Report from the NFB Seniors Division – 2017 National Convention:

From the Braille Monitor, August-September 2017

For the past several years the Seniors Division has sponsored a seminar before the official opening of the convention. This year was no different. On Monday, July 10, Diane McGeorge with Duncan Larsen and others spoke to about forty convention attendees. They shared techniques about living with blindness as a newly blind senior. “A Day in the Life of a Newly Blind Senior” gave tips, ideas, and demonstrations of techniques to use when transitioning from using only vision to developing skills with tactile and audible cues. For example, a white cane user establishes that he/she is blind with the public but more importantly, the sound the cane makes as the tip comes into contact with a variety of surfaces informs the user of many factors in the environment being traversed. Some technology such as the Pen Friend, a fancy recorder to make audio labels was one of the demonstrations. The audience asked questions and learned that often a variety of methods can be used. Good ideas and techniques were shared as well as discussion about social occurrence dealing with family and the public in general gave new insight to these conventioneers.

On Wednesday we kicked off our annual meeting with items being auctioned from our "not-so-silent" auction. Ruth Sager and Shelley Coppel spoke about the newest initiative of the division, a senior retreat to be held at Rocky Bottom, South Carolina, October 8 through 14. This retreat is designed for seniors who are losing vision and want to hone nonvisual skills such as using a computer with screen-reading capabilities; walking confidently with a white cane; and developing daily living skills of cooking, shopping, and cleaning. Shelley described the physical surroundings of the buildings and grounds at the site.

New members, Linda Melendez from New Jersey and Dan Vrata from Minnesota spoke about their interaction with fellow Federationists and how this has changed their perceptions about losing vision. Linda noted she thought her life was coming to an end, and now she is running, actively engaged with her chapter, and the head of New Jersey's sports and recreation group. She has found meaningful relationships and lost over 100 pounds by running. She feels great and encourages other seniors to find something they are passionate about and go for it! Find your dreams, she says: "You can do anything you want to, just get out there and do it!" Dan is a student in the senior program at BLIND Inc. He notes how beneficial his training has been and acknowledges several important groups. He credits the friendships he has made with fellow students; equally important in his learning has been observing how the staff interact with their students, guiding each to want the very best for him or herself. He says he is grateful for the Federation and the opportunity it has given him to learn the truth about living as a blind senior.

Two gentlemen from the Helen Keller Center came to introduce their new program for seniors losing both hearing and vision, the ICanConnect program. Mr. Cory Parker, outreach coordinator of the Southeast Region described how the Center has regional offices throughout the country where consumers can address specific issues and learn about equipment. “Bapin,” as he is known, is the adaptive technology trainer and spoke more specifically about seniors in Florida who can receive specialized equipment from telephones to computers to meet their telecommunication needs if they qualify for services. He had handouts for anyone interested in learning more specifically how to engage with the Center.

Duncan Larsen presented the Colorado Center for the Blind’s new video "Seniors in Charge," which describes CCB’s senior program.

Amanda Tolson from En-Vision America spoke about its audible medical reader ScripTalk and noted that September 9 through 15 is National Health Vision Awareness Week. She has flyers and special kits with information that, if seniors are willing to sponsor activities during this week to showcase using nonvisual techniques to read medical labels, she will be happy to lend a ScripTalk for this purpose. Lisa Wadors from Bookshare noted that new changes are expanding the collection which now contains books in foreign languages. She donated two Bookshare subscriptions for the auction.

Finally, Carol Braithwaite from Alabama and Nancy Yeager from Virginia described how they gathered Federationists together in their states and formed new senior divisions. They both have frequent conference calls and are planning other activities for the coming year. We welcomed them into the family of state senior divisions and groups.

Elected:

The seniors division election of officers remains the same as it is a two-year term, but both of our board members were up for election and were reelected: Glenn Crosby from Texas and Jane Degenshein from New Jersey. Our officers remain in place until 2018. They are: president, Ruth Sager; first vice president, Arthur Schreiber; second vice president, Judy Sanders; secretary, Shelley Coppel; and treasurer, Diane McGeorge.