

**Families Need Critical Early Intervention**

HEAR Wisconsin President and CEO addresses the implication of changes in Milwaukee County’s referral process for babies needing services.

**Five Good Reasons**

Get financial help to purchase assistive technology to ease communication with family, friends and co-workers.

**Sail Away at Corks and Kegs!**

Grab your gear and get ready to sail on June 6, 2019 — HEAR Wisconsin’s annual fundraiser is at the stunning Milwaukee Yacht Club.

# The Conduit

HEAR Wisconsin’s newsletter about clients, donors, and events  
In-print and online



## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Medicine? An Audiologist Who Makes House Calls



Audiologist Nate Berg gets ready to go on a house call

We’re all familiar with the blue skies and balmy days of summer. However, Southeastern Wisconsin can also have its share of bad weather. Storm warnings, dipping temperatures and snow accumulations between November and March can make heading out for appointments hazardous, especially for someone with ambulatory issues or trouble breathing in the cold.

But, what if your appointment came to you? HEAR Wisconsin is at your service.

Seniors in need of a hearing aid check or minimal audiology exam can call and HEAR Wisconsin’s audiologist, Dr. Nathan Berg, will travel to your home or assisted living center, depending on the distance. And if a hearing aid needs programming? Dr. Berg can do that too, thanks to advances in technology and a portable laptop computer.

It’s all in a day’s work, according to Berg. “This is what I think about when I think about good healthcare,” Berg said. “I consider the patient as a whole, not just parts that need to be cared for or fixed. At HEAR Wisconsin, we look out for our patients and care about their safety and convenience.”

If you or someone you love needs audiology services, contact HEAR Wisconsin at 414-604-2200.

**Did You Know?**

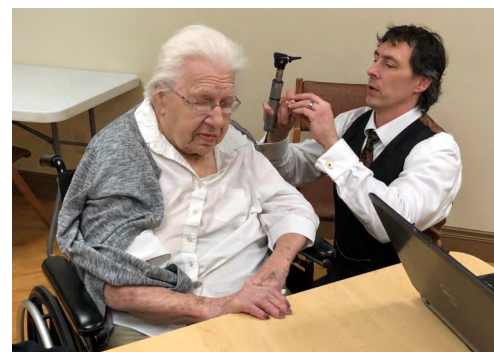
- People aged 60-69 have the greatest amount of hearing loss
- 25% of US adults have experienced Tinnitus (ringing of the ears)
- Men (aged 20-69) are twice as likely

to have hearing loss than women of the same age

- As women age, they have more difficulty hearing at lower frequencies than men

**Hearing Aids Help Long Term Function**

Scientists are finding increasing evidence of a link between hearing loss and declines in thinking and memory, according to a February 2019 article in the Wall Street Journal. Wearing a hearing aid could help delay cognitive decline. Two studies published last year found that using hearing aids slowed or reversed cognitive decline in elderly participants, and a large trial is underway to learn more. ■



Helen Norby, 96, gets her ears and hearing aid checked out by audiologist Nate Berg

# Families Need Critical Early Intervention

## Cutting Edge and Best Practices at HEAR Wisconsin

By Jill Van Calster, HEAR Wisconsin President and CEO

But they depend on us.

This was the first of many thoughts that raced through my head when I learned late last December that HEAR Wisconsin would not be awarded a contract with Milwaukee County to provide Birth to Three early education and therapy services to children who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing and their families. It was the end of a thirty-year relationship.

Milwaukee County's decision to reduce the number of local service providers from seven to four and refer all babies with hearing loss to generalists, instead of the experts at HEAR Wisconsin, was devastating. Reactions from parents were overwhelmingly against this development.

Milwaukee County suggested that the remaining four providers subcontract with HEAR Wisconsin, but there is little incentive for them to do so, which leaves families on shaky ground. Ultimately, 99 percent chose to stay with us – they left the County's entitlement program to continue services with our speech-language pathologists, auditory-verbal therapists, and teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing at HEAR Wisconsin. Why?

We are the experts.

At HEAR Wisconsin, we view hearing loss as a neuro-developmental emergency. Hearing is not about the ears, it's about getting language to the child's brain. We learn language with our brain; the ears are one doorway - the eyes another. An early intervention provider must know how to educate and coach the parents on how to make language and communication accessible to the child -- how to get language and communication through one or both doorways to the child's brain.

HEAR Wisconsin staff have the expertise and knowledge to do this. Our therapies are cutting edge and in line with best practices. It's what we do.

Our staff provides critical, unique and individualized services – they are specialists in their field. Sending these babies to generalists is a grave disservice with potential disastrous, long-term effects.

### The Price is High

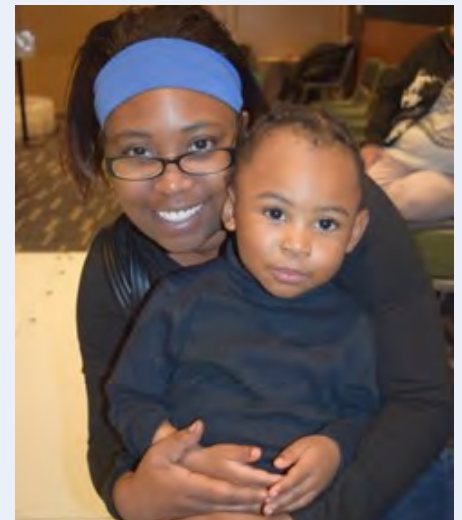
The estimated lifetime cost to society is \$1,000,000 per child in special education and accommodation costs. However, when hearing loss is identified early and intervention takes place during the first years of life, it is possible to dramatically improve a child's language and related development, and in this way reduce future costs of additional educational resources.

We are disappointed by Milwaukee County's decision to terminate our long-standing partnership. We are also gravely concerned about the future of babies being newly diagnosed with hearing loss.

### Creating Equal Access

People – babies, children, adults, and seniors – who are deaf or hard of hearing can often be found on the periphery, not first and foremost in the minds of business owners, educators, even government agencies. Full accessibility to everything the world has to offer is an inherent right.

HEAR Wisconsin is the first step in that process. We are the irrefutable best resource – it's been our mission for almost a century. HEAR Wisconsin is in the process of regrouping and reorganizing, while still not turning any families away. We will forge on ensuring the very best start for some of our community's most vulnerable. ■



Children receiving early intervention services through the Kellogg Child and Family Program

## 5 Financial Help for Technology Reasons to Apply for an Assistive Technology Voucher

1. Funding available for anyone deaf, hard of hearing, speech, mobility or motion impaired
2. Open to all Wisconsin residents
3. No age limit
4. Easily accessible (we can help)
5. You (and/or your loved one) deserve it!

Stop by HEAR Wisconsin (park in our lot right outside the door) and browse the wide variety of equipment including iPads, amplified phones, PockeTalkers and more!

For appointments with one of our assistive technology consultants, call 414-604-2200 or if using a video phone, call 414-395-2117. You may also send inquiries to [info@hearwi.org](mailto:info@hearwi.org).

## Streamline with Smart Assistive Technology Devices

### Serene Innovations

#### instaLINK Smart Phone Alert Watch

This is a vibrating watch to alert people to incoming cell phone calls, texts and social media notifications. It has eight alarms which can be used to set up daily reminders or to wake up with when traveling. It also has up to eight medicine reminders. Works with iOS or Android cell phones. It will alert you if you are out of range of your cell phone.



### Panasonic Link2Cell Phone

With the Link2Cell you get the flexibility of taking calls on both your landline and cell phone! Or if you do not have a landline, simply pair up to two Bluetooth-enabled cell phones and experience the same high quality sound you'd expect from an amplified phone. The Link2Cell is the only amplified phone that we carry that also alerts you to incoming text messages.



## MINI SPRING APPEAL

## Strong Connections Start Here

Helen Keller said, "when you lose your vision, you lose contact with things. When you lose your hearing, you lose contact with people." No one should have to lose contact with those around them!

HEAR Wisconsin helps babies, individuals and entire families remove communication barriers – and stay connected! We do it with early intervention education, specialized services, amazing state-of-the-art technology and more. **But we need your help.**

Your donation can help us:

- Make sure a low-income family can participate in critical early intervention education.
- Provide communication information, technology and home visits to the elderly and immobile.
- Ensure that adults who are deaf or have hearing loss with cognitive and/or developmental disabilities can participate in educational programming to improve social and independent living skills.
- Purchase wish list items such as an outdoor shed for playground toys, special headbands for babies to keep hearing aids and/or cochlear implants in place, books and supplies for home visits.



Your contribution will impact lives. Partner with HEAR Wisconsin! Let's strengthen precious connections!

# Becoming the Tornado

## Skill and Creativity Drive American Sign Language Interpreters

Lightning flashes on stage as tornados (in the form of colorful, inventively costumed actors) twist and writhe to an intense, frenetic beat. Terrified Dorothy, the main character in the First Stage production of *The Wiz*, is suddenly swept up into threatening, turbulent skies. Children who are deaf or hard of hearing rely on professional American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters to accurately depict highly charged scenes like this during performances at the theater.

Headlining in this role are HEAR Wisconsin professional interpreters. "Our job is to show Dorothy's fear on our hands and with our body," said interpreter Angela Hoag. "We become the sound of the atmosphere, the wind – we become the tornado -- so kids who are deaf can experience the play the way kids who hear can," she said.

CommLink Sign Language Interpreting is a busy division of HEAR Wisconsin. Angela Hoag is one of its 26 nationally and/or state certified professional ASL interpreters. The 21 women and five men bring

experience in ASL, Manually Coded English, Oral Interpreting and Deaf/Blind Interpreting.

In 2018, CommLink interpreters served 203 businesses in Southeastern Wisconsin. They provided interpreting services 24/7 to deaf and hard of hearing individuals at medical facilities, corporate meetings, schools, and more. Last year, they totaled 7,695 hours of interpreting.

### Community Partners

First Stage offers one interpreted performance for each play each season, usually on the last public performance during each show's run. The only exception is the holiday show, which gets interpreted on a Sunday before Christmas. Generally, two HEAR Wisconsin interpreters can be found sitting next to the stage, (dressed in black or dark blue), typically on the right side.

Jennifer Hubbart is the marketing and public relations director for First Stage. She values the alliance with HEAR Wisconsin and the important service provided. "HEAR Wisconsin interpreters are always

professional and they provide energy similar to what is on stage," Hubbart said. "It is so important that we have a way to connect with all of our patrons." HEAR Wisconsin is contracted through 2019 with First Stage.

Angela Hoag loves her interpreting role. Hoag graduated from Milwaukee Area Technical College in 2007. The 43-year-old admits interpreting is not always easy, but says it is always rewarding. She considers it a privilege.

"I love being able to become the performer," she said. "We show the vocal expressions, the intonation of the character, so children can see what the character is going through and become engrossed in the story," she said. ■

### Upcoming ASL Interpreted Shows:

**3:30 PM, Sunday April 14**

[Big River: The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn](#)

**3:30 PM, Sunday June 2**

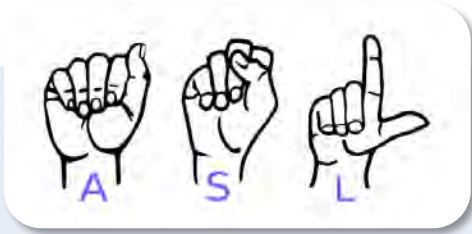
[Tinkerbell](#)



Camara Stampley in *THE WIZ*. First Stage, 2018  
Photo by Paul Ruffolo

### Steps Professional Interpreters Take Before interpreting a First Stage show:

1. Receive the script to study the characters
2. Watch the play, discuss roles, learn the music and go over possible problems with seating, lighting, and sound
3. Meet in theater's Green Room for a signing "run through" (They listen to the play and practice signing)
4. Attend the play and interpret for children who are deaf or hard of hearing



## Hands Up for HEAR Wisconsin

### Walking the Walk and "Talking" the Talk

They say necessity is the mother of invention. Last summer, a mother of one of the children in HEAR Wisconsin's Kellogg Child and Family Program came to the front desk. She asked a question in her native language – American Sign Language (ASL).

Jill Van Calster, HEAR Wisconsin's President and CEO, happened to be walking by. Van Calster realized that neither she nor the front desk staff member were able to converse with the woman – and they immediately set out to find someone who could (about half of the 25 staff at HEAR Wisconsin can converse in ASL, but they are not always available to come down to the lobby).

"This impacted me greatly," Van Calster said. "We couldn't quickly help this mom because we couldn't speak her language. It just wasn't good enough. I knew we had to do better." Van Calster came up with a plan.

Beginning in April, *Hands Up* Lunch & Learn classes will be held bi-monthly for the staff to learn conversational American Sign Language. The classes will be short but fun, taught by HEAR Wisconsin's Jim Hagen and Taylor Koss and will not be optional.

"Outstanding customer service starts with conversations," Van Calster said. "Our mission is to help remove barriers to communication for anyone who is deaf or living with hearing loss. It makes good sense for each of us to be able to communicate with the clients who walk through our doors. Going forward, learning conversational ASL will be required for all HEAR Wisconsin staff." ■



## Get Outside – Join Team HEAR Wisconsin!

Walk with us to raise awareness of hearing loss in our community and to help support critical services for children and adults. There will be entertainment for kids, including balloon twisting, caricatures, face painting and other activities. Complimentary light breakfast and lunch will be provided.

**Saturday, May 11th**  
**Greenfield Park, Area #3A**  
**2028 S 124th Street**  
**West Allis, WI 53227**

**Check-In: 9 am**  
**5K Walk Starts: 10 am**

**Register: [hearwi.org/events](http://hearwi.org/events)**

Questions? Email [fundraising@hearwi.org](mailto:fundraising@hearwi.org)



**2018 Walk4Hearing  
HEAR Wisconsin team and client families' teams**

The Milwaukee Walk4Hearing is one of many Walks being held throughout the country each year and are coordinated by Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA). Additional information about HLAA can be found at [www.hearingloss.org](http://www.hearingloss.org).

## Snow, Dark Chocolate and Raising Dough (Both kinds!)



Rhonda Plotkin

If you want to complain about the white stuff, don't expect HEAR Wisconsin's newest hire to join the grumble fest. "I LOVE

snow!" said Rhonda Plotkin with a big smile, on a day in mid-February when 8-10 inches were predicted during a winter weather advisory, "bring it on!"

Plotkin, who started her role as HEAR Wisconsin's first Director of Development on January 22, brings a blizzard's worth

of experience in the areas of major and planned gift fundraising, capital campaign planning and management, donor recruitment, solicitation and more. Prior to HEAR Wisconsin, Plotkin worked as Development Officer on the Major Gifts Team at Aurora Health Care. Before that, she was Development Director at the UWM College of Engineering & Applied Science.

"It's an honor to be at HEAR Wisconsin as the first Director of Development," Plotkin said. "What drew me to come on board is the mission of helping all age groups with hearing loss to break down barriers to communication and language. That very much resonates with my values. Serving this community for 93 years demonstrates longevity, which is also evident in staff

tenure. Many have been here more than a decade. People stay here because of the mission. It is my goal to engage with our donors and prospective donors in order to steward and build long-lasting relationships in the community. My intent is to raise more philanthropic dollars to ensure that HEAR Wisconsin is in the Milwaukee-area community for another 93 years and beyond."

In addition to a good snow storm, Plotkin loves baking (especially on snowy days), spending time with friends and family, her cats and dark chocolate.

If you are interested in making a donation to HEAR Wisconsin or want to share a recipe, contact her at [rplotkin@hearwi.org](mailto:rplotkin@hearwi.org) or 414-244-9593. ■

## FUND DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

### Recognize these Champions?

They aren't pro football players or Hollywood celebrities, but the immeasurable generosity of these local superstars from the past twelve months impacts babies, families and individuals – the young and the young at-heart – and helps them banish barriers to communication and live life to the fullest. We thank these recent grantors!

Chickens 4 Charities' Bowling Fundraiser  
 Patrick and Anna M. Cudahy Fund  
 Ray and Kay Eckstein Charitable Trust  
 Elm Grove Junior Guild  
 The Gardner Foundation  
 Greater Milwaukee Foundation's Gertrude M. Speer Fund  
 Greater Milwaukee Association of Realtors Youth Foundation  
 Dorothy Inbusch Foundation  
 Microsoft's Chili Cookoff Fundraiser  
 John C. and Katherine B. Miller Charitable Fund  
 Oberkotter Foundation  
 Stackner Family Foundation  
 Henry H. Uihlein Sr. and Marion (Polly) S. Uihlein Foundation  
 United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County  
 William Stark Jones Foundation



HEAR Wisconsin Board Members bowl at the Chickens 4 Charities fundraiser (left to right): Shannon Burns (event coordinator), Daryl Hudnall, and Rachel Smith

## Nearly 50 years

### Standing behind HEAR Wisconsin's mission



Mary York

Mary York is a dedicated long-time supporter of HEAR Wisconsin. She served as the Board President twice during her 40 years on the HEAR Wisconsin Board of Directors and has given

generously over the years. This is her story.

#### Please tell us a little bit about yourself – what would you like our readers to know?

My husband, Merrill York and I have been married for 51 years. Together we raised three children who have provided us with 11 grandchildren. We are blessed that they all live nearby, and we enjoy every minute with them. I love to travel and enjoy gardening, nature, needlepoint and volunteering. Basically, my interests are my faith, my family and being a community volunteer.

#### What got you interested in HEAR Wisconsin – how did you first connect?

My involvement with HEAR Wisconsin began when my daughter, Susan, was diagnosed with a profound hearing loss at ten months of age. We came three times per week for oral therapy throughout our

*"Hearing loss is invisible.*

*HEAR Wisconsin is critical in helping young children obtain a great start to learning language..."*

daughter's young life, through grade eight. (There were no play groups or speech therapy opportunities then). In the mid to late-1970s, I was invited to join the board of directors and I remained on the board for 40 years, twice as president.

#### What does the HEAR Wisconsin mission mean to you?

Hearing loss is invisible. HEAR Wisconsin

is critical in helping young children obtain a great start to learning language (oral or sign) and to assimilate into the world. As I grew older, I saw firsthand how hearing loss also affects adults. The support services, equipment, and interpreter services enrich adult lives and help enhance their abilities.

#### What inspires you to give?

HEAR Wisconsin gave my daughter a chance to become a well-adjusted woman in society – a wife, a mother, and an inspiration. It also provided services for my aging father. This organization contributes to and enhances lives in our community. The caring and motivated staff are wonderful. ■

*Mary's daughter, Susan York Jeide, recently took the reins as the President of the Board of Directors. The HEAR Wisconsin team is grateful for Mary and Susan for their tremendous support. They are instrumental to the success of the HEAR Wisconsin mission!*

## WAYS TO SUPPORT HEAR WISCONSIN

### Individual Giving

Without individual donors like you, we could not continue providing critical services to the thousands of children and adults with hearing loss who depend on us each year. Donate online, by mail, or over the phone.

### Special Event Sponsor

HEAR Wisconsin hosts fundraising events and a variety of program events throughout the year. They are a great way for any business, large or small, to showcase their brand while supporting a great cause. Call 414-604-2000 or email [fundraising@hearwi.org](mailto:fundraising@hearwi.org).

### Planned Giving and Endowment Fund

Create a lasting legacy with a financial donation that will be distributed in the future to HEAR Wisconsin. You can make a planned gift by naming HEAR Wisconsin as a beneficiary of your will, life insurance,

or IRA account. Other gift opportunities can be created through your financial advisor or a foundation such as a charitable remainder trust, or charitable lead trust. For more information, call our Director of Development, Rhonda Plotkin, at 414-244-9593 or email her at [rplotkin@hearwi.org](mailto:rplotkin@hearwi.org).

### Workplace Giving / Matching Program


Ask your employer about establishing a workplace giving campaign, or, if there is one set up already, see about directing your contribution to HEAR Wisconsin and having your employer match your gift.

### Volunteer

You can volunteer by assisting staff with administrative, programming and/or special event tasks. For inquiries, call 414-604-2000 or email [volunteers@hearwi.org](mailto:volunteers@hearwi.org).



414-604-2000  
info@hearwi.org  
www.hearwi.org

 Go Green! Visit HEAR Wisconsin to sign up for our online newsletter.

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION  
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# Save the Date

**Thursday, June 6, 2019**

6:00 to 9:00 PM

**Milwaukee Yacht Club**

1700 N Lincoln Memorial Dr

Support a great cause while enjoying spectacular views of the harbor from the balcony of the Milwaukee Yacht Club.

Parking is free and so is the food, wine and beer.

Don't miss it!

**RSVP AT HEARWI.ORG**

