

# Thirty Years!

*The Hearing Loss Association of America® is celebrating the vision of its founder, Rocky Stone, who saw a need all those years ago for an organization to represent people who are hard of hearing. He pushed to have people who are hard of hearing and their distinct needs recognized.*



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## From the Executive Director's Desk

**W**e have made progress in the past three decades but still have work to do to get the right accommodations such as CART (Communication Access Real-time Translation) and assistive listening devices (ALDS) in public places.

Three actively engaged and committed members of HLAA recently asked me to correct the misinformation being propagated by some Deaf organizations about hard of hearing persons. Their ire was triggered by the latest statement on the National Association of the Deaf's (NAD) new website where it claimed to be:

"...the nation's premier civil rights organization of, by and for deaf and hard of hearing individuals in the United States of America"

My response to our members was that although I hear their concerns loud and clear, I do not think challenging another organization's mission statement will achieve our goal of meeting the needs of people who are hard of hearing.

Criticizing organizations for what they publicly say is not going to clarify the confusion of who serves who; but, rather, it will create a combative environment that will hinder the close working relationship we currently have among the organizations for people with hearing loss. For example, we work collaboratively with NAD and others to get national laws passed, such as the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act, the Hearing Aid Tax Credit, and telecommunications relay service improvements.

Different organizations are needed to respond to the needs of people with varying degrees of hearing loss and philosophies. In my opinion, people who are hard of hearing join HLAA whose mission specifically addresses their needs. They look to HLAA for information on hearing aids, cochlear implants, and hearing assistive technology. They look for coping skills, mutual support, and to understand the psychosocial impact of untreated hearing loss. They also look to HLAA to support prevention, treatment, and research for cures for hearing loss.

I believe the proactive way to deal with disagreement about types of communication access needs is for people with hearing loss to be more outspoken about our needs. And for all of us—individuals, organizations within and outside HLAA—to advocate hard for CART and ALDs in any place and any time that sign language interpreters are provided. For example, we have advocated with the Obama Administration and asked for CART at recent national events where HLAA staff was present. They provided CART along with sign language interpreters.

### Times are Changing

The first wave of babies who received cochlear implants is now reaching early adulthood. They have been mainstreamed in school and many of them also use sign language. Using sign language is not seen as part of their culture, but rather, as a skill to pull out when they need it, much as you would if you speak French or Spanish and find yourself in a situation where you cannot communicate.

Of the 60 young adults who attended the HLAA convention for the first time in Nashville last June, many of them use sign language but are most comfortable speaking and identifying themselves as being hard of hearing, not deaf.

Deanne Bray, the actress featured on our cover shows how she moves effortlessly among the deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing communities using sign language, a hearing aid, and speaking—whatever the situation calls for.

The Twitter logo, consisting of the word "twitter" in a lowercase, blue, sans-serif font with a white outline, set against a light blue background.

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## Working Toward a Common Goal

We need to look at our experience in working with legislators. They have told us, in so many words, that the disability community "eats its own." When legislators see in-house fighting, they use it as an excuse to do nothing. HAAA would rather join forces when we can. We have worked together with Gallaudet on the hearing-aid-compatible working group, and NAD and TDI on a number of issues with the Federal Communications Commission, including our recent filing to mandate CapTel (captioned telephone). HAAA wants to continue to work together to make change happen.

The bigger issue, by far, is to ensure that funding is appropriated for programs for all types of hearing loss and communication access. In the states, advocates should be monitoring how the state funds are allocated within state divisions (e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation and offices for people who are deaf and hard of hearing). Are funds provided both for CART and sign language interpreters? Are programs funded to provide communication access for people who are hard of hearing that use technology as well as for deaf people who use American Sign Language? Is captioned telephone, the preferred relay of people who are hard of hearing, supported by the states?

Are personnel knowledgeable about hearing aids, hearing assistive technology, cochlear implants, coping strategies, and the psychosocial impact of untreated hearing loss? Are hard of hearing specialists on the payroll? Is fluency in sign language one of the hiring requirements? Are the positions being filled by professionals with deaf education backgrounds who are often not familiar with people who prefer to speak and use their residual hearing?

Funding for appropriate services for people who are hard of hearing as well as those who are deaf is what will make a difference—not criticizing our fellow organizations. Ultimately we are all trying to improve the lives of people with hearing loss—however they prefer to communicate. ■■■■

*Brenda Battat is executive director of the Hearing Loss Association of America® and can be reached at [battat@hearingloss.org](mailto:battat@hearingloss.org).*

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For more information contact Christopher T. Sutton, director of development and education, by calling 301.657.2248, or by e-mail [CSutton@hearingloss.org](mailto:CSutton@hearingloss.org).