

# NEWSLETTER



*PA Chapter President Mary Beth Kernan, flanked by Membership Committee members Debbie Johnston Tobin and Jane Newcomer, poses with the chapter's 2004-2006 Best Membership Program Award.*

## PA Chapter Wins Membership Award

At the biannual convention in Pittsburgh, PA, our chapter was given the Membership Award. AG Bell described our reactivated chapter as being ambitious, focused and hard working. Since we rejoined the chapter network in 2005, we used a variety of tactics to recruit new members over a one-year period. Many of these new members were involved in the recent convention. This is clearly the place to be!

## President's Message

Welcome to our first issue of the newsletter for the Pennsylvania Chapter of AG Bell. I hope that after reading it you will have a better understanding of who we are at AG Bell PA and what we do.

Special thanks to all of our Board members who submitted articles and information for this inaugural issue. And in particular, thank you to Lisa Goldstein, our Board Member-at-Large and Newsletter Editor, who did an outstanding job putting all of this together.

In May 2005, a group of people from across Pennsylvania met in Pittsburgh to discuss the reorganization of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Chapters had been formed in the past (most recently 2000) but none seemed to be able to carry the momentum past a few years. As is the case with other state chapters, the board members of these previous chapters became "burnt out" after several years of planning events, fundraisers and programs.

In spring of last year, I contacted Greg Zick, Senior Director of Membership and Chapters, about restarting our chapter. Greg was extremely enthusiastic about the idea, and very helpful. Parents, professionals and DHHSers were contacted and a kick-off event was planned at the DePaul School for Hearing and Speech in Pittsburgh. After an inspiring talk by Justin Osmond (yes, he's a member of THE Osmond family), an oral, hearing-impaired adult and motivational speaker, a group of us talked about how we would get this new chapter up and running.

Since that time, our board members have worked hard planning events, increasing membership (see Debbie Tobin's article on our Membership Award) and building a new website. Our goal is to bring our members from throughout this very large state together so we may support the mission of our chapter and AG Bell National: Advocating Independence through Listening and Talking!

I hope you enjoy this first issue and find the information useful and informative. If you have any news, personal stories or ideas you'd like to share or events in the state that would be of interest to our members, please contact Newsletter Editor Lisa Goldstein ([lisag@steinsquared.com](mailto:lisag@steinsquared.com)).

*Mary Beth Kernan, President.*

## MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE OFF TO A GOOD START

The PA chapter has 308 active members, with approximately 47 new members since the reinstatement of the chapter in May of 2005. Several efforts to increase awareness of AG Bell among new parents and professionals have occurred statewide, helping to increase membership. In fact, 99 percent of the faculty and staff of DePaul School for Hearing and Speech in Pittsburgh have maintained their membership or joined AG Bell for the first time. We hope to continue efforts to promote AG Bell over the next several months, with special attention to lapsed members. Volunteers to assist with phone calls or e-mails are always welcome :) Please contact Debbie Tobin ([dt@depaulinst.com](mailto:dt@depaulinst.com)) or Jane Newcomer ([jn@depaulinst.com](mailto:jn@depaulinst.com)), if you are willing to help out with the Membership Committee.

## STATE CHAPTER CONFERENCE IN HERSHEY

If you like chocolate, you'll welcome an excuse to visit Hershey, Pennsylvania, the town built on chocolate. If you don't like chocolate (what's wrong with you?), you'll want to come anyway, because you'll learn a lot at the annual PA state chapter conference. The conference will be at the Hershey Lodge on Saturday, November 4. At 8:30 that morning, the annual state chapter meeting will be held, followed by two informative sessions.

The first session will be on promoting healthy social, emotional and behavioral development of hard of hearing and deaf children. Because healthy social, emotional and behavioral development is so dependent upon consistently effective communication between children, peers, and adults, this session will describe developmental milestones and strategies that parents and professionals can use to promote this development specifically with hard of hearing and deaf children. Louise Montoya, a licensed professional counselor and director of Children's Hospital of Philadelphia's Family Wellness Program, will be the presenter.

Session two is called Making Connections Through Hearing Assistance Technology, presented by Elaine Mormer, coordinator of the Audiology Clinical Training Program at the University of Pittsburgh. This presentation will introduce consumers to the role that Hearing Assistance Technology (HAT) can play in achieving maximum independence and communication ability. Participants will learn about laws and resources that might enhance HAT availability to deaf and hard of hearing individuals. Examples of devices and their application to daily activities will be shown.

After the sessions, attendees are invited to tour the Hershey Museum and Hershey's Chocolate



World. Learn about the process of making chocolate on Hershey's Great American Chocolate Tour, see the Hershey's product characters come to life on the big screen in Hershey's Really Big 3D Show, and even help operate an actual Hershey's Factory works Experience.

Later that evening, join us by honoring Pennsylvania State Senator Charles Lemmond, Jr. Senator Lemmond was a key sponsor of the Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Act in PA.

Childcare will be available onsite for children ages 2-12 for only \$10 per child. Conference attendees can stay at the Hershey lodge for a reduced rate of \$159. Call 717-533-3311 to make reservations and be sure to mention the AG Bell conference to get the discount. The conference fee itself is only \$25 for members and \$35 for non members. Registration and payment must be received by October 30. If interested, email Mary Beth Kernan at [mk@depaulinst.com](mailto:mk@depaulinst.com) or call her at 412-924-1025.

## PARENT CONNECTION

The Parent Connection is in the process of establishing a parent network throughout the state of Pennsylvania to extend emotional support and information to families with children (birth through high school) who are deaf or hard of hearing. One of our goals for 2006 is to develop awareness and options available to parents of newly diagnosed hearing-impaired children throughout the state and to educate members of the medical community as well as local state representatives on the importance of promoting the needs of our children.

We are also in the process of reviewing coverage through various private health insurance companies and lobbying our state representatives in Harrisburg

to support State House bill HR 490, which calls for an immediate repeal of the premium proposal which would require families enrolled in the state ACCESS program under the PH95 "loophole" category to pay a premium based upon their income level.

Any AG Bell member who is a parent, grandparent, great-grandparent or legal guardian of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing can become a member of this section. We are always looking for interested families to help us achieve our goals. If you would like to join us in our efforts or have questions, please e-mail Linda Meyers, Parent Section Committee Chair at [poohls@aol.com](mailto:poohls@aol.com).

### C O N T E S T ! !

This being the newsletter's inaugural issue, we're without a name. We need you, the PA chapter members, to help us come up with one. Some examples from other states include: Colorado Voices, Amplifier, Sound Bites, Speak Out and Bluegrass Sounds (for Kentucky). Now put those creative minds to work, and send your submissions to [lisag@steinsquared.com](mailto:lisag@steinsquared.com) by November 1. The winning entry will be announced in the winter issue. The reward for your brilliance will be a \$25 savings bond.

## EARLY HEARING DETECTION & INTERVENTION ONLINE CME COURSE

Earn a free CME credit! You can access a new online CME course to learn more about early hearing detection and intervention *and* earn up to two free CME credits through the University of Pittsburgh Center for Continuing Education in the Health Sciences.

Just log on to: <https://cme.health.pitt.edu/index.asp?MI=000042>

This online CME course uses a case-based format and covers:

- 1) Universal Newborn Hearing Screening and the timeline of evaluations
- 2) Primary care of children who do not pass the hearing screen, including:
  - helping families obtain a follow-up rescreening
  - finding an audiologist if the child needs to be referred
  - referring to Early Intervention for children diagnosed with a hearing loss
  - assisting with obtaining funding for hearing aids
  - providing information about hearing loss and parent-to-parent support
- 3) Clinical approach on the basis of family and cultural issues

If you do not wish to take the full CME course, you can also use the web site to obtain information on the clinical detection and management of hearing loss, as well as local and national resources for medical professionals and families of children with hearing loss. Just register and go to Resources on the menu at the right side of the screen.

This is funded in part by the Pennsylvania Department of Health.

## ONE OF OUR OWN WINS FIRST RUNNER-UP IN STATE PAGEANT

This year has been an exciting one for Elena LaQuatra of Mount Lebanon, Pennsylvania. The 14 year-old teenager, daughter of AG Bell parent member Effie LaQuatra, recently competed in the Miss Pennsylvania Outstanding Teen America pageant and finished as first runner-up. Elena was competing as Miss Mid-State Outstanding Teen and was the youngest contestant to make the top five in the state-wide competition. The pageant is part of the Miss America organization.

Elena lost her hearing after contracting meningitis at the age of four. Not long afterward, Elena was enrolled at the DePaul Institute (now known as the DePaul School for Hearing and Speech) in Pittsburgh and later received a cochlear implant. At the age of eight she mainstreamed into a regular classroom in Mount Lebanon school district.

Not surprisingly, with her experiences at DePaul and with her cochlear implant, Elena's platform for the competition was "Oral deaf education...finding your voice." Elena told the judges that she hoped to have the opportunity to continue to educate the public about the benefits of a cochlear implant and an oral education for deaf children. She told them she has been shaped as a person by the events that

happened to her and she feels fortunate to have had the opportunity to attend an oral deaf school and feels oral communication is vitally important in today's society. Elena is also a strong supporter of Universal Newborn Hearing Screening and hopes someday to testify in Congress about the benefits of laws that support the hearing-impaired.

Elena, who performed a tap number during the talent portion of the pageant, is no stranger to the stage. From an early age she has been involved in dance and theater and has danced and acted in several professional productions in Pittsburgh. The talented teen also plays drums and this fall she joins the Percussion Ensemble at Mount Lebanon Senior High School.




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## INFANT HEARING SCREENING ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

The Infant Hearing Screening Advisory Committee for Pennsylvania recently held its meeting in Harrisburg on Friday, August 25, 2006.

The Infant Hearing Education, Assessment, Reporting and Referral (IHEARR) Act (Act 89 of 2001) required that the "Secretary of Health appoint a six-member Infant Hearing Screening Advisory Committee within the Department of Health. The Committee advises and makes recommendations on issues relating to, but not limited to, program regulation and administration, diagnostic testing, technical support and follow-up.

During the committee meeting, a Parent Resource Guide developed by EPIC-EHDI (Educating Physicians in their Community - Early Hearing Detection and Intervention) was reviewed. This parent resource guide will be distributed to families of infants identified with a hearing loss. Copies of the guide are available through the department.

The committee continues to diligently work on Newborn Hearing Screening Program Guidelines. This document is still in draft form, with an anticipated 2006 deadline for completion.

Newborn Hearing Screening Program Updates during the committee meeting included status of grants, hospital monthly reports, the Out of Hospital Birth Program and the National Initiative for Children's Healthcare Quality (NICHQ) Learning Collaborative on Preventing Losses to Follow-up through Better Coordination with the Medical Home.

The next committee meeting is scheduled for sometime in November. The exact date, time and location are to be announced. These committee meetings are open to the public and have a time allotted for public comment.



NEW MEMBERS

A big welcome to those who have joined us this past quarter (April 2006):

- |                              |                           |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Seo-ji Ahn                   | David Misra               |
| Rebecca Anderson             | Susan Moyer               |
| Barbara Breier               | Yvet and David Opperman   |
| Sharifa Bugwaith             | Leigh Partridge           |
| Robert Bush III              | Karin Pejack              |
| Judy Campbell                | Mr. & Mrs. Willie Perez   |
| Laura Campbell               | Maria Perkins             |
| Terri Cohen-Johnson          | Christina Polowczuk       |
| Jennifer and Ian Collin      | Mr. & Mrs. Robert Poulson |
| Mr. & Mrs. Raj Devabhakthuni | Jeannie Robertson         |
| Mr. & Mrs. Quang Dinh        | Nino Russo                |
| Mr. & Mrs. David Egan        | April Scheller            |
| Elyse Elliott                | Monique D. Shallow        |
| Joelle P. Sherlock Ellis     | Kevin A. Slonaker         |
| Jennifer Famularo            | Samantha Smith            |
| Yvonne Folmar                | Joseph Sorgini            |
| Kimberly Frank               | Lisa M. Sunderland        |
| Stewart Hughes               | Janet Tinkel              |
| Nancy Jewell                 | Janet Trychin             |
| Joanne Kisow                 | Barbara Weiner            |
| Camille A. Kubla             |                           |
| Dana LaVerde                 |                           |
| Mr. & Mrs. Steve Lehman      |                           |
| Dorothy Luckock              |                           |
| Stephanie Messer             |                           |
| Arlene Miller                |                           |
| Andria Miller                |                           |

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 Sue Zerfoss ... President-elect  
 Dan Salvucci, M.E.D., Ed.M... Secretary  
 Mary Beth Kernan... Treasurer (Interim)  
 Deborrah Johnston-Tobin, CCC-A...  
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 Kathy Niemeyer... Communications Director  
 Lisa Goldstein... Member-at-Large

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 Patti McGowan  
 Linda Meyers  
 Jane Newcomer  
 Lynda Wright, Ph.D.

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**DePaul School for Hearing and Speech**

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## FIRST-TIMERS AT NATIONAL CONVENTION

Since the 2006 AG Bell Convention was held in our lovely keystone state of Pennsylvania, many chapter members were able to go. The convention can be overwhelming for anyone, particularly someone who is attending for the first time. Here, some first-timers talk about their experiences.

“[There was] so much to do and see,” recalls Linda Meyers, of Pittsburgh, PA. The PA board member and parent of two deaf children adds, “It took a day or two to map things out, but overall it was a wonderful educational rewarding experience.” In fact, her major dislike was actually having too many choices to pick from - especially since some sessions overlapped.

A fellow Parent Section member, Shelly Hovan of Allentown, PA, also loved the variety of events. She plans to attend future conventions to become more educated and meet and share experiences with other families.

Indeed, it is this sharing that both parents valued. “I think it is important that parents share their stories and connect with each other because it mentally helps you with your own feelings,” says Meyers.

When asked what she would say to a parent who’s thinking of attending a convention for the first time, now “veteran” Hovan says, “It’s important because it refreshes your knowledge and motivation to continue to do those techniques for your child that are effective in promoting spoken language. We do so much reading and learning and day-to-day with hectic lives, it’s easy to forget and stop integrating the techniques. When you attend conventions such as this one, you go home reenergized, and with even more knowledge to continue with the daily communications and activities that benefit deaf/hearing impaired children.”

Amanda Wysocki, a teacher at the DePaul School for Hearing and Speech in Pittsburgh, PA, enjoyed the opportunity to network with other professionals in the field. As a volunteer in the children’s program, Wysocki liked working behind the scenes. Her recommendation for first-timers is to

plan ahead. “I would tell them to look through the program book ahead of time and map out what presentations they want to attend for each day,” says Wysocki, who wanted to attend all of the presentations. “I would also [take] the time to visit all of the booths and meet other professionals. Be sure to ask questions and learn about other programs. If possible, take some time to volunteer. It is a great opportunity to learn about what goes on behind the scenes.”

Technology was forefront on Michael Breier’s mind when he attended the convention. The Pittsburgh, PA resident wanted to see what technology existed that he may not have heard of. He plans on attending future conventions because he wants to keep up with the technology, as everything improves over the years. “I would recommend anyone with a hearing loss attend this convention because they can learn a lot about what’s out there for people with hearing losses,” says Breier. “As a DHHSer, it’s important to attend so the individual will know what technology is available to them.”

Whether it’s families, professionals or the deaf or hard of hearing, we’re all looking for the same things: connections and information. These first-timers clearly found both.



*Banquet MC and Survivor winner Tom Westman with Amanda Wysocki*

## ADVOCACY COMMITTEE GOALS 2006-2007

The goals for the next year are to:

- Establish working relationships with the Pennsylvania Department of Health and Advisory Committee for Newborn Hearing Screening
- Educate families on the resources available for their deaf or hard of hearing child
- Promote a public awareness of the importance of early identification and early intervention for children with a hearing loss
- Educate medical professionals on the resources and local contacts available for families once their child is identified with a hearing loss
- Promote networking opportunities that will offer support and expertise to state and local agencies in establishing collaborative initiatives within the state

Contact co-chairs Sue Zerfoss ([szertifoss@liu18.org](mailto:szertifoss@liu18.org)) or Dan Salvucci ([dsalvucci@clarke-pa.org](mailto:dsalvucci@clarke-pa.org)) if you have any questions or would like to help.

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## CI SUPPORT GROUP

Can you believe that there's no cochlear implant support group in Pittsburgh? A group of us is aiming to change that. If you're interested in joining us, please contact Lisa Goldstein at [lisag@steinsquared.com](mailto:lisag@steinsquared.com).

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## 2006 FINANCIAL AID AND SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

### College Scholarship

This year, AG Bell awarded \$93,000 in College and Graduate-Level Scholarships to Students with Hearing Loss for the 2006-2007 school year to 31 students who are deaf or hard of hearing and use spoken language to communicate. The students represent 17 states, India, and Korea. Our state recipient is:

- Nino Russo, age 18, from Venetia, PA. He is attending Ohio University.

### Arts and Sciences

This year, AG Bell awarded \$40,460 in Arts and Sciences scholarships to 54 students, aged 6 to 19 years old who are deaf or hard of hearing and use spoken language to communicate. This year's award winners represented 18 states, Australia, and Canada. The funds support arts and science exploration. Our state's winners are:

- Constance Champagne, age 8, from Moon, PA
- Courtney Fluehr, age 18, from Bensalem, PA
- Christine Girata, age 10, from Monaca, PA
- Elena LaQuatra, age 14, from Pittsburgh, PA
- Joseph Manolios, age 16, from Pittsburgh, PA
- Talia Palko, age 19, from Macungie, PA



# Fall 2006 Newsletter

PA CHAPTER, AG BELL

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## Calendar

### October 12, 2006

Reach for the Stars Benefit for The DePaul School for Hearing and Speech, Westin Convention Center Hotel, Pittsburgh. Keynote Speaker: Justin Osmond. Visit [www.speakmiracles.org](http://www.speakmiracles.org) for more information.

### October 27, 2006

Sixth Annual Cochlear Implant Conference, Philadelphia, PA. For more information go to: <http://www.chop.edu/cme/2006/cochlear/pdf/cochlear06.pdf>.

### November 4, 2006

PA Chapter Fall conference, followed by dinner honoring State Senator Charles Lemmond.

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