



© Cindy Dyer

From the Executive Director's Desk

How can we reach the millions of people with hearing loss and make them aware of all the support and technology available to help them cope?

Brenda Battat is executive director of Hearing Loss Association of America and wears a hearing aid and a cochlear implant. She lives in Bethesda, Maryland, with her husband Joe. She can be reached at battat@hearingloss.org.

Happy New Year! It's 2009 and the Hearing Loss Association of America enters its 30th year. Founded in 1979 by Howard E. "Rocky" Stone as Self Help for Hard of Hearing People (SHHH), the organization was born in a basement office with five volunteers and has grown to a national organization with 14 state organizations, 200 chapters nationwide, and a national office just outside Washington, D.C.

Over the past 30 years HLAA has served hundreds of thousands of people with hearing loss and their families, giving them the tools to self advocate and live and work successfully with hearing loss. We are a known leader in advocating for better communication access.

A New Year is a Time to Reflect

Highlights of some of our past achievements include:

- advocated successfully for the establishment of the National Institute of Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD), the thirteenth institute of the National Institutes of Health that researches hearing and balance disorders;
- chaired the 1981 White House Conference on Aging where ALDs were first showcased in the United States;
- represented people with hearing loss on the U.S. Access Board that wrote the guidelines for communication access in the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act;
- advocated successfully for FCC ruling requiring wireless and cordless phones to be hearing aid compatible.

It's Also a Time to Look to the Future

We have to steer the organization in a rapidly changing mobile world of social networking, the You Tube generation, instant messaging, video communication, and fourth generation wireless technologies. Not to mention the explosion of people with hearing loss reaching epidemic proportions, baby boomers coming of age realizing they don't hear so well, and the aging of America.

The question becomes how to reach all these people with hearing loss who could benefit from the services that HLAA and other consumer organizations offer—such as the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the National Association of the Deaf, the Association of Late-Deafened Adults, and Telecommunications for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Inc., among others. Most people with hearing loss do not belong to or even know about our organizations. I would estimate that our collective members are less than 700 out of every million people with hearing loss. Where are the other 999,300 people? Or to put it very generously, we can count one person out of every 1,000 as members of national organizations that are consumer- and hearing-loss related.

How can we reach the millions of people with hearing loss and make them aware of all the support and technology available to help them cope? We need the concerted efforts of all the key stakeholders to get hearing loss into the national consciousness, and we need the public to take hearing more seriously as a health condition that needs no less attention than diabetes and high blood pressure. Let's all commit this New Year to spreading awareness and making sure that everyone who needs support, needs technology, needs education, and needs self advocacy, and knows where and how to satisfy those needs.

We will celebrate HLAA's 30th anniversary in Nashville, June 18-21, 2009 at our national convention. I would like to invite each of you to the birthday celebration—please bring your family and friends, and be sure to tell your hearing health professional about it. To register for the convention, please visit our website at www.hearingloss.org. I look forward to seeing you there. 