramming for finals. I hoarded over research notes so that I could finish my papers on time. I joined the delta zeta sorority and lived in a house with 20 other women. There's endless numbers of people willing to take you to Taco Bell at 2:00 a.m.

[Laughter]

And let us not forget the pivotal change of spending too many hours on this thing called the Facebook.

Throughout my college career, I also continued to immerse myself in involvement in the National Federation of the Blind. I spent summers out building NFB chapters in Maryland with Richie Flores. I spent summers teaching at the Louisiana Center for the Blind. It was through that teaching that I realized two things. One, I loved teaching. I loved the process of people learning, the excitement that they had. And second, I hated teaching technology and Braille. It was too monotonous. There wasn't enough creativity. I needed something to get up and move.

I was convinced, though, as I was wrapping up my senior year that I had to be part of this movement. I was already part of the people's movement, the National Federation of the Blind, but that field of blindness rehabilitation was mine for the taking. And off to the Louisiana Tech program I went.

Now, I want you to think about your very first cane. And for many of us the cane that was prescribed to us was the appropriate cane based off of your height and the hypotenuse to the ground by which mathematically your stride should fit. It was at a national convention that Derrick Williamson gave me my first NFB cane lesson and showed me how important this tool was. Remember, I knew that teaching Braille and technology weren't giving me that same jolt. But I knew the Louisiana Tech program was using this cane. And I had proven to myself over the many miles that this cane was powerful, beautiful, and the taller the cane, the faster I could move. This meant I could keep up with my students who were taller than me, which is not hard to do when you're five feet tall. It also meant I could wear whatever shoes I wanted at Washington Seminar because the heel size no longer mattered.

As I worked my way through that rigorous course, I was reminded of all the things that had happened and all the people that had made that college possible. I was joining a small crowd of trail blazers in 2007 once more. I was entering in to a program that not only said that the hierarchy of sight was false, it didn't take vision to teach, it didn't take vision to be safe.

You could also build a high quality program with our structured discovery approach to learning through a university program. This of course was thanks in part to Joanne Wilson and Dr. Ruby Wiles. Structured discovery to me is a nonvisual approach to thinking about the world, gathering information, and for our students to evaluate the world and make their own decisions. It is not about how I perceive the world, how we as professionals prescribe that you do something. The Louisiana Tech program has grown many other professionals who are sitting among you today.

Now, I run an NFB center, right, but that's not exactly how I got here. I felt that there were some things that I still needed to prove to myself, much like my journey in blindness training. So rather than going to apply for a job at a training center where structured discovery was the norm, I found a few fellow Federationists in Virginia who would take me on. Melody Roan and Maurice Pare were my confidants in my first job. Because of Maurice's spirit and grip and bad jokes, we were able to keep the naysayers at bay. Nobody thought the blind guy would last. And heaven help us when it was two blind travel instructors running around the building! I felt myself needing a change. And I knew that I had a lot to share. But I also knew that I was interested in other places and how they operated. And thus I moved to Salt Lake City, Utah, and worked for the division of services for the blind.

[Applause]

Now, the state agency in Utah, mind you, while they were a little bit further ahead in their understanding of blindness, just like Maurice, I was not the first. A gentleman by the name of Nick paved that way for me. Nick was one of our very own Louisiana Tech graduates. He had been challenged with a number of situations that I learned about after I took my job. This included a supervisor who refused to supervise him. He said, nope, I'm not going to do it. It's not safe. Your own boss doesn't even believe that you can do it. So he was required to report to what I believe was either an assistive technology person or someone with a slightly lower ranking. He was given the hardest students that they had with the multiple disabilities, the language barriers, and Nick stuck through it.

It is because of that, because of his commitment to what they were doing in Utah, that I believe I was called to go. You see, Nick's time among our rehabilitation professionals was cut forth when he lost his battle with melanoma. I am today still the only recipient of the National Federation of the Blind scholarship in his name.

[Applause]

I didn't know Nick well but I always felt his spirit in the fight. Now as the Executive Director of blindness learning in new dimensions, I am the first of our Louisiana Tech graduates to run one of our own training centers.

[Applause]

While I did not come into this position with quite the same challenges and struggles that Joyce did in the 1980s, I certainly feel that pressure to make sure that the training opportunities for the blind of Minnesota and the nation is always at the forefront of what we do.

Additionally, this organization is governed by blind people, run by blind people. I had never worked at a place like that. In some ways it was a little bit similar to state government because I have seven bosses. However, these seven bosses are all sitting among us with the highest of expectations. This is an empowering thing to be thinking of, to be the blind speaking for ourselves 30 some years later in our training centers. Our centers are constantly challenged to address new ways, new thinking methodology, and still remain true to the confidence that we build today. After all, that's what we do here at National Federation of the Blind. We challenge one another to examine our own beliefs, the angles by which we approach things, try to find ways to feel respected and welcomed among our community members and find value in each and every member.

We must continue to develop the teaching techniques that are used by our blind brothers and sisters and our blind at heart members because we do it best. Whatever comes our way, we have risen to that challenge. This includes running training centers during the time of the COVID pandemic. The Louisiana Center for the Blind, the Colorado Center for the Blind, and BLIND, Incorporated were the only training centers that were open for face-to-face instruction for a number of months in the nation. I cannot imagine being a director and having to have my staff for 12, 14, 16 months working from home, and I'm so glad that the National Federation of the Blind believed that we too could operate safely in the time of the pandemic.

[Applause]

We have all of our employees. We did not furlough them. Even when times were tough. We knew how important it was to maintain employment, and a sense of purpose, in a time when so many of us felt lost. Pam, Julie, and I had many calls going, what are we doing? How do we handle this? And it was comforting to know we were all trying to figure this out together. After all, it's kind of scary when you're the new guy in the group.

We were required by various state contracts to do things always related to employment and we always have. We revamped our programs to call attention to reasonable accommodation, sexual harassment, misconduct, racism, diversity and inclusion, and building a more welcoming community, understanding boundaries and consent, because that is what is required in the workplace and that is what is required of a National Federation of the Blind training center staff member.

[Applause]

I can tell that you with all of the work that we have done and the meetings that we have had with the directors across the nation of various blindness agencies, they too recognize how important this is to the success of employment for blind people.

I am often asked why BLIND, Incorporated was not named the Minnesota center for the blind. In my research for this, I will offer you the following. Joyce, our founder, thought hard about the name. And she wanted "blind" to be the prominent word. Much like me and my understanding of what vision loss was, she wanted blindness to be the thing that was in your face and it was a thing to be found of.

Structured discovery really is exactly learning in a new dimension. So blindness learning in our new dimensions fits perfectly with the work that we do.

We only fear the word "blind" because of what society has thought that it is. We only fear blindness because for many of us, myself included, it is the unknown. And it is only because of the community of members in this room that I believe and live out every day that blindness need not be the thing that defines you and it is not the tragedy that society tells you it is.

[Applause]

I proudly describe myself as a blind person. I encourage our students to describe themselves as a blind person. And most importantly, I encourage all of my staff and students to participate in the National Federation of the Blind. It is because of each of you, both in person and now on Zoom, that our programs have the track record that they do. It is because of you that we continue to find people in all corners of the country and the positive stories to share with each other. It is because of you that the last 2 and a half years that I have been in this job, that I am still sitting here today.

Thank you for believing in me and in our training centers and for believing in all of the work that was done to get us here. Thank you.

[Applause]

MARK RICCOBONO: Let's hear it for our NFB training centers!

[Applause]

We will continue to shape them and they will continue to shape us. Thank you to the leaders and founders of our centers for giving us this legacy that we can continue to build on.

We have one more presentation today so I'm going to ask you to hang in there with me on this. I do want to let you know that I mentioned in the presidential report that Ellume was one of the accessible tests out there. Of course it does require use of a smartphone. These are the tests that are being provided by the government through the targeted effort that's being made. The government has sent us a number of tests to this convention. Of course you can still order the tests and have them shipped to your home. But if you need, because you're experiencing symptoms, if you happen to need a COVID test, you will be able to get an Ellume test at either registration or at the Independence Market. One test per person, please. For those of you who still need to get your orange wristband, if you're listening virtually but coming later in the convention, you will be able to get that test at registration. So there are still COVID tests available.

Thank you, everybody, for continuing to mask in this convention, in the hallways, in the elevators, in the meetings. It's really important to keep all of us safe. The experts we've talked to have made it clear that masking is the best thing we can do to keep everybody in this convention safe. So please continue to do that. And thank you. We do have masks available.

Okay. For our final item this afternoon, really important. Federation SAFE: Blind survivors, leadership, and our shared commitment. You heard in the presidential report that we established our NFB blind survivors group, and two individuals have taken up the charge of working with the group which is a demanding job in terms of making sure that we're bringing the right resources to the work of the Federation. So here for a presentation are Kathryn Webster and Danielle Montour!

[Applause]

KATHRYN WEBSTER: Good evening, Federation family! I'll start with a trigger warning. This presentation will mention sexual misconduct. If at any point you feel triggered, please feel free do whatever is best for you.

My name is Kathryn Webster. I use she/her pronouns. I colead our newly established survivor group. And I am a survivor of sexual assault.

DANIELLE MONTOUR: I'm Danielle. I use she/her or they/them pronouns and I am a survivor of sexual violence.

KATHRYN WEBSTER: This work is scary. This work is so, so hard. And this work is far more vulnerable than anything I've ever done in my entire life. I accepted this role because this work matters and is necessary for the healing of our organization. I continue to feel devastated and overwhelmed by how much harm and pain has been experienced by members and nonmembers of this community. There is so much more to say in this regard, but I am most eager about sharing our progress over the past year with hopes that this will help ensure we are heading in the right direction. And if you feel that we are not, please, please, reach out to us at survivors@NFB.org, so we can incorporate your perspectives and ideas.

After our updates, I will turn the mic over to Danielle to talk a little bit more about creating a necessary culture of consent within our organization.

So folks, there has been a lot of work done since the last time I was on the virtual stage last year as a member of the survivor-led task force. I am proud of what's been done, but I also recognize there is so, so much work to do ahead of us. Training has been a critical initiative we continue to focus on, and preceding the baseline training from RAINN in 2021 required by leaders and staff, we replicated this training for six more sessions this past spring, requiring chapter Presidents, anyone coordinating youth programs, and state scholarships. This was also offered to anyone interested. Nearly 100 members opted in to join this training and learn what RAINN taught many of the leaders across our organization.

The only difference between last year and this year's training, as President Riccobono mentioned during the presidential report, are those scenarios that were adjusted to make sure they're really specific to our organization instead of just the boilerplate scenarios that don't really apply. We wanted to make sure that the baseline training was pushed out to as many folks as possible, recognizing that training is just not enough.

As we look ahead, we are developing a five-module training curriculum for all elected and appointed leaders. The modules will cover overview of our organization, including the structure and Code of Conduct policies and procedures, inclusive leadership, diversity, equity, and inclusion, bystander intervention and conflict resolution, and consent and boundaries.

We are hoping to launch this training in early 2023 and are really eager for our elected leaders to be taking this every other year. So everyone is refreshed on such important topics.

Way more information to come, but we are very excited about this sustainable approach.

Pivoting to the SAFE Fund, the Survivor Assistance to Facilitate Empowerment Fund, is a dedicated financial resource for providing therapy support to survivors. In 2021 the national board adopted a resolution for a fund for supporting individuals who have been harmed by those who violate the Federation's Code of Conduct. This initiative pays the cost of trauma-based therapy to assist in a survivor's healing process. The fund will cover 12 individual therapy sessions and may cover additional sessions at the request of the therapist and upon approval by our third party claims administrator who has been recommended by RAINN. If the survivor has insurance, the fund will require that it be used. However, the fund will pick up the cost of copays and other charges not covered by insurance.

Big benefit is if the survivor does not have insurance, the fund will pick up the entire cost of therapy. Any person who has filed a Code of Conduct report that was substantiated may apply for funding if they wish to seek trauma-based therapy as part of their healing.

Those whose claims of sexual misconduct or harassment or discrimination are eligible for the fund. Individuals with a claim for misconduct related to harassment or discrimination based on race, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, religion, marital status, age, genetic information, disability, or any other characteristic of your identity are able to go through the organization's Code of Conduct process and are then automatically eligible.

In addition, individuals who have been identified by the Federation's external investigator or the 2021 special committee as having been impacted in the past have been deemed eligible by the Federation's board of directors. Currently 66 people have been offered access to the SAFE Fund. Survivors who are eligible to receive support through the fund will have been contacted by the external investigator or counsel to the special committee. If a survivor consents to having their information shared with the third party administrator, the survivor will be put in touch with them. From there the survivor may elect to initiate support from the fund as we just discussed. No Federation leader will be aware of who accesses the SAFE Fund. Only the Federation's external investigator, counsel to the special committee, and external legal counsel are and will continue to be aware of what's ban greed upon for your name to be shared with the third party administrator. So from that point forward, only the third party administrator will have individuals who are using this support of the SAFE Fund.

To ensure financial accountability, the information that Federation leaders will receive are regular reports on the number of people using the fund and the resource spent. However, no personal identifying information will of be shared with leaders of the Federation. Individuals must utilize the funds provided to participate in one on one therapy provided by a trauma-certified therapist. Unless none is available in their geographic area. In that instance, the third party administrator will approve the selection of a certified therapist who does not specialize in trauma. Upon request, the claims administrator can provide a list of available appropriate licensed therapists. Our board of directors understands that we, survivors, need time to decide whether or not to seek therapy. Therefore, no deadline of application has been established at this time.

Thank you so much, President Riccobono, for spearheading these outstanding steps in the healing process for all of us survivors.

So on to the constitutional amendment very briefly that we're voting on tomorrow. I appreciate the attention to detail that we're prioritizing. Certainly more to be discussed, and if you have questions, always welcome to answer them. But as a survivor, I value that my name will be as protected as possible throughout the process of involving our delegates. So thank you for pushing transparency more and more.

Briefly on training centers. We are glad to have a third-party investigator who has been on boarded to investigate sexual misconduct reports within our three affiliated training centers, and we also are really appreciative that there's been increasing numbers of training for staff and students and enhancements to the policies and procedures alongside the national board and the board of directors at the training center.

Finally, a response protocol was developed with RAINN's guidance and advice to ensure trauma-informed approaches, survivor-centered, and removal of bias is above all else.

Our greatest priority, as a survivor, is communication. So much has been done and will continue to be done, but these transformative moves mean nothing if we are not being transparent with each of you throughout the process. Please keep the feedback coming.

Now I am so honored to pass the mic to my fabulous and beautifully authentic colead, Danielle!

[Applause]

DANIELLE MONTOUR: Thank you, Kathryn. I want you all to understand why I'm here doing this work, because a year ago I did not think I would ever be even back as a member of this organization, never mind being up here talking to hundreds of y'all.

I also want y'all to know why I want y'all here doing this work. I can do this work, but I need y'all here too.

This year has been tough for a lot of us survivors. And I've personally centered running toward things that scare me instead of running away. And this work is really hard, y'all. It's hard. And it takes a lot for me and it takes a lot from the people around me. And yet unlike the things that make me able to say I'm a survivor, this work is my choice and I'm here because I want to be here. None of us are survivors because we wanted to be at the hands of something that caused us pain or caused us trauma. None of us wanted this label. But I do want this work and I want y'all to be present for this work. And Kathryn is lovely and she is here wanting to be present for this work.

Something I really appreciated, kind of continuing on to why I am here with the Federation and up here speaking, is something that President Riccobono said. He said this isn't just a thing you can fix. You can't just fix it. He's right. You can't fix decades of pain. You can't fix the hurt and why people have left the Federation and why people are worried about coming back and why it took me years to come back. You can't fix that.

But you can be here and you can hold space and you can be authentic and you can step up and listen and honor the folks who are speaking about these things and the folks who are thinking about it and the folks who have been impacted. And that's something President Riccobono has really illustrated well that he's wanting to hand off to us as a community to do together and not just be something one person gets done. This pain isn't fixed on an arbitrary deadline. There isn't a single solution that makes this stuff go away.

But what does help a lot is being here in front of a family. And I always used to scoff at that. I used to laugh when people said my Federation family. And I'm finally starting to understand why people say it. Mainly because of a survivor who talked to me last night who gave me her consent to share something she said, which is, we're a family, and if we're a family, then the rest of the family needs to know what's going on. And we need y'all to understand that. We need y'all to know what's happening. We need y'all to know that we're hurting. There are people in this family who are hurting, and we need your help. We need you all to step up with this too because we're here and there are so many of y'all in the crowd who even if it wasn't sexual violence, you've been grabbed when you've been trying to go across the street. Someone's answered a question for you when you were the one who was asked. Your consent in that way, your autonomy as a blind person, has not been honored.

That's the same for those of us standing up here too. And we need y'all to step up and listen and be uncomfortable with us and dig in and do this work. We need to recognize there's maybe more that we have in common than we thought. And we just need folks to be present for us and love us and hold space for us. And we need that to be something that everybody does. And we can do that together. And I know that. Seeing what we've done this year and us all being together, I know we can do it.

And just like that survivor said, I want y'all to know what's happening: And I know that yule can do this work with us. So this is our first year of doing this work. And I want this to be the first of decades and decades of dismantling the pain that took decades and decades to get here.

So thank you all so much for listening and for Kathryn for being here with me. I appreciate you all and I love y'all. Please dig in with us. Please! We need you!

[Applause]

MARK RICCOBONO: Thank you so much to our coleads and to all of our survivors here at this convention this year. We appreciate you being in and amongst the Federation family. Let's give them a round of applause.

[Applause]

Now, Bennett, get a nice door prize ready because we'll need a door prize, but I have to tell you all, I have some sad news. And I hate to end a nice day like this, but it's important.

When I was at the Colorado Center for the Blind in 1999, there was a woman who was in the program at that time. Her name was Ruth Stewart. Ruth came to this convention. First time I got to know Ruth was in 1999 when I was at the center. She came to this convention. She's 81 years old. Getting ready for yesterday's board meeting, she had a heart attack. They took her off to the hospital, and she's been in the ICU since she got to the hospital yesterday. And I'm sad to report to the convention that she passed away at 1:45 this afternoon.

So in one sense, she was probably in the place she wanted to be, but in another sense, it's a loss. So I would encourage you to keep Ruth and her friends and family in your prayers this evening.

So with that, Bennett, though, we should celebrate Ruth by having a door prize.

BENNETT: I add the $50 to a mixed bag with socks that had $50 in it so that will be $100 with a smart thermometer and chocolate covered cherries. The winner is Sharon Appell.

How about Shirley Pratt from Louisiana? Are you here?

Well, okay. How about Amy Snow from Wisconsin?

Okay. That's it, Mr. President.

MARK RICCOBONO: Okay. We will stand adjourned until tomorrow morning.

(Meeting ended at 5:41 p.m. CT)