



# The Deaf Reader

## Table of Contents

|  |         |
|--|---------|
| President's Message.....   | Page 2  |
| Ohio Deaf Friends of the Library New Officers.....   | Page 3  |
| 2025 Volunteer of the Year Christine Stepien .....   | Page 4  |
| In Remembrance: ODFL Former Advisor, Beverly Cain's .....  | Page 5  |
| Helen Keller National Center: Walters - Smith Legacy Atrium Ribbon Cutting Ceremony.....                             | Page 6  |
| ASL Story Time Storytellers in the Public Libraries .....  | Page 8  |
| In Memory of Ken Aldrich: 1942 to 2025.....  | Page 10 |
| Gallaudet University Chapel Hall Honoring Indigenous Awareness Month.....  | Page 11 |
| Community Services for the Deaf KODA Camp News .....   | Page 12 |
| National Federation of the Blind of Ohio Chapter Conference .....  | Page 13 |
| A Trip to the American Council of Blind Ohio Chapter Conference.....   | Page 14 |
| Deaf Women of Ohio 2025 Holiday Party.....   | Page 15 |
| Dawn Watts' Interview with CantonRep.com   Repository .....  | Page 16 |
| Government's Anti-Diversity Policy Affects Deafblind Children .....  | Page 19 |
| 6th Annual Deaf-Themed Children's Art Contest.....   | Page 20 |
| ASL Story Time by Liliana Pokorny on January 3, 2026.....  | Page 21 |
| Book: <i>Rising From The Abyss of Grief</i> .....  | Page 22 |
| Deaf Seniors of America President's Message .....  | Page 23 |
| The Nation's First Driver Refresher Course for Adults 50+.....   | Page 24 |
| Book: <i>Deafhood and Empowerment</i> .....  | Page 25 |
| Ohio Deaf Association President's Message .....  | Page 26 |
| ViaQuest, Inc. Behavioral & Mental Health Services for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Individuals with Disabilities..... | Page 28 |
| Upcoming Events .....  | Page 29 |
| Contact Information .....  | Page 30 |

**HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

# President's Message

*Written by:* Danny Lucero

It is with deep gratitude and humility that I accept the nomination to serve as President of ODFL (Ohio Deaf Friends of the Library). This organization has always stood as a beacon of access, culture, and community—and I am honored to continue that legacy. I recognize the weight of this responsibility, yet I step into it with confidence, knowing that together—with our dedicated officers, committed board, and passionate supporters—we are capable of remarkable accomplishments.

As we look toward the years 2026–2028, I am inspired by the possibilities ahead. My vision for ODFL is bold, hopeful, and focused on securing our future so that generations to come can experience the power of ASL Storytelling in their libraries, homes, and communities.

As President, I am committed to:

- \* Establishing a strong fiscal foundation with a dedicated \$500.00 storytelling budget to support our artists and program needs.
- \* Forging statewide collaborations with libraries across Ohio so our ASL Storytelling programs can reach more children and families.
- \* Building an ODFL Storytelling Collection Library, preserving our stories and creating a legacy of Deaf cultural richness.
- \* Developing an ODFL home-based office that strengthens our communication, identity, and operational structure.
- \* Positioning ODFL as a national model is a shining example for libraries across America seeking to celebrate Deaf culture through storytelling.

But our vision does not end here. I believe that ODFL's greatest strength lies in our collective voice. Your ideas, your experience, and your passion are essential as we shape the future. I welcome your thoughts, your suggestions, and your dreams for what ODFL can become.

Together, we can build something extraordinary—an organization that not only serves today's communities but inspires future generations of Deaf storytellers, families, and leaders.

Thank you for your trust. I look forward to serving with an open heart, a clear purpose, and a shared commitment to the mission before us. Happy New Year.

With respect and inspiration,

*DL*

# Ohio Deaf Friends of the Library New Officers!

*Written by:* Dawn K Watts, *The Deaf Reader* Chairperson, and Juanita Hall, Co-Editor

During the November 20th Ohio Deaf Friends of the Library (ODFL) meeting, the ODFL members voted on the new ODFL officers. They added additional representatives for the two-year term from 2026 to 2028. The following officers and representatives were elected.

## **ODFL Officers:**

President: Danny Lucero

Vice President: Dawn Watts

Secretary: Christine Stepien

Treasurer: Debbie Brown

## **ODFL Representatives:**

North Representatives: Angie Potosky, Regis Gilchrist, Alma Sepulveda

Central Representatives: Brad Race, Julie Levine, Geo Rinker

South Representatives: Christopher Cooley, Britney Garstka, & Juanita Hall

Webmaster: Michael Homko

ODFL Parliamentator: Bob Donaldson-Pirc

ODFL Advisor: Allison Knight

Let's extend our huge congratulations to these newly elected ODFL officers and representatives. We appreciate their hard work serving as volunteers for the ODFL.



# 2025 Volunteer of the Year: Christine Stepien

*Written by:* Dawn K Watts, *The Deaf Reader* Chairperson, and Juanita Hall, Co-Editor

We are thrilled to announce that the Ohio Deaf Friends of the Library Volunteer of the Year Award goes to Christine Stepien!

Christine's dedication and hard work have made a lasting impact on ODFL. She has served in multiple roles, including Secretary, Children's Artwork Judge, and Ohio Deaf History Month Organizer and Contributor. Her passion and commitment to our mission truly embody the spirit of volunteerism. Dawn Watts, former ODFL President, took her out to a restaurant in Dublin, Ohio.

Please join us in congratulating Christine Stepien on this well-deserved honor!



Photo Credit: Dawn Watts & Microsoft Copilot Images



# In Remembrance: Former ODFL Advisor, Beverly Cain

*Written by:* Juanita Hall, Co-Editor

Former Ohio Deaf Friends of the Library (ODFL) advisor, Beverly Cain, the State Librarian of Ohio, passed away on November 18, 2025, following a recent medical emergency. She served for the ODFL for three years from 2016 to 2020. Beverly is known and appreciated for her strong commitment and dedication to service, mentoring library professionals, and providing accessibility for everyone. Known for her dedication to library service, she retired in 2020 after a 33-year career, which included ten years as Agency Director and State Librarian, before returning as Interim State Librarian in 2024 (Google, 2025; State Library of Ohio, 2025).

Key details regarding her service and legacy include:

- **Education:** Earned three degrees with a Master of Public Administration in 2009, a Master of Library Science degree in 1986 from Kent State University, and a Bachelor of Music degree from the University of Akron.
- **Career Highlights:** Served as Director of the Portsmouth Public Library System (1997–2010), Branch Manager at Upper Arlington Public Library (1992–1997), and worked at Medina County District Library (1986–1992).
- **State Library Leadership:** Led the development of Regional Digitization Hubs as a State Librarian and strengthened statewide resource sharing.
- **Interim Return:** Served as Interim State Librarian from April 2024 through early January 2025, assisting with the leadership transition.
- **Legacy:** Recognized for her role as a mentor to library professionals and a compassionate leader, she was celebrated for her commitment to providing access for all.

Beverly was the perfect role model with compassion, grace, and steadfast determination for others to reach their highest potential with accessibility. Her legacy will be remembered and carried on by future librarians (Google, 2025; State Library of Ohio, 2025).

Read more at the [Library Ohio Government website](https://library.ohio.gov/st-lib-beverly-cain): <https://library.ohio.gov/st-lib-beverly-cain>



Photo Credit: Google Images

## References

Google. (2025, December 18). *Beverly Cain, State Librarian* [Generative AI in search results].  
State Library of Ohio. (2025, November 18). *Former State Librarian Beverly Cain Passes*. State Library of Ohio.  
<https://library.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/lib/home/news-and-events/all-news/st-lib-beverly-cain>

# Helen Keller National Center: Walters - Smith Legacy Atrium Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

*Written by:* Juanita Hall, Co-Editor

There was an exciting event that occurred on November 17th, 2025, from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm at the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) with the unveiling ceremony of the Walter-Smithdas Legacy Atrium! Art Roehrig, accompanied by Dawn Watts, was invited to this ceremony. This event honors the extraordinary bond between Barbara Walters and Dr. Robert J. Smithdas, whose lives and friendship shaped the future of accessibility (Helen Keller Services, 2025a).



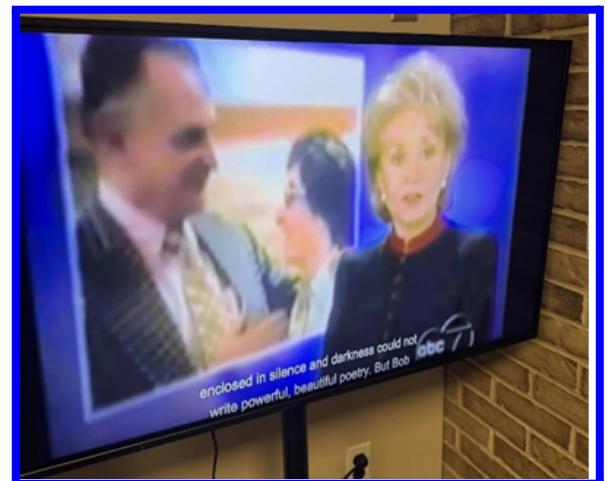
Barbara Walters is a household name, a trailblazing broadcast journalist who has interviewed global leaders such as Margaret Thatcher, Indira Gandhi; celebrities such as Barbra Streisand, Michael Jackson, Audrey Hepburn, Tom Cruise, and Eddie Murphy, and public figures such as Christopher Reeve, Martha Stewart, and Hillary Clinton (Google, 2025a).



Dr. Robert J. Smithdas is a well-known visionary DeafBlind educator and advocate. He made history by becoming the first DeafBlind person in the United States to earn a master's degree and doctorate. Dr. Smithdas served as the HKNC's Director of Community Education when the Center was established in 1967. He was a passionate advocate for the DeafBlind for 65 years until he retired in 2009. He transformed services for DeafBlind individuals, such as influencing national policy and setting new education and rehabilitation standards (Helen Keller Services, 2025b).

What makes this tribute even more remarkable is the extraordinary friendship between Walters and Smithdas—a bond rooted in mutual respect and a shared commitment to breaking

down barriers. Robert and Barbara's friendship started when she interviewed him on the Today Show in 1967, where they discussed his advocacy for the DeafBlind Americans. Dr. Smithdas impacted her strongly as she said this interview was the most memorable of her entire



career. He changed her understanding of communication. They developed a long-term friendship (Helen Keller Services, 2025b).

The Walters' estate contributed \$1 million to the Helen Keller Services to advance their work with the blind, DeafBlind, and low vision individuals to thrive in life. Their collaboration and advocacy efforts inspired generations that continue today (Helen Services, 2025b).



The Walters-Smithdas Legacy Atrium is more than a commemorative space; it is a model of accessible design, incorporating cutting-edge features to ensure full inclusion for individuals who are DeafBlind. From tactile signage and high-contrast visual elements to advanced assistive technology, the atrium sets a new benchmark for universal design in public spaces (Helen Services, 2025b).

Learn more about the [Walters-Smithdas Legacy Atrium and HKNC's mission](#) at:

<https://www.helenkeller.org/walters-smithdas-legacy-atrium>

Watch this [YouTube video where Art and Dawn](#) are shown!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lf30Cn3t6Gg>



## References

Google. (2025a, December 27). *Barbara Walter's Interviews* [Generative AI in search results].

Google. (2025b, December 27). *When did Barbara Walter and Dr. Robert J. Smithdas first meet?* [Generative AI in search results].

Helen Keller Services. (2025a). *Walters-Smithdas Legacy Atrium Ribbon-Cutting Event*. Helen Keller National Center. <https://www.helenkeller.org/walters-smithdas-legacy-atrium-event/>

Helen Keller Services. (2025b). *Opening Doors: Helen Keller National Center Unveils The Walters-Smithdas Legacy Atrium*. <https://www.helenkeller.org/walters-smithdas-legacy-atrium/>

# ASL Story Time Storytellers in the Public Libraries

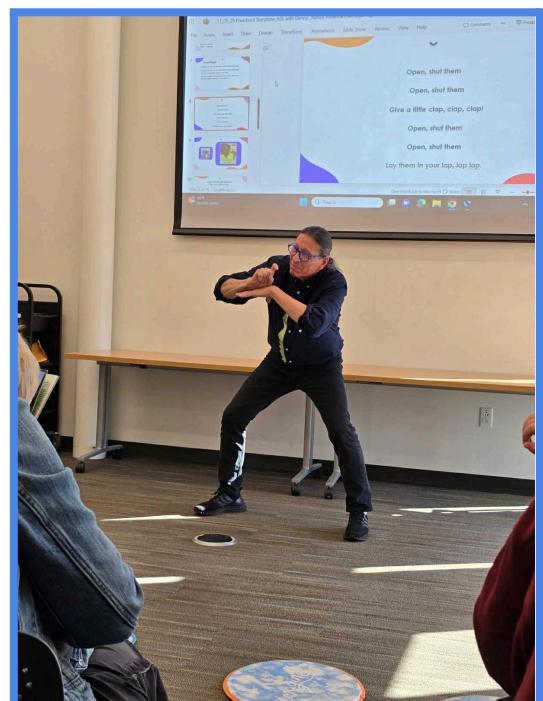
*Written by:* Dawn K Watts, *The Deaf Reader* Chairperson & Slideshow created by Juanita Hall, Co-Editor

A few months ago, the ODFL Library Advisory, led by Ms. Levine from Cleveland Heights Public Library, collaborated with Danny L. on a grant from the Federal Institute of Museum and Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) by the State Library of Ohio for the ASL Storyteller project. Additionally, Advocate for Kids partnered with us on this initiative. We were awarded a \$10,000 grant to support the program.

Initially, we launched the project at three public libraries, providing three Deaf ASL Storytellers and interpreters for a three-month period. The response was overwhelming, with many attendees, including children, expressing enthusiasm and interest in having more ASL Storyteller programming in the future.

There were three story times, one in Coventry Village Public Library, Cleveland Heights by Liliana Pokorny, Dayton Public Library by Danny Lucero, and Westerville Public Library, by Christine Stepien.

Enjoy watching the recent [ASL Story Time slideshow](https://youtu.be/OE0DqoB6Fuo): <https://youtu.be/OE0DqoB6Fuo>



In the future, the ODFL President Danny and Dawn Watts are very passionate about ASL Storyteller, we strongly believe that Deaf individuals as ASL Storytellers need to work in the Public Library. Danny and Dawn had a meeting with Canton Public Library for ASL Storyteller. We have our new ODFL Representative, Alma Sepulveda. We are looking forward to increasing the number of ASL Storytellers for the public libraries. Also, we will meet with a new ODFL Advisor at the Dayton Public Library on Jan 23, 2026.

If you are interested to be ASL Storyteller, please contact Dawn Watts at [dawnwatts7@gmail.com](mailto:dawnwatts7@gmail.com).



# In Memory of Ken Aldrich: 1942 to 2025

*Written by:* Juanita Hall, Co-Editor

Kenneth Lee Aldrich, fondly known as Ken, passed away unexpectedly and peacefully on December 24, 2025, surrounded by loved ones. Ken was born on September 11, 1942, in Chicago, Illinois. He lived a life marked by kindness, dedication, and service to others. He was a devout Catholic and was the perfect example of living his life in Christ's love through his actions and words throughout his life. Likewise, he was deeply loved by his family, friends, and Deaf community, leaving behind cherished memories and a legacy of compassion.

Ken was a proud member of the Deaf community. He earned his Bachelor of Arts from Gallaudet University in 1968 and went on teaching for the Ohio School for the Deaf. Ken's life was enriched by his love for family gatherings, outdoor activities, and helping those in need. He will be remembered for his generosity, sense of humor, and unwavering support for friends and relatives.

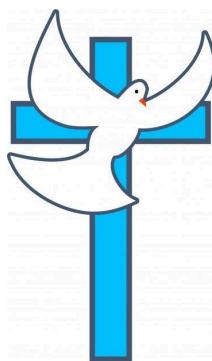


He is survived by his beloved family members, who will continue to honor his memory and celebrate the impact he had on their lives (Friedrich-Jones Funeral Home, 2025).

Read more on [Ken's obituary webpage](https://www.friedrichjones.com/obituaries/Kenneth-Lee-Ken-Aldrich?obId=46560766): <https://www.friedrichjones.com/obituaries/Kenneth-Lee-Ken-Aldrich?obId=46560766>

## Reference

Friedrich-Jones Funeral Home. (n.d.). *Kenneth Lee "Ken" Aldrich obituary*. Retrieved from <https://www.friedrichjones.com/obituaries/Kenneth-Lee-Ken-Aldrich?obId=46560766>



# Gallaudet University Chapel Hall Honoring Indigenous Awareness Month

*Written by:* Dawn K Watts, *The Deaf Reader* Chairperson

November is Indigenous Awareness Month, and we invite you to revisit and celebrate the powerful exhibition *We, Native Deaf People, Are Still Here!* at the National Deaf Life Museum. While this month offers a moment of reflection and recognition, Indigenous stories and artistry deserve to be celebrated every day.

It's hard to believe it's been one year since this groundbreaking exhibition first opened its doors. Building, installing, and curating such a monumental display was no small feat — and it took a remarkable team of community curators, artists, and museum staff to bring it all to life.

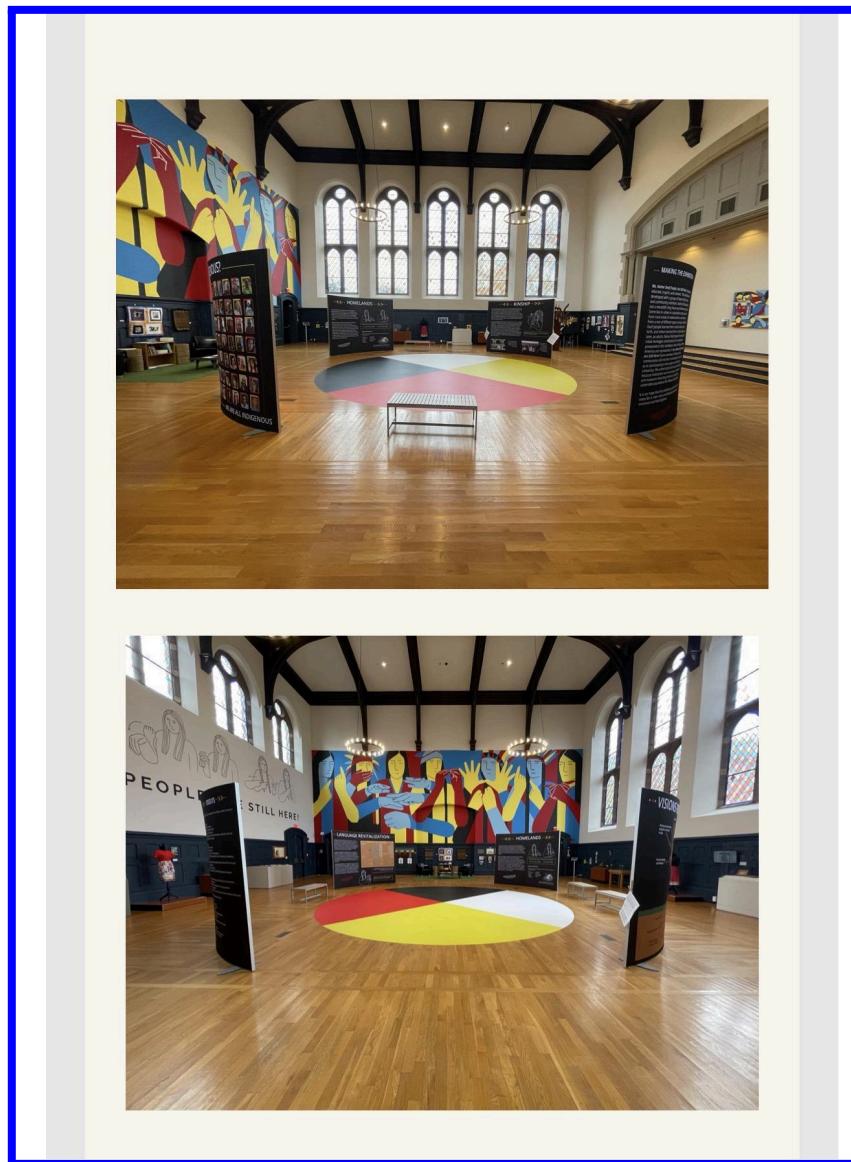




Photo Credit: Community Services for the Deaf Camp December Newsletter

The 2026 Community Services for the Deaf (CSD) Kids of Deaf Adults (KODA) Deaf Camp will be held on Sunday, June 14, 2016, to Friday, June 19, 2026. For more information about the CSD KODA camp, here is the [CSD KODA camp](https://csddaytoncamps.my.canva.site/koda) website: <https://csddaytoncamps.my.canva.site/koda>

Staff and CIT (Counselor In Training) Applications will open in January 2026.

Camper Applications will open in April 2026.

**All applications will be located on the CSD KODA Camp website!**



# National Federation of the Blind Ohio Chapter Conference

*Written by:* Dawn Watts, SSP/CN Ohio State Coordinator

Here is a link website:<https://nfbohio.org/convention>

Last fall, the National Federation of the Blind Ohio Chapter Conference held in Westlake, Ohio, invited Kacie Weldy, HKNC Regional Representative 5, as well as Jason Judy and Dawn Watts, to discuss the SSP/CN Pilot Program Service. They provided us with ASL interpreters.

Many attendees were unfamiliar with our service program, and we provided detailed responses to their numerous questions. HKNC offered additional information to meet their needs.



Photos Credit: Dawn Watts

# A Trip to the American Council of the Blind of Ohio State Conference and Convention

*Written by:* Janae L. Miller

The American Council of the Blind of Ohio held its annual state conference and convention from November 4 through November 16 at the Best Western Hotel in Strongsville, Ohio. The event brought together members and leaders from across the state for several days of collaboration, learning, and celebration.

The first day of the conference began with the Board of Directors' annual meeting, where we discussed the conference layout and the schedule of programs and activities. After the morning session, attendees enjoyed boxed lunches before heading out for a fun and educational group tour of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. The visit offered a fascinating look into the history of music and its many genres—an experience we all truly enjoyed.

That evening, my family and I had dinner at Pickle Bill's restaurant, where we shared great food and wonderful company. It was the perfect way to unwind after a full and exciting day.

Saturday was a particularly memorable day, filled with both business and celebration. Our business meeting was held in person and via Zoom, making it accessible for members throughout the state. During this session, we conducted elections for board members—welcoming new faces to the team and recognizing those continuing their service to the organization.

Later that evening, the organization hosted its annual dinner honoring individuals who have made significant contributions to our community—whether as Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs) or as dedicated service providers who make a difference every day. The evening also featured our annual auction, a wonderful tradition that raises funds to help the organization continue growing and serving its mission.

One note I'd like to share is that I currently serve as the Chapter President for the Columbus, Ohio Chapter of the American Council of the Blind. I also serve on the state affiliate's Board of Directors, as well as on a national level through my appointment to the Multicultural Affairs Committee—a group selected by the current national president to help ensure diversity and inclusion remain core values within the organization.

Overall, the conference was both productive and inspiring. It provided a meaningful opportunity to reconnect, reflect, and refocus on our shared mission to serve and advocate for the blind community across Ohio.

Warm regards,  
Janae L. Miller  
(614) 499-2814



# Deaf Women of Ohio 2025 Holiday Party

*Written by:* Dawn Watts, *The Deaf Reader* Chairperson



A large and engaging crowd attended the Deaf Women of Ohio (DWO) Holiday Party, with approximately 55 Deaf women participating. The event featured various games and a delicious lunch served by Tim Miller.

Deaf Women of Ohio will conduct their general meeting in the spring of 2026. Please stay alert for the date, which will be announced on Facebook.

We extend our appreciation to the DWO officers and committee members for their dedicated efforts in organizing this event.



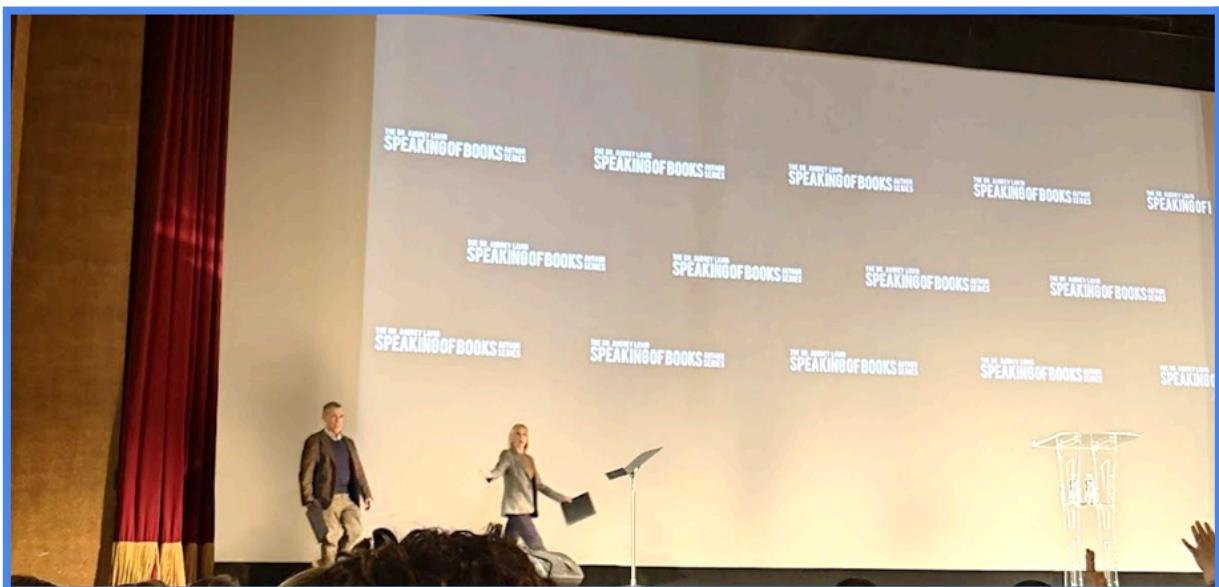
# Dawn Watts' Interview in [CantonRep.com](http://CantonRep.com) | The Repository on Marlee Matlin

*Written by:* Dawn K Watts, *The Deaf Reader* Chairperson

In one of her books, she wrote, “I’ll Scream Later.” I completed reading this book within 12 hours, and I found it to be very engaging. Previously, I did not have a strong impression of Marlee Matlin; however, after reading her autobiography, my perspective changed. I developed great admiration for her, especially for her courage in speaking out before the U.S. Congress about the importance of closed captioning years ago. Her personality remains energetic and dynamic. Following her presentation, I had the opportunity to ask her questions. She acknowledged my raised hand and gestured to me.

I introduced myself as being involved with Language Equality and Acquisition for Deaf Kids (LEAD-K) in Ohio and mentioned to the audience that our local Ohio legislator, Senator Casey Weinstein, supports the LEAD-K initiative. This initiative focuses on children aged 0-5 who are deaf and their hearing parents, many of whom are unfamiliar with sign language. I inquired whether she has plans to write another book about LEAD-K. She was enthusiastic and pleased to respond to my questions. At the conclusion of her remarks, she encouraged me by saying, “Do NOT GIVE UP!” and signed ILY! I also asked the audience to contact Senator Casey Weinstein to support the LEAD-K initiative. Most of them showed me their hands, waved in the air, and clapped! One of the reporters caught and interviewed me. (next page)

[Book: I'll Scream Later \(click\)](#)



**CantonRep.com | THE REPOSITORY**

## ENTERTAINMENT

# 'Always dream big.' Academy Award winner Marlee Matlin inspires Canton Palace crowd

**Ed Balint**

Canton Repository

Updated Nov. 7, 2025, 6:18 a.m. ET

**Key Points**

- Marlee Matlin, the first deaf actor to win an Academy Award, was the featured author Nov. 6 at a Stark Library event at Canton Palace Theatre.
- Matlin, 60, is also an advocate for closed captioning in television and streaming platforms.
- A documentary about Matlin's life was released this year and is on PBS, YouTube and various streaming platforms.

CANTON – Marlee Matlin summed up her mantra for life in three words — courage, dreams and success.

"Courage plus dreams equal success," the deaf actor and advocate for the deaf community said Nov. 6 through an interpreter at the Canton Palace Theatre. Her appearance was part of the Stark Library's Dr. Audrey Lavin [Speaking of Books Author Series](#).

To emphasize the message, Matlin, 60, taught a near capacity crowd how to sign each of the three words.

'CODA' actor Marlee Matlin inspires Canton, Ohio crowd with life story

11/7/25, 5:06 PM

Dawn Watts, 70, of Columbus is deaf and serves as president of the nonprofit Ohio Deaf Friends of the Library. An interpreter for the deaf and blind, she's working to get legislation passed in Ohio that would help deaf children in the education system and with their language needs.

Watts said through an interpreter that Matlin is an inspiration.

"I realize she went through difficult times like myself," said Watts, who wore a purple sweater because it's Matlin's favorite color. "I don't feel like I'm the only one."

Watts also had asked Matlin a question about efforts to assist deaf children with their education.

Matlin said language deprivation is a critical issue.

"It's very important to give (deaf) children the education they need," she said. "Language is vital; language is the top concern."

"We must give them everything they need and the equivalent of their hearing peers."

## **Mentors are Henry Winkler and Whoopi Goldberg**

Matlin said during her remarks that attending a public school was challenging.

Parental support was key.

"They taught me to own who I was at the same time the world around us made little accommodations for deaf people," she said.



# Government's Anti-Diversity Policy Affects Deafblind Children

*Written by:* Juanita Hall, Co-Editor

There are roughly 10,000 deafblind children in the United States, along with other disabilities who rely on government grants for equipment, specially designed phones, technology, books in braille, etc., to be able to have a fulfilling life in school, home, etc. (New York Times, 2025). Due to the current Government's anti-diversity policy, various multi-year grants for deafblind children's programs funded by the government have been cut or stopped, leaving these Deafblind children and parents without the funding they need to provide their children the support, education, and tools they rely on for communication, life skills, and education. Some of these funds were in the middle of their five-year grant cycles when they were terminated. The states mostly affected are Washington, Oregon, Wisconsin, and New England (Google, 2025).

These funds were cut because the grants had language about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), even though the government said they wouldn't cut special education. Therefore, due to the public outcry, the Department of Education decided to reroute some of the funds to an alternative organization for one year (Google, 2025).

To learn more about the individual deafblind children affected by these cuts, read this New York Times article:  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/15/us/trump-dei-funding-deaf-blind.html>

## References

Google. (2025, December 28). *Federal grants for the deafblind program*. [Generative AI in search results].

New York Times. (2025, December 15). *Trump administration proposes cuts to DEI funding, raising concerns for deaf and blind communities*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/15/us/trump-dei-funding-deaf-blind.html>



Photo Credit: Google Images

# 6th Annual Deaf-Themed Art Contest

Ohio Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind and KODA

Grades K-12

Sunday, March 8, 2026

Columbus Museum of Art

Create your Art there from 10 am to 1 pm (supplies provided)

Or

Email your finished 8 x 10 Art work to

[camillle@adv4kids.org](mailto:camillle@adv4kids.org) on or before March 1st.

## Winners:

1st place \$50.00

2nd place \$30.00

3rd place \$20.00



## Art Groups

K-2nd

3nd - 5th

6th - 8th

9th - 12th

3 Winners per art group will be announced at 1:30 pm at the event prizes awarded at the event and by mail. All arts will display at the Statehouse for Ohio Deaf History Month on March 13 to April 15, 2026.



# ASL Story Time by Liliana Pokorny on January 3, 2026



# ASL Storytime

SAT • JAN 3 • 11 AM  
Coventry Village Branch



An interpreter  
will be provided.



Come join deaf story teller Liliana Pokorny as she offers an ASL storytime! Join Liliana in signing, learning signs and doing crafts that celebrate American Sign Language and Deaf Culture! All ages welcome! No one is too young or too old to enjoy Liliana's storytimes!

This program is funded in part through a federal Institute of Museum and Library Services LSTA grant awarded by the State Library of Ohio and a Cuyahoga County Board of Developmental Disabilities Library Grant.



## Book: *Rising From The Abyss of Grief*

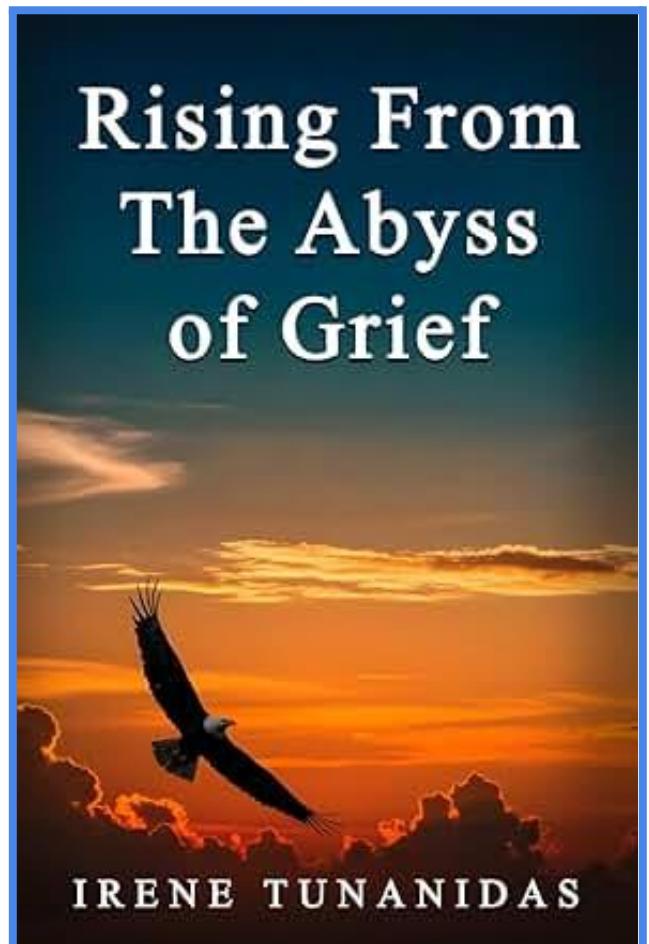
*Written by:* Irene Tunanidas, author and *The Deaf Reader* Co-Editor

Irene Tunanidas Amazon (click to order a book from Amazon)

In 2011, Miss Irene started writing her 53-page memoir about her 3-year journey as her mother's caregiver after her tragic accident in 2003. The book titled *Rising from the Abyss of Grief*. She finished the manuscript last summer. Amazon is selling it for \$15.00 on paperback and \$9.99 Kindle. If you want to know more details about Irene.

Click this [Who is Irene Tunanidas?](#)

Photo Credit: Irene Tunanidas



# Deaf Seniors of America President's Message

*Written and ASL Signed Video by:* Phil Aiello, Deaf Seniors of America President

## Message from the President

Click video to watch [President Aiello's ASL signed video](https://youtu.be/1BNiBIGvJBU) - <https://youtu.be/1BNiBIGvJBU>

Hello DSA Community -

As the final weeks of 2025 unfold, we pause to reflect on the journey we have traveled together. This season is more than a time of transition—it is a moment to honor the unyielding strength and vibrant spirit that each of you brings to our community. Your lives form a rich tapestry woven from countless moments of advocacy, innovation, and unwavering support for one another.

As your DSA President, I want to express my deepest gratitude to our members, friends, partners, and everyone who has stood with us throughout 2025. This year, we achieved so much together.

Because of your support, DSA continued to educate, advocate for, and uplift Deaf seniors across the nation. Every program, every workshop, every webinar—we accomplished all of it because of YOU.

As we look ahead to 2026, we invite you to continue supporting our mission. Giving Tuesday is here, and your donation—big or small—helps DSA expand our services, strengthen our community, and improve the lives of Deaf seniors. Your contribution ensures that the legacy and support network we've built together continue to grow stronger.

From the entire DSA Board: Thank you for believing in us. Thank you for supporting us. And thank you for standing with Deaf Seniors of America.

We appreciate you. We value you. And together, we will keep moving forward.

*“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”*

As the year draws to a close and the lights of the holiday season begin to shine, we send you our warmest wishes. May your home be filled with joy and laughter, the comfort of good company, and the peaceful warmth of cherished traditions. May the new year bring you abundant health, happiness, and renewed opportunities to connect with the people and passions you love.

Be well, stay safe, and enjoy this season of gratitude and celebration.

Happy Holidays and Happy New Year!

*Phil Aiello*

President, Deaf Seniors of America

# The Nation's First Driver Refresher Course for Adults 50+

*Written by:* Dawn Watts, The Deaf Reader Newsletter Chairperson, and Juanita Hall, Co-Editor

I am a member of Deaf Seniors of America and the AARP Executive Director agreed to collaborate! For 10 years, I have been a member of the AARP. The AARP Smart Driver™ course is designed for individuals aged 50 and older, offering an opportunity to refresh driving knowledge and skills. This program helps drivers stay informed about changes in road conditions, vehicle technology, and personal driving abilities that occur over time. By enrolling, drivers can learn strategies to improve safety and confidence behind the wheel (AARP Driver Safety, n.d.).

As the nation's first driver refresher course for older adults, the program is beneficial for all ages and does not require a driving test. Upon completion, participants receive a certificate, which is nice to have as many use to qualify for auto insurance discounts. In fact, approximately 91% of surveyed drivers who took this course reported using their certificate to obtain such savings (AARP Driver Safety, n.d.).

The course emphasizes practical, up-to-date information and evidence-based techniques to promote safer driving. Some of the beneficial topics taught in this course include managing distractions, understanding the effects of medications, and using modern safety features effectively. These resources aim to help drivers maintain independence and reduce risks on the road to maintain driving safety (AARP Driver Safety, n.d.).

Read here for more information: <https://www.aarpdriversafety.org/why-take-our-course/>

## Reference

AARP Driver Safety. (n.d.). *Why take our course*. AARP Driver Safety. Retrieved December 29, 2025, from <https://www.aarpdriversafety.org/why-take-our-course/>



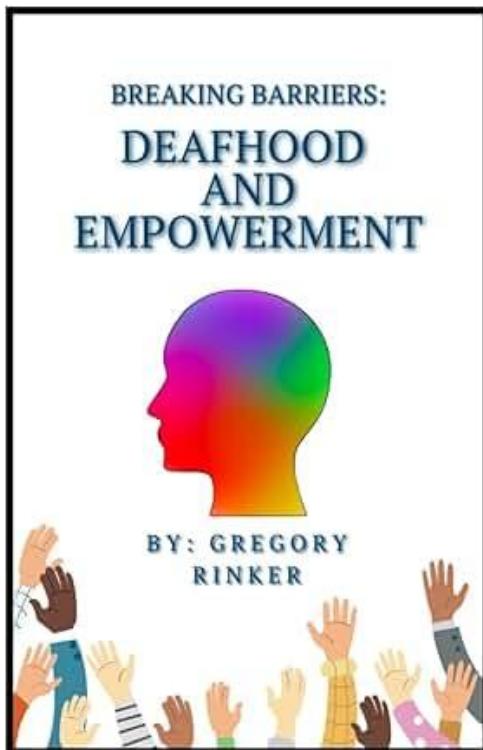
(American Association of Retired People)

Photo of AARP logo used with permission.

## Book: *Breaking Barriers: Deafhood and Empowerment*

*Written by:* Geo Rinker

This book explores the unique mental health challenges faced by the deaf community, emphasizing systemic barriers such as communication gaps, cultural misunderstandings, and stigma that limit access to effective care. Highlighting the critical importance of culturally competent services including ASL fluent providers and the recognition of deaf culture as a vital component of care. It advocates for systemic reforms like increased funding, accessible resources, and inclusive policies. Through actionable strategies and community-driven initiatives to reduce stigma and promote mental health literacy, this work envisions a transformative, equitable future for mental health care that empowers and uplifts the Deaf Community.



Order book at Amazon: [Geo Rinker](#)



## OHIO DEAF ASSOCIATION

# Ohio Deaf Association

*Written by* ODA President, Dr. Marsha Moore

Greetings, ODA and ODFL members and friends!

So many things have happened with the Ohio Deaf Association since the last report. Here are a few highlights!

### ODA Deaf/KODA Youth Camp Director Position

A Camp Director job posting has been approved by the ODA board and was posted on Facebook and Instagram. We would like to start the person in that position in January 2026. [Camp Director Position](#)

### **ODA Deaf/KODA Youth Camp – June 18–21, 2026 – MARK YOUR CALENDARS TODAY!**

Registration for the Summer 2026 ODA Deaf/KODA Youth Camp will open on January 15, 2026. We have only 40 spots open, so be sure to register early. Scholarships will be available for campers who need them. See flyer for details here: [Camp 2026 Flyer Link](#) and email [TheOhioDA@gmail.com](mailto:TheOhioDA@gmail.com) with questions.

### Legislative Updates - LEAD-K Ohio– by Dawn Watts

On Tuesday, October 14, 2025, Senator W and his assistants met with Dr. Lou at the Ohio School for the Deaf. Attendees included Anthony Coy, Principal; Julie Stewart, Assistant Principal; Cedar Wells, Cheryl Prunsinski, myself, and one additional individual.

Cheryl delivered an insightful presentation on language deprivation among Deaf children, supported by statistics and research from the National Association of the Deaf. The research indicates that approximately 70% of Deaf, DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, and Hard of Hearing children lack adequate language access. She shared her report via email.

The next step involves a meeting with ASHA at the Ohio Statehouse with Noah Turoff, Senior Legislative Aide.

Dawn also attended the Marlee Matlin presentation at the Canton Public Library on Thursday, November 6th. She discussed parts of her book, "I Am Not Alone Anymore," which is straightforward and can be read in a day. This book focused on language deprivation and how it impacted her life. There was a discussion on the LEAD-K initiative, and Marlene Maltin supported it and hoped that it went through for Ohio.

### **Pickleball Fundraiser – March 7, 2026**

Mark your calendars! We're thrilled to team up with ASLIN and DWAVE for the Ohio Deaf Pickleball Fundraiser. This exciting event supports all three organizations and will be held on March 7. Register now! See flyer for more information at: [Updated PB Tournament Flyer 3.7.26.](#)

### **ODA Board Meetings around Ohio**

We've set up the next few board meetings around the state. Please plan to meet us at one of the meetings so we can hear from you what you want ODA to do for you. You can find the tentative schedule at [ODA Board Meetings 2025-2026](#). If you want us to host a board meeting in your area, please email [TheOhioDA@gmail.com](mailto:TheOhioDA@gmail.com). See you at the next Board Meeting soon! ODA wants to see you!

### **New Centralized Calendar**

Remember to continue to send in your news, flyers, articles, and events to ODA! We will post them on FB, IG, and on our website. You can find it at [www.ohiodeaf.org/event](http://www.ohiodeaf.org/event). The goal is to help promote community events and to reduce schedule conflicts.

As always, thank you for your ongoing support of ODA's mission. Your energy and involvement keep our community connected, informed, and thriving.

From all of us at ODA, we send you warm wishes for a Happy and Safe Holiday! See you all in 2026!

Warm regards,

Dr. Marsha Moore

President, Ohio Deaf Association

[www.ohiodeaf.org](http://www.ohiodeaf.org)

Warm regards,

Dr. Marsha Moore, President Ohio Deaf Association

[www.ohiodeaf.org](http://www.ohiodeaf.org)

# ViaQuest, Inc. Behavioral & Mental Health Services for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Individuals with Disabilities

## Behavioral & Mental Health Services

ViaQuest offers specialized mental and behavioral health care tailored to a wide variety of populations, including those in nursing facilities; individuals with intellectual, developmental, or dual sensory disabilities (e.g., deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, CODA); as well as families, couples, and the senior community (ViaQuest, Inc., n.d.a)

## Counseling Services

- Licensed Signing and Deaf Counselors**

ViaQuest's team includes licensed counselors and social workers who are fluent in sign language. They support individuals dealing with trauma, anxiety, depression, abuse, and other mental health concerns through evidence-based talk therapy.

- Flexible Service Delivery**

Clients can receive support individually or attend group sessions.

These take place in a variety of settings—whether at a ViaQuest office, in community spaces, or within nursing facilities—so that care is both accessible and tailored.

- Root Cause & Goal-Oriented Approach**

Therapy focuses on uncovering the underlying drivers of behaviors and thought patterns. Together with clients, counselors set clear, actionable goals and replace harmful thoughts with healthier alternatives.

- Personalized Assessment and Planning**

ViaQuest conducts thorough assessments to evaluate each individual's unique needs. From these evaluations, customized treatment plans are created, ensuring that each person has a targeted roadmap to success (ViaQuest, Inc., n.d.b).

Image Source: Microsoft Chat | M365 Copilot

### Behavioral & Mental Health for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Individuals with Disabilities



Website: [viaquestinc.com/contact-us/](https://viaquestinc.com/contact-us/)

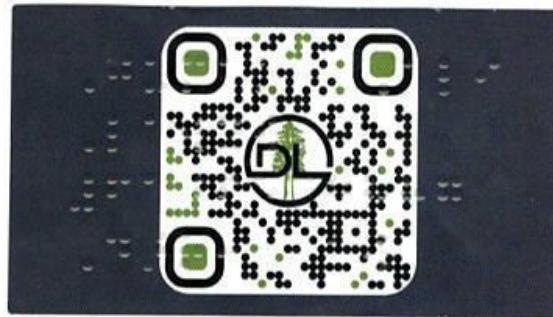
References ViaQuest, Inc. (n.d.a). *Behavioral & Mental Health*. Retrieved from

<https://viaquestinc.com/core-services/behavioral-mental-health/> ViaQuest, Inc. (n.d.b). *Facility Services – Behavioral & Mental Health Services*. Retrieved from <https://viaquestinc.com/core-services/behavioral-mental-health/facility-services/>

# Upcoming Events

If you need an attorney for an American Sign Language Access lawsuit, use this QR code below.

Darr Law: Jumana M. Ali  
Attorney  
JMA@Darr.law  
[www.Darr.law](http://www.Darr.law)  
614-653-7887



If you have any issues regarding this newsletter, please contact the Director, Editor, or Co-Editors at [Thedeafreader@gmail.com](mailto:Thedeafreader@gmail.com)

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The Next Deaf Reader Newsletter: **April 2026**

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## COMPUTER

If you need someone to fix your PC or Apple computer, Justin Watters, a Deaf Computer technician, can help and support you. You can contact him at [jwwatters3@gmail.com](mailto:jwwatters3@gmail.com). He will charge you for the service.

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## DINGO

- 1) **Senior Citizens for the Deaf at the Columbus Colony Housing II**, Multi-Purpose Room 1105 Colony Drive, Westerville, Ohio, on the first and third weeks every month on Thursday from 11:00 am to 3:00 pm.
- 2) **Columbus Deaf Club at the Columbus Colony Housing II**, Multi-Purpose Room, 1105 Colony Drive, Westerville, Ohio, on the third week of the month on Saturday, from 5:00 pm to 9:00 pm.

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**Deaf Photography Business: Etta Photography** 100% ASL user photographer

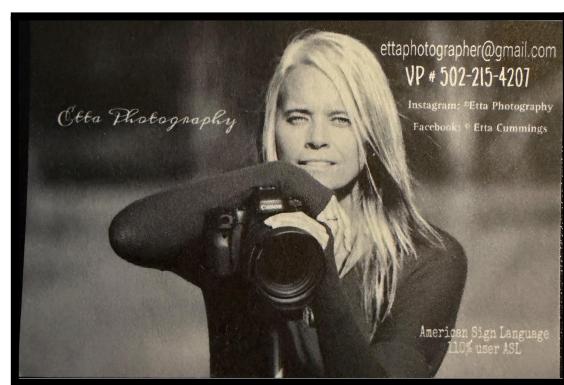
### Contact Information:

Email: [ettaphotography@gmail.com](mailto:ettaphotography@gmail.com)

VP #502-215-4207

Instagram: [@Etta Photography](https://www.instagram.com/@Etta_Photography)

Facebook: [@Etta Cummings](https://www.facebook.com/@Etta.Cummings)



# Contact Information

## Standing Committees

**Library Advisor:** Allison Knight

**Deaf Mentor Program:** Danny Lucero and Dawn Watts

**Webmaster:** Mike Homko

**Bylaws:** Dawn Watts

**Bylaws Parliamentarian:** Bob Donaldson-Pirc

**President:** Danny Lucero

**Vice-President:** Dawn K. Watts

**Secretary:** Christine Stepien

**Treasurer:** Debbie Brown

## Representatives

### North Representatives: Angie Potosky, Regis Gilchrist, and Alma Sepulveda

Allen, Ashland, Ashtabula, Auglaize, Carroll, Columbiana, Crawford, Cuyahoga, Defiance, Eric, Fulton, Geauga, Hancock, Hardin, Harrison, Henry, Holmes, Huron, Jefferson, Lake, Lorain, Lucas, Mahoning, Medina, Mercer, Ottawa, Paulding, Potage, Putnam, Richland, Sandusky, Seneca, Stark, Summit, Trumbull, Tuscarawas, Van Wert, Wayne, Williams, Wyandot, and Wood

### Central Representatives: Brad Race, Julie Levine, and Geo Rinker

Coshocton, Delaware, Licking, Fayette, Fairfield, Franklin, Knox, Marion, Madison, Morrow, Muskingum, Perry, Pickaway, and Union

### South Representatives: Christopher Cooley, Britney Garstka, & Juanita Hall

Adams, Athens, Belmont, Brown, Butler, Clark, Clermont, Clinton, Champaign, Darke, Gallia, Greene, Guernsey, Hamilton, Highland, Hocking, Jackson, Lawrence, Logan, Meigs, Miami, Monroe, Montgomery, Morgan, Noble, Pike, Preble, Ross, Scioto, Shelby, Union, Warren, and Washington

## The Deaf Reader

Ohio Deaf Friends of the Library (ODFL) website: <https://ocdlibrary.org/about-us>

ODFL email: [thedeafreader@gmail.com](mailto:thedeafreader@gmail.com)

ODFL Mailing address:

P.O. Box 917

Worthington, Ohio 43085-09147

Chairperson: Dawn K. Watts Co-Editors: Juanita Hall, Brad Race, and Irene Turnanidas

*The Deaf Reader* newsletter editors reserve the right to review and make any necessary edits in the enclosed articles.