

"Sightings"

Wyoming Council of the Blind

<https://www.wycb.info>

307 629-1916

February 2025

President's Address By Cheryl Godley

Hello Folks,

I hope you all had a wonderful holiday season filled with love and gratitude for our lives and others in our lives.

We are reminded of how grateful we are to have one another as friends and fellow members when we remember the loss of our beloved member, Linda Bechtel. Many of us have known Linda over the years and will miss her greatly. Our thoughts are with her family during this time of loss.

With the New Year, we are already starting to plan our next Convention. Specifics related to it will be passed on as soon as the plans materialize.

The Lion's Club is having their Convention in Torrington the weekend of April 26, 2025. If you have an interest in this, would like to attend, or would like more information, please contact our Board member Bonnie Harrison through the WyCB phone at 307-629-1916.

WyCB is focusing on developing Low Vision Support Groups across the state for individuals of all ages who are losing or who have lost their sight. Their families, friends, and caregivers are also strongly encouraged to attend these meetings. These support groups are wonderful opportunities to learn about the latest in Assistive Technology, resources available to us in Wyoming, learn about events/concerns in our communities related to B/VI, and to gain support and meet with other individuals living life with vision loss. Let us not forget about the empowerment and fellowship we experience in meeting together as a group! Currently we are sponsoring these meetings in Buffalo, Casper, Powell, and now in Sheridan.

**Buffalo Low Vision Support Group
Meets the second and fourth Monday of the month
at 11:00 AM at:
Buffalo Senior Center
671 W. Fetterman Street Buffalo, WY 82834
307-684-9551**

Casper Low Vision Support Group

Meets the second Monday of the month from

10:00 AM to 12:00 PM at:

Central Wyoming Senior Services

1831 E. 4th Street Casper, WY 82601

Group Facilitator: Cheryl Godley 307-629-1916

Low Vision Support Group of Powell

Meets the second Tuesday of the month at 1:15 PM at:

Rocky Mountain Manor

140 N. Cheyenne Street Powell, WY 82435

Group Facilitator: Tom Lealos 307-764-3664

Sheridan Low Vision Support Group

Meets the third Thursday of the month at 1:00 pm at:

Cascades of Sugarland Ridge

1551 Sugarland Drive Sheridan WY 82801

Group Facilitator: Linda Woodruff 208-313-3987

These meeting times and places are also listed on our WyCB.info website under the “Resources” tab. If you are interested in developing a new support group in the state, please contact Cheryl Godley at 307-629-1916. If you would like to be in a support group but there is not one in your area, please call Cheryl Godly and we will try to find a way for you to

join a group by telephone. We are also brainstorming ideas of how to establish an online Zoom platform for support groups.

The grant year will be ending in March for the project funded by the Natrona Collective Health Trust. It was this grant that offered us the opportunity to update and make our website more functional for our organization. We continue to be grateful for that support. And our thanks go out to Annette Carter, our webmaster, for all of her diligent and creative work.

If there are ideas you have for the Board related to activities, if there are ways the Board may serve you as a member, please let us know. Similarly, if you have ideas you would like to share regarding possible funding opportunities, please call the WyCB phone number to share those with us. We are renewing our memberships now for the 2025 year. If you have not received an application or reminder, you may apply for membership through our website, or call us and we will mail one to you. Please do not forget to encourage others to join our ranks on behalf of individuals with B/VI.

In Memory of Linda Bechtel

With the new year we received the sad news of the passing of Linda Bechtel. Linda was a longstanding, beloved member of WyCB, and she was an ardent supporter of our efforts, including serving on our board. She attended our convention this past fall and it was a pleasure to hear her share her experiences of working at the Pineview School. Many of our members have fond memories of Linda. Briefly here are just a few of them:

“I always loved encountering Linda on the Assist Bus and it was a joy having a chance for us to catch up with what was happening in each other’s lives.” Cheryl Godley

“Each time my fellow VOS consultants and I would have a meeting in Casper, Linda and her husband Tom would invite all of us to their home for a get together. These were wonderful times. Linda was a warm and gracious hostess. These events always involved foods of various kinds and whatever one wanted to drink. The conversations were lively and interesting. Because of the inviting spirit of our hostess, one could not feel anything but welcome in their home. I always left with a feeling of warmth and gratitude to be included in each of these wonderful times.” Gary Olson

“Cleo and I were saddened by the news of Linda Bechtel’s passing. She served on the WyCB Board as a Director back when I was the President. As I remember, she always spoke out strongly for the B/VI folks that we represented. She was one of those people who you could always count on to come down on the right side of any issue we were discussing. She cared, as I am sure all of her friends can attest. I am fortunate to have known her.” Tom Lealos

Linda’s obituary stated that memorials for her could be made to The Montgomery Trust. WyCB has made a \$250.00 donation in her memory. The Montgomery Trust Fund for the Blind in Wyoming provides grants for adaptive equipment and training for the visually impaired. The trust is funded by interest from Roy Montgomery's estate. Grants are awarded to individuals or groups who are clients of Wyoming Department of Education Vision Outreach Services. Applicants must also meet the qualifications of the Montgomery Trust Fund Review Board. The trust is the last source of funding available to the applicant.

Changes to the WyCB Scholarship

Starting in January 2025, the annual WyCB \$1,000.00 Scholarship has been modified by the WyCB Board. The scholarship will no longer have a due date. This change was made to accommodate nontraditional education options. When an applicant has applied, and sent in all of their materials, they will hear whether they have been approved six (6) weeks after receipt of all scholarship application materials. All scholarships will be presented at the annual WyCB Convention in September. To apply for our scholarship go to:

<https://wycb.info/wycb-scholarship>

We look forward to receiving many applications. If you have questions please contact Debra Thompson, Scholarship Chair, at 307-389-2060 or email her at: adrinamom@gmail.com.

Lunch with the Natrona Collective Health Trust

Just before Thanksgiving President Cheryl Godley and Treasurer Tom Smyth were invited to a luncheon hosted by the NCHT held in appreciation of their many nonprofit partners. The food was very good, but what was even better was having a chance to meet the motivated members of other nonprofits and to share what we are doing and trying to accomplish.

WyCB is very fortunate to have such a productive relationship with NCHT. They have funded great improvements to our website and to the organization of our operations. We look forward to collaborating with NCHT in the future.

The Conference of the Northern Rockies Association for Education and Rehabilitation for the Blind and Visually Impaired By Robin Loen and Sarah Sexton

In October of 2024, the Northern Rockies Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired, N.R.A.E.R, held a three day conference in Lander.

The presenters included people from Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. Lived experience and a passion for improving accessibility to those who are blind or low vision made the presentations applicable and captivating. One of the more serious workshops discussed grief and acceptance of a loved one's low vision diagnosis. Another reviewed how and when to cross the street when experiencing low vision or blindness and thusly only using one's auditory intake to judge how safe it is to cross.

Some of the more light hearted classes included a cooking class in the commercial kitchen of the conference venue while another explored tactile art and the advancements being made in that field.

There were vendors representing the northern Rockies as well; some were selling digital technologies to make accessing printed words easier while others were advertising their consulting and training skills. WyCB was there with President Cheryl Godley representing the council with a table loaded with information about what WyCB has done and can do for those experiencing low vision or blindness.

One of WyCB's directors, Robin Loen, had a vendor booth for her business Matters of Independence, which puts people who are low vision or blind in touch with adaptive technology. WyCB Secretary, Sarah Sexton, was also present at the conference as an attendee, soaking up all of the incredible knowledge, research, and support.

Of Heart Ache and Healing By Sarah Sexton

Grief is a strange and unavoidable part of our existence. Our knowledge and understanding of grief changes and evolves all the time. Fortunately, the idea that we can grieve the loss of something or someone, even if that something or someone still exists, is becoming widely accepted and explored.

My lived experience has provided me with the awareness that loss is more than death and pain. Those two things are the bedrock from which we can begin to rebuild and reassess. Grieve the loss, feel that tight ache that rests just behind your sternum. And then, listen to what you are being called to do.

I have grieved the loss of my eye sight and all of the plans I had for my sighted life; that life is over. We all had to grieve the loss of that. I adapted and learned the skills required to function well as a person with blindness.

This, for me, included putting in the substantial effort and time to obtain a dog guide. I applied to three different dog guide schools and the one that I was accepted into had a waiting list of six to nine months. When I was finally matched with my dog guide Sonny Boy, we had almost two fantastic years together.

When that incredible and freeing opportunity was swiftly and completely removed due to Sonny's uncorrectable dog reactivity. This developed after he was attacked by a loose dog in a public space while he was actively working. I was, once again, faced with grieving a loss of a being that was still alive, still amazing, but was no longer the thing I was expecting and wanting it to be. This round of grief has been different. I have been angry, despondent, and jealous of dog guide teams who are thriving and adventuring.

Recently, in a 14 day timeframe, I encountered three pet dogs in indoor public spaces where they absolutely did not belong. One dog was so out of control that he jumped up into my lap and licked me from chin to forehead. These three exposures to people being completely inconsiderate, and of local businesses being willfully ignorant to the life-altering environment they are permitting, brought me to a new level of angry.

So, for the first time, in my entire life, I stood up for myself, for MY needs. I did start to talk myself out of addressing this issue but only to come to the horrifying realization that when I get a new dog guide, I will be entering these public places with my service animal and could very likely encounter these untrained dogs and negligent owners again.

While the attack inflicted on Sonny Boy will likely not happen again, I do not want to risk it. And I am well aware that I will still encounter loose and/or untrained dogs and negligent owners regardless of the education and advocacy that I do. However, I cannot stand by and be a victim of people's ignorance and inconsideration. Educating local businesses and people is a cause that I am now passionately committed to. I spoke with staff and management at all three of the businesses where I had had these pet encounters. I asked all three to prominently post signs stating "No pets allowed. Service animals only." I also asked management to speak with the offending patrons. Two of the three businesses were incredibly receptive to my requests. The manager of a grocery store told me that the corporate office had to give permission to post signage at the entrance but that she would speak with them about it.

While it is the prerogative of each privately owned business to allow pets into their establishment, pets are not permitted in grocery stores, per Wyoming state law. When I spoke with these businesses, I clarified that this advocacy is not only for my peace of mind and safety but also for the comfort and safety of others. Improperly trained dogs and owners in public spaces can lead to stress and potential harm to their customers.

I will check to make sure that these businesses post the proper signage and speak with their customers. If they choose to not provide a safe environment, my only option will be to no longer be their customer. And yes, I shared this stipulation with them.

I find it healing to educate and to advocate. I will continue to do so in a professional and polite fashion. I may also seek to hold these and other businesses that do not comply with the law accountable by no longer being a paying customer and perhaps even reporting them to the state attorney general. There will surely be more to share on this new journey I have found myself on. Stay tuned!

Blind/Visually Impaired Art News By Tom Smyth

Recently WyCB has been contacted by the Nicolaysen Art Museum in Casper and the National Museum of Wildlife Art in Jackson for our input in helping to improve the accessibility of their exhibits. Much of this is in the early stages of planning, but it is encouraging that both of these museums are actively seeking involvement with the B/VI community.

The following are edited excerpts from the February 14, 2024 press release from the National Museum of Wildlife Art:

Jane Lavino, the Museum’s Chief Curator of Education, attended the American Association of Museums annual conference. Tactile Images was at the conference, featuring an exhibit of 3D artworks and photographs. “3D artworks have great potential to support the Museum’s goal of broadening the audiences and populations who feel welcome and engaged when visiting,” Lavino says. “Ideally, at some point in the future, all of the Museum’s permanent galleries will have one tactile interactive display so we can provide a substantive experience for blind/low vision visitors.” NMWA is committed to increasing accessibility for all Museum visitors.

**Adult Camp for the Blind and Visually Impaired at the Allen H. Stewart Lions Camp in Casper
August 17 - August 21, 2025 By Bonnie Harrison**

Nestled in the scenic beauty of Casper Mountain, the Allen H. Stewart Lions Camp offers a unique and enriching experience for blind and visually impaired adults. This special retreat provides a safe and supportive environment where attendees can engage in outdoor activities, build friendships, and gain new skills for greater independence.

The adult camp is designed to be both relaxing and empowering, featuring a variety of activities tailored to meet the needs of individuals with visual impairments. Campers can enjoy hiking, arts and crafts, and educational workshops that promote confidence and self-sufficiency. Experienced volunteers and instructors are on hand to ensure that every participant feels welcome and included.

The Allen H. Stewart Lions Camp has long been a beacon of service within the Lions Clubs of Wyoming, exemplifying the organization's commitment to vision-related initiatives. Through this program, Lions Clubs continue to make a meaningful impact, enhancing the quality of life for blind and visually impaired individuals across the state.

For those interested in attending or supporting the camp, more information can be found through local Lions Clubs or the Wyoming Lions Foundation. Whether as a camper, volunteer, or donor, involvement in this incredible program helps sustain its mission of empowerment, adventure, and lifelong learning.