

**Insight: The Voice of
The American Council of the Blind of New York, Inc.**

<http://www.acbny.info>

Fall 2020

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The American Council of the Blind of New York is the largest consumer advocacy and support organization of blind and visually impaired people in the state. Your financial contributions help ACBNYs work to promote the educational, vocational and social advancement of blind and visually impaired people in New York. Send your tax-deductible donations to ACBNY Treasurer, 1403 Chadwick Court, Tarrytown, N.Y. 10591. Questions for our treasurer can be sent to: treasurer@acbny.info

Join the Monthly Monetary Support (MMS) program and support ACB National and ACBNY through the 2 for 1 program. Find out more about joining by going to <http://acb.org/content/acb%E2%80%99s-monthly-monetary-support-mms-program>

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Presidents Message

By Karen Blachowicz

Hello ACBNY family. Welcome to the beautiful fall season that is approaching us. Im hoping this message finds everybody doing well, healthy and happy. We have all come through some challenging times this year. I know its been very difficult on our members and all people across the country and the world but somehow in some way we all need to stay positive and strong and look for the silver linings in all that we do. I know many of our members have been participating in quite a few of the national community calls. I know that more and more people are using the telephone and other platforms to communicate and that somehow makes the world not seem like such a big place.

New York has been moving forward on accessible voting, accessible New York alerts and many other topics and issues. The organization is still holding strong and growing in members and strength.

Im sure by now you all know that the state convention could not go on in person but will still be presented in a virtual format. I am looking forward to a new adventure and the possibilities a virtual convention can bring.

This year celebrates 50 years of advocacy. We are still looking for essays on how CBNY impacted your life. Please send those to Jean Mann or me before October 1. I know all of you can do it. Theres a lot of history in this organization and the sharing of information and personal stories is part of the celebration and what makes us, us.

We will be moving into 2021 before you know it. We are always looking for new challenges, new topics and new ways to improve the organization. I am hoping all of you feel comfortable reaching out to me at any time with any issues, problems or fresh ideas. Stay safe and healthy.

###

Editors Messages

By Annie Chiappetta and Jean Mann

Hello ACBNY members and friends,

I hope you all are doing well in spite of this novel coronavirus stuff. I hope you did not lose anyone and, if like me, you did, I empathize and share what it means to walk through the tunnel called grief.

On a brighter note, we are celebrating! Fifty years is a significant milestone and ACBNY has so much to be grateful for, mostly because of US. WE are the ones who advocate, support, and push for change. WE are the ones who lead this organization and help each other. WE rally together and make legislators and businesses take notice. WE make a difference and will keep doing it for ad infinitum.

I want to thank former INSIGHT editor, Jean Mann, and her assistant, Kate Chamberlin for taking charge of this issue. Ive been pulled away by chairing the convention. I hope to hear you during our presentations and after-hours meetings. Until then, Happy Anniversary, stay safe and stay well.

Greetings ACBNY Members and Friends,

Im Jean Mann, and as Annie stated, I edited this newsletter many years ago, and Im happy to be helping her with this issue. Back in the days when I edited it, we spent hours recording it on cassette (remember those?), duplicating them, labeling and stuffing envelopes, and proofreading it for the few members who received email versions. My how times have changed!

I hope all of you are doing well and getting through these crazy times. With the isolation because of the pandemic, the social unrest were currently experiencing, and the contentious elections coming up, its easy to feel overwhelmed by it all. If youre feeling somewhat alone or depressed, or youd just like to interact with people, you might want to consider attending some of ACBs community calls. Cindy Hollis, ACBs Membership Development person, started them back in April when it became clear that Covid-19 wasnt going away any time soon, and there have been over a thousand calls so far. Topics include fitness, cooking, crafts, technology; many of them are just places to talk with other people. If youre interested or would like to find out more about them, theres a list which you can subscribe to, and youll get an email every morning listing the calls for that day. Just send a message to Acb-community-events-subscribe@acblists.org.

Those without email can access this information by phone by dialing 1-800-424-8666 and listening to the prompts.

Unfortunately, we wont be able to have a live convention this fall, but we will have a virtual one. This is very sad for those of us who will miss seeing each other in person, but its a bonus for those of you who arent able to physically attend conventions because of financial or other constraints. You can listen in on Zoom, ACB Radio, or on your phones. If you havent already seen the invitation letter, were including it in this newsletter. It includes everything you need to know about registering for the convention, and I

hope all of you do. Its our 50th year as an organization and we want to make it the biggest celebration possible.

Thank you to all of you who contributed articles about your chapters activities. We heard from most of you, and we hope well hear from the rest of you next time. And special thanks to Kate Chamberlin from our Rochester chapter for compiling all of your information.

On that note, well go on with the rest of the newsletter. Stay well, stay safe, and hope youll all attend our 50th ACBNY State Convention!

###

ACBNY 2020 Convention Invitation Letter

Greetings from ACBNY. We are writing to tell you good news. This year we are celebrating fifty years of advocating and supporting New Yorkers who are blind with our first virtual convention. The dates are October 16 and 17, 2020.

Go to www.acbny.info to register

Celebrating Fifty years is a milestone event for us; with the assistance of ACB radio staff, we are providing two days of live streaming at no cost. Thats right, anyone can listen and participate in the program for free. All we ask is for attendees to register.

The virtual program begins at 10 a.m. on Friday, October 16 and concludes on Saturday, October 17. Highlights include the NYSCB town hall, opening ceremonies, workshops and messages provided by vendors and ACB leaders. We cant wait to host this event and we have a few extra surprises to share during the two-day event. The entire program will be streamed live thanks to ACB Radio staff. Listeners will be able to access the program by computer, a mobile device, or by the A lady and/or other virtual assistants. Once registered, attendees will be sent the Zoom webinar links to listen and/or participate, depending on the workshop or presentation; the links and dial-in numbers and passwords will also be included and delivered to your inbox and we ask that you do not share these links to prevent those pesky Zoom bombers from harassing us.

Additionally, real-time captioning requests must be indicated on the registration form and sent in no later than October 1, 2020.

After the convention is over, the recordings will be available for listening from our website.

If you are not an ACBNY member and want to join, let us know on the form and we will contact you. Individuals can still support ACBNY with a donation of any amount.

We want to thank you in advance for registering and attending virtually and supporting ACBNY in these unprecedented times.

Sincerely

Karen A Blachowicz, President ACBNY

Ann Chiappetta, ACBNY Convention Chair

convention@acbny.info

www.acbny.info

914.393.6605

ACBNY Convention Program

Friday, 10/16/2020

- NYSCB Town hall 10a.m.-12p.m.
- Opening ceremony 12:45 p.m. Join us for the 50th annual ACBNY convention with opening remarks by President Karen Blachowicz followed by convention chairperson, Annie Chiappetta. A Special guest (TBA) will recite the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by Fr. John Sheehan singing the National Anthem. An interfaith invocation will also be led by Fr. Sheehan.
- Following the ceremony, we will hear from chapter presidents and other updates, TBD.
- During session breaks we will hear from supporting sponsors and vendors.

2:30-4:45 ACBNY annual business meeting.

- 5:15 – 7:30 (presentation guest speaker TBA. Topic: diversity and ACBNY. hosted by Meghan Parker, ACBNY Legislative cochair and ILNY Director of Advocacy.
- 8 p.m. Virtual after-hours community drop in (not streamed) hosted by David Dunphy

Saturday 10/17/2020

Chapter and special interest group program

- 9:30 – 11 a.m. Guide Dog Users of the Empire State (GDUES) Join us for a presentation from the Federation of Search and Rescue Teams and learn about the matching and training of these task-driven canines and their handlers.
- 11:15 – 12:15 p.m. CCLVNY topic TBD

Break until 12:30 p.m.

- 12:35 – 2 p.m. RSVNY program hosted by Karen Blachowicz with guest presenter Louise Turner, topic TBD.
- Leadership reflections (prerecorded)
- 2:30 – 4 p.m. ACBNY Through the Decades panel (interactive)
- 4-5 p.m. Final comments and closing of convention.
- 7 p.m. After hours community call and check in. (not streamed)

End of program.

###

What ACBNY Means to Me

By Annie Chiappetta

I joined the Westchester Council of the Blind of New York in 2006, after going back to work after losing most of my vision. The president at the time was Sherry DeFrancesco. Sherry was also my supervisor where I was working. I met Meghan Parker there, too. We worked at an Independent Living Center called Westchester Disabled on the Move. Or, WDOMI. I met Mike Golfo, Becky Davidson, then Barnes, and Beckys late husband, Jim, among others by becoming a member of the Westchester County chapter.

It was because of my local chapter that I eventually began taking on more responsibility. I learned so much from the other members and my confidence returned after years of struggling with depression and isolation caused by losing my sight. I got my first guide dog in 2009, became an officer in GDUI and held other positions on the Westchester chapters board of directors. I coordinated a State convention with Mike Golfo and Becky and our chapter in 2016. We formed and chartered GDUES in 2016 after realizing that GDUNY did not wish to affiliate with ACBNY. I met so many great people and most of you are probably reading this, so thanks! You are the folks who mentored me and many other new members, and because of this, we have paid it forward and mentored other new members. I am proud to express this appreciation because we must continue mentoring and bringing younger members into our organization in order to continue growing.

So, heres to us, to what we have achieved and to achieving more in the future.

###

Chapter Roundup

Compiled by Kate Chamberlin

American Council of the Blind of Western New York, Inc.

By Marie Lyons, Publicity Chair

The Western New York Chapter of ACBNY has exciting news to share! As of May 26, 2020, we are officially incorporated as a not for profit organization. Our official title is the American Council of the Blind of Western New York, Inc., or ACBWNY, Inc.

We thank our president, Ian Foley, for his tireless work on this assignment! Congratulations to our chapter!

ACB of Rochester

By Kate Chamberlin

In this issue, we'd like to introduce Tom Flaherty, who is the current treasurer of the Rochester Chapter.

(interview and Excerpt from: Freedom Guide Dog Newsletter, Fall 2018)

Tom has been blind since birth. Born prematurely, he was placed in an incubator and the oxygen levels burned both of his retinas.

Tom was raised the same as his sighted siblings, except for his schooling at the New York State School for the Blind (NYSSB) in Batavia, New York. His other senses compensated for his lack of sight, and he once ducked and missed a shoe that his brother had thrown at him because he could hear it coming!

During his early life, Tom relied on a cane for travel. He worked for the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ABVI) after completing his schooling and looked into finding a guide dog when he moved on to working in the hotel business. He received his first of four guide dogs, a golden retriever, in 1992.

“Travel is so much faster with a dog,” Tom said. “We are trained with them, but the handler needs to work their dog and keep up their skills.”

While multitasking at the front desk at the hotel, Tom was approached by a law firm about coming to work for them. When his job at the hotel came to an end, Tom called law firm Brenna Boyce about their offer and was hired as the Client Services Manager. He keeps busy as their receptionist, calendar organizer, and phone system administrator.

Tom doesn't consider his blindness to be a disability, and uses old and new technology at Brenna Boyce. He takes notes in Braille, uses his iPhone as a communication tool, and has a computer equipped with a voice system.

In the spring of 2018, Tom was placed with Zeppelin, a Freedom Guide Dog. Zepp has lots of energy, but it's controlled by being busy. Tom and Zepp are out in public a lot. They take the bus to work every day, cross busy streets, ride paratransit and Uber, and keep busy with clients at work.

Zepp arrived just in time for the 100th anniversary celebration of the alumni association for NYSSB. Tom is the current vice president of programming for the alumni and spearheaded a celebration that was well attended.

Tom commented, “It was Zepps first major outing and I was concerned that he was new to his job, but he made the conference so much easier for me. I can tell he was raised well and he has a great work ethic.”

While many folks cant wait to retire, Tom cant wait to go to work every day. He loves it, and so does Zepp. With the same work ethic and sense of humor, this team will be great together!...

When Rochesters treasurer, Janet Wettenstein, passed away, Tom stepped in and is grappling with re-organizing our finances. Thank you, Tom, for all your efforts on our behalf.

The New York State Council of Citizens with Low Vision (NYSCCLV)

By Charles (Bob) Cronin, President NYSCCLV

The New York State Council of Citizens with Low Vision (NYSCCLV) is an affiliate that has members throughout New York State. For that reason, we have been meeting via conference call between our normal gatherings at the ACBNY Convention and the Legislative Weekend.

The main effect that the pandemic has had on our group is to shift the discussion that we hold when we meet. We have been discussing our experiences in dealing with what has come to be called the “new normal”. By sharing our experiences, we are sharing our strength as well.

We are looking forward to hosting a panel at this years ACBNY Convention. The major subject of this panel will be Tips and Tricks to Live Independently with a Visual Impairment. It has been my experience that a skill or simple trick that one person has developed or learned can be a great help to someone else. So, we look forward to having you join us. In the meantime, stay safe, healthy, and strong.

Capital District Chapter

By Kathy Farina, Secretary

The Capital District Chapter of ACBNY had its January, February and March meetings in person at the Gateway Diner in Albany as usual.

In February, Gary Horn from the Albany County Sheriffs Office presented about the Evacuation Functional Needs Registry (formerly the Special Needs Registry). People with special needs can register to be contacted in case of an emergency, such as a natural disaster. Participants can get assistance locating and accessing shelters.

When COVID-19 struck, and things shut down, it was decided to meet virtually on Zoom. In May, Zack Howell from the City Planning Office in Albany spoke to us about a project intended to construct more pedestrian walkways in Albany.

In July, several members attended our summer picnic at the home of Bill and Nancy Murray. Folks swam in the pool and enjoyed traditional picnic food.

We awarded two \$1000 scholarships to college students who are visually impaired. An official presentation of the scholarships will be made at our September meeting, which will again be a virtual event on Zoom.

Our Dinner In The Dark fundraiser has been canceled for 2020. We hope to reschedule it for some time in 2021.

Our chapter intends to continue meeting on the second Friday of each month on Zoom. We look forward to the time when we can be together again in person.

Guide Dog Users Of the Empire State

By Annie Chiappetta

Hello ACBNY. We have a few things to tell you.

First, we have postcards available for guide dog users to hand out to businesses. One side is text explaining what a legitimate service dog is and how a business can refer to the Federal ADA service animal policy. The other side is a great looking logo. ACBNY members who want a few

of these postcards can contact our secretary, Nancy Murray. We can provide 5 cards per person free of charge via surface mail/free matter.

Next is our upcoming program during the virtual ACBNY convention. Our guests will be handlers and dogs from a search and rescue organization. The presentation is taking place Saturday October 17.

Finally, GDUES, with help from WCBNY, is in the process of applying for our Articles of Incorporation. Once this is accomplished, we plan to apply for our tax-exempt status.

Well, thats it for now. Wags and be well.

Life for the Long Island Council of the Blind

By Lori Scharff

The membership of the Long Island Council of the Blind has increased by 2 members since submitting our membership roster. Despite the inability to attend meetings in person, both members actively participated in the American Council of the Blind ACB Conference and Convention and enjoyed the experience while increasing their knowledge on issues affecting people who are blind across the country.

David Dunphy upped the post-convention socialization by starting a meet-up on Facebook. Now David has his Davids Bar and Grill on Sunday and Thursday evenings on the ACB Community Call list.

Until further notice, our monthly meetings will be taking place via Zoom. Once our prior meeting place becomes available again, we will need to assess any restrictions on meeting size and safety precautions needed such as social distancing and the requirement for masks.

LICB provided input during the New York State Commission for the Blind hearing regarding services during COVID-19. Our members have been pleased with the remote services being provided by both NYSCB staff and the contract agencies covering our geographic area.

We are thankful to the dedicated staff and volunteers of the Catholic Guild for their many years of service. We hope that services to English Language Learners and academic services will be provided at as high of a quality going forward as has been done by the Catholic Guild in the past.

Hurricane Isaias changed our summer virtual picnic plans. Our pre-scheduled virtual picnic did not happen because several members did not have electricity for 5 days post-Isaias. We hope to host a virtual event to socialize in the upcoming weeks.

WCBNY 2020

By Rodney Stanford and Martin Cahill

Be careful what you ask for. For many of us, 2020 was something we always looked forward to experiencing. When we were young, there were thoughts of flying cars, medical breakthroughs, and commercial space travel. But the reality did not really sync up with our imaginations. Not only did we not manage to bring science fiction to life, we couldn't even get out of the house. Instead of living like the Jetsons, we were just happy if we could find toilet paper. But we did get the video conferencing thing down. More on that later.

But while this has not been the year we imagined, even as late as January, there have been some noteworthy achievements and activities by the WCBNY. When the world went into lockdown, the blind and visually impaired in Westchester sprang into action. Here is a review of the things we did because of COVID-19, and also of the things we managed to get done despite COVID-19.

Like the rest of the world, we all learned how to Zoom. It is, and rightly should be, a point of pride, the degree to which our group embraced technology that enabled us to keep up our work, and our relationships. It was sometimes challenging, sometimes funny, but always empowering. Here is what we did in and around Zoom:

- We held our regularly scheduled monthly meetings and continued normal operations unabated.
- We featured guest speakers from Visions and Westchester Para-Transit.
- We hosted a series of game nights, each with at least twelve participants, for such favorites as Name That Tune, 20 Questions, Mad Libs, and Trivia.
- We held our third annual July picnic in the form of our first ever virtual picnic, each of us in the comfort of our own air conditioning, and eating our own picnic food, while we played games and shared things over Zoom.
- Through conversations in our meetings and via Email as well, we marshalled a list of resources, complete with our own experiences and reviews, to assist our membership in getting medication, food, and transportation during the pandemic.
- Some of our members used their Zoom skills to participate in the ACBs virtual national convention, and shared information and resources with the rest of our group.

- And when there was no Zoom meeting, we called each other, just to chat.

But it wasn't all about surviving the pandemic. We weren't about to lose 2020 and the things we had set out to accomplish. So, despite the challenges, we pressed on in the following areas:

- We cleaned up some paperwork issues with the IRS and filed papers to incorporate. Having received those, we are now moving forward with obtaining 501c3 status. That should be done by the end of 2020 and will give us a tremendous amount of autonomy and flexibility in our fund-raising efforts going forward.
- We re-ignited our Audible Pedestrian Crossing Committee, with several members jumping at the opportunity to participate in this very important work.
- Our members have continued to make their presence felt locally, through efforts such as REV-Up and the Disaster Preparedness Committee.
- Following through on the proposal that originated with our chapter, the ACBNY has conducted a statewide membership survey. And Westchester has been very well-represented on that committee, in addition to all of the other work our representatives do at the state level as officers and directors.

2020 isn't over yet. There are both opportunities and time remaining. Please make sure you join our email list and actively participate. The chapter belongs to the members, the more we each participate the better off we all are.

#

Think Spring!

As your chapter carries on its business and activities during the coming months, jot down a few notes in a file as things happen, so you can send us your news when we're ready for the Spring ACB INSIGHT Newsletter Chapter Round-up.

Most likely, there is a member you could honor for their efforts in your chapter. Interviews are fun and Kate would be happy to interview your honoree. Closer to the spring newsletter due date, we'll remind you to send your e-mail submissions to: KathrynGC1@verizon.net or request a telephone interview.

In ACB friendship,

The INSIGHT Editorial Team

Annie Chiappetta and Jean Mann, Editors

Kate Chamberlin, Round-up Correspondent

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ACB Womens Breast Cancer Support Group

My Dance With Cancer

By Kate Chamberlin

On March 2, 2020, when the diagnosis of Invasive Ductal Carcinoma registered in my brain, the music didnt stop, but, I sure missed a beat. The experience my mother had with breast cancer in 1976 rang loud and clear in my memory. She went from robust to dust in six months. I knew my cancer was early Stage one-A, so I tuned up my research skills and began to compose a plan. I was determined to choreograph my dance with cancer to have a different finale.

I read “Dr. Susan Loves Breast Book, sixth edition”, by Susan M. Love, Karen Linsdey, and Elizabeth Love, downloaded from Bard, DB82608. I also downloaded “The Cancer-Fighting Kitchen: Nourishing, Big-Flavor Recipes for Cancer Treatment and Recovery” by Rebecca Katz and Mat Edelson (DB96582).

A friend told me about the Breast Cancer Coalition of Rochester. There are other regional coalitions in New York, and this one was the nearest to my home. Due to the Covid-19 shutdowns, and meetings going to Zoom rooms, it was very convenient for me to attend virtual meetings.

“In this time of COVID-19, business is not as usual and we are working to stay connected with our survivor community,” Jennifer Gaylord, BCCR Program Director, stated in an e-mail. “We have diverse, supportive groups of women breast and GYN survivors, who are newly diagnosed, actively in treatment, or many years out to converse about the issues that pertain to them.”
(info@bccr.org)

The women Ive virtually met are wonderful, open, and honest about their situations, but, something was still off-key for me. My dance card wasnt full.

Then, through an ACB virtual Community Membership meeting, I heard about and contacted Linda Porelle.

The ACB Womens Breast Cancer Support Group meets on the first Tuesday each month from 8:00 pm to 9:30 pm EST via a tele-conference line. This is a support group for women who are blind and have been living with breast cancer. Whether you are recently diagnosed or you are a long-term survivor you are welcome to join us. While we identify each attendee by name, confidentiality is maintained to enable each of us to share our concerns, issues, and support one another at whatever step we are at in our dance with cancer.

The group is facilitated by Linda Porelle and Lori Scharff, two social workers who are volunteering their time.

“Lori and I have been facilitating this monthly group since December 2008,” Linda e-mailed. “We have met courageous women from all around this country, some of whom joined us very early on. They have shared their cancer journeys with us, and most importantly, with each other. Our members are warm, open-hearted women who know what you may be experiencing because each one has been there herself.” (lporelle@gmail.com)

Now, Im not alone in choreographing my dance with cancer. My dance card is full of new friends, so let the band play on. (KathrynGC1@verizon.net)

###

Help ACB and ACBNY Without Really Trying

By Jean Mann

If youre like many of us, you want to help support organizations you belong to with financial contributions, but you forget to send them and you get tired of receiving those monthly reminders in the mail. Or, you might be one of those people who cant (or is unwilling to!) participate in fundraising activities said organization, in this case ACB of New York, asks you to take part in. I have a very simple way for you to support ACB and ACBNY. Its called the Monthly Monetary Support (MMS program, and heres how it works.

Every month, the amount of money you designate (a minimum of ten dollars) is either charged to your credit card or withdrawn from your checking account as a tax deductible donation in support of the American Council of the Blind (ACB). One hundred percent of your contribution can be given to ACB, or you can request that up to 50 percent of what you donate go to an affiliate of your choice. If you want to contribute to more than one affiliate, sign up as many times as you like. Each time you do, up to

half of what you donate will go to ACB and the other half will go to the affiliate you choose. If you're already an MMS donor but you'd like to increase that donation, you can do so by as little as five dollars a month. And you do not have to be an ACB member to join.

Several of our members have already joined this program, and each quarter, Mike Golfo, our treasurer, receives a check from ACB; currently we're receiving over 500 dollars a quarter. It may not seem like much, but when you add it up it's over \$2000 a year.

There are currently two ways for you to sign up. You can visit ACB's website, acb.org, tab to the Donate Now button, and then tab to the MMS program. Or you can call the ACB office in Minneapolis at (612) 332-3242 and they'll help you fill out the necessary forms to get you started.

The MMS committee holds a drawing after each ACB convention for a great prize, and everybody who joins the MMS program with a monthly donation of at least ten dollars, or increases what they're already giving by at least five dollars a month, is eligible to win it. So think about it and sign up today. It will make you feel wonderful, knowing what a great organization you're supporting.

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American Council of the Blind of New York, Inc.

2020 Officers and Board of Directors Contact List

The following is the most up to date list of members of the 2020 ACB NY Board of Directors.

Please contact your President Karen Blachowicz karenablachowicz@gmail.com or

Secretary/newsletter editor, Annie Chiappetta at editor@acbny.info

Beginning January 1, 2020

Officers

President: Karen Blachowicz, karenablachowicz@gmail.com

First Vice president: Nancy Murray, nancy.murray1947@gmail.com

Second Vice President is currently vacant.

Treasurer: Michael Golfo, mssg74@gmail.com

Annie Chiappetta, Secretary: anniecms64@gmail.com

Board of Directors

Capital District: Michael O'Brien, m.obrien@samobile.net

Greater New York: Fitz Martin, fitzmartin@willpowerent.com

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Utica: Carl Gage, carlgage8@gmail.com

Westchester: Rodney Stanford, Rodney.stanford@gmail.com

NYSCCLV: Bill Murray, billmurray52@icloud.com

RSVNY: Alex Meister, Alexmeister@verizon.net

ACB of Western New York: Ian Foley, ianfoley206@hotmail.com

Member at Large: Jean Mann, jmann40@nycap.rr.com

End of Newsletter.