



Minnesota Hands & Voices FOCUS

—supporting families with kids who have hearing loss—

APRIL 2011

Coordinated approach helps some families adjust to news of hearing loss

If they have no experience with hearing loss, parents who have just learned their child is deaf or hard of hearing may feel overwhelmed. A coordinated approach to providing information to a family makes it easier for parents to understand what lies ahead and to take the next steps to help their child develop language skills without delay.

Under a process coordinated by the MN Department of Health (MDH) starting this year, the audiologist who identifies a baby's hearing loss provides the family with a packet of information. The materials in the packet include a book about hearing loss, *Beginnings*, which contains advice about adjusting to the news as well as details on how the ear works. The packet also includes MDH's Step-by-Step Road Map, a brochure that walks parents through steps they'll follow the first year after identification to ensure their baby develops good language skills. The first step listed in the brochure is for parents to connect with helpful programs, including Minnesota Hands & Voices (MNHV).

"This parent-to-parent connection is critical," said Candace Lindow-Davies, MNHV Coordinator. "Research has shown that families crave contact with other experienced families who have traveled the road before them. Feelings of isolation and helplessness may impact most families, and can be a barrier to parents taking the necessary steps to accept their child's hearing difference and make informed choices," Candace explained.

"Minnesota is rich with resources, role models and services. Parents may need encouragement and support to access all of this during a critical window," she added. "We strive to echo the message that professionals offer. We also ensure parents get information about the full array of choices available today for children with hearing loss."

MNHV's brochure is one of the items included in the initial packet that audiologists give to parents. So is a brochure about Help Me Grow, the program offered through local public school districts and community partners to provide support services for families that have children from birth to three with special needs.

Alexandra Vetrovsky, AuD, CCC-A, an audiologist with The Hearing Clinic of St. Cloud ENT, appreciates having the brochures

at hand to discuss with parents. "At our office, we refer directly to both agencies if the parents agree," she said. "I think having the ability to refer directly helps give parents an immediate sense of doing something."

Along with the initial packet from the audiologist, families also receive a Family Resource Organizer in the mail from MDH a couple of weeks later. The tabbed organizer provides an easy-to-use format to keep information from medical providers, interventionists, and others. Families know they'll be getting the organizer because the initial packet contains a bookmark describing it.

"These coordinated materials were created as a direct response to parents who expressed frustration over being given piles of printed information from everyone they contact, and having to sort through all the duplication," Candace said. "Now, audiologists, primary care physicians, early interventionists and Parent Guides can all reference the same resources as they work with families, and families aren't overwhelmed from reading all these different resources that say essentially the same thing."

MNHV has teamed up with the Lions Children's Hearing Center to offer parents another avenue to understand what they can do after their baby is identified with hearing loss. The "Next Steps" seminars give parents the chance to hear from medical experts about the latest medical information related to hearing loss. These seminars are offered at the University of Minnesota Amplatz Children's Hospital and as an online webinar. Parents who participate can ask questions of

the expert medical panel. The webinars later are available at www.mnhandsandvoices.org.

"Because the webinars are posted on our website, parents can watch them from home or with a professional at any time," Candace added. The next webinar takes place April 12. See the boxed information for a link to a flyer with more details.

Medical Home

One of the things parents will learn about in the materials they receive is how to work with a "Medical Home."

"It is NOT a building but an approach to providing comprehensive primary care," explained MDH's Nicole Brown. "Families with children who have hearing loss, particularly when first identified, may feel overwhelmed by the number of specialist appointments that are recommended. Many families turn toward their established and trusted primary care provider for information and guidance. The primary care provider acts in partnership with parents in a medical home to help them identify and access appropriate audiology, intervention and specialty health care services," she said.

A medical home provider can be any health care professional, added audiologist Alexandra Vetrovsky. "This provider can help the parents manage the followup needed. As to who is the best person for this, it depends on the needs of the child."

At the recent Minnesota EHDI Summit, Rachel St. John, MD, presented on the topic of a medical home. "I think collaborating with a Medical Home is an important step for a family, particularly a family with a deaf or hard-of-hearing child. Not only does the Medical Home serve to coordinate what can be a very complicated pathway involving numerous providers, but it allows parents to focus on being parents as much as possible. Partnering with an effective medical home can hopefully give parents both a sense of empowerment through increased knowledge, and a sense of relief at being able to let go of needing to know everything."

"It is so valuable to have a knowledgeable medical home that the family can rely on to point them in the right direction," added Melissa Ferrello, Au.D., CCC-A, an audiologist with the University of Minnesota, Fairview.

NEXT STEPS FOR FAMILIES W/ CHILDREN NEWLY IDENTIFIED WITH HEARING LOSS:

INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION WITH
MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS



TUESDAY, APRIL 12
6 TO 8:30 P.M.



MOOS HEALTH SCIENCES TOWER
ROOM 1-450
515 DELAWARE ST. SE, MPLS.

ATTEND IN PERSON OR ONLINE—

Here's What's Happening Around Town

- Sunday, April 3** **“Beauty and Power: Renaissance and Baroque Bronzes from the Collection of Peter Marino,”** the ASL-interpreted tour at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, starts at 1 p.m. by the Info Desk in the lobby. Questions? Contact dhegastro@artsmia.org. “Art in Bloom” is the tour at 7 p.m. Thursday, April 28 and at 1 p.m. Sunday, May 1.
- Saturday, April 9** **Take part in the Family Learning Event** at Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf in Faribault. For details, see Page 4, go to www.msad.state.mn.us or call Denise Reid at 800-657-3996.
- Saturday, April 9** **Watch “Deaf American Idol,”** a fundraiser for the Minnesota Association of Deaf Citizens and the Miss Deaf Minnesota Ambassadorship Program, at 7 p.m. at St. Paul College. Tickets are \$10.
- Tuesday April 12** **Join us for “Next Steps for Families w/ Children Newly Identified with Hearing Loss:** an interactive discussion with medical professionals from 6 to 8:30 p.m. Participate in person at the University of Minnesota Malcom Moos Health Sciences Tower, Room 1-450, 515 Delaware St. SE, Minneapolis, or at home on your computer. See www.mnhandsandvoices.org/pdf/FINAL%20Next%20Steps_4-12-11.pdf.
- Sunday, April 17** **Thompson Hall Deaf Club hosts Kid’s Easter Day** from 2 to 4 p.m. at the hall, 1824 Marshall Ave. in St. Paul.
- Thursday, April 28** **Students in grades 9-12 and parents can attend the free Deaf and Hard of Hearing Day** from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. Tour campus and meet Disability Services ambassadors. To register, email dsdhhday@umn.edu.
- Friday, April 29** **Metro Deaf School holds its 17th Annual Spaghetti Dinner** fundraiser from 5 to 8 p.m. at Concordia Creative Learning Academy, 930 Geranium Ave. E. in St. Paul. \$8 for adults, \$5 for kids (12 and under), and free for children under 2.
- Friday, April 29** **Music in the Park has an ASL-interpreted performance** celebrating Jewish music, dance and storytelling at 7:30 p.m. at St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church in St. Paul. See schubert.org/musicinthepark/family.
- April 29 & 30** **“A Look in the Mirror—The Memoir of a Deaf Performer,”** an autobiographic performance in ASL by Nic Zapko, takes place at 7:30 p.m. at Bread of Life Deaf Lutheran Church, 2901 38th Ave. S., Minneapolis. Voice interpretation provided. Appropriate for ages 13+. Advance tickets are \$15 (niczapko@yahoo.com) or \$18 at the door. For a description of the show, see www.dreamlandarts.com.
- Saturday, April 30** **See renowned deaf performer Bernard Bragg in “My World Stage”** at 1 and 7 p.m. at St. Catherine University’s Jeanne D’Arc Auditorium, 2004 Randolph Ave., St. Paul. The performance is in ASL with voice interpretation. Advance tickets are \$15 (\$12/students) or \$20 at the door. Contact Albert Walla at Medeafie@hotmail.com.
- Saturday, May 7** **ASL interpreters are on hand for the Spring Raptor Release** at 1 p.m. at Hyland Lake Park Reserve Recreation Area. Crafts and hands-on activities start at 11 a.m. See www.threeriversparks.org.
- Saturday, May 14** **Northern Voices’ 2nd annual Walk for Talk** takes place at Long Lake Regional Park in New Brighton. See www.northernvoices.org.



ASL-Interpreted Performances

To Kill a Mockingbird

Saturday, April 9, 7:30 p.m.;
Friday, April 15, 11 a.m. (student matinee)
Park Square Theatre, St. Paul; 651-291-7005;
www.parksquaretheatre.org

Once Upon a Mattress

Sunday, April 10 2 p.m.
North Saint Paul High School;
651-748-6000; www.northhightheatre.org

Wuthering Heights

Captions projected above the stage at every performance April 16-23
The Minnesota Opera at Ordway Center,
Sr. Paul; 651-224-4222; www.mnopera.org

Comedy of Errors

Friday, April 22, 7:30 p.m.
Normandale Community College, Bloomington;
952-487-7462; www.normandaletheatre.org

Jersey Boys

Sunday, April 24, 1 p.m. (captioned at 6:30)
Historic Orpheum Theatre, Mpls; 612-339-7007;
www.hennepintheatretrust.org/accessible

Arsenic and Old Lace

Friday, May 13, 7:30 p.m.
Captioned Thursday, May 19, 7:30 p.m.
Guthrie Theater, Minneapolis;
612-377-2224; www.guthrietheater.org

Confirm interpreting when you book tickets. Also ask for the VSA discount.

FOCUS is published by Minnesota Hands & Voices at Lifetrack Resources.
709 University Avenue West
St. Paul, MN 55104-4804
651-265-2435(v); 651-265-2379(tty)
Toll-free: 1-866-DHOHKID (346-4543)
Toll-free TTY: 1-866-857-2379
E-mail: mnhv@lifetrackresources.org
Website: www.mnhandsandvoices.org

Our mission is to build better lives for children who are deaf or hard of hearing by providing parent-to-parent support.

Newsletter Editor: Audrey Alwell

Information in this newsletter about events, services, or other organizations does not imply endorsement by Minnesota Hands & Voices or Lifetrack Resources.

© 2011 Lifetrack Resources

In Your Corner

By Candace Lindow-Davies, Minnesota Hands & Voices Coordinator

March was an action-packed month for MNHV. Our staff was delighted to participate in the MN EHDI Summit: Building Connections. This conference was a wonderful opportunity to bring stakeholders together in one place. Connecting parents with so many different experts/individuals is a rare event. They could dialogue with public health nurses, educators, Deaf Mentors, other adults/young adults who are deaf or hard of hearing, parents, organizations, as well as meet national experts. I hope those who attended found great benefit. There is so much our community can discuss and learn from one another. Let's try to work together to support other opportunities like this in the future. Several of the presentations are scheduled to be posted to various websites in the near future—we'll let you know as soon as they're up so you can take advantage of some of the knowledge and experience that was shared at the Summit.

Last weekend, MNHV's staff participated in The Nerderly Overnight Website Challenge. We were awarded ten of the most talented web experts to give us a complete site makeover. The website is scheduled to be officially launched next week, and suffice it to say, it is MUCH better than the previous site. New features will include a welcome video to our newest members, secure portal for online referrals, a search engine—the content of our FOCUS newsletter now will be searchable—and even an iPhone referral app! We have come so far.

Going from “drab” to “fab” during the challenge was rewarded. Out of 18 teams, MNHV was one of the four finalists! You can take a sneak peek at the changes the design team made by watching www.youtube.com/watch?v=1w6n2sj0kpo.

Our wonderful web design team consisted of 10 brilliant and creative young men, mostly from Catalyst Studios (catalyststudios.com/aboutus). They were a fun group as well as keenly astute as to how website visitors might navigate the information. We are DEEPLY indebted to The Nerderly for creating this incredible opportunity for non-profits to participate in the web challenge. We are SO grateful to Catalyst's founder Jason Rysavy and Interactive Director Jared Lukes for pulling together a genius team of creative, resourceful, and intuitive folks to give us a website far beyond anything we ever would have thought of on our own. Their generosity includes a free year of hosting and supporting the site as well as training for our staff—an incredible gift to this non-profit.

Hope you are strongly considering joining us for our Next Steps workshop/webinar April 12, and/or the Mom's Retreat in May. Both will be great events!

Online series teaches Auditory-Verbal techniques

Smart Ears offers a series of online workshops on teaching children with hearing loss to listen and talk through Auditory-Verbal Therapy. The workshops are aimed at early intervention professionals, but there also are resources for parents. See <http://smart-ears.com> for details. The online workshop series for professionals begins again April 27 with “The Basics.”

Legislative issues affect deaf, hard of hearing

The Minnesota Legislature is considering several bills that impact people who are deaf or hard of hearing. One of the bills (SF400/HF133) would allow students in the state to have a trial placement at Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf. Other bills could impact the Minnesota Employment Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Deaf Mentor program, support for DeafBlind interveners and support service providers, and other programs that benefit people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Next week there will be a hearing on eliminating all health insurance mandates, including the hard-fought mandate that requires insurance carriers to cover hearing aids for children. For more information, see www.mncdhh.org/legislation/362/legislation-2011.

ADA regulations implemented in March

Revised regulations implementing Title II and Title III of the 2010 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) went into effect March 15. The amended regulations contain many new or expanded provisions on general nondiscrimination policies, including the use of service animals and providing interpreter services through video conferencing. Title II covers nondiscrimination in state and local government services, while Title III covers public accommodations and commercial facilities. For more information, see www.ada.gov.

Congress considers IDEA Fairness Act

Last month, the bipartisan IDEA Fairness Restoration Act was introduced in both the US House and Senate. The bill would allow parents to recover expert witness fees incurred in due process hearings under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

In the 2006 Supreme Court case *Arlington Central School District v. Murphy*, the court decided that parents who win their IDEA cases cannot recover expert witness fees along with attorney fees. In *Schaffer v. Weast*, the Court's decision placed the burden of proof on parents to present evidence about educational methodology, behavioral supports, medical issues, and other technical subjects when challenging a school district's placement of a child with disabilities. Since only qualified expert witnesses can present this technical testimony and since that testimony can cost thousands of dollars, few parents will be able to afford to challenge a school district's denial of free and appropriate public education for their child.

The current bill going through Congress would restore Congress' original intent for IDEA, and make due process hearings affordable for all parents of children with disabilities. Advocacy groups are encouraging parents to contact their legislators to support passage of the IDEA Fairness Restoration Act.

The International Center on Deafness and the Arts (ICODA)

continues its webinar series with “If You Know Your Student You Can Develop Innovative Strategies to Modify the Core Curriculum” and “All Senses on Deck: Reality Instruction.”

The first title is offered April 26 and 30; the second is offered May 17 and 21. Each hour-long webinar is \$89. Details are online at www.icodaarts.org.



The View from Here

Central

Sign Language at the Mall goes from noon to 3 p.m. Saturday, April 9 at the food court in Crossroads Center in St. Cloud.

“Signing On,” a documentary about Deaf breast cancer survivors, their families and the Deaf community, will be shown at the CentraCare Health Plaza Education Center in St. Cloud Thursday, April 28 at 4:30 p.m. Seating is limited. To reserve a place, email signingondocumentary@gmail.com.

Southeast

“The Printer” is the story for Literacy Night at Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf (MSAD), Faribault, on Monday, April 18 from 6 to 7 p.m. The evening includes a signed story, a craft, games and other activities.

The Little Theatre of MSAD presents *Hansel and Gretel*

May 11, 12, and 13 at 7 p.m. at Noyes Auditorium, Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf (MSAD), Faribault. Admission is \$5 for adults and \$3 for students.

Disney’s Beauty and the Beast is ASL-interpreted at 2 p.m., Sunday, April 10 at the Rochester Civic Theatre. For details, see www.rochestercivictheatre.org.

Upper Northwest

Central Lakes College in Brainerd presents the children’s production “Tinytown—A Very, Very Poor Village” with ASL interpretation Saturday, April 16 at 2 p.m.. See www.clcmn.edu/theatre.

Guide position open in state’s Upper NW

MNHV has an opening for a Parent Guide in the Upper Northwest region of the state, which includes the cities of Crookston, Bemidji and Brainerd. Also, the Northeast Parent Guide position will open up this summer. Curt Leitz has offered to help with that transition. For a map showing the areas served by these Parent Guide positions, go to our website (mnhandsandvoices.org), click on “Parent Guides,” then click “MN Hands & Voices Regional Map.”

Parent Guides provide emotional support, unbiased information, and referral resources for families with children who are deaf or hard of hearing. They also represent MNHV in local communities, and help plan activities for families. The paid position is approximately 24 to 32 hours a month and offers flexible hours. Candidates need to live in the region. Parents of children who are deaf or hard of hearing are *strongly* preferred. Direct inquiries to CandaceD@lifetrackresources.org.

Hey Mom! Connect with other moms of children who have hearing loss (including your friends from MNHV) at the **Dreams and Inspirations Moms’ Retreat at Camp Confidence near Brainerd May 20-22. Come for a relaxing, rejuvenating weekend “at the lake!” To register or receive more details, contact mnhv@lifetrackresources.org.**



**Alexandra Vetrovsky,
Audiologist**

Hello! I am an audiologist with The Hearing Clinic of St. Cloud ENT. I feel fortunate to have the chance to work with families in the MNHV community. When we see families with young children for the first time at our clinic, we refer them to MNHV’s Parent Guides so these families get connected to services quickly and easily. It’s a great connection.

I graduated from Ohio University in 2003 with a bachelor’s degree in Hearing, Speech, Language Sciences. I went to graduate school at Central Michigan University, where I received my Doctorate of Audiology in 2007. As part of my doctorate training, I completed a one-year externship at University Hospitals in Cleveland, Ohio. It was there that I realized how much I enjoyed working with kids and their families, and decided that’s where I wanted to focus my career.

I moved to St. Cloud in July 2007. I’ve now been at The Hearing Clinic almost four years, and continue to enjoy what I do daily—helping kids and their families with hearing issues.



Sign up for FREE Family Learning Event at MSAD next weekend

Minnesota families that have a child who is deaf or hard of hearing can attend the FREE Family Learning Event Saturday, April 9 at Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf (MSAD) in Faribault. Childcare and special activities will be provided for all children, including hearing siblings.

Minnesota Hands & Voices is one of the sponsors for this free event, which focuses on keeping our kids safe. The morning features a panel of parents and MSAD alumni who will share their experiences and answer parents’ questions. Over the lunch break, families will have the chance to connect with each other or meet with vendors to learn more about services and products for their children. Lunch is \$3.50/\$2.50 for children under age 5. In the afternoon, guest speaker Dave Eisenmann will share tips for keeping our children safe on the Internet, with social media and on cell phones. The day concludes with a demonstration with trained Hearing Dogs.

To see an event flyer, go to www.msad.state.mn.us. Then, contact Denise Reid at 800-657-3996 to reserve your spot by April 5.

Apply now to join Miss Deaf MN contest

The Miss Deaf Minnesota Ambassador Program will crown its 2011-2013 ambassador June 25 during the Minnesota Association of Deaf Citizens' biennial conference in St. Paul. Contestants must be age 17 to 30, and must be deaf. Applications for Miss Deaf Minnesota are due by April 30. For more information, contact Misty Schomberg at youth@minndeaf.org.

MDS holds annual fundraising dinner

Metro Deaf School (MDS), a public charter school in St. Paul that serves preschool-12th grade, holds its 17th Annual Spaghetti Dinner fundraiser from 5 to 8 p.m. at Concordia Creative Learning Academy, 930 Geranium Ave. E. in St. Paul. The cost is \$8 for adults, \$5 for kids (12 and under), and free for children under 2, with a family's total limited to \$25.

New this year, the dinner will include a raffle and silent auction. All proceeds will benefit the MDS Playground and Parent-Teacher Group General funds.

For more information, email rswinney@mdsmn.org.

Annual workshop in May focuses on self awareness

The annual Spring Workshop sponsored by Regions Hospital's Health and Wellness Program runs all day Friday, May 20 at the University of Minnesota St. Paul Campus. Curt Micka, J.D., presents "Self-Awareness: Bringing out the Best in Yourself - Personally and Professionally." This workshop is designed for professionals and others who are interested in ways to reduce work-related stress. Cost is \$ 65, which includes the book "The Essential Enneagram." To register, email Kristen.L.Swan@HealthPartners.com.

Transition

Using equipment to smooth communication on the job

By Mary Bauer, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS)

Getting a summer job can provide great experience for teens. You learn how to show up on time, work as a team, and have an opportunity to explore what career you want to pursue—and, of course, you earn money to buy stuff. For a teen with hearing loss, it can be a challenge to bridge the communication gap with hearing employers, co-workers, and customers. DHHS' Pathways to Employment can help by lending equipment to your employer to help you do your job. Here are some situations to show how this equipment might help you.

1. You are working at the local flower shop. Sometimes you have to be in the back room prepping the plants/flowers, but your boss needs you to go to the front of the store when someone enters the store—and you can't hear the door chime. What are you going to do? Try the Silent Call TransMATTer (\$184.95). It has a built-in pressure-activated transmitter that activates a Sidekick receiver with a strobe light that flashes for 15 seconds when someone steps on the mat, which can be hidden under a door mat.

2. You landed a job as a "go-for" in a small business office. Part of your responsibilities include covering the phones once a week. You have pushed the volume on the office phone to the loudest it will go, but it's not loud enough...now what? The ClearSounds IL95 UltraClear Portable Phone Amplifier (\$34.95) is compatible with 99% of corded telephones. The Boost Button amplifies volume up to 40dB and eliminates background noise. Or try the W10 In-Line Phone Amplifier (\$35.95) for multi- or single-line standard or electronic phones. It increases incoming telephone volume more than 3 times above normal (12dB to +19dB) with variable volume control.

3. You snagged a job that requires a lot of computer work. The only trouble is, the office is set up so that your back is to the hall (and the office space cannot be reconfigured so you can face the door), so you don't know when someone is behind you and when they tap you on the shoulder, you jump through the roof! Your employer could get a wireless doorbell with a chime and strobe light at the local Home Depot, which sees one by IQ America for about \$35 and one by Heath Zenith for about \$44. Or your employer could borrow the iMate Computer Mirror (approximately \$22.95) from DHHS to try out before buying. The mirror has a wide-angle view so you can see everything around you - your co-workers, your visitors, and the view behind you.

4. You've landed the perfect job, but you need something to help you communicate with your supervisor, co-workers, or customers. You might want to try the Ubi-Duo (\$1995). This does NOT replace a sign language interpreter, but helps when an interpreter is not available. It's a portable, wireless communication device with two displays and two keyboards for you and another person to type back and forth to each other. Pretty cool!

All these cool tools are available through DHHS offices around the state for loan to an employer for up to one month. You can find more details about the equipment loan program at www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/disabilities/documents/pub/dhs16_139261.pdf.

Film tells story of deaf fighter

"Hamill," a feature film about Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) fighter Matt Hamill, who is deaf, has been earning awards at film festivals as its creators negotiate with distributors for a theatrical release this summer.

The film picked up the Audience Award for Best Feature Film recently at the Miami Film Festival. It also won the Breakthrough Film award at the 2010 AFI Film Festival in Los Angeles at the end of last year.

Russell Harvard, a deaf actor, has the lead role. The filmmakers chose to use a deaf actor, Russell Harvard, rather than a big-name star to give a more realistic portrayal of Hamill. That decision is making it a little harder to sell the film to distributors, they said, however these awards will help.

The movie next heads to the Cleveland International Film Festival, where the UFC will document Hamill's work promoting the film as part of the "Countdown to UFC 130" program. Hamill is slated to fight Quinton "Rampage" Jackson at the event, which takes place May 28 at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas.

To see the movie's trailer, go to HamillTheMovie.com.

AG Bell presents conference

AG Bell hosts the Listening and Spoken Language Symposium July 21-23 in Washington, D.C. featuring the latest research in listening and spoken language development. The keynote presenter is Melody Musgrove, director of the Office of Special Education Programs at the U.S. Department of Education. She will provide an update on federal education initiatives for children with disabilities. For details on the symposium, see www.agbell.org.



Dad's Viewpoint

By Curt Leitz, NE Parent Guide

One night this past January, I found myself on a dark ski trail, thighs burning, struggling to climb a steep hill whose summit I couldn't see. I was training for the "Birkie," a cross-country ski marathon running thirty-one miles from Cable to Hayward, Wisconsin. It was three below, and I was an hour from the car. No choice but to keep going.

I got home that night to a dark, quiet house; as I took off my boots I questioned the value of putting so much time into such a self-centered endeavor. I'd recently written my previous column on heroism, arguing that everyday sacrifices, choosing what's right over what's easy, constitutes heroism. In contrast, the "heroism" of athletes seems completely empty.

Around that time I had the honor of getting to know a parent who is making such choices. Early this year she learned that her eight-year-old daughter has severe unilateral hearing loss. She said over the years she'd wondered if her daughter might have trouble hearing, but not until her daughter started falling behind in school did enough questions arise that she took her daughter to an audiologist. The school system had never performed a hearing check.

This mother lives in a highly rural area in a state bordering Minnesota. Her local school district, tiny in size but covering a huge area, informed her that her daughter was the first student in memory with a hearing loss. If she would just tell the school nurse what her daughter's needs were, then the district would work on providing for them.

"Wait a minute," she told them. "How am I supposed to know everything my daughter needs? Shouldn't someone other than the school nurse help us figure this out?" After some back-and-forth, the district saw that they would need to bring in a teacher of the deaf and hard-of-hearing to help evaluate the girl.

Next, this mom wrote a letter to the school board. "Some years back," she wrote, "you stopped testing hearing. You still test vision, but not hearing. Last year you spent money on a new football field. If we can afford a football field, shouldn't we be doing hearing tests?" The school board agreed. Two weeks later, the district identified three more students with hearing losses.

You never know when something you say will stick, when something you do will have an effect.

At the end of February, skiing the Birkie, I thought about this mom. I thought about her daughter, and the three kids she's helped. Then I hit the next hill, and couldn't think of anything. I crossed the finish line with blood and ice frozen in my beard, and my daughters carried my skis back to the car.

That night, my legs aching, I stumbled downstairs to tuck the girls in bed. "Pop," my elder called as I closed the door. "Yes?" "Good job today." At the bottom of the stairs I paused, reflecting on my daughter's words. Then, thighs burning, I started one more climb into a dark night.

TED is not a stuffed bear! It's the Telephone Equipment Distribution (TED) Program, which provides assistive telephone equipment—at no cost—to eligible Minnesotans. For details, see www.tedprogram.org.

Minnesota schools perform well in Academic Bowl

Two schools from Minnesota competed last month at Gallaudet University's annual Academic Bowl. Metro Deaf School (MDS) made it into the "Sweet 16" playoffs, and finished 9th out of 78 teams. Junior Linzie Fuechtmann was one of 16 players out of more than 300 in the competition to receive an "All-Star Player" award. Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf also made it to "Nationals" (see description below), but didn't qualify for the sudden death "Sweet 16" competition.

This year's Academic Bowl had a new format, bringing all the teams to Washington D.C. for 2 days of back-to-back matches to narrow the field to the top 32 teams competing in "Nationals" for another two days. Maryland School for the Deaf took first place at Academic Bowl for the second year in a row.

MSP airport adds captions for pages

Thanks to input from the Commission of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans, Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport now offers better access for travelers who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Auditory pages from the airport's Information and Paging Office now scroll across the bottom of the weather screens near the airport's flight information displays and are posted to a "paging history" screen located at each of the airport's information booths. The scrolling messages continue for several minutes, while the historical messages typically stay visible for several hours.

When airlines need to page a specific passenger, a prominent message will scroll across the bottom of the CNN television monitors located throughout the airport, primarily in gate hold areas and baggage claim, in addition to the weather and paging history screens.

The airport provides web-based ASL interpreting at the Travelers Assistance main desk in Terminal 1 (the big Lindbergh terminal) from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily. The airport also added video relay service (VRS) telephones this year in addition to TTYs. For more on airport accessibility, see www.mspairport.com/accessibility.aspx.

Community advocates receive awards at Capitol

The Commission of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans recently honored "Changemakers" in the community—individuals and organizations that have created positive change for those who are deaf, deafblind or hard of hearing. The commission presented the awards at a ceremony March 2 in the Capitol rotunda. Here are a few of the honorees:

Lifetime Achievement Awards went to Alan Parnes for advocacy in employment, and Marian Hausladen for advocacy in education.

The Grassroots Advocacy Award was given to Metro Deaf School for successfully advocating for legislation that saved the school in 2010.

Sherri Rademacher received the Citizen Advocate Award for her ongoing advocacy with news stations and candidates for public office to follow federal and state captioning laws.

The Advocacy Through the Arts Award went to Barbara Allen, Nancy Meyers and Anita Buel for their film, "Signing On," about women who are deaf who have breast cancer.

The Community Justice Award was given to Officer Chad Koch of the St. Paul Police Department for educating officers about the Deaf community and for outreach within the Deaf community.