

## HLA-NJ News and Views

### A Monthly Column from The Hearing Loss Association of NJ

*By Peter Yerkes, Trustee, HLA-NJ*

#### Walk4Hearing 2012 - Turnout, Donations Set New Records

By any measure, *Walk4Hearing 2012* smashed all records. More participants turned out than ever before, as over 500 people gathered beneath bright blue autumn skies in Mercer County Park, in West Windsor NJ. Fundraising not only met the goal of \$60,000 but soared higher – an unprecedented \$64,000 with new donations still coming in when this column was being written - more young people than ever before, more families than ever before. Walk4Hearing is growing from year to year, raising money for programs and services to help people with hearing loss, and raising awareness of the “invisible disability.”

Special thanks go to Wayne Roorda, HLA-NJ Walk Chairperson, who stepped up to chair the Walk4Hearing committee this year. Special thanks also to Suzanne D’Amico, the regional walk coordinator of the Hearing Loss Association of America, who did so much to help with planning and making the Walk such a success. In addition, dozens of committee members, team captains and members, and donors played important roles.

Yet another first: a record 35 teams took part, showing the success of a strategy that brings individuals together to work as teams. And there were more alliance teams than ever, groups using this opportunity to raise funds for their organizations as well as the *Hearing Loss Association of New Jersey*. Our thanks to the four: *Summit Speech School*, *the Deaf-Blind League of New Jersey*, *ALDA New Jersey* and *Bridges to Employment*. Teen spirit has also come to Walk4Hearing. A group of teens in North Plainfield joined together as the North Plainfield ASL Honor Society and raised more than \$1,000. They didn’t even register formally as a team. They just got together and raised money.

Another teen group, *iTold4*, got contributions to support their project to alert teens to the dangers of noise to their hearing, a special problem in an age of heavily amplified music, ear buds and other hazards. Members of this group came to both the pre-Walk KickOff and to the Walk itself, according to Arlene Romoff, past president of HLA-NJ.

“They didn’t even do this to earn any community service credits,” Ms. Romoff said. “They did it just because they wanted to help address this important issue.” Another first that many people noticed was the large number of families who took part. The Walk was truly child friendly, with face-painting and other fun activities, hot dogs and lots of chances for youngsters and teens to meet others with hearing loss.

Ms. Romoff, a veteran of many walks, said she was especially impressed that so many people came with children and grandchildren. “The families really loved this, and they had the largest teams,” she said. “They were also responsible for an exciting new feature this year—the families had tailgate parties in the parking lot before the start of the Walk. The tailgate parties weren’t officially planned, but people loved them.” The presence of so many families was not only fun for them. It helped shatter the stereotype that hearing loss affects only the middle aged or elderly. At the Walk, people of all ages turned out, and could share experiences with hearing aids, cochlear implants and other issues.

For children, it can be especially important to learn that they are not the only people their age who wear hearing aids or cochlear implants. Parents say more adults need to learn that hearing loss can affect the young.

Jennifer Vistoso, mother of two boys who wear hearing aids, says “Children are often forgotten and most people are shocked when they see my kids with hearing aids.” One son is six years old, the other three years old. She also has a daughter who is six months old. “I like the Walk because it allows me an opportunity to expose my family and friends to other people (in addition to my kids) who have hearing loss. They are always amazed at what they see and hear. Yes, Deaf people can ‘hear’ and talk. I know from personal experience that the Walk is incredibly eye opening, and I want to expose as many people as possible to it.” In addition to giving people with hearing loss a chance to meet, mingle and share stories, the Walk4Hearing is the chief fund-raiser for HLA-NJ.

Every dollar raised by the Walk goes to provide education, advocacy or support. In New Jersey, that means programs ranging from college scholarships for incoming freshmen with hearing loss, to the new Assistive Listening Device Demonstration Center at Montclair State University. There,

people with hearing loss can try out the latest technology that can help them, devices such as captioned telephones and personal FM systems. Money raised by the Walk also goes to programs of the Hearing Loss Association of America, which supports a network of 200 chapters and state associations. The HLAA support advocacy to protect the rights of people with hearing loss, information, coping and referral resources at [www.hearingloss.org](http://www.hearingloss.org), installation of hearing assistive technology in public places and a wide range of other programs and services for people with hearing loss.

*Do you have questions about hearing loss, or personal experiences you'd like to share with readers of this column? Please contact me at [p.yerkes@comcast.net](mailto:p.yerkes@comcast.net). To learn more about HLA-NJ, please contact Arlene Romoff at [info@hearingloss-nj.org](mailto:info@hearingloss-nj.org). We also invite you to visit [www.hearingloss-nj.org](http://www.hearingloss-nj.org), or to attend one of our local chapter meetings in Bergen, Monmouth/Ocean or Middlesex County, and our newest Morris County chapter. Dates, places and times for chapter meetings are available from [info@hearingloss-nj.org](mailto:info@hearingloss-nj.org), and you can ask to be put on the HLA-NJ email contact list. It's a great source of information about HLA-NJ events and about hearing loss issues in general.*