



# GEM STATE MILESTONES

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## 'LOOKING AHEAD': THE 2019 NFBI STATE CONVENTION

*Dana Ard, NFBI President*

The state convention, with the theme “Raising Expectations Now and For a Lifetime,” was held in Boise at the Holiday Inn, March 21-23. Julie Deden, director of the NFB Colorado Center for the Blind, was our national representative. Other special guests included Julie’s husband Dan Burke, and former Idahoan, now living in South Carolina, Shelley Coppel.

This convention was unique because in addition to our regular general sessions, we held the Recreation and Discovery Workshop for families

of blind children. Funding for this event was provided by a grant from the Gibney Family Foundation. Parents participated in a workshop lead by Angela Lindig from Idaho Parents Unlimited on how to present information about their blind child in an effective and concise manner. Parent discussion groups were led by Pat Renfranz, from Utah, and her daughter, Caroline, who is now



*Photo: NFBI Scholarship Winners: Seth Lowman, Erin Olsen, Matthew Turner, Nicole Hill, and Amelia Palmer*

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## HEARD BIRDS - 2019

*Steve Bouffard - Curator of Birds, Orma J. Smith - Museum of Natural History - College of Idaho*

Although we're early in breeding season and birds are just cranking up, you can still enjoy birds' calls. There is still a lot of bird activity and they are making a lot of calls. Calls are not songs, but utterances that birds make to keep flocks in contact with each other, basically saying "here I am - let's keep together". Also, there are alarm calls when they see danger. Most species have learned to respond to alarm calls from other



*Photo of a crow*

species. Right now you can hear American and lesser goldfinches, chickadees, waxwings, robins, house finches, house sparrows, nuthatches, doves, flickers, starlings, geese and ducks. My neighbor left tons of grapes on his vines. Yesterday there were 50 or so robins dining on the grapes, and giving their contact calls. I even heard some half-hearted singing. Immature male song birds often practice singing in fall and winter to hone their song before they have to compete with mature, experienced males for mates in later spring.

I've been reviewing intelligence in birds for some presentations that I will give. Intelligence varies greatly among bird species. Some, like the members of the crow family are very smart. They learn quickly to use humans to their benefit. They learned to crack nuts by dropping them on a hard surface. Then they learned it was even easier if you let cars run over the nuts. Then they took it a step further. They learned to watch the traffic lights or listen to the audible crossing signals before venturing onto the road to retrieve the nuts. So one of these days you may find yourself waiting at the crosswalk with some crows for the signal to proceed!

## SADDLE UP AND RIDE! THE 2019 CYCLE FOR INDEPENDENCE IS UPON US

*Al Schneider, Coordinator*



*Photo of bicycles*

It's that time of year again: spring flowers blooming, bird songs coming to life, trees budding, and folks biking. So saddle up for a fun family ride followed by a cook-out, live music, and prizes. And just as important: comradery and our famous socks! This is the 21st year of the Cycle for Independence, the largest fund raiser in Idaho for The National Federation of the Blind. The event is sponsored by NFBI Treasure Valley Chapter, and proceeds are split among the local chapter, the state affiliate, the national organization, and a fund helping members throughout Idaho who wish to attend the national convention. New this year is live music by Jensen Buck, a local song writer of the year winner. He calls his style "country reggae," and his latest CD is entitled Lost Pages. The event is May 18th this year and our base is Riverglen Jr. High, located at 6801 N. Gary Ln. in Boise.



## BAKER'S RECIPES

### Tips and techniques around the house

*Guest contributors:*

*Leslie and TJ Mora*

Sometimes, it's the little things that drive me crazy: forgetting the instructions on the back of my package of instant rice, not wanting to bother my fellow movie-goers but really wanting more popcorn, wanting to get a picture of Goldengate Bridge, or needing to know what this quaint little sandwich shop is selling. All of those situations have solutions. I could borrow a friend to take my picture. I could write down the instructions for my rice so that forgetting them won't be an issue next time. I could order a larger popcorn so that I don't have to get up in the middle of the movie. I could ask the nice lady behind the counter what sandwiches she's selling. As a blind person, finding accommodations or reaching out for assistance can sometimes feel time-consuming and/or awkward, especially if you're an introvert like me. I like to recognize the time invested by myself and others; if everyone is invested in the movie, I'm not going to get my popcorn—I don't need popcorn badly enough to take someone away from their escape. I will, however, call Aira.

Aira is a service that provides instant access to information for the blind and visually impaired. Through an app on a modern smartphone, or on a pair of specialized smart-glasses, a blind or visually impaired person, or explorer, can call into a live agent and perform a large and varied number of tasks. Aira agents have helped explorers with tasks as simple as reading the instructions on a package of instant rice, navigating to an open seat in a movie theater, finding a way around a construction zone, going through the daily mail, or finding a trash can. Aira has helped explorers with complex tasks such as building a YouTube channel, editing videos, remodeling a house, re-tarring a driveway, finding a job, shopping for groceries, navigating airports, and playing video games.

There are a large majority of tasks that Aira can assist with. Are you a small business owner? Aira agents have experience with all kinds of software to help make your business task easier. Are you looking for a job? An agent would be more than happy to help you fill out job applications, format your resume, and even pick out clothes for the interview. Are you a student? Aira can remote into your computer and help you complete those assignments and presentations that will wow your professors.

Aira is a convenient service with endless possibilities from the simple to the complex, and Aira can find a spot in your life. If you are interested in learning more about Aira's plans, pricing, and more information about the service, visit their website. If you have any questions, you may also give their customer care and sales number a call: 1-800-835-1934.

**LOOKING AHEAD...** *Continued from page 1....*

a blind college student, and Jackie Stallings, an NFB parent from northern Idaho. Blind and sighted siblings enjoyed creating 3 dimensional art with blind artist Brendon Patrick, participating in improvisation activities with Leta Neustaedter and creating music with bell chimes with music therapist Jerry Simons. The Saturday morning general session was designed to help parents imagine the future for their blind children with presentations on transition services for blind teens, planning for college, and the importance of blindness training, employment, and much more. Parents also learned about the National Federation of the Blind through the national report given by Julie Deden, and by the state president's report.

Our opening session on Friday began with remarks from Muffy Davis, District 26 House of Representatives. Muffy had attended our legislative luncheon in January and was excited to speak to our organization. Her warmth and enthusiasm set the tone for the convention. Our first panel presentation, "Adjustment to Blindness; It's not for Sissies," gave us all an understanding of what it is like to transition from being sighted to being blind. Panelists Larry Sebranek, K'Lynn Hand, and Dan Burke showed us how we, in the Federation family, can help in this challenging process. This theme was echoed in our final presentation by Marcie Chapman on Saturday afternoon. Frank Skogsberg and Sue Sebranek helped us understand how we can help our members who have both a sight and hearing loss. We had agency updates from the ICBVI, the Idaho Talking Book program, and from the Idaho Educational Services for the Deaf and Blind. In addition to our Blindness Products and Services Expo, we had a "Celebrating Membership" seminar. We discussed membership in the Federation, and Julie Deden presented the new membership coins to those in attendance. Our Friday night activities were a presentation by Brandon Patrick, and creating music with bell chimes with Jerry Simons.

This year's scholarship winners were Nicole Hill, \$1000; Seth Lowman, \$1500; Erin Olsen, \$2000; Amelia Palmer, \$2500; and Matthew Turner, \$3000. Amelia and Erin will be attending our national convention as national scholarship finalists. We also had an appreciation award for Al Schneider and his family, Braille-a-thon awards, and a very special award for retiring State Treasurer, Harry Gawith. Our on-line auction grossed approximately \$3200. Many thanks are



*Photo of a Cycle for Independence logo*

given to Ramona Walhof, auction chair, and all of those who contributed and bid on items. We are the co-host affiliate for our national convention at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino in Las Vegas. We are currently finalizing our schedule for the affiliate hospitality room and lobby information desk. If you are attending the convention, you will be expected to work at least one shift in one or both locations. Mary Symms is the scheduler. Room rates are \$99.00 plus taxes, and reservations can be made by calling 877-632-9000.

Convention preregistration is open through May 31 at [www.nfb.org](http://www.nfb.org). Preregistering saves time and also saves \$5.00 on the registration fee and the banquet. Hope to see everyone at our national convention. Enjoy our beautiful weather and have a great spring.

## MEET THE BOARD: DANA ARD

*A series featuring the NFB Board members*

The fact that I have been able to experience this amazing life is a miracle in itself. I was born two and a half months premature and weighed only 2 pounds 11 ounces, which was very small in 1951 and babies born that early often didn't survive. I not only survived, but I thrived. By the time I was five months old, I weighed 15 pounds and I didn't look like a premie any more.

At three months, my parents noticed that my eyes were not tracking, and an examination by an ophthalmologist revealed that I had RLF (Retrolental Fibroplasia). When I was 11 months old, my parents attended a conference at the University of Oregon Health Sciences Center.

They were told that a blind child is first and foremost a normal child and they should have the same expectations for me as they would for a child who is not blind.

When I was around five, I began learning to read and write Braille. My teacher, Uldine Thelander, was blind and at that time was the NFB state president. She traveled to our home in a cab and used a guide dog. She was my first blind mentor. She demonstrated by example that a blind person could travel independently, work, manage a home, and have a normal life. Years later, as a counselor at ICBVI, I visited Uldine with my first guide dog, and told her how she had influenced me in my life.

My parents did not believe that a six year-old child should be sent away from home to go to school. My mother had read an article about how blind children were being educated in public



*Photo of Dana Ard*

schools in California. She felt that if they could do it in California, they could do it in Idaho. I began school at my neighborhood school, Koelsch Elementary. My mother learned Braille and transcribed many books, because many materials were not available in Braille. Since there were no teacher's aids to work with me, my mom also had to write the print words above the Braille words in all of my books, until I had completed the third grade. When I entered junior high, the Boise Junior League formed a Braille transcribers group, which did the Brailing for all of the blind children in public school.

I graduated from Borah High School in 1969, and attended St. Olaf College majoring in music education. Two events during college began my understanding of the importance of the National Federation of the Blind. In my freshman year, NFB former president, Marc Maurer, met with me to discuss forming a student division in Minnesota. Later that year, I encountered discrimination because of blindness, when I was told I could not be a member of the prestigious St. Olaf choir because of my blindness. At that time, no legislation was in place to fight this. The reason for denying me this opportunity was that Dr. Jennings, the director, believed that I could not be responsible for my own possessions on a choir tour. Although I never was allowed to join the choir, I did not let this stop me from having a meaningful college music experience. I joined two choirs, a chamber choir and the much larger Chapel Choir, where I had the awesome experience of singing the Bach St. Matthew Passion. I also got two part-time jobs, a church organist position, and a music teacher for a private school for developmentally disabled children and adults. I student taught in a public elementary school and at the Minnesota school for the Blind. I loved working with children with disabilities far more than I enjoyed teaching classroom music, and this love launched my desire to become a music therapist. I attended graduate school at the University of Kansas, and completed a music therapy internship at Napa Psychiatric Hospital in California. I worked as a music therapist for four years and then was hired by the ICBVI as a counselor, where I worked for 36 years, retiring at the end of 2014. In 2000, I received my Master's degree in rehabilitation counseling from the University of Idaho. My husband Mike and I have been married for 30 years, and we are a great team. For a variety of reasons, we decided not to have children, but we have had 22 dogs, including the five we have now.

In the NFB I have served as a state and chapter board member, newsletter editor, chapter president and state secretary. In 2012, President Elsie Dickerson asked me to attend a training for upcoming state presidents. I was elected NFB state president in 2015 and I serve in this capacity because I believe in the mission of the National Federation of the Blind. We have overcome many obstacles, but we still face discrimination, lack of opportunity, inaccessibility of technology, low expectations, poor educational opportunities for blind children and the list goes on. We have work to do on local, state and national levels. I choose to be president because I want to give back to those who have given so much to me. I want to continue to change what it means to be blind, and make the world a better place now and in the future.



Ride for the cause – Ride for the fun!



Route	Cost (Individual)	Check-In	Start
100 Metric	\$40	7-7:45AM	8:00 AM
25 Mile	\$40	8-8:45AM	9:00 AM
10 Mile	\$30	8:45-9:15AM	9:30 AM

Preregistration ends May 13, on-site available ride day

River Glen Jr High | 6801 N Gary Ln, Boise

Registration and Route Maps at [www.cycleforindependence.org](http://www.cycleforindependence.org)



BBQ, music, and famous socks as always!



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 Friends of the Weiser River Trail | Sock Guy  
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