



Register Now for HLAA 2023 Convention in New Orleans

Early bird rate ends March 31, 2023

Join HLA A June 29-July 1 in the “Big Easy” for the largest event of its kind with workshops, demonstrations, an Exhibit Hall, social events, and a Research Symposium, all designed to educate and empower people with all degrees of hearing loss.

Don’t miss keynote speaker, Dr. K. Renee Horton — renowned physicist, author, and space launch engineer for NASA — on overcoming her own hearing loss, and the successful intersection of talent and passion. The Convention hotel is on Canal Street in the French Quarter, in walking distance to shops, restaurants, and NOLA attractions.

Highlights

The Welcome Back Bash “A Taste of New Orleans” on Thursday, June 29 at 7-10 p.m. will be held at The Presbytère, a historic museum in the French Quarter of New Orleans, where the exhibits will be open.

The Research Symposium topic is the *Joy of Music/Loving Your Ears* on Friday, June 30, especially appropriate in the birthplace of jazz.

For more information, visit bit.ly/3vHRg71.

Dr. K. Renee Horton is a native of Baton Rouge, Louisiana and is a graduate of Louisiana State University with an Electrical Engineering B.S. and holds a Ph.D. in Material Science with a concentration in Physics from the University of Alabama, as the first African American to receive this degree. Renee is a compelling, international, and inspirational speaker whose love affair with space began when she was 9 years old, and her parents gave her a telescope. Her dream was to become an astronaut. After graduating high school at the age of 16, she took an Air Force ROTC physical. During the physical, Horton learned a shocking truth: she had a hearing loss. Her dreams of the Air Force and a career as an astronaut were crushed. But Renee looked for ways to continue pursuing what she loved.

She found it in her day job, she serves as a NASA Airworthiness Deputy for the Electrified Powertrain Flight Demonstrator (EPFD) Project. In 2022, she served as an Astro Access Ambassador on the charted Zero G flight.

Astro Access is a project dedicated to promoting disability inclusion in space exploration by paving the way for astronauts, who are disabled, in STEM by launching scientists who are disabled, veterans, students, athletes, and artists on parabolic flights with the Zero Gravity Corporation as the first step in a progression toward flying a diverse range of people to space.

Her experiences have inspired her to advocate for people with disabilities and their inclusion in physics. She is the founder of Unapologetically Being, Inc., a nonprofit for advocacy and mentoring in STEM. Renee also serves on the board of Lighthouse Louisiana, whose mission is to empower people with disabilities through services, employment, and advocacy and the board of Families Helping Families. She is the author of *Dr. H Explores the Universe*, a children's series with the third book in the series, *Dr. H Explores the Universe – A Visit to the Moon*, released in 2021.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER
Dr. K. Renee Horton



You Belong at an HCAA Convention

BY MARGARET PITTMAN

When I joined the military at age 19, I felt like I fit right in, and I loved the camaraderie I found there. It was similar in some ways to the sense of belonging I felt at the HCAA 2022 Convention.

I didn't have serious hearing issues until 2006, when I lost some hearing in my left ear, and in 2012, I noticed a loss in my right ear. It was so devastating—like a connection to the world had been taken from me. I felt like people looked down on me or got frustrated with me, and I just wanted to isolate myself.

My ear, nose and throat specialist referred me to Dr. Christine Dinh, who changed my life. Having a doctor who not only understands your condition but also supports you throughout this tough journey is priceless, but I fought her on the cochlear implant (CI). I was in denial; I really thought my hearing would come back.

An Instant Connection with a New Community

Dr. Dinh connected me with Roxana Rotundo, who invited me to my first HCAA Chapter meeting in Miami. I worried about not being able to understand anyone, but I soon realized that everyone was in the same boat, and much like the military, we supported each other and had an instant bond.

A Victim No More

HCAA has helped me grow and take control of my hearing loss. I stopped asking why this happened to me and began asking what I could do to improve my life.

I did get the CI, and I've installed various gadgets around my house, like a motion sensor that makes my bedroom lights brighter when it detects suspicious movement. My lights flash when my doorbell rings, and my dog alerts me when my oven timer buzzes.

In June 2022, I attended my first HCAA Convention. A friend from the HCAA Miami Chapter and I attended together, and it was a great experience! My CI surgeon, Dr. Dinh, and my former audiologist, Dr. Martinez, presented at the Research Symposium and several workshops.

Friendship on Common Ground

I loved learning about progress with CIs, as well as current research, but the best part was the friends I made. Meeting people who instantly understood my hearing loss was priceless. It's like we had this silent recognition of each other. There's no code to crack; we just knew how to communicate.

I'm already making plans to attend the HCAA 2023 Convention in New Orleans. I can't wait for it! **HL**

