

The History of NAOBI-Atlanta

It all started in 1999, with an initial application request to become a NAOBI chapter being initiated by Persis Bristol and Brenda Terry. They then drafted the Constitution and By Laws in May of 2001. At NAOBI's June 2001 Annual Conference in Las Vegas, Atlanta was announced as Affiliate Chapter #6 under the national structure. The first NAOBI-Atlanta meeting occurred on December 15, 2001, where a group of Sign Language Interpreters came together to meet at the call of Persis Bristol, CI/CT, NAD V and Eric Toland, the Southern Region NAOBI (National Alliance of Black Interpreters) Representative.

The message stated that there would be an important meeting. The very first meeting of NAOBI-Atlanta was held at the Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture & History. The following individuals were in attendance at that initial meeting: Eric Toland, Franklin Eaves, Mignon Jackson, Brenda Terry, Janet Hill, James Thomas, Felicia Bornes, and Persis Bristol.

The first election occurred at that same meeting with the following officers being elected:

Persis Bristol – President
Brenda Terry – Vice President
Franklin Eaves – Secretary
Felicia Bornes – Treasurer

On January 12, 2002, NAOBI-Atlanta hosted the "NAOBI Southern Chapter Symposium" at Georgia Perimeter College in Clarkston. The NAOBI Southern Chapters included NAOBI-New Orleans, NAOBI-Houston, NAOBI-Alabama, and NAOBI Atlanta. Two workshops, "Enhancing Your Vocabulary" and "Register Variations" were presented by Anthony Aramburo, President of NAOBI, Inc.

The 2002 NAOBI National Conference was held in New Orleans, LA. NAOBI-Atlanta strongly supported that event, and had a full page ad listing 20 officers and members. There was no conference in 2003, but the membership of NAOBI-Atlanta remained very active. In 2004, NAOBI-Atlanta put in a bid to host the

National Conference. In 2006, NAOBI-Atlanta hosted NAOBI's 10th Annual National Conference here in Atlanta. The turnout was amazing, and the local support of NAOBI-Atlanta members and friends made it a smashing success!

The year of 2007 was a challenging year for NAOBI-Atlanta. Participation started to wane, there was not a consistent meeting space nor defined dates for meetings, and our beloved founding member, Eric Toland passed away. With there not having been a meeting since February of that year, in June of 2007, Persis Bristol sent an "All Call" email inviting everyone to a picnic full of "Sun, Food and Fellowship!" People responded positively, and that picnic was held on August 18th at Midway Park in Decatur. Members were inspired and the fire that was lit in 2007 took ablaze in 2008!

In 2008, things started to fall in place nicely. The By Laws were updated, a new logo was selected by contest, and a connection through Jean Plant at Georgia Perimeter College, ensured a regular meeting space. We teamed up with ABDA (Atlanta Black Deaf Advocates), and later secured meeting space at GACHI (now known as GCDHH – Georgia Center of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing). Renee Olson hit the ground running as President of NAOBI-Atlanta with Linda Ogletree as Vice President, Franklin Eaves as Secretary, and James Goddard as Treasurer.

Membership in NAOBI-Atlanta soared under the leadership of President Renee Olson, growing from 33 in 2008, to 87 in 2010. Under Renee's leadership strategy and vision philosophy, the organization thrived. Renee served NAOBI-Atlanta well, until her untimely death in 2010. During that time, NAOBI-Atlanta established Study Groups, and focused on training for passing the RID (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf) national exam, the NIC.

In 2011, The Inaugural Shaunta Renee Olson Memorial Scholarship was established, and the Award Luncheon was held at the Porter Sanford Performing Arts Center in Decatur. The first two scholarships were presented to Georgia Perimeter College students, Sherita Robinson and Vicki Bass. Don Clark, President and CEO of Don Clark and Associates, and Certified Interpreter, was the speaker for this event. This became an annual event, where scholarships are available to eligible applicants.

In 2014, the Eric Fitzgerald Toland Award was established. This award is in honor of the late Eric Fitzgerald Toland, who was instrumental in NAOBI-Atlanta being established. This award goes to the most active NAOBI-Atlanta member for a given year, offering funding to the awardee to be used for a single event of testing, ASL workshops, or ASL Conferences.

NAOBI-Atlanta celebrates Black History Month at our February meetings, having had Black Deaf individuals sharing their experiences, Black Deaf Storytellers, and Black History Activities, trivia, etc.

In 2015, 2016, and 2017, NAOBI-Atlanta partnered with Gallaudet Interpreting Services, bringing Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI), Training workshops to the Atlanta Area. There was a total of 38 individuals who participated in these training sessions, and of those who received the required 40 hours of RID training with us, 5 individuals were successful in passing the written portion of the CDI Examination.

We were fortunate to facilitate this training and testing at Georgia State University, Clarkston, with Diane Lynch and Damita Boyd administering the CDI testing over that three year time period. Gallaudet Interpreting Services, Sorenson, LATN Language Solutions, Georgia Center of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and Georgia Perimeter College-Clarkston, all partnered with us in some way as we brought this tremendous CDI Training Opportunity to the Atlanta Area. We are truly thankful to have been instrumental in this cause.

NAOBI-Atlanta participated in several "Give Back" initiatives, providing Personal Care Gift Boxes to Helping Hands for the Deaf in 2016 and 2017. In 2018 and 2019, we provided much needed school supplies to the children at The Atlanta Area School for the Deaf.

In 2018, the By Laws were updated, and we had a tremendous Spring Symposium which drew participants from multiple states including California and North Carolina. This symposium was facilitated by Dr. Leandra Williams, and Dr. Anthony Aramburo was a guest interpreter for this symposium, serving alongside

other NAOBI-Atlanta interpreters. That symposium was a smashing success, with 35 individuals attending.

In 2018, we were invited by LaTanya Jones, M.S.M., NIC, and the Assistant Director of The CATIE Center at St. Catherine University, to partner with them in an effort to share their information and training opportunities with our members and friends. We hope to be instrumental in the efforts to help increase the number of Certified P.O.C. Interpreters in the field of Sign Language Interpreting.

We voted on a new logo by contest, and introduced that new logo at our January of 2019 Business Meeting. We started to have difficulty with a regular meeting location, and started to use Dekalb County Libraries for our monthly meetings. We also were very excited to open our virtual/online store, naobiatlanta.qbstores.com. Apparel with the NAOBI-Atlanta logo can be purchased online, including a wide variety of items, such as jackets, hats, bags, shirts, and more.

In 2019, we invested in the Zoom Virtual Platform, not realizing that the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic would require the use of Zoom for all future meetings and events. This platform allowed more members to be active participants because of the convenience of the virtual meetings. We saw participation increase from an average of 15-20 participants for monthly meetings to 35-40 participants.

In 2020, NAOBI-Atlanta established an Interpreter Mentoring Program, where mentors and mentees are paired for skill building purposes. This program has been very successful, with Deaf individuals and Nationally Certified Interpreters serving as mentors. Also in December of 2020, NAOBI-Atlanta will officially start celebrating the anniversaries of our founding, as we celebrate 19 years of our existence in 2020.

A very special "thank you" to the contributors of our NAOBI-Atlanta History goes to: Persis Bristol, Marilyn Teague, Damita Boyd, Marvette St. Clair, Linda Ogletree, James Goddard, Franklin Eaves, and Vicki Bass.