

HLAA TC

June 2025

Twin Cities and Greater Minnesota



The mission of HLAA TC is to open the world of communication to people with hearing loss by providing information, education, support and advocacy.

WALK4HEARING

June 21 at Como Park
(see p. 6 for details)

UPCOMING MEETINGS

September 20, 2025
Meeting
(to be announced)



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The next Hearing Loss Association of America Twin Cities Chapter meeting
(HLAA TC) will be held on September 20, 2025

See page 11 for further details

President's Message

Robin Coninx

HLAATC New Board Announcement

On May 17th at the HLAATC Chapter Meeting our board was updated and new members have joined the HLAATC Board. Please help me in welcoming our new members, and those taking on new roles that have served with us in the past!

President: Robin 'Byrdie' Coninx – returning for a second term

Vice President: Kim Fishman – New to the board

Secretary: Christy Myers – previously Christy has served as a Director-at-Large, while helping with financial and admin duties during her serve

Treasurer: Sharon Witt – New to the Board

Director-at-Large: Eve Boaheng – New to the Board

Director-at-Large: Mark Daly has decided to stay on

Director-at-Large: Michael Smith has decided to stay on

More info about our new board members:

Vice President: Kim Fishman

I am a practicing audiologist with 30 years of experience, and my personal journey with hearing loss has deepened my commitment to this field. I first noticed my hearing difficulties in my early 30s, after I had already begun my career. Over time, my hearing loss has progressed to a severe mixed hearing loss in my right ear, likely stemming from a childhood injury when I was struck in the ear with a hockey puck during neighborhood boot hockey games. I now have a mild loss in my left ear as well. Helping others has always been a driving force for me, and I believe strongly in justice, support, and care for all. As someone who lives with hearing loss and knows the field intimately, I understand the urgent need for advocacy from those directly impacted, not just from providers. I am passionate about promoting hearing health, reducing noise exposure, ensuring business transparency, and protecting ADA rights for those with hearing challenges. I would be honored to serve on the board and work toward the changes our community deserves.

(Board members, cont.)

Secretary: Christy Myers

I live in St. Paul and have been a member of HLAA-TC for several years and a Member at Large on the Board for the last two years. I would like to move into the position of Secretary to help the Board grow. Hearing loss is hereditary in my family and mine has gotten worse over the years to the point that I am currently considering receiving a cochlear implant. I first became involved with HLAA-TC when I was really struggling and the meetings and people I've met have been very important in my journey. As a Board member I want to continue to provide education and resources to even more people with hearing loss. Being a Board Member has been very rewarding. It is interesting and the other Board members have great ideas and passion.

Treasurer: Sharon Witt

I live in Eden Prairie. My hearing loss began in my mid-50's and has gotten worse over time, especially with understanding speech. Being involved with HLAATC has had significant positive effects on my life. I would like to give back by being Treasurer for the Chapter

Director-at-Large: Eve Boaheng

"With over a dozen years of experience in the hearing industry, my introduction to audiology began during my undergraduate studies in Communication Disorders. By chance, my husband's career move prompted me to look for a new job, and I found myself at a hearing clinic, where I discovered my passion for helping people hear better. Throughout my career, I have held diverse roles such as Audiology Technician, Hearing Care Provider, and Technical Support Specialist for a leading hearing aid manufacturer. When I'm not working, you'll catch me fully engaged on the soccer field, cheering with such enthusiasm that my excitement can be heard from across the pitch. My husband and three children make life dynamic and adventurous. We cherish our snowmobiling trips to Northern Wisconsin with my parents and enjoy relaxing family game nights together."

HLAA-TC May 2025 Chapter Meeting Summary

Opening remarks and accessibility

Members discussed challenges finding the meeting room due to unclear signage, suggesting more visible signs at entrances and stairways

Acknowledgements

Gratitude was expressed to board members, captioner, Courage Kenny, and volunteers for setup and signage

Laura Hagemann was recognized for managing social media and Book Club

Speakers who presented this year without compensation were thanked for covering topics like phone loan programs, disaster preparedness, hearing loss memoirs, theater accessibility, lobbying, hearing equipment, hearing research, and social isolation.

Newspaper outreach project

Michael Smith introduced the newspaper outreach initiative to increase chapter visibility and membership in the nine-county area.

Collaboration with the Minnesota Newspaper Association and community newspaper was discussed, emphasizing free publicity for non-profits.

The project aims to combat isolation by connecting people with HLAA-TC, potentially through hybrid meetings and recordings for broader reach.

A member offered to leverage connection with the Camden News to include HLAA-TC information, especially during May (Hearing Loss Awareness Month).

Walk4Hearing Fundraiser

Scheduled for June 21, 2025 at Como Park, the event supports national HLAA advocacy and raises local funds

HLAA-TC will have a team, with members encouraged to join, contribute, or form sub-teams. The chapter receives 40% of team-raised funds and 50% from new sponsors.

The event features vendors (e.g. Resound, Starkey, Advance Bionics, Captel), activities (including face painting, bouncy house), and a 3K accessible walk/roll.

Registration starts at 9:30 a.m., with a presentation at 11:00 a.m. and the walk at 11:15, typically concluding by noon.

Board activities

Board members have engaged in external advocacy:

Robin consulted with Walker Art Center on accessible programs

Christy and Byrdie represent HLAA-TC at the U of M CATSS group

Christy and Michael are on the Theater in the Round's Access Advisory Council

Karla Sand is a member of the Commission.

Officer Elections

Uncontested elections were held for:

President: Robin Coninx

Vice President: Kim Fishman

Secretary: Christy Myers

Treasurer: Sharon Witt

All candidates were approved by voice vote (ayes, no opposition).

Two members-at-large (Michael Smith, Mark Daly) continue their terms. Michael nominated Eve Boaheng for an open member-at-large position, to be voted on at the next meeting with a bio provided.

Financial Update

Starting balance: ~\$9,300; ending balance: ~\$12,110.82.

Revenue: ~\$825 from memberships, ~\$3,200 from fundraising.

Expenses: ~\$1,513, primarily for chapter administration (website, accounting, postage) and programs.

Discussion on creating a budget to allocate funds for outreach, scholarships, or educational materials. Suggestions included reserving a buffer (e.g., \$3,000) and spending a percentage (e.g., 10%) annually on initiatives like scholarships for audiology students.

Member Feedback and Suggestions

Membership Engagement: Members expressed concern about declining attendance and suggested re-engaging past members via physical newsletters or letters, as emails are often ignored or inaccessible. A directory of members' contact information was proposed to foster connections.

Meeting Content: Some speakers were less engaging; members suggested surveys to gauge interest and identify relevant topics. Desired topics include cochlear implants, equipment demos, and emotional/psychological aspects of hearing loss.

Social Activities: A Christmas white elephant gift exchange with music and decorations was proposed to attract members and encourage socializing.

Advocacy and Education: Members emphasized educating audiologists and the public about hearing loss realities, addressing misconceptions (e.g., hearing aids fully restore hearing). Inviting audiology students to speak or attend was suggested to expose them to the human side of hearing loss.

Accessibility Challenges: Issues with untrained staff at facilities like Courage Kenny and difficulties with phone communication (e.g., long wait times, unhelpful responses) were highlighted, underscoring the need for advocacy.

Future Plans

Hybrid Meetings: Technical challenges with Zoom were noted, with plans to recruit tech-savvy volunteers (e.g., audiology students) to manage hybrid formats.

Speaker Planning: A committee will form over the summer to plan next year's speakers. Christy invited volunteers (Sharon and Michael committed) to suggest topics and contacts.

Advocacy: Continued outreach to newspapers, community organizations, and policymakers to raise awareness and support for hearing loss issues.

Join the Fun at Walk4Hearing 2025!



The Walk4Hearing is back at Como Park on June 21, and it's going to be a blast: a scenic one-mile walk, face painting, balloons, and bouncy slides for the kids, plus exhibitors sharing the latest in hearing loss solutions.

Last year's event was a hit, with hundreds joining in the festivities.

To donate without registering, visit the page of one of the following members of the HLAA-TC team. Remember to designate your donation to HLAA-TC. Thank you!

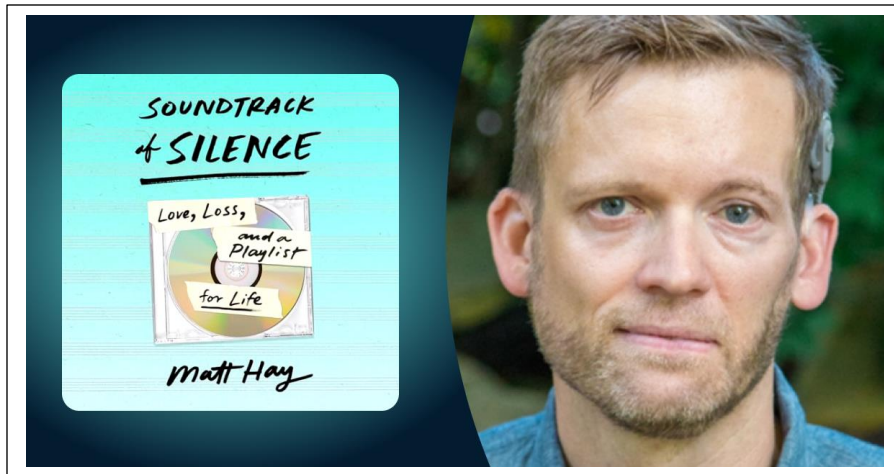
To join us at the Walk4Hearing and spread the news to your family and friends, use this link to [Register](#) and designate your funds to the HLAA-TC team.

HLAA-TC Walk4Hearing Team Members pages:

- [President Byrdie Coninx's page](#)
- [Director-At-Large Mark Daly's page](#)
- [Director-At-Large Christy Myers' page](#)

Matt Hay Book Club Summary

By Laura Hagemann



HLAA-TC Book Club met on Thursday, May 29th and welcomed author Matt Hay to talk about his memoir “Soundtrack of Silence: love, loss and a playlist for life.” Below is a summary with links of our discussion.

- Synopsis: “As a child, Matt Hay didn’t know his hearing wasn’t the way everyone else processed sound-and like a lot of kids who do workarounds to fit in... But as a prospective college student who couldn’t pass the entrance requirements for West Point, Hay’s condition, generated by a tumor, was unavoidable: his hearing was going, and fast. Soundtrack of Silence was his determined compensation for his condition: a typical Midwestern kid growing up in the 1980s, whose life events were pegged to pop music, Hay planned to commit his favorite songs to memory...”
- Author [Website](#)
- Author's Biography (from author's [website](#)): "Matt Hay, MBA has a 25-year journey toward deafness (and subsequent recovery with his auditory brainstem implant). He shared his story on a National Public Radio (NPR) podcast titled Soundtrack of Silence. The intimate, funny and authentic segment inspired actor Channing Tatum and Paramount Pictures to option the motion picture rights to Matt’s life story and St. Martin’s Press, an imprint of MacMillan Books to option his memoir."
- ["Soundtrack of Silence" NPR podcast from April 11, 2017](#) (no transcript or captions)
- Author Interviews:
 - [Hearing Wellness Journey Podcast](#) a video podcast.
 - Matt Hay’s TEDx Talk: [“What losing \(and regaining\) my hearing taught me about resilience”](#)
 - Matt was the cover story of the September 2020 issue of HLAA’s Hearing Life magazine. [Read the article here.](#)
 - [Article](#) by Matt Hay on Neurofibromatosis Type 2
 - [Video Podcast](#): Hearing Matters (interview)
- On Neurofibromatosis Type 2:
 - [Description of NF2](#) on the Johns Hopkins website. (The condition Hay has that affected his hearing.)
- Critical Reception of Book:
 - [Reader Reviews \(average rating is 4.14\)](#)
- Professional Reviewer Reviews: [BookPage](#), [Living With Hearing Loss \(A Blog by Shari Eberts\)](#)

- Themes Discussed:
 - Global Health Leadership: Matt had just got back from a trip to Bangkok. He is getting his doctorate in public health and travels periodically for that.
 - Disability Accessibility in Public Health: Matt discussed his personal experience as a deaf person and his interest in public health, focusing on health equity and accessibility for people with disabilities.
 - Memoir Writing: Matt shared his journey of writing a memoir, discussing his initial hesitation due to feelings of egotism and the responsibility of accurately representing his family's perspectives. Matt also highlighted the process of selecting content that resonated with his younger self, aiming to provide valuable insights and perspectives.
 - Music and Hearing Loss Awareness: Matt shared his personal experience with music therapy and hearing loss.
 - [HLAA has a post](#) on music and what those with hearing loss can learn from professional musicians
 - Representation:
 - Children's books with character with hearing aids (a member mentioned reading such a book): [This website lists many similar books.](#)
 - Barbie Doll with hearing aids: [Barbie](#) and [Ken](#)
 - [American Girl Doll with hearing loss](#) was 2020 doll of the year Joss Kendrick (partnered with American Girl)
 - Technology Mentioned:
 - [Spotify](#): Matt uses this music streaming services lyric feature to read lyrics along with listening to music.
 - [Zoom](#): The video conferencing platform has many [captioning and translation features.](#)
 - [Otter.AI](#): The transcription app that Matt used to write a good chunk of his book (by talking into his phone and recording it in Otter).
- Additional Topics Discussed:
 - Matt mentioned that he enjoys reading historical fiction and read Erik Larson's ["The Devil in The White City."](#)

Next Book Club:

JUNE 2025: Tuesday, JUNE 24, 5:00 pm Western/ 7:00 pm Central/ 8:00 pm Eastern Time. [Lady Tan's Circle of Women: A Novel](#) (fiction) by Lisa See, Now Welcoming Special Guest Author Lisa See! BARD: DB 115160 [[ZOOM-Register Here](#)] Zoom Meeting. Synopsis: About "a woman physician in 15th-century China. According to Confucius, "an educated woman is a worthless woman," but Tan Yunxian—born into an elite family, yet haunted by death, separations, and loneliness—is being raised by her grandparents to be of use. Her grandmother is one of only a handful of female doctors in China, and she teaches Yunxian the pillars of Chinese medicine>.." Note: not about hearing loss or disability but does feature a minority group doing incredible things in the face of adversity. Published in 2024.

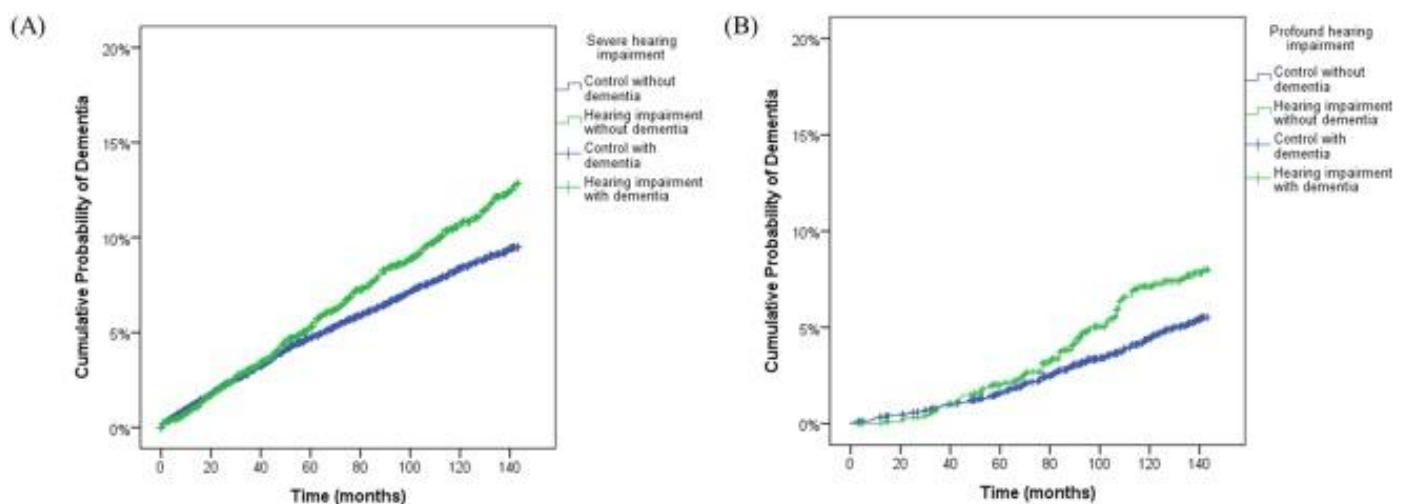
Hearing as we Age

“Everybody’s hearing slowly and gradually declines over our lifetimes’...By ages 65 to 74, an estimated 1 in 3 U.S. adults have lost enough that hearing aids could be beneficial....by age 64, an estimated 10% of U. S. adults have disabling hearing loss....Improved hearing may reduce dementia risk by up to 50%.” AARP Magazine, April/May 2025)

The online National Library of Medicine (NIH) reports on a similar study: “This study did not include the cases of congenital or childhood hearing impairments. Because the congenital hearing impairment could have different pathophysiology, such as genetic or infectious causes, with acquired hearing impairment, the impacts of hearing impairment on dementia had to be explored in acquired hearing impairment population.”

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6189102/>

“Severe hearing impairment increased the risk of dementia. Both middle-aged and older adults showed an elevated risk of dementia in the severely hearing-impaired group. Moreover, middle-aged group demonstrated higher HR of hearing impairment for dementia than older-aged group.”



Editor’s comment: These studies always make me wonder about the dementia risk in culturally Deaf groups. I guess we will have to wait a while for answers, since “Research on the relationship between profound hearing loss and dementia, and the prevalence of dementia among Deaf people, is scarce” (per NIH website, above).

HLAATC REACHES OUT TO NEW AUDIENCES VIA COMMUNITY NEWSPAPERS

Initiated by board member Michael Smith, HLAATC is now reaching out to thousands of readers via a new community newspaper project. Board member Mark Daly, a former KARE11 news reporter, is writing a monthly column about issues related to hearing loss that will be published in nearly a dozen community newspapers throughout the western portion of the Twin Cities Metro area.

Additionally, the HLAATC “Newspaper Project Team“ is urging community newspaper editors throughout the state to publish stories about issues that are important to Minnesotans with hearing loss.

READ ALL ABOUT IT HERE: (link to the first column that was published last month)

https://www.hometownsource.com/sun_sailor/free/column-hear-me-now---news-advice-for-those-with-hearing-loss/article_1f55c7fa-587b-466e-af17-299de6e643dd.html

Look for upcoming columns in the Sun Sailor, Sun Post, and Sun Current community newspapers.



AARP (May-June 2025) sought an answer to the question:

“Why does the always-approachable [Rob] Lowe sometimes snub fans?”

Lowe has been deaf in one ear for as long as he can remember. “I always am very careful about not wanting to lose that one good ear that I have,” he says. ..”He is also hypervigilant about fans approaching him. “I’m always worried that people are gonna think I’m stand-offish because I don’t hear them”, he says.

Editor’s comment: We totally get it, Rob!

Membership form

To join the HLAA TC Chapter, please print and complete this form and mail to:

HLAA TC Chapter
P.O. Box 26021
Minneapolis, MN 55426

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone/TTY#: _____

Email: _____

Membership Type:

(Please Select One. All Memberships are annual and renewed on September 15th of each year)

☐ New Membership

☐ Renewal

☐ (\$25) - Individual Membership

☐ (\$50) - Professional Membership

☐ (\$15) - Printed Newsletter (optional - all memberships include a newsletter via email)

☐ (\$____) - Donation

Please add up totals and mail this form along with your payment to the address listed at the top of this form.

_____ **Total Enclosed**

***NOTE: National Membership is a separate membership with privileges and publications (see www.hearingloss.org).**

RECEIPT

This is acknowledgement that \$_____ has been received by HLAA-TC for _____

from:

Name _____

Date _____

By _____

Meeting information

The next meeting of the Hearing Loss Association of America Twin Cities Chapter (HLAA-TC) will be held on September 20, 2025.

Location: Courage Kenny, 3915 Golden Valley Road, Golden Valley, MN 55422

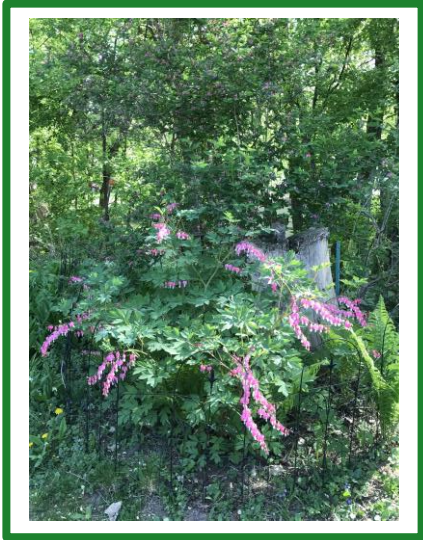
Registration: (TBD)

Meeting time: Meeting begins at 10 AM (social time at 9:30).

Accommodations: All meetings are realtime captioned by Captioners from Veritext/Paradigm (www.captioning-paradigm@veritext.com).

The meeting room is also looped for enhanced hearing directly to your hearing aids or Cochlear implant using T-coil.

HLAA TC
PO Box 26021
Minneapolis, MN 55426



First Class

Membership Form HLAA Twin Cities Chapter

Name.....

Address.....

City.....

State.....Zip.....

Phone.(area code).....

E-Mail.....

Newsletter via email included in all memberships

_____ Individual \$25 (includes digital newsletter)

_____ Professional \$50

_____ Donation _____

_____ Printed Newsletter (optional) \$15

Mail to: HLAA Twin Cities Chapter
PO Box 26021
Minneapolis, MN 55426



Welcomes You!

President - Robin Coninx president@hlaatc.org
Vice President - Kim Fishman vicepresident@hlaatc.org
Secretary - Christy Myers secretary@hlaatc.org
Treasurer – Sharon Witt treasurer@hlaatc.org

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