



OHIO ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAF, INC.

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## **Ohio Association of the Deaf's 60th Anniversary**

February 23, 1961

By: Irene Tunanidas

This year Board officers, committee chairs and members celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Ohio Association of the Deaf's founding. Our founders, three gentlemen, two deaf and one hearing businessman, who was an insurance agent, had a vision for a new organization to advocate for Ohio's Deaf drivers who were denied auto insurance at that time. OAD, formerly called "Ohio Deaf Motorists Association", was merged into a 501(c)3 organization and its charter was signed by Ohio Governor Frank Lausche.

Ohio Association of the Deaf looks back at 60 years of its amazing growth. In the mid-1980s, Membership Drive, led by Minnie Hawk, reported a growth of over 1,000 members from Ohio, Pennsylvania and Kentucky. OAD has witnessed a number of momentous milestones: its long, close partnership with the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission. Together, they formed the D.E.A.F Program to train deaf adolescents to prepare for the job market, and the creation of the 10 Community Centers for the Deaf was the brainchild of Robert O. Lankenau, one of OAD's founders and its past president. He and Frank Gattas, Program Specialist with the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission, set up an advisory board on deafness and spearheaded efforts to obtain state and government funding for many programs to improve quality of life for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Ohioans. A few of OAD's other achievements listed are: Miss Deaf Ohio Pageant, OAD's Biennial Grand Ball and OAD's Deaf Expo as its major fundraiser. OAD teamed with the Ohio Chapter of Interpreters of the Deaf to develop Interpreter Quality Assessments for new interpreters who were in the process of applying for employment in the Deaf Community. OAD's investment with AT & T resulted in the evolution of the Telecommunications Service for the Deaf in the late 1980s.

Ohio Association of the Deaf faced challenges in the late 1990s. Its membership has declined significantly partly due to the medical breakthrough on the development of cochlear implants which threatened the survival of the deaf world. Poor leadership was cited as the main reason why members left, due to the loss of morale support.

Today, the Ohio Association of the Deaf is slowly emerging as a viable organization and its new team of leaders focus on key principles for its growth: transparency, team work, fairness and a clear vision to improve quality of life for the Deaf in Ohio. OAD will triumph over fear, is restructuring its system for effective governance to bring stability, and working with affiliates in other geographical areas. Happy 60th Birthday, OAD!