

A Local Voice for People with Hearing Loss

by Julie Vitto



The Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) is the nation's foremost advocacy organization for individuals affected by hearing loss. Founded in 1979 in Bethesda, Maryland, by Howard E. "Rocky" Stone, who had a bilateral hearing loss, HLAA is an international, nonprofit organization for people with hearing loss, their relatives and their friends. Its mission is to open up the world of communication through information, education, support and advocacy.

In 2001, the HLAA-PA all-volunteer state office was established to provide information, education, support and advocacy for Pennsylvanians living with hearing loss. HLAA-PA publishes a free, quarterly newsletter that reaches more than 2,200 people and services 13 chapters throughout Pennsylvania, with new locations in development.

"Telecommunications, as well as emergency preparedness for people with disabilities, is a top priority on my agenda," says Kay Tyberg, a member of the HLAA-PA Advisory Council and chair of



the PA Telecommunications Relay Service Advisory Board. As a former Bucks County resident and someone who has experienced hearing loss herself, Tyberg has fully embraced the work of facilitating access to assistive technologies, such as Video Relay Service (VRS) and captioned telephone systems.

"VRS is a way for profoundly deaf people to communicate with other deaf or hearing individuals via video through a live, on-screen interpreter. It is a huge breakthrough for the deaf community," says Tyberg. "In a nutshell, the VRS technology is replacing the teletypewriter, or TTY, for all but those with access issues."

The captioned telephone is another device that, as Tyberg explains, many older deafened adults are more accus-

tomed to using. "I use CaptionCall and CapTel with certain calls. I've discovered that, 90 percent of the time, the messages relayed are efficient and correct."

Local HLAA chapters, like those in Bucks and Montgomery counties, provide information to members of all ages and with all degrees of hearing loss about hearing aids, assistive technology, legal rights, coping strategies and more. They offer a supportive space where individuals can share strategies for daily living and connect with audiologists, hearing aid specialists, assistive technology counselors and other professionals in fields associated with hearing loss.

Visitors are invited to attend social activities and fundraisers throughout the year as well as quarterly meetings that feature special presentations using the hearing loop system and Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) captioning.

The Montgomery County Chapter meets quarterly at Jeanes Library, 4051 Joshua Rd., Lafayette Hill. For more information, call 215-272-4450, email HLAAMCC@gmail.com or visit HLAAMCC.org.

The Bucks County Chapter meets quarterly at Northampton Library, 25 Upper Holland Rd., Richboro. For more information, call 215-357-3702, email MCL0312@comcast.net or visit HLAA BucksCounty.org.

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