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The Power of Good News 🧡

BY BARBARA KELLEY

We look for good news anywhere we can find it. Even a morsel of happy is a balm to soothe the struggle we're going through with the COVID-19 pandemic. There's lots of good news coming out of HLAA these days.

In these unique and challenging times, we are holding up our mission. We found that the community of people with hearing loss sought out HLAA more than ever since the pandemic began.

Beginning March 15 until the time of this writing, mid-July, we adapted much of what we do to a digital platform delivered to your laptops, desktops and smartphones. And, our events were free and captioned. With most people sheltering at home, our chapter and state leaders took steps to keep people engaged and connected.

Since many of you are connected on social media, one person's post or question led to further conversations, new ideas, and just a lot of general support. While there were the inevitable pain points of online communications, the past few months were marked more by a long series of small successes and happy discoveries.

What we've been able to achieve in a short period of time is good news. What is even better news is that you were willing partners—you wanted what we offered and joined our online events. You craved what the HLAA community could offer.

"The pandemic has taken so much from so many in so many ways; with situations that range from truly tragic to simply annoying," said Shari Ascher, when talking about the virtual Westchester/Rockland (NY) Walk4Hearing. "But the thing it took from all of us is our ability to be together in the same space; to gather and enjoy and be a community. The virtual Walk4Hearing gave that back."

What About Those Face Masks?

Face masks became a hot-button issue—barriers to communication! The masks, of course, are essential to protect our health and stop the spread of COVID-19, but this put everyone in a jam with lipreading being blocked from view. Masks can also reduce the volume level of conversation anywhere from 2 decibels to 25 decibels. Add six feet of social distancing and the sound really deteriorates.

Today, the good news is that clear masks (or window masks) are getting noticed. We made appearances on news shows, both local and national, talking about the need for clear masks. We had webinars and posted tips on our website. We joined the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association in their urging of the CDC to inform people about clear masks and applauded the CDC in July when they issued guidelines for alternative masks for the general public.

The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, National Institutes of Health, told us they were inspired by our advocacy and information, so they published information on their website about clear masks. We helped a parent advocate for his child with hearing loss for clear masks in the classroom.

We partnered with Cricut®, a company that makes fabric cutters and materials which created instructions on how to make clear masks. Cricut arranged for HLAA to receive a shipment of masks from crafters from all over the country, which quickly sold out. We hope that in the very near future a clear mask is approved by the FDA for all of us to use. We'll keep advocating for that.

The Digital Lifeline

Good news: This issue of *Hearing Life* is being offered to the world, for free, on hearingloss.org. Share the link with your friends and families. (Go to hearingloss.org and search for *Hearing Life*.)

We want to encourage folks to take their hearing health seriously to be healthy, active and engaged. There are many people who aren't sure what to do, or what to think about their suspected loss of hearing as they struggle to understand speech. For years you told us our magazine is a lifeline. Now, the lifeline and its reach just got longer with our digital communications.

We'll continue to reach more people through this new digital reality we've embraced. HLAA is committed

to helping people wherever they are. Maybe some of you just need a little hearing enhancement in specific situations, or you're on the other end of the spectrum needing the latest technology in hearing aids, cochlear implants, captioned phones, speech-to-text apps or realtime captioning. We're committed to bringing you the latest and most reliable information so you can make your own decisions about your hearing health.

HLAA continues to evolve and greet the future with open arms just as we did in 1979 when we were founded. Take some action. Sign up today for our free online *Hearing Life e-News* at hearingloss.org. Become a member and receive this magazine. Keep in touch with what's happening in advocacy and public policy that affects you. Stay informed about the latest technology. Participate in one of our virtual events.

The really good news is that you are not alone with your hearing loss. **HL**

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HLAA's Virtual Reality

In a few short months, we all came together online. We provided timely information as we continued our advocacy work and supported each other. While there were the inevitable pain points of online communications, the past few months were marked more by a long series of small successes and happy discoveries.



In addition, staff attended hundreds of online meetings with coalition groups, policy and rulemaking bodies, working groups, and corporate partners. There were thousands of tweets, Facebook, and Instagram posts.

Go to hearingloss.org to keep up with the latest events. Sign up for the free online *Hearing Life e-News*. Since many of you are connected on social media, one person's post or question leads to further conversations, new ideas, and just a lot of general support. **HL**