# National Federation of the Blind

# 2022 National Convention

# Banquet

## July 10, 2022

## 6:30 – 11:00 p.m. CT

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[gavel]

SPEAKER: Good evening, everyone! 2022 banquet of the National Federation of the Blind in the great city of New Orleans is called to order.

[Cheers and applause]

If I could have your attention, please. If I could please have your attention. It is now my pleasure to introduce this evening for our invocation member of the National Board of Director, the members for the National Federation of the Blind of California and advocate, a mentor, a leader, a civil rights advocate, an author, someone who is beloved by so many of us in this organization who has touched all of our lives in so many ways. It's my pleasure to introduce Ever Lee Hairston.

EVER LEE HAIRSTON: Today is the day that the Lord has made. Let's be glad and rejoice in it. All right! If that's true with you, I want to hear you applaud yourselves for being here.

[Cheers and applause]

Let's bow our heads, please.

Almighty and Gracious Lord... we have so pleased that you have allowed us to come together once more in person...

[Cheering]

…for our 82nd convention. Heavenly father, favor us with your presence in this house. Heavenly Father, so many tonight, in spite of the joy and the happiness that we share, are sad because they are dealing with grief, because we have lost so many leaders and members of the National Federation of the Blind this year. Let's have a silent second to say God bless them all.

God bless them all.

Heavenly Father, we want you to pour out your spirit to each one of us, because we have dealt with a very challenging history in our organization. It has been difficult and challenging at times, but we as Federationists never walk alone. You, and you all know that we are never alone in our striving to be who we are, and to be the best that we can be, fulfilling our dreams from day to day. And Heavenly Father, we ask this evening that you remember that this is a very diverse organization, and we strive towards being bonded all ethnicities, all people, no matter where they are from, no matter what they are about, no matter who their higher power is, we say, oh, God, we are together no matter what. Continue to bond us as we move forward for another year. Oh, Heavenly Father, we ask that you would really allow us to thank our extraordinary leaders of our organization, Dr. Jacobus tenBroek, founder, and our profound leaders, past presidents, Dr. Kenneth Jernigan, Dr. Marc Maurer, and our current president, Mark Riccobono.

[Applause]

 Who is going to give us our address this evening. Father, we ask that you give him clarity, give him peace, understanding, stand by him, O God, knowing that he has been so dedicated and committed to our movement in spite of the difficulties and the challenges that we have had to meet. O Heavenly Father, we ask that you would bless all of our sponsors and our friends. Bless our affiliate presidents, chapter presidents, division presidents, members and friends of our organization. Heavenly Father, we ask that you bless our scholarship finalists, as they come on stage tonight, Father, we ask that all of those scholarship finalists will excel and become leaders, our future leaders of tomorrow. Heavenly Father, we ask this evening that you throw your mighty arms around those who have been challenged, those who have been survivors. We also pray O God for those who have violated our code of conduct. We pray for them O Father, we ask God that you would bless those who have wronged us. Give us the strength and the courage to forgive, because, Father, we know that we will never walk alone, no matter what they try to do to us, we are strong and stronger together. And now God we ask that you would bless this food we are about to eat. May it give us strength and nourishment for our bodies. These and all of the blesses we ask if your Son Jesus' name, let's all say... amen.

[Applause]

SPEAKER: Thank you so much, Ever Lee. How about a door prize as we get started tonight? We have a lot of great door prizes this evening and I I'm sure we have a lot of people who would love to win those door prizes. So our first door prize is for two $25 gift cards, and it's going to Dennis O'Brian from New Hampshire. If Dennis is here. I think we've got him.

All right, congratulations!

Also, I know that we have a lot of people who are listening virtually this evening, so let's give a big cheer out for everyone who is joining us virtually. We know that you are with us in spirit and we're sending our love out to everyone all over who is listening in tonight. And we're going to be having some virtual door prizes. So our first virtual door prize winner ‑‑ and remember to please email prize@NFB.org . Our first winner is Jennifer Wenzel. And she will be winning $50. Congratulations Jennifer, if you email prize@NFB.org , I'm sure she's listening. So enjoy your dinner and we'll be back momentarily.

[Music playing]

SPEAKER: Okay, let's have a round of applause for our wonderful musicians tonight. We appreciate their wonderful talent and we're so glad that they're here with us while enjoying our dinner. Now I have... we're going to be doing some drop‑ins here in just a moment. On some of those who are joining us virtually. Again, we know there are people listening from all over the country, so we're really excited to welcome them. So Will, are we ready for our first drop‑in?

SPEAKER: Are you ready?

SPEAKER: We're ready.

SPEAKER: Okay. Are we good to go for our first drop‑in?

SPEAKER: Yes.

SPEAKER: Okay. So do you we want to say a great shout oat out to the Aurora chapter of the National Federation of the Blind of Colorado.

[Cheering]

SPEAKER: Hi! We are so glad you're joining tonight. Hello, Dale, can you hear us?

DALE: Hello!

SPEAKER: We're so glad you're with us tonight. We hope you are having a great banquet party. Welcome. We understand that you have a very special guest with you.

DALE: Who is...

SPEAKER: Yes, we do.

DALE: Who is that?

SPEAKER: This might be the one and the only Diane McGeorge.

DALE: Oh, yes.

SPEAKER: Hey, Diane.

DIANE: Guys, this is so wonderful.

SPEAKER: Great to hear your voice.

SPEAKER: die we're having a great banquet with a bunch of the Colorado folks, and I wish I was there.

SPEAKER: We wish you were with us too. We're sending lots of love, Diane.

DIANE: Thank you. I know that. I'm going to be there next year.

SPEAKER: We're counting on that. We're holding you to that.

[Applause]

DIANE: Thank you all.

SPEAKER: In honor of you, Diane, we're going to do a door prize.

DIANE: Right. It better be a big one.

SPEAKER: This is for $150, and it is for Zach Dreicer from New Mexico. Are you here?

Let's see if he's here. Is Zach here?

All right, we're going to try to locate Zach. But it's great to drop in. I hope you have a wonderful banquet.

 And we have our second drop‑in this evening. We're excited to welcome the San Joachim of California. How are you?

MIGUEL MENDEZ: Hellooooo!

 [Cheering]

SPEAKER: It's great to be with you. Wearing Mardi Gras masks.

[Cheering]

SPEAKER: We're getting into the spirit. Miguel Mendez, we're excited to welcome you.

MIGUEL MENDEZ: Thank you. We are at the home of Gustavo and Marissa Mendez, they are the host for this chapter to have our banquet. I am Miguel Mendez. I have the honor of serving as president for the Central Valley. I would like to tell you that my heart is gladdened to hear the beautiful voice of Ms. McGeorge, who alongside Joanne Wilson and the late great Joyce Cannon, who was my personal mentor and the person that transformed my life through her blindness learning new dimensions incorporated in Minneapolis, Minnesota. My heart is always glad whenever I hear any of those three person's names mentioned or their wonderful voices. So that was so beautiful to hear.

DIANE: There are three incredible pioneering women. So thank you, Miguel. We appreciate that. And we are so glad to hear from you. We hope that you enjoy the banquet. Thanks for letting us drop into your party.

Our third drop‑in, we understand this one is enjoying some Louisiana inspired food. So let's give a warm welcome to our First Lady, Melissa Riccobono --

[Cheering]

-- from the National Federation. Hey, Melissa.

MELISSA: Hello!

SPEAKER: I miss sitting next to you.

MELISSA: I said the same thing earlier. I miss seeing you as well. But you're in my ear. So it is kind of like I am right now.

SPEAKER: That's right exactly. It's so good to hear you and be with you virtually tonight. How is everything going?

MELISSA: Everything is going well, aside from the fact that my guests have all decided that because it's later here on the East Coast, they sort of wanted to be at home to enjoy the banquet, so I'm kind of by myself, sitting down in living room with a little toy poodle that I'm watching for a friend of ours, and... but still very good. We had a really nice Louisiana ‑‑ food from Louisiana inspired restaurant, though I went the healthy route and had a salad and cream of crab soup, so I was very Maryland. But there was definitely Louisiana inspired stuff available. I just didn't take advantage.

SPEAKER: I love it. Getting in the spirit. That's awesome. Well, we miss you, and we are all thinking of you, and we hope you can feel the love all the way in Maryland from Louisiana. So let's give a big cheer for our First Lady.

[Cheering]

MELISSA: Great to hear the big cheer. Enjoy the banquet, and I can't believe convention is almost over. It's been a great one. So thanks for letting me drop in.

SPEAKER: Thanks, Melissa. Enjoy! Happy banquet!

MELISSA: Thank you, you too.

SPEAKER: And we're going to have one song and then we'll be back with a few more announcements. Enjoy.

[Music playing]

SPEAKER: If I can have your attention. If Judy Sanders and Jessica Proctor and LeeAnn Beacham can make your way to the stage. Thank you.

[ Music playing ]

SPEAKER: Okay, how about another door prize. We have a door prize. We did not find Zach, so this next door prize is going to be for $200, and if Katie Pat is here from Texas...

[Cheering] are you here, Katie?

All right, sounds like she's here. So congratulations, Katie! We also are going to do a virtual door prize. Again, we're so happy to have everybody joining virtually tonight. And the winner of our virtual door prize... and remember to please email prize@NFB.org  ... it's Lori Ann Coley from South Carolina. And Lori won an $100 Independence Market gift certificate. Happy shopping, Lori, we hope you can get that in in the next 30 minutes. If I can have your attention, it is now my pleasure to introduce for some exciting announcements about... I know we have been working hard this week to raise money for the PAC Plan, so it's my pleasure to introduce Scott Labarre.

SCOTT LABARRE: Good evening! Good evening, my Federation family. Are you out there?

[Cheering]

SCOTT LABARRE: Oh, man, I, quite frankly, am astonished. I'm blown away. I am happy. I am... we've got a lot of things that are going to get decided here tonight. We have to award our PAC critters, okay? And I guess we were going to deal with the most difficult one first, and this is for the PAC rat. Now...

[shouting in background]

SCOTT LABARRE: So all week Colorado and Maryland have been battling back and forth by the way, Texas are you out there?

[Cheering]

You came in a close third, I just want you to know.

SPEAKER: Can I borrow your mic?

SCOTT LABARRE: Sure.

SPEAKER: Maryland, where are you!?

[Cheering]

SPEAKER: We're going to beat Colorado!

SPEAKER: I don't care where you are now, but I hope you're back at the PAC table earlier today.

SPEAKER: You don't understand it, Maryland. We can't have rats. We have too many

SCOTT LABARRE: I'm going to have to have Pam bust you guys up. Okay, so the PAC rat goes to the affiliate with the most activity. Both Colorado and Maryland sent exactly the same number of people to the PAC table.

 It's a tie. So they're going to have to fight it out. Because I've got two PAC rats. I've got Ryan, Sr. and I've got Ryan, Jr., the PAC rat. And by the way, Ryan, we miss you. Shout out to you. And so here is the deal... Colorado raised 671 new dollars a month on the PAC Plan, whereas Maryland only did 237. So in my unbiased...

SPEAKER: Nooooo!

SCOTT LABARRE: ... unbiased professional opinion, the senior PAC rat ought to go to Colorado.

SPEAKER: Maryland already has way too many rats, okay? You guys have a problem with that.

SPEAKER: We don't have little rats. That's why we need the big ones.

SPEAKER: You need the little one because we need to get a little more infestation in Colorado.

SPEAKER: We need the billing one because it has to be authentic!

SPEAKER: You're just waiting until we get to fight, Ronza.

SCOTT LABARRE: Here is the deal... I'm going to throw both of these rats down there under the floor and they can go after them.

SPEAKER: All right, one... two...

SCOTT LABARRE: Two... three... [ Cheering ]

SPEAKER: Pulling my hair! Ahhhh!

SCOTT LABARRE: All right, Ryan, Sr. goes to Colorado. But Maryland...

SPEAKER: Sports and rec, she's scrappy.

SCOTT LABARRE: But Maryland, it's not all bad. Monthly contributions Colorado finished at $4018 a month, which is a great increase, obviously. Maryland finished... and I guess their number one... $4,826 a month.

Now, for the other critters, for the PAC mule, for the division that did the most activity, they really kicked it in gear and won the race easily. Let's give it up for the NFB Seniors!

[Cheering]

Judy Sanders. Here you go. Here is a PAC mule. You got it? You can say something if you want.

JUDY: Oh, yeah. Where is it?

SCOTT LABARRE: It's a skinny little mic.

JUDY: Hello, everybody! So I just want to say that seniors are ready to show some decorum, unlike...

[Laughter]

... unlike the younger version of... congratulations for all they did. And I want to give a special mention, as long as I have this mic, to Diane McGeorge, who couldn't be with us, but as she says, she's coming next year. And I would also ask that everybody remember Ruth Seger, and we're going to think about all that as we celebrate this thing that is in my hand.

SCOTT LABARRE: It's a PAC mule. Scott the PAC mule.

JUDY: Oh, it's Scott the PAC mule. All right, do I have to return it next year?

SCOTT LABARRE: No, it's yours.

JUDY: Oh, thanks.

SCOTT LABARRE: Now and forever.

[Laughter]

SCOTT LABARRE: All right, so lasts, but not least, in terms of the PAC critters, for the affiliate that raised the most percentage‑wise, this is the pachyderm, the woolly mammoth, this goes to Maine. Maine, you're not up here. We called for Leon. Whoever is a representative of Maine, meets me at my table, which is 54. We'll give you the PAC Peret the Pachyderm. Those who are already in PAC and increased their pledge, the first $250 gift card goes to... Larry and Sue Sebronic of Boise, Idaho. Meet me at table 54, or come up here real quick. And then for a new PAC pledge, another 50 dollars gift card to Helen Mejia Stevens of Des Moines, Iowa. Again, table 54, or if you want to run up here right now.

 Then lastly, I want to report to you that because of our activity, we ended up at $496,319 a year on the PAC Plan. So one last time... join me in... me... me... me... [singing]

Get on the PAC Plan

Sign up today

      We need your contribution right away

      Funding a movement

      It must be done...

      So all our battles can be won

      Again, again!

      [ singing ] get on the PAC Plan

      Sign up today

      We need your contribution...

      Right away!

      Funding our movement

      It must be done...

      So all the battles can be...

      ... WON!

Thank you, everybody!

SPEAKER: Congratulations to our winners. Thank you, everyone! And thank you so much for your contributions to PAC. Let's have a door prize in honor of our winners and in honor of everyone who so generously gives to PAC to support the programs of the National Federation of the Blind, and we have a great door prize. Again, I want to thank everyone who contributed door prizes, all our chapters and affiliates, thank you so much for your generosity. And our next door prize we have $100 and also $100 in gift cards, and that's going to go to Albert Elia of Washington. Are you here?

All right, congratulations!

And if Jessica Stover and Tracy Soforenko can make their way up front, we're going to have a special musical surprise here in a little bit. And I want to take a moment, if I could have your attention, please, we've been talking about ways we do fundraising in the National Federation of the Blind, and how important all of the generosity is. I want to thank so many people, a special acknowledgment to all of our sponsors that have been sponsors this year at convention. If we could have a round of applause for all of our sponsors. I know later tonight we are looking forward to hearing the exciting announcements for our 2,022 scholarship winners. But I want to take a moment to acknowledge all the alumni here with us, scholarship winners from the classes of 2020 and 2021. We had a really special in‑person reunion this year, and I want to take a moment to acknowledge them MRI yam Abdul Sataar, Chris and More Blessings, Tushar Cooper, Matthew Hoffman, Lucien, Maxine, Maniel Joffrey, Jeannette Jones, Emily Keel, Sarah Luna, Jimmy Treover, Sarah Pablo, Teresita Rios, Tracy, Tina Reisner, Logan Stenzel, Megan Swanson, Ken Showtella, Addison Villanada, Miranda Williams and Brian. So give them a round of applause. They're with us for a special in‑person gathering. We're so excited. Congratulations, we're so glad you're here with us this evening. And so if Tracy Soforenko...

[Cheering]

If I could have your attention, please. I know everybody is enjoying the delicious food, but if I could please have your attention.

[gavel]

If I could have your attention, please. Can I have your attention, please? And if Peter Tucic could make your way to the front. If I could please have your attention.

Thank you so much. All right, thank you so much. Again, let's give a round of applause to our class of 2021 and 2020 scholarship alumni. I know others are listening virtually tonight, so we really, again, so happy that you're with us.

[Applause]

And now I have... it's my pleasure to introduce for our next presentation... how many participate in our Give 20 Campaign this year? [ Cheering ]

Excellent. And I now want to turn the microphone over for his remarks, Tracy Soforenco, president of the National Federation of the Blind of Virginia, member of our national board, and also a chair of our Jernigan Fund Committee.

TRACY SOFORENKO: The power of our movement comes from when we are together. When we come together, there is nothing that can stop us. Dan Parker set the land speed record. For the fastest blindfolded individual. I have to admit, every time I heard about Dan, I kept thinking about a song from Sammie Hager... "I can't drive 55". I'm conscious of the fact that many in my Virginia delegation participating over Zoom said they were thrilled to hear me sing while the rest of you maybe not so much. But when we came together, 555 people contributed to the Give 20 Campaign!

[Cheering]

Together we raised $38,043.

 [Cheering]

Like you can... and you can still give, and maybe Humanware will continue to match us. You can give at NFB.org /give20. We're going to accept donations. We're happy to have that be part of the match, I hope. I'm putting Peter on the spot here to see if he's willing. But our goal here is... or you can call our number, extension 2430.

Like Dan Parker, we needed an extra boost. I think of it... Dan had nitric oxide added to his vehicle to give that extra boost. We had extra boost. It was the so generous match from Humanware. They were willing to match for our Give 20 Campaign up to $50,000.

[Cheers and applause]

TRACY SOFORENKO: Someone, as part of the Give 20 Campaign will be coming to our 2023 convention. They will be getting transportation for two, hotel, two banquet tickets, registration for two, and $1,000 walking‑around cash, to tell us who the winner is. I have the Hon nor of introducing our partner at Humanware. We don't have a magic wand at this point to share for that activity, but we have a great partner in Humanware and Peter Tucic their director of strategic partnerships, Peter has a background... his degree is from the University of Illinois at Chicago. He is responsible for the strategic key relationships between Humanware for their assistive technology with low vision and blindness organizations and our community, and it is my pleasure to introduce you to who is coming home with our Give 20 Campaign prize for 2023, our friend, Peter Tucic.

PETER: Can I start by saying how glad we are to be back in person. We're here! We're united. We're back. And we talk about unity. We talk about how good it is to be back. When Dr. Craig Medder and Bruce Miles were on stage Friday, they talked about partnerships. I do not want to hear any wands. I don't need to hear them. But partnerships are extremely important and Humanware is thrilled to be a dedicated and long‑time partner of the NFB sponsoring many conventions and just being a part of the fabric of making all of these things accessible. I am thrilled to be here. We're ready to announce the winner of the Give 20 Campaign, and I will say I'm thrilled because this is somebody from the midwest. I'm not going to call out specific states, but if you're from the Midwest like I am, you will be ready to rumble.

So the winner is... Peg Alvarson from Lincoln, Nebraska!

And I very much appreciate the opportunity to be here. So thank you, NFB. And let's continue to be united, and let's Give 20!

[Cheers and applause]

SPEAKER: Thank you so much. Let's have a round of applause for Humanware, for their generosity and support!

[Applause]

Thank you again to everyone who contributed. We truly appreciate it. So we're going to listen to another great song from NOLA Soul, and we'll be back momentarily.

[Music playing]

SPEAKER: Let's give a round of applause to our NOLA Soul. We appreciate you being with us tonight. Thank you so much. Anybody ready for a door prize?

 [Cheering]

 Okay, so our next prize is for $100, and also a Q Health reader, and it goes to John Scott of Michigan. John Scott, are you here? All right, do we have John?

 All right.

 Okay, everyone, if I could please have your attention. If I could please have your attention. All right, if I could please have your attention. I know that everyone enjoyed a delicious meal. We want to thank all of our staff at the Marriott for serving and working so diligently throughout this week. We really appreciate all the hard work. It's so great to be here in New Orleans. So thank you to our staff and our Marriott team!

[Cheers and applause]

And now I would like to introduce our head table, if I could please have your attention. And if you are facing the stage, I'm going to start on the far right. First I would like to introduce the former First Lady of the NFB, an award winner, incredible mentor, Jean Brown. And next to Jean, the second vice president of the National Federation of the Blind, baseball champion, Ron Brown.

We again want to wish Ron and Jean happy 35th anniversary. And sitting next to Ron, past president of the National Federation of the Blind of Texas and national board member and recently elected as president of the Senior Division, Glen Crosby. And sitting next to Glen, president of the National Federation of the Blind of Texas, our host convention affiliate next year, and also wearing many hats, serving on our national board as secretary and also acting treasure and treasure elect, Norma Crosby. And I'm going to skip over the next individual, and then next to the podium I would like to next introduce the... my husband and leader in the National Federation of the Blind of Louisiana, Roland Allen.

[Cheers and applause]

Sitting next to Roland this evening is a woman who I know has taught us all so many in her service and leadership in the National Federation of the Blind, Mary Ellen Jernigan.

[Applause]

Next to Mrs. Jernigan, someone who we are will always so thankful for our partnership and extreme generosity throughout the many years, a long‑time friend of National Federation of the Blind, Dr. Ray Kurzweil

[Applause]

And next to Dr. Kurzweil, we are thrilled to welcome to our head table the First Lady of the National Federation of the Blind of Utah, a scholar and incredible neurosurgeon, Dr. Angela Peters.

[Applause]

And, finally, sitting next to Angela, we have president of the National Federation of the Blind of Utah and our secretary – elect, presenter for our awards today, Everette Bacon.

[Applause]

So let's have a round of applause for our head table.

[Applause]

And if I could please have your attention. If I could please have your attention in the back left, please. Thank you. During this week, as we have celebrated the accomplishments of the National Federation of the Blind and come together in person and also as we're welcoming all those who are joining virtually this evening for our banquet, the power of love and the spirit that we have felt has uplifted and restored all of us. I know that this evening we have all looked forward to the time that we could come together again in person at our banquet to reflect on all that we have accomplished, the challenges that we have faced, the work that we must do together. And the future that we will building, the saved and inclusive future for ‑‑ the safe and inclusive future for all. That would not be possible without the loving example and selfless leadership of our president, Mark Riccobono.

[Applause]

I know that we have all looked forward to this moment when we can come together again and listen to our banquet address together as a Federation family. And it is now my distinct honor to introduce my friend, our president, Mark Riccobono.

[Cheers and applause]

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Good evening, fellow Federationists! Thank you, Pam, for that warm introduction.

Listen. Feel the energy. Let the understanding warm your heart. We are back! We are together again!

[Cheers and applause]

And in coming together we experience the collective heartbeat of our movement as blind people. David Whyte offers us the following in his poem entitled "Working Together."

We shape our self to fit this world

And by this world are shaped again. The visible and the invisible working together in common cause, to produce the miraculous.

 I am thinking of the way the intangible air travelled at speed round a shaped wing easily holds our weight. So may we in this life trust to those elements we have yet to see or imagine, and look for the true shape of our own self, by forming it well to the great intangibles about us.

The COVID‑19 pandemic has undoubtedly disrupted our ability to harness the power we have when we gather together in the organized blind movement. The intersecting social, economic, cultural and philosophical challenges in our communities have been further heightened by the physical distancing that was a necessary response to the worldwide pandemic. Despite the uncertainty, the power of our ideas, the strength of our determination, and the wisdom of our collective lived experience continues to drive this unparalleled movement – a movement that serves as a space for us to come together. This is the space where equity and inclusion are valued; a space where respect and active participation are expected; a space where we believe in our own capacity to determine the future; a space from which we show the world that we belong. We are the National Federation of the Blind.

[Cheers and applause]

Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "A social movement that only moves people is merely a revolt. A movement that changes both people and institutions is a revolution."

Margaret Mead warned... "Never depend upon institutions or governments to solve any problem. All social movements are guided ‑‑ are founded by, guided by, motivated and seen through by the passion of individuals."

President Lyndon B. Johnson said that there are no problems we cannot solve together, and very few that we can solve by ourselves.

Malcolm Forbes defined diversity as "the art of thinking independently together."

While Yoko Ono mused that "A dream you dream alone is only a dream. A dream you dream together is reality."

[Cheers and applause]

As humans, we seek to classify aspects of our world to create order and understanding. In general, a movement is defined as a group of people who share the same beliefs, ideas, or aims. Sociologists have classified movements often by the nature and extent of the change being sought. Examples of classifications include reform, revolutionary, reactionary, religious, and self‑help movements. Others prefer classifications based on the area of concern that brings the movement together. Examples might include environmental, civil rights, anti‑war, LGBTQ, and gun‑control movements.

One real issue with these classifications is that when a movement is shaped by a diverse group of people, it may not fit neatly into a single category. Especially if a movement is to be sustained, it must continue to be a living reflection of the people within that movement and their aspirations to cause change in the current society. For a movement to be successful, its targets for change must evolve, or there will be no motivation for the people to take further action. The strength of the togetherness in a movement is measured by how well it reflects the values that are shared among the people of that movement.

 With that in mind, what reflections can we make on the National Federation of the Blind – America's organized blind movement? Now in our ninth decade, we emerge again into local communities after a prolonged period of physical distancing. Who are we? Are we different from what we were before? What do we want to be? And how critical is our working together?

The societal patterns of thought about blindness were built into human consciousness many centuries before the founding of the National Federation of the Blind. Misconceptions about the impact of blindness on the physical, mental, emotional, and social capacity of humans had become an understood truth, much like the fact that the sun would rise and fall in a predictable place. Yet throughout all human experience, there have been people living with blindness who have known the errors of these misconceptions. While not every blind person was able to overcome the internalization of these myths, many did find imaginative ways to rise above the social stigma and limited expectations, in order to live meaningful lives. When opportunities for blind people to band together arose, the misconceptions shattered at an even greater pace. However, historically these opportunities to come together were created through institutional systems built for us, not by us ‑‑ schools for the blind, sheltered employment settings, and even homes for the blind. While these institutions afforded us the opportunity to bond together, they also had the effect of reinforcing the very misconceptions that held us back. By the time we entered the 20th century, blind people were a long way from being recognized and respected as a class of capable citizens who deserved the equal rights and responsibilities of our nation.

Locally organized groups of blind people began to emerge across ‑‑ locally organized groups of blind people began to emerge across the country in the early part of the last century. At the same time, our nation was maturing in its governmental structures and federal programs, which created new opportunities. Blind leaders across the country found ways to connect with each other to discuss these opportunities, strategize ways for blind people to gain the equal access and to dream about overcoming the persistent low expectations. Connecting was not as easy as sending a tweet, posting to a Facebook group, or writing a blog post. But the value of sharing ideas, concerns, hopes and dreams, was as powerful as it is today. As changes in American society made the need for organizing on a national basis more important, a young blind scholar of the United States constitution gave meaning, motivation, and voice to the need for a vehicle for collective action by the blind themselves.

Jacobus tenBroek, blinded as a boy, had been shaped into a man of purpose by a determined blind mentor from the California School for the Blind.

Dr. Newel Perry lived through the painful effects of unequal treatment and low expectations, without a National Organization of Blind people to have his back. Motivated by Dr. Perry's high expectations, Jacobus tenBroek studied the law and found power in the roots of the equal protection clause of the 14th amendment to the United States constitution. Protections resulting from the work of the abolitionist movement of the previous century. These blind men, mentor and mentee, shared a belief in self‑determination that empowered representatives of seven state organizations of the blind to work together, resulting in the founding of the National Federation of the Blind in November 1940 and the election of Jacobus tenBroek as the first president of the organized blind movement.

[Cheers and applause]

An initial priority of our movement was to influence the development of policies for the newly established federal social security program ‑‑ earning us an early classification as a reform movement. Alternatively, since one aim was to establish a basic level of support for blind people, it might have been equally accurate to say welfare movement. Still others might believe that the nature of blind people working together to support each other made it a self‑help or self‑determination movement. These classifications, and others we might consider, miss the unique and singularly powerful reason for the movement. No one else was to set the direction and priorities. Only the blind. No one else was to speak for the movement. Only the blind representatives elected by the blind. No other aspect was more critical than the reality that it was a blind people's movement.

[Applause]

The nature of our work during the 1950s may have justified the classification of organizing movement. As we grew in participation and success, efforts to resist our movement emerged. This is similar to the resistance that most powerful movements have experienced. In the case of the blind people's movement, the resistance came out of institutionalized charity and low expectations. The idea that we should and could speak and act for ourselves was a direct contradiction to the narrative upon which many agencies for the blind had built their services.

The resistance was so severe that in the late 1950s, we needed to compel the United States Congress to consider bills to protect our right to organize ‑‑ a right already widely enjoyed by other Americans.

From our perspective today, some may find it difficult to imagine firm resistance to the basic idea that blind people can and will speak and act for ourselves. However, it still emerges in our daily lives today. How often in public does someone talk about you rather than to you? Or express surprise that you can manage your own affairs?

What is the root of such treatment? I regularly encounter this myself. A couple months ago I was traveling with a non‑blind colleague of mine for the Federation. Breakfast being essential to a long day of Federation business, we went to a local restaurant before our planned meeting with the local affiliate leadership.

I ordered the local specialty of peach pancakes. When the plate arrived, the server firmly addressed my colleague by saying... "Now, ma'am, what I want you to do is cut this up so that he gets a taste of all the flavors in every bite.." Some people brush these experiences off as merely ignorance. However, they are an echo from previous centuries, a persistent obstacle that we must actively work to overcome. We must continue to speak and act for ourselves and to assert that it is normal and reasonable for us to do so. We must also be prepared to do our part to assist others when it is necessary.

My non‑blind colleague, who is an active participant in the blind people's movement, told the server that her plan was to enjoy her own food, knowing that help was not needed. We enjoyed our meal after shaking off the awkwardness of the situation, but I continued to wonder what negative impact that server might have on the experience of blind people in her community. These experiences happen to us every day, in traveling the streets, shopping in stores, participating in educational programs, attending religious services, performing our jobs, enjoying leisure activities, and exercising our rights and responsibilities in society.

While we can have some positive influence on individuals when we address these low expectations, it is the wider movement of blind people working together that advances our status as a class of people. We belong. We have the right to speak and act for ourselves and when we bring our individual efforts together, we make the world better for everyone.

[Cheers and applause]

These low expectations persist as systemic problems. How often are agencies for the blind led by blind individuals who provide positive philosophical as well as administrative direction to their agency staff? How many boards of agencies for the blind have more than one blind person? How many are majority‑controlled by the blind? How many times do agencies, technology developers, city planners, or employers consult with us in a meaningful way and incorporate our perspective prior to making significant plans? The answer to all of these questions is "rarely." When blind people are not a part of the leadership decisions made about us, rarely is there a departure from the vision centered by us that continues to create obstacles for us. Without a doubt, we continue to need a movement to advance the idea that we speak and act for ourselves ‑‑

[Applause]

‑‑ and to transform that idea into reality. That movement is the National Federation of the Blind!

[Cheers and applause]

During the second and third decades of our movement, as America experienced a disruptive period of civil rights reform, we were rapidly raising expectations for the blind in education, rehabilitation, and employment. The blindness system responded to our efforts by using the institutional structures of the field to attempt to slow our progress. One example was the establishment of a system of accreditation for agencies serving the blind based on the misconceptions of the past. This effort did not include us in a meaningful way, thus we pushed back using the effective strategies and tactics that characterize the Civil Rights Movement of the time. Aggressive organizing, wide dissemination of our message, and protesting in the streets.

[Applause]

It is this period of our development that helped us to be known as a Civil Rights Movement or, for those less friendly to us, a militant or radical movement. Regardless of the label chosen, the most important factor was that blind people decided for themselves what strategies and tactics would be used.

[Applause]

Under the dynamic leadership of Kenneth Jernigan, our second long‑term president, the period of the 1970s and early 1980s focused on growing the local structure and membership of the movement by finding new ways to bring blind people together. We began forming affinities between blind people through their positions as students, teachers, or workers in other professions. We established more regular training for leaders at the national level. We increased our communication channels.

The result was more blind people finding our movement. Those people stayed because the Federation offered an authentic place where blind people could work together on terms of equality to advance our own future. They found a community that believed in blind people more than anywhere else in the world. Our movement was the space where blind people were the priority.

As we worked through the 191980s, the maturity of our movement gave us the confidence to grow in new dimensions. For example, in 1983 we established the National Organization of Parents of Blind Children, as a purposeful action to expand the impact of the blind people's movement. This was not the first attempt to incorporate families of blind children into our movement. From our earliest days, we provided both mentorship and advocacy for blind youth. We established Future Reflections ‑‑ a publication for parents and educators, sharing the lived experience of the blind people's movement.

Our state affiliates held seminars for families and found ways to partner with schools for the blind. However, the establishment of this national division marked a significant new aspect to the blind people's movement. The division was permitted by the Federation to have a membership and president who were not blind. Had the movement gone soft? Had it abandoned its core values? Quite the opposite. The movement was now confident enough in its position as a blind‑led movement to create mechanisms to encourage the participation of non‑blind family members within our mission.

We are now approaching the 40th year milestone of parents of blind children benefitting from and contributing to the blind people's movement. The result has been a significant increase in the expectations for blind youth in America's educational system...

[Cheers and applause]

... and an abundance of resources for families generated from our lived experience, and multiple generations of blind youth, who have grown to be leaders in the blind people's movement. Yet even today parents have to fight to have a blind advocate attend their child's IEP meeting. Very few blind people are serving as administrators in public education programs. Many teacher training programs lack the philosophy of high expectations we share, and discrimination in employment continues based upon the misconception that blind cannot ‑‑ are not capable of safely supervising children. Despite the challenges, we persist in raising expectations. We now have our own extensive network of educational programs, teacher training projects and family outreach and support efforts. This is the result of working together. This is the uniqueness and power of the blind people's movement. This is the nature of the National Federation of the Blind.

Since the 1980s, our position of leadership in integrating the blind into society on terms of equality has been unmatched. This efforts were shaped by the imaginative leadership of Marc Maurer, who gave us...

[Cheering]

... who gave us more time and energy to the leadership of our movement than any President we have followed. During this time we established model training centers in Louisiana, Colorado, and Minnesota.

[Cheers and applause]

Which remain the only training centers in the nation that operate within the blind people's movement.

[Cheers and applause]

These centers provide the most comprehensive training available to blind individuals, allowing graduates to pursue their dreams, contribute to the wisdom of the movement, and expand the reach of our shared network.

 Furthermore, the leaders of these centers have an expectation that their blind graduates will share their perspectives to improve the training programs for the future. NFB centers are built on the value that they are both accountable to blind people and contributing to the overall movement of blind people.

[Cheers and applause]

It is a commitment of working together, give and take, that is rarely made by those operating at a distance from the blind people's movement.

Through our movement, we have built programs and services to provide blind people with equal access to information, such as NFB NEWSLINE, and to change the laws to protect the 21st century access needs of blind people.

[Cheers and applause]

We have expanded our public education efforts through wide dissemination of our message and have found imaginative projects to highlight the capacity of blind people. We have offered scholarships and employment opportunities. We have partnered in research projects and we have even led our own.

We have created reading machines, digital talking book players, and explored the development of innovative tactile interfaces. We have developed educational programs that have inspired blind people to be scientists, engineers, technology developers, mathematicians, or to pursue careers in other challenging fields.

Through our advocacy, we have established our movement as the voice of the nation's blind in the halls of power. We have shaped the copyright laws of the nation to include us, improved our access to voting, protected our ability to travel independently on the streets of America, and raised the awareness of Braille literacy.

We have improved the protection for blind parents and caregivers, increased access to accessible technologies, improved educational standards and raised wages.

[Applause]

Are we an educational movement, an access‑to‑information movement, a workers' movement, a public‑awareness movement, or a government‑reform movement?

 Frequently our efforts have benefitted not only the blind, but all people with disabilities. Does that simply make us a part of the disability rights movement? Knowing Federation members, there will be someone who can eloquently argue for any or all of these above. But there is no need for debate. In everything that matters, our effort has been developed, led, and executed by the blind. We are a movement representative of the blind people of our day, inclusive and responsive to the issues of the day, and ever‑adapting to the dynamic circumstances each new day brings.

We are the National Federation of the Blind!

[Cheers and applause]

In case you need justification for why we continue ‑‑ for why we commit to continually adapting our movement together, remember March of 2020. Our togetherness was challenged. Our practices were disrupted. Our systems were altered. But our spirit was never broken.

[Cheers and applause]

This was not the first period when our movement marched forward in extreme adversity. However, the past two years have been different from any other our movement has endured. In a matter of weeks, our in‑person conventions were cancelled, our chapter meetings were postponed, our access to public information and services were diminished, and our togetherness was disrupted. As individuals we felt uncertain, scattered, and without the resources we needed. In many ways, we were not unlike the blind people of 1940. Think about it. In that brief moment, many of us experienced what our blind predecessors experienced before the establishment of the National Federation of the Blind. However, we had the advantage of decades of experience working together in the organized blind movement to draw upon as a resource in fueling our response. Remember what we, blind people, did in those early moments of the COVID‑19 pandemic. Because it is the signature of what we must continue to do. It reflects the best intangible qualities that are the foundation of the blind people's movement. We built a new form of our network. We quickly began connecting with each other in new ways, blind person to blind person. We checked on each other, shared resources and ideas. Applied our philosophy to unforeseen circumstances, challenged ourselves not to settle for the status quo and developed new opportunities for teaching each other. We continued to raise expectations every day in America an America that seemed at the time completely unfamiliar to us. Except that I believe deep down, I was all too familiar.

The isolation. The uncertainty. The lack of information access. The inability to find transportation. The barriers to voting and other public services. And the fear of not knowing the techniques that would keep us safe are all things we have experienced before as blind people. These are the symptoms of the deeply embedded misconception in our society that blindness exclusively defines and limits us. However, they are also the echoes of where we have been in our personal journeys as blind people. Many blind people were still working through their own understanding of blindness when the pandemic put everything on hold. Others of us had their confidence shaken by becoming disconnected and withdrawn. This evening we shake off the struggles and renew our work together.

[Cheers and applause]

Our message to each other tonight is: "You will be fine."

You will be fine because we will work together. You will be fine because the National Federation of the Blind knows that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you or your future. Every day we, together, raise the expectations of blind people because low expectations create obstacles between blind people and our dreams. You can live the life you want. And blindness is not what holds you back.

[Cheers and applause]

The intangible bond we share in our movement is what lifts us up from the depths of loneliness to the joy of participation. Our bond of faith lifts us from the isolation of despair to the comprehension that we can build a brighter tomorrow. Our belief in one another lifts us to know that we can make our lives what we want them to be. Our shared commitment is the spirit of our movement that lifts all of us up.

Tonight we gather to acknowledge the difficult period of setbacks we have experienced all over this nation. It Has deeply affected us, blind and non‑blind alike. It has triggered those deeply held misconception about the human experience that we have worked for decades to change. It has forever shaped our perspectives. This leaves us with the question: "Are we different from what we were before?" Yes and no. Yes, because the society around us is different, and we must continue to operate within that society even as we seek to change it. As blind people, we seek to live in the world not apart from it. We are not immune from the broader trends in society; we live within them. Our movement of blind people represents all intersectionalities.

[Applause]

Are we different from what we were before? In one real sense, the answer is no, because our foundation continues to be a diversity of blind people working together in a movement to make a tomorrow full of greater opportunities.

Tonight we also join together to celebrate the spirit of support, action, love, and determination that has continued to sustain us in these times. Whether you are in this room tonight or participating virtually from anywhere else, this movement ‑‑ this moment is one for celebrating the togetherness of the blind people's movement.

[Cheers and applause]

For as challenging as our recent times have been, we know how much more challenging they would have been without the family that is the National Federation of the Blind. In coming together, we again affirm the truth ‑‑ normal is our experience in the space we build and share together. Our working together is the single most powerful force for transforming our normal into the normal everywhere else in the world. The blind people's movement is our shield against those deeply held misconceptions invading our own consciousness and preventing us from realizing our dreams. In everything that matters, we have one another. No matter the distance, the span of time, or the disruptive forces, we can continue to choose progress together in our movement.

[Cheers and applause]

We can be certain that as we emerge back into our world, there will continue to be great challenges in a ‑‑ in achieving our dreams.

There are still resistance in many places to the idea that blind people can and should speak and acted for ourselves. There are still many entities in the blindness field that feel they know better than what we do what would be meaningful to our future. The general public and government officials still operate on outdated misconceptions about how blindness limits our value and ability to participate fully. Competing societal issues ‑‑ many competing societal issues make it challenging for our message of independence, self‑determination and equal protection to be adequately addressed by those in power. All of this is made more complicated by living in a society that is increasingly polarized by people self‑selecting into limited information channels.

Despite the challenges, tonight I am filled with hope, energy and love, by participating in the National Federation of the Blind, because my expectations are raised, my contributions make a difference to me and to others, and I can celebrate the realization of our dreams with my Federation family.

[Cheers and applause]

This movement has made all the difference to me in what has, without a doubt, been the most challenging years of my life so far. I have observed people in this movement responding to the challenges of the past few years with a spirit that I wish we had observed in other parts of our society. It is not that we are better than others in society, but rather that we have made an honest and deep commitment to working together, even when it is imperfect and difficult, it is always together. Blind people together. I honor tonight the difference this movement makes in our lives and show gratitude for the opportunity to share it with you. During the past year we have shared the pain of losing some of our closest Federation family members. Yet in leaving us, they have asked us to remember that most important tool we have for both progress and success is the bond of faith that we share through the blind people's movement.

So are we a reform movement? A self‑determination movement? An organizing movement? A civil‑rights movement? An educational movement? Tonight, again, we declare with certainty that we are all of these and more!

[Cheers and applause]

We as the blind speaking for ourselves are defined by our collective action. Not by the form that action takes. We are not limited by any action because we can and will use any tools at our disposal, and the wisdom of our shared history to meet the challenges of the day. We are a one‑of‑a‑kind movement. A movement where everyday blind people and our friends and family are blessed to make extraordinary contributions to our human experience. A new movement fueled by the hearts, strength, determination, and thoughtfulness shared between members. A movement built on our lived experience rather than the misconceptions about us.

[Applause]

While our philosophy, our strategies, and our diversity gives us strength, it is the intangible bond of faith we share that makes us unstoppable. Those who choose not to work together with us will use other terms to describe the shape of our movement. But we who make up the blind people's movement with all of our diverse characteristics, share the truth common in our individual stories. We celebrate the power of our march together, and we recommit ourselves to working together for an even brighter future.

[Applause]

To repurpose the ending of David Whyte's poem, we come together to seek the true shape of our own self, by forming it well, to the great intangibles about us in the National Federation of the Blind.

My Federation family, the struggles we have endured since we last gathered in person were unprecedented. But together we remain unbroken. We continue to possess...

[Cheering]

... the collective wisdom, power, and determination to overcome all that stands in our way. We have more to gain than any time in our history, and equally, we have more to lose should we fail to work together. While we are far removed from the struggles that compelled us to first join together in 1940, in our hearts and minds, we will never forget from where we have come. Progress has been ours, because at every moment the movement has been ours. In everything that matters, the blind have made this movement all that it is. We have taken ownership of telling our story and determining our own future. We will continue to use all of the tools necessary to complete our march to freedom, but more importantly, we will never be divided as a class of people working together and committed to each other in society.

[Cheers and applause]

The lesson in coming back together is to remember the way and how our movement worked together when the world was turned upside down. This is the commitment we make to each other. This is the love, hope, and determination felt in our movement. This is the bond of faith where coming together today makes us hopeful for our tomorrows. Let us go together to find the blind that have not yet shared our strength. Let us show the world that we belong in the world and make it better. Let us never be divided. Let us go build the National Federation of the Blind!

[Cheers and applause]

[audience members chanting "NFB"]

SPEAKER: Thank you, President Riccobono. Let's give another round of applause for our president.

[Applause]

Incredible. Thank you, President Riccobono. We will continue to stand with you and support you. Thank you so much for your leadership. I think it's time for a door prize in honor of that incredible presentation. And we have a fabulous door prize to offer. We have $350 combination of money and gift cards if this person is in the room. So let's see if Rachel Newland of Michigan is here. Are you here, Rachel? Are you here?

Okay, I don't think Rachel is here. How about Raymond Hudson of Ohio? Raymond Hudson, are you here?

Okay, anyone out there?

[Cheering]

All right, how about Rachel Otrimba of Maryland?

[Cheering]

Sounds like we have Rachel. All right, congratulations!

And we want to give a virtual door prize, so we're going to give that in just a moment. So everyone listening virtually, be ready. And next, for his remarks, I would like to introduce, for his comments, someone who has revolutionized information access for the blind, a true friend, someone whose generosity has been invested in blind scholars, as he supports our scholarship programs and our initiatives. I am so pleased to welcome for his remarks, Dr. Ray Kurzweil.

[Applause]

RAY KURZWEIL: Wow. I mean, I hadn't really expected so many people to come with COVID, but shows people's devotion to being here.

[Applause]

It was great to hear Mark Riccobono's reflections on the state of the National Federation of the Blind. The speech is a highlight of the year that I very much look forward to. Somehow I get asked to speak right after his brilliant speech. I'm not sure what I've done to deserve that, but I will do my best. He spoke about the overall movement, to understand what blind people can contribute to society and to affect all people's understanding of blindness and its capabilities. So even though there is still people in the world who share centuries‑old prejudices about blindness, this movement nonetheless makes exponential progress each year.

It's wonderful to actually be together in person this year. The COVID pandemic was nothing like we have ever experienced. You have to go back to the 1918 flu, which is a bit before my time. It does make a huge difference to actually be in the same room again. So I enjoyed Mark Riccobono's quotations of people from diverse backgrounds. I'm reminded, actually, of a quote that Lyndon B. Johnson made that is very similar.

"There are no problems we cannot solve together, and very few that we can solve by ourselves."

[Applause]

So that reminds me when I actually met Lyndon B. Johnson in the White House in 1964. I was a senior in high school. He was meeting with me and 39 other young scientists as part of the Westinghouse science talent search. I had created a computer that could compose music. President Johnson gave a speech saying something very similar to this that we can only solve problems if we work together. He also expressed a wish that we would never see war. He went on to describe how horrible war was and hoped we would never encounter it. Unfortunately, later on that year he led the United States into the Vietnam War, which brought all the horrors of war to my generation and the nation. I did get involved in the movement to oppose the war.

I did like Mark's quotation from Yoko Ono. That was my favorite. "A dream you dream alone is only a dream. A dream you dream together is reality."

So if we dream something together, we make it a reality. That does remind me of the National Federation of the Blind and its dream that we are able to dream together.

A quotation I also loved was from Martin Luther King. "A social movement that only moves people is merely a revolt. A movement that changes both people and institutions is a revolution."

So I have been involved with the National Federation of the Blind for 48 years. Where does the time go?

[Applause]

From 1974 to 2022. And I've come to its banquet each year since that time. I actually missed one. That was only six years after the death of Jacobus tenBroek. So I wonder what it would have been like to have actually met him, who gave birth to this organization and movement.

The National Federation of the Blind has had an enormous impact, not just on the blind, but really on the lives of millions of people. It's greatly affected our institutions. I remember when the Americans with Disabilities Act was enabled. That was actually largely drafted here. I remember that the National Federation of the Blind was deeply involved in this enormous change in law more than any other organization. I remember many by Jim Gaschell, that he wrote many of the provisions of it. I remember him discussing how these changes would affect blind people, but also people with all disabilities. That is just one change that the National Federation of the Blind has created to improve our institutions.

[Applause]

Despite all these changes, ancient ideas about blindness still exist, as Mark Riccobono has illustrated. These are becoming actually far more rare. I mean, in the 48 years I have been involved, it's happening more and more infrequently. I remember Martin Luther King very well. During 1950s and '60s, I would go to civil rights marches led by Martin Luther King in Washington, D.C. and in the South of the United States. I would go with my mother, and we were inspired by his view of how society could change. And we saw real changes among both people and institutions that followed from King's civil rights marches. When I met Kenneth Jernigan in 1974, I felt right away that he was the Martin Luther King of the blindness movement.

[Applause]

I remember meeting blind people who were remarkably competent and capable and found out that they all came from Iowa. I quickly discovered why they all came from Iowa they all learned from Dr. Jernigan, who was then the director of the Iowa Commission for the Blind. They had been taught by him to put aside centuries of negative concept of blindness and to be confident in doing everything that sighted people could do. Dr. Jernigan called his approach "structured discovery," and over time his findings have been utilized by rehabilitation programs all around the world. But most of all he created this organization, the National Federation of the Blind, in the way we know it today. He led a true revolution in both how blind people, as well as everyone in society, views the capabilities of the contributions of the blind.

I also have been deeply satisfied this organization has continued to grow and expand its influence with the leadership of Dr. Marc Maurer and Mark Riccobono. I like to look back at the couple of movements I have been involved in. For example, I have been involved in the field of artificial intelligence for 60 years.

[Applause]

Again, where does the time go? Just as I missed meeting Jacobus tenBroek by six years, I also missed by six years the naming of this field of artificial intelligence. It was named at a 1956 conference at Dartmouth College. At that conference they made a pledge to understand written language by computers in two years. While it's now 66 years later, we're still working on that. However, we are actually getting close now to actually achieving that goal. The progress in artificial intelligence has been growing exponentially.

And the other major field I have been involved in has been this movement: The rights and abilities of blind people along with the understanding that the best way to advance these concepts is with an organization that is run by blind people themselves.

[Applause]

As I said, I have been involved with the National Federation of the Blind for 48 years, and I have been amazed at how, to modify Martin Luther King's quote... it is a movement that changes both people and institutions to create a revolution in our understanding of blindness. All of us can be proud of the profound changes we have made to our institutions of understanding and advancing the field of blindness. Thank you very much.

[Applause]

SPEAKER: Thank you so much Dr. Kurzweil. We appreciate all you've done and it is such a pleasure to work with you as we change the lives for all blind people.

And now we have a door prize, and this is 50 dollars if Mark Tardiff from Maine is here.

All right, congratulations!

It is now my pleasure for a special presentation, Jacobus tenBroek was one of the most influential minds in the field of civil rights. He was a staunch advocate and respected attorney and legal scholar whose legacy continues even 54 years after his death. His writings and teachings on equality were pivotal to the landmark case Brown v. Board of Education. The Supreme Court decision that desegregated schools in America. He founded the National Federation of the Blind and served as our first president. His work in the blindness field shattered stereotypes and revolutionized how the blind live in the world. His contributions to society are so immense and lasting that we hold an annual disability law conference which carries his name. The National Federation of the Blind awards the Jacobus tenBroek Award periodically, and 2022 is one such year. As an organization, this award is the highest overall honor that we bestow, and we only award it when we feel someone exemplifies the characteristics that are synonymous with Dr. Jacobus tenBroek himself, including an unwavering commitment to civil rights and the work that results in meaningful change for all blind people. And I'm honored to present this award tonight.

In 1970, this individual joined the National Federation of the Blind and attended their first convention in 1971 in Houston, Texas. They have been involved in organizing many different state affiliates. In every state in which they have lived, they have given generously, lovingly, and freely of their time and energy to the National Federation of the Blind. Sometimes as a leader in their chapter on state boards, many times behind the scenes, but always giving. They have worked on national and state legislation and have been a mentor to thousands of future and current Federationists. This individual has worked in many different fields and has been a trailblazer as a teacher in a western state. In 1982, this individual began coordinating the information desk outside of the convention hall at our national conventions. This individual was also once arrested on a plane for sitting in an exit row. Maybe you can guess who this individual is. Judy Sanders grew up in Boston...

[Cheers and applause]

... and Denver, and graduated from the University of Colorado where she studied to be a teacher of public speaking and social studies. Judy experienced a rude awakening when the Denver public schools would not hire anyone with less than 20/40 vision in the better eye. It was because of this problem that she discovered the National Federation of the Blind. Through her connection with the National Federation of the Blind she obtained the position as a substitute teacher. Some other careers in which she has been involved include serving as the director of the Minnesota Office of congressman Jerry Sikorsky and working with blind children and adults through Blind Incorporated and state services for the blind. I remember meeting Judy when I first joined the National Federation of the Blind and traveled to Minnesota for an organizing trip, and she had lots of great advice. Though Judy is required, she is never not busy and continues to volunteer in so many ways and to serve in her state working, advocating, speaking, sharing the voice, and making sure that the message of the National Federation of the Blind is heard. She serves on the Independent Living Council and the State Rehabilitation Council. She has been a champion for seniors and also serves add president of our Senior Division most recently. Some adjectives that have been used to describe Judy, when talking to people include "wise, generous, opinionated...

[Laughter]

... "tenacious, self‑sacrificing, and caring."

I understand that she has been known to share the cost of big ticket items at convention auctions with others so that they can partake and raise money for the National Federation of the Blind. You may have seen her this week at the NFB information desk outside the ballroom. Judy works hard every day in all she does to share our message not only through her words but through her example and purposeful actions. Judy, you have touched my life and the lives of so many and help us collectively transform our dreams into reality. And it is now my pleasure to present to you this 2022 Jacobus tenBroek Award.

[Applause]

And as Judy is making her way up, I'm going to hold this plaque up just for a moment. It's a big room. If you can make your way up.

[audience members chanting "Judy"]

We'll let her fan club...

And the text on the award reads...

Jacobus tenBroek Award presented to Judy Sanders for your dedication, sacrifice and commitment on behalf of the blind of this nation. Your contribution is measured not in steps but in miles, not by individual experiences but by your impact on the lives of the blind of the nation. Whenever we have asked, you have answered. We call you our colleague with respect. We call you our friend with love. July 10th, 2022. Judy...

[Cheers and applause]

SPEAKER: A lot of mic time tonight.

SPEAKER: She's all over this.

SPEAKER: Go Judy!

JUDY SANDERS: I want to thank you. I'm not sure what to be most proud of that have been given this award or that I made it to the stage twice (laughing)

But I guess, you know, all the things that Pam just mentioned cause me to think about when I first started to get involved in the NFB, it was actually for very selfish reasons. I wanted to teach. I knew I could. And I was convinced that I would be so good that they would hire me, and change their policies. Well, I was so good. And they didn't. (chuckling)

And so that's how I got involved in the NFB. And I remember when I finally got a job as a substitute teacher, the first person to be employed as a full‑time teacher was not a member of the NFB. She was a member of something else that didn't lend any help to what we did. And so she called me to thank me, and I said, I'm not the one you have to thank. You have to thank the National Federation of the Blind for three reasons. One is I wouldn't have had the know‑how where to begin to solve this problem. Number two, I wouldn't have had the money to do it. So, thank you, seniors, for those extra donations. And number three, I wouldn't have had the nerve. It was much easier to say the National Federation of the Blind did this, and then you know, go from there. It wasn't me. So as I went through all my time in the NFB, it's always been like that. When I got my job with congressman Jerry Sikorsky, he was the first member of Congress to employ a blind person full time.

[Applause]

And that was to his credit, not mine. I was the lucky one who benefitted from it. So I guess I want to thank you for putting all these things together in one place, because it took a long time for all this to happen. And I thank you, and I will continue to do what I have been doing. So, thank you.

[Applause]

SPEAKER: Congratulations, Judy. And thank you so much for your service and your leadership. I would now like to introduce Mrs. Jernigan for a special presentation.

MARY ELLEN JERNIGAN: First I want to congratulate Judy Sanders on her well‑deserved award.

[Applause]

Day in and day out I have watched her service serve this organization with steadfast love, self‑sacrifice, and more, for more than four decades.

Now, because the Jacobus tenBroek Award holds such significance, one might almost say "sacred significance" to us in this organization, we deliberately chose not to present the award in 2020 or 2021. And I'm glad we didn't. It would not have seemed right for us not to be together as a family to express our love, respect, and gratitude for Judy as we have just done. Don't you think it's such a joyful thing to do?

[Applause]

Yeah, I agree. So you know what? We're going to do it again. Right now.

First I need to tell you, I'm just the set‑up person for the second tenBroek Award we're about to present. It gives me great joy to have been assigned this role this evening. Because, again, I have seen firsthand up close, and for many decades, the selfless service that occasions the presentation of this second award tonight. Speaking of roles, I want to talk a little bit about the roles members of the federation are called to fill. There are many in number, diverse in skills required, and complex in nature. Some are so highly visible that it would be virtually impossible not to know who is performing that role, as well as having a fair bit of knowledge about what the task entails. Take the national president, or your state affiliate, or local chapter president, for instance. You know precisely who these people are, and you see what they do. But take something like our national convention. Ever wonder about the literally thousands of specific individual details involved in planning and then bringing off an event as complex as this one? Well, obviously, you know, I have.

[Laughter]

You saw me, and now you see John Bergeron. But what about all those people you don't see working just as hard taking incredible responsibilities, performing the hidden tasks that you never even thought about? Tasks you would become acutely and painfully aware of the instant someone was not taking care of it. I use the national convention, because the convention is a common experience that all of us here can relate to. But what about the rest of the year? What are the other things being done day‑by‑day, year after year, by someone, someone we do not see and may not even know. But back to the tenBroek award. You see where I'm going. This award is going to two individuals. They are a couple. Added together, they have a combined 73 years of experience to this organization.

[Applause]

Some of you know them. Many of you won't. One of them has been a bit more visible than the other. Both have served in roles critical to the essential day‑to‑day operation of the federation. One has let us know that it is time for us to find another way to accomplish his tasks. The other has not. Not yet at least.

Now, at this point in my remarks, I had intended to say, lest I exceed my assigned role, I'm going to stop here and turn the mic over to Dr. Maurer. However, he and Mrs. Maurer found it necessary earlier today to begin quarantining in their room.

So I will share with you some of the things I know he would have said. I think the first thing he would have said would be to ask Joe and Pat Miller to join me on the...

[Cheers and applause]

And then he would have said, come on, you two... get up here!

[Applause]

MARY ELLEN JERNIGAN: As they are coming... then he would have said, "The two people being recognized for their extraordinary service tonight are the longest serving full‑time staff of our organization."

[Applause]

And the federation would not be as responsive or as capable as it is without them.

[Applause]

Now they're here. Mrs. Miller, Pat, has served in many capacities in the Federation. More often than not in a supporting role to an executive at our headquarters. Now, this is Dr. Maurer speaking directly.

My favorite of her positions is as primary assistant to me. I have dictated tens of thousands of pages of documents to her. I have asked her tens of thousands of questions. I have expected her to find for me facts from legal cases, from census figures, from organizations of the blind anywhere in the world, from government archives or from business. She has never been dismayed by these requests, and she has often made suggestions that enhance the research. I have asked her to tour sheltered workshops and to notice what I might want to know. I have asked her to travel with me early and late, although she was raising a family. Mr. Miller, Joe, has also served in many capacities. These days he is probably best known for his mastery of our computer systems that are the heart of the public information campaigns that we conduct. Millions of letters are sent each year to give people information about the correct understanding of blindness, and to enlist the support of such recipients who believe learning the truth about blindness can help build a better society for the blind and for the sight as well. However, Mr. Miller has undertaken many other roles. He has been a truck driver for the tons of material we need at convention. He has helped organize computer systems to conduct convention activities. And he has been available when extraordinary services have been needed. At one time he created all the print masters for every publications we needed to print. At one time he was our entire IT department. [chuckles] and was a master at creating and using databases before most of us knew what that term meant or what they could do. Just give him an assignment and he did it. 18 months ago Mr. Miller gave us notice that he was ready to retire. We asked him to wait until we could find a way to reassign everything he was doing. Only now as this convention ends this evening we have told him that he is going to be per mid to retire.

[Applause]

He is going to be permitted to retire.

[Applause]

Mr. And Mrs. Miller met at the Federation and were married a couple years later. They have given of themselves without reserve for the work of our organization. Even while raising their two girls. I ‑‑ again, Dr. Maurer speaking ‑‑ I, who have had a demanding part in the Federation, know that to do this is no easy task. It requires a belief that balancing home life with work life will require understanding from all family members. The pressures are great, and doing both at the same time demands not just talent but genuine commitment as well. That commitment, that spirit of giving, that faith in the certainty that we can build a brighter tomorrow is the very essence of all that we know Patricia and Joseph Miller to be.

[Applause]

So, now, on behalf of this organization, I present to the two of you this plaque, which reads... "National Federation of the Blind Jacobus tenBroek Award presented to Patricia and Joe Miller for your dedication, sacrifice and commitment on behalf of the blind of this nation, your contribution is measured not in steps but in miles, not by individual experiences but by your impact on the lives of the blind of the nation. Whenever we have asked, you have answered. We call you our colleague with respect. We call you our friend with love. July 10, 2022".

[Applause]

MARY ELLEN JERNIGAN: And Mr. Miller is asking, are you to say something? You got it. Of course we're asking you to say something.

JOSEPH MILLER: I am stunned.

[Applause]

The NFB gave me a job, a career, and a family. And I will always be grateful. Thank you.

[Applause]

MS. MILLER: Thank you, my family. It's impossible to know what to say right now. It's such a great honor that I never would have expected, and I love all of you. It's a pleasure to serve.

[Applause]

SPEAKER: Congratulations to our tenBroek winners. Let's give them a round of applause.

[Applause]

A well‑deserved. And I want to thank Ron Brown, Norma Crosby, Dr. Maurer and Barbara Lows for serving on our tenBroek committee.

Congratulations. Now in celebration of our own, we have a virtual door prize for Michael Home from New Jersey, $100 gift card. Please email prize@NFB.org . And in the room door prizes, we have our $200 in cash, Rollin Tedesco of Massachusetts. Congratulations!

And I'm going to turn the microphone back over to President Riccobono.

[Applause]

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: I was never given as far as I know two tenBroek Awards in one night. We're not giving three. But I want to make sure that Ronza and Shawn are here. So during this convention, we have organized or reorganized two new divisions. Now, we don't create new divisions very often, and the board over the last number of years has been taking a hard look at our divisions to make sure that they're really building the National Federation of the Blind. Because that is their purpose. So over the last year we have examined our division dealing with government employees and members of the federation have gotten together to restructure the division, its purpose, to make sure that it continues to build opportunities. We could talk for a long time about the problems, especially in the federal government with the 508 system and the barriers that it puts in front of blind people, but we now have National Association of Blind Government Employees that's going to do something about it.

[Applause]

So I have here the official charter of affiliation, the board reviewed the materials last evening, and has approved the new division. So I'm going to hand the charter over to the newly elected president of the division, Ronza Othman. There you go.

[Applause]

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: But we have chartered another division at this convention, and we spent a number of years talking about the work that is going on in our diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, and we have had a subcommittee that has been working for a number of years to elevate the work of Black leaders and integrate the contributions of Black leaders into more places in the Federation and to stimulate conversations about the intersectionalities, and we've had many conversations about how our history as an organization operating within a nation, where race has been such a topic of conversation. The impact that that has had on us as an organization. Of course you know my feelings about that, because I wrote about it last year. But our Black leaders have made so many great contributions to our organization, and a number of them are serving currently on our national board. We decided that the time had come for us to find new ways to continue to strengthen the pipeline of leadership in our organization. So we had an organizing meeting earlier in this convention. Some of you may have been there. And yesterday the Board of Directors approved the charter for the National Association of Black Leaders of the National Federation of the Blind.

[Applause]

So I have here the charter, which I'm going to give to its newly elected president, Shawn Callaway.

SHAWN CALLAWAY: Thank you, sir. Appreciate you.

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: And only because I have the microphone and didn't do it earlier, congratulations to our Black leaders to the great work you are doing to advance our shared mission. Thank you for that.

[Applause]

I enjoyed the organizing meeting. I wasn't at the other division, but I was at the organizing of the Black leaders, and I was good old‑fashioned Federation organizing at its best. So, I enjoyed it. But since I'm here, it's not new news, but we didn't get to do it a couple days ago. I do have, for our first vice president, a copy of the official certificate commemorating the fastest car driven blindfolded, which was driven by a graduate of the Louisiana Center for the Blind. So I want to present one of the official Guinness world record certificates to the director of the Louisiana Center for the Blind for display at our center here in Louisiana. Here you go.

[Cheers and applause]

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: Thank you.

SPEAKER: Thank you so much, President Riccobono. We look forward to displaying that. We're so proud of Dan and all of the graduates in our centers and the work that we do in the National Federation of the Blind training centers. Thank you, President Riccobono. And in honor of our two new divisions, how about $200? So if you are here, the winner is... Lindau Penn of Tennessee. Is that you? Or just a friend? Okay, Lindell.

How about James Walk or of Virginia?

[Cheering]

All right, sounds like James is here. Congratulations! Now, I know that we are all very excited for our next presentation. We have heard how important the scholarship program and how grateful we are to all of our sponsors for supporting our program. I know that the scholarship program truly changed my life, and it is now my pleasure to share with us the exciting news about our class of 2022. I want to recognize our scholarship chairperson, who is also an outstanding educator and mentor and leader in the National Federation of the Blind of New York. My friend and colleagues, Cayte Mendez.

CAYTE MENDEZ: Good evening, fellow Federationists. That was awful. Try again. Good evening, fellow Federationists!

[audience response]

That's better. No one does call‑and‑response like an elementary schoolteacher. That's a special good evening to you as well who are joining virtually. I know there are quite a few of you and we are so happy to have you with us in the way that is you can be. First... can everybody hear me?

Wonderful! New York, out in the back, you hear me? Okay, good! Wonderful. Okay.

So President Riccobono earlier shared with us the story of who our organization has been, who we are, and who we will become. Such a large part of that last, the "who our future will let us be" is determined by our students. Students, where are you?

[Cheering]

Apparently they're all to my left. Are there any students on my right?

Okay, there's like four. Okay. Great. Every year it is the privilege of the Scholarship Committee to select from our hundreds of outstanding students, 30 who will represent our organization as our scholarship class. We receive hundreds of applications every year. It's never an easy process to select those 30. And those that we do select are representative of the highest academic excellence, the highest levels of leadership, of community involvement. They are tremendously special individuals. This year our scholarship program did have some changes made to it, which I'll address briefly in a moment. But the essentials of that prom have not changed. We look for ‑‑ the essentials of that program have not changed. We look for excellence. We expect success and we look forward to the future that these folks will help bring to this organization.

To give you all an idea what a wonderful group of folks they all are and how much they have their finger on the pulse of what the organization is all about and who we are to one another, I would like to let you know that every single one, all 30 of them, without complaint or demur is masked tonight to make sure that all of us stay safe and healthy.

[Applause]

So, as I said earlier, some of the aspects of our scholarship program has changed. As I give my presentation in the next few minutes, you will notice that the scholarship values will no longer be a part of the things that I share about each finalist. The reason for that is that for many reasons, which President Riccobono shared during his presidential address, we will no longer be having a tiered system of awards. The awards values have been flattened to all scholarship finalists receiving the same dollar value. Someone in the back said "why." You know why... because the value of these scholarships is repped by what they represent and who they represent and not by the digits in front of the comma.

[Applause]

So, the rest of the presentation, however, will look exactly the same as what you're used to. I'm going to invite these wonderful 30 individuals on to the stage by telling you their last and first names, home states, school states, vocational goals. And, wow, what an amazing set of vocational goals. Once they are all up here behind me, I'm going to announce the scholarships that they will be receiving, and finally the recipient of our Kenneth Jernigan Memorial Scholarship, our most prestigious scholarship will have the opportunity to address the convention for a brief few moments.

This year we added a really exciting new aspect to the selection of that Jernigan process. The students have the opportunity, if they chose, to nominate a member of their class for that award. Those nominations were taken into account as the Scholarship Committee met last night and made its decisions. This is a wonderful way... what do we do in this organization? What do we do? We choose our future. That includes our future leaders. So to give our scholarship finalists the opportunity to select the person they want to represent them, the person whose speech they want to signify the work and learning of their whole class is a wonderful first step in making those choices that will help them be Federationists that make our movement stronger in the future. Without further ado, let's get started... are you ready?

[Cheering]

All right!

As I announce them, I also will announce our three ten brook fellows, three members of the scholarship class who previously won National Federation of the Blind scholarships, so definitely be listening for those. The first scholarship winner this year, Shawn Abraham. Maryland. And I know this is super hard, but everybody managed it at NABs and the board meeting, please hold your applause until the end or we will be here all night. You don't want to be here all night.

And Nancy Aguilera, researcher and professor of political science. Tasnim Alshuli, Arizona, Arizona.

Professor antibiotics consultant.

Katelyn Beresic, West Virginia, West Virginia. Social worker for LGBTQ youth and disabled individuals.

Jovan Campbell, New York, New York, community education.

Justin Champagne, Louisiana, Louisiana. Professor of mathematics.

 Jenn Doran, Oregon, Oregon

Will be receiving a Ph.D. to help people in vulnerable communities survive climate change.

Abigail Duffy, New Hampshire New Hampshire. Psychology, criminal justice.

Teresa Fabre, Illinois, originally from Mexico, going to school in Illinois, visual rehabilitation therapy and work with adults.

Ethan Fung, California. Operations management and environmental sustainability.

Izzi Guzman, Florida. Music education, composer and entrepreneur.

Michael Hardin, Indiana, Indiana. Social work.

Renae Hemmings. New Jersey, New Jersey. Psychologist and therapy U.S.

Natasha Ishaq, New Jersey, New Jersey. Paleoanthropological studies or law.

Hunter Kuester.

[Cheering]

Okay!

Wisconsin, Wisconsin. Brewery and kitchen owner.

You got some future customers down there, Hunter.

All right, here we go...

Maura Kutnyak, New York, New York. Attorney.

Robert Lamm, Colorado, Colorado. Environmental engineering. And I do want to... I remind everybody... I know it's so hard, but sit on your hands, please. We'll clap at the end.

Katie Lester, Alaska, Alaska, social work therapist.

Casey Martin, North Dakota, North Dakota, speech and language pathologist.

Daniel Martinez, Texas, Texas, educator of blind students.

Sarah Menefee, Texas, Oklahoma, registered dietitian.

Selene Monjarez, Tennessee, Connecticut, mental health therapist.

Julia Murray, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania, occupational therapist.

Finn Paynich, Washington, Washington, musical theater.

Emily Schlenker, Kansas, Kansas. Pharmacy.

Carla Scroggins, California, California, global security analyst and diplomatic strategist.

Bhavya Shah, California, originally from India, going to school in California, data science.

Katelyn Siple, Maryland, Pennsylvania. Communications and leadership and not‑for‑profits for ministries. Stephanie Valdes, Massachusetts, Massachusetts, interpreter and translator.

Colin Wong, Washington, Washington, adult education and blindness rehabilitation research.

All right, now let's hear it!

[Cheers and applause]

All right, you will have another opportunity to clap at the end. Because now what I'm going to do is I'm going to share with you the winners of the various scholarships that have been awarded this year. Each of our finalists will receive a scholarship, and, again, the winner of our most prestigious, the Kenneth Memorial Scholarship, will address the convention. So this time they will be out of order. And Kenneth Jernigan will be the last, just like always.

So the winners of our National Federation of the Blind scholarships are... again, guys, hold your applause, please, until the end.

Nancy Aguilera, Missouri, Missouri.

Katie Lester, West Virginia, West Virginia

Jovan Campbell, New York, New York.

Robert Lamm, Colorado, Colorado.

Casey Martin, North Dakota, North Dakota

Selene Monjarez, Tennessee, Connecticut.

So the next sets of scholarships have been donated by various organizations, entities or are donated in memory of various individuals so listen for those names.

Our Edith R. and Alvin J. scholarships, two of them, will be awarded to Shawn Abraham, Maryland, Maryland, and Katie Lester, Alaska, Alaska.

Jessie and Hertha Adams is Natasha Ishaq, New Jersey, New Jersey.

Hunter Kuester, Wisconsin, Wisconsin.

Sarah Menefee, Texas, Oklahoma, and Katie Lester, Maryland, Pennsylvania.

Our two other scholarships will be awarded to Jenn Doran, Virginia, Oregon, and Finn Paynich, Washington, Washington.

If I could read state codes. There we go.

All right, and then Stephanie Valdes, Massachusetts, Massachusetts.

Pearson education award goes to Tasnim Alshuli, Arizona, Arizona.

Our Charles and Betty Allen scholarship will go to Carla Scroggins, California, California.

And Carla is one of our three tenBroek recipients this year, as I should add, I apologize, the previous winner, Tasnim Alshuli.

Our EU and Gene Parker scholarship will go to Ethan Fung, California, California.

JAWS for Windows scholarship will go to Julia Murray. Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania.

Our NFB STEM scholarship, which is contributed by the members of the computer science divisions, is going to Emily Schlenker, Kansas, Kansas.

Our Oracle scholarship for excellence in a STEM field will go to Justin Champagne. Louisiana, Louisiana.

Our Or call scholarship for excellence in computer science will go to Bhavya Shah, California, California.

That's a lot of scholarships.

Okay, the Jacqueline Billy Memorial scholarship will go to Daniel Martinez, Texas, Texas.

Our Jeannette C. Early scholarship goes to Teresa Fabre, Illinois, Illinois.

Adrian Ash Memorial Scholarship will go to Maura Kutnyak, New York, New York.

There's two left, guys.

Only two. Here we go...

Our American Action Fund Scholarship will go to Abigail Duffy, New Hampshire, New Hampshire.

And if you have been playing scholarship Bingo, which I know some of you have, you know who is left.

Our most prestigious award, the award that honors one of our Federation's long‑time leaders, and man who helped shape a generation in the organized blind movement, our Kenneth Jernigan Memorial Scholarship this year will go to Colin Wong. Washington, Washington.

[Cheers and applause]

Now, Colin, of course, he's a W, the guy at the end of the row, he has to make himself all the way up and around the rest to have finalists to join me over here at the podium. So you can keep clapping while Colin makes his way up here.

[Applause]

COLIN WONG: Thank you so much for this tremendous honor. I am very blessed to be able to represent the scholarship class of 2022. Each of these individuals also deserve this prestigious award, and I am grateful to be here and accept this award today. I want to start off by thanking President Mark Riccobono, the National Board of Directors, the sponsors that made this possible, Kate Mendez and the scholarship committee and all the support that they have provided in making this scholarship a reality.

There are a couple individuals I want to make sure to thank because without their support and their ability to listen to all of my frustrations in this journey we call life, this Ph.D. definitely would not be possible. I want to start off by thanking Ashley Moon, Shawn Callaway, Marcie Carpenter, Marco Carranza and Dr. Edward Bell. I want to thank my beautiful wife, Destiny Wong.

[Applause]

Next week we will have been together for nine years.

[Applause]

In this journey, as I'm sure we all have done, I have stumbled and made mistakes, and without her support and her love and dedication, I would have definitely fallen, but she has picked me back up every single time.

[Cheers and applause]

While I have not met Dr. Kenneth Jernigan personally, his influence on me cannot be understated. It is an honor and I am humbled to accept an award in his name. His influence in my life has not only influenced my professional career but also my personal career. I started going to Louisiana Tech University, the Louisiana Center for the Blind, and I serve on the National Blindness Professional Certification Board, each of whom involve the structure discovery methodology that Dr. Jernigan created. Without his influence in the area of adult rehabilitation and blindness, I can honestly say I would not have a career or a passion in order to shape the next generation of blind individuals.

I also want to note the impact that the National Federation of the Blind has on me. Dr. Kenneth Jernigan said that there has to be a day after civil rights, and that's the most powerful gift that the Federation has given me, an opportunity for dreaming and towards looking towards the future. It's so easy to focus on the present and the challenges that we have to overcome, but it's a lot easier when we know what the future has to hold, and I cannot thank the Federation for the expectations that they have instilled in me and the opportunities that they have provided. The Federation is a place of support. It's a place of love, hope, and determination. The Federation has given me so much more than I have been able to give to it. Today it has given me an educational opportunity. Collectively it has given all of us standing on this stage a future. For that I am eternally grateful. Thank you so much. And let's go build the National Federation of the Blind!

[Cheers and applause]

CAYTE MENDEZ: Well, folks, I know it's late, but I think we have time for one more huge round of applause for the NFB scholarship class of 2022.

[Applause]

All right, as they make their way back to you tonight, make sure you congratulate them, air hugs, text messages. Let them know how tremendously they have done this week and how much we value the time that they have given to us, and how much we are looking forward to having them with us again next year at our 2023 convention. And Mr. President... or I guess Pam. The mic is yours.

Thank you, everyone.

[Applause]

PAM: Let's have another round of applause for the scholarship class. Thank you so much. You can see that we are in great hands with our future. So let's have a door prize also in on nor of our scholars so this is for $200, if this person is in the room. And this is a lucky individual. Barbie Elliot from Utah.

[Applause]

Do we have Barbie? All right, congratulations, Barbie!

Now, just to mention also, we have a special door prize. So it's coming up soon. We're almost there. And this is a very special door prize you don't want to miss in celebration of our convention here. As we are winding down this evening, we have so much for which to be thankful and so much to celebrate, and I want to just take a moment to thank and acknowledge all of those in the National Federation of the Blind of Louisiana who have worked so tirelessly this week and in all of the convention planning and all that has gone into making this. We have so thankful and so grateful. I appreciate everyone's hard work, and it has been truly our honor and our pleasure to host everyone. I also want to send, again, a special hello to all of those who are listening virtually, all those who are not feeling well, who are guaranteeing, we are sending our thoughts and healing wishes your way. We know that we are with you and, again, we feel your presence here at our banquet this evening.

Now, I have a couple other door prizes. We just have a few more things. And, again, we've got some great door prizes. Our next one also is $200. And this is for Tina Seoul of Arizona, if Tina is here. Do we have Tina?

All right, congratulations, Tina! Congratulations!

And as we're winding down, thinking about our convention this weekend, all that we shared, all that we learned, the stories that we have shared with one another, we know that we are writing our own stories. We are telling our stories. Again, the work we do would not be possible without everyone in this room and everyone who is listening. All of the combined power and the love and the strength of the National Federation of the Blind truly transforming dreams into reality. And as we're beginning our trips home, remember how important it is to take with you what we have gained and what we have shared this weekend, this week, throughout the week, as we have come together, we have gained strength, and we have gained home from each other. I want to also acknowledge, if you're here at your first convention, please say aye.

I want to acknowledge our first‑timers. Again, I want to acknowledge our first‑timers. We are so happy that you are here, and we hope that you will be coming back for many, many more conventions.

[Applause]

We do welcome you.

Now, our grand prize ‑‑ again, this is all due to the hard work of the National Federation of the Blind of Louisiana who has been working so hard. In Louisiana we like to have a little something extra. Lagniappe, you've heard about that. We have great food and hospitality and most importantly we have great people who work in the National Federation of the Blind of Louisiana. So you might guess, those that have been to banquets before, that this prize would be for $2,022, in honor of the year, but it's actually for $2,200 this year in honor of coming together. And we are thrilled, if this person is in the room, to present this to Sarah McHubbin of Maryland. Is Sarah... doesn't sound like Sarah is here. If I won $2,200, I would not be that quiet. So how about Patricia Love Sipho of Michigan. Patricia?

Okay, not here.

Anyone left? Anyone left in the banquet tonight?

All right, anyone interested in $2,200?

All right, how about Noni Phife of Hawaii? Is Noni here? Not?

Okay, how about Garrett Mooney of Maryland?

Garrett, are you here?

No?

All right, we do not have Garrett, correct?

All right, how about from the great state of California, Autumn Sheer?

I'm really trying to give away this $2,200.

All right. How about Jim Antonacci of Pennsylvania?

Is Jim here?

All right, we've got him?

All right, we've got him. Congratulations, Jim! We will be delivering your money to you.

[Applause]

Again, as we close, I want to recognize the hard work of everyone that makes the work we do together possible, and our work would not be possible without the leadership of our president. It is now my pleasure to turn over for closing remarks, turn the microphone over to President Riccobono.

PRESIDENT RICCOBONO: All right, Pam. Do you want your phone? Is this your phone?

Okay. It was so great to get back together. We got the... we remembered how to do things. You know, Pam came over and said, you've got to shake the hands of the scholarship program. I thought she was just telling me what she was going to do. It took me a minute to realize, oh, she wants me to come shake hands.

Well, it's been a great convention. I want to echo thanks to NFB of Louisiana. What an outstanding affiliate!

[Cheers and applause]

People coming together, working together. What great hospitality! Thank you for your extraordinary efforts. I know Houston... I know Texas is going to have some work to do to outshine. I think there's only one thing to do, and if you're listening virtually, you can participate. Open your windows. What we need is one... before we get there, I want to say I wish everybody well, have safe trips home, continue to do what we need to do to keep each other safe, and let's make sure that all of us can be back together next year in Houston for an even bigger and better convention. And I appreciate the work that each and every one of you do. I appreciate our board, and especially our first vice president for the work that she does and the endless love she gives to our organization.

So if you're at home virtually, you've gotten a chance to open your windows. We're all together in the roomed and elsewhere... one big Federation cheer!

[Cheering]

The 2022 convention of the National Federation of the Blind is now adjourned.