

SERTOMAN

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Sertoma Awards

Meet Julie Hejtmanek

Accomplishing the Impossible

Club News



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Accomplishing the Impossible

How Affiliation with Sertoma Makes Possible the Impossible

Founded in 1861, the Kansas School for the Deaf in Olathe, Kansas excels in providing a quality education in a language rich environment for deaf and hard of hearing students from across the state. As a Sertoma National Affiliate and one of over 240 participants in Sertoma's Adopt-An-Agency program, the School routinely accomplishes the impossible for children of all ages and their families.

Leslie Caldwell, a speech/language pathologist, joined the School's staff in 2003 and for the last three years has served as its Community Resource Facilitator. Caldwell saw firsthand the benefits of being a Sertoma National Affiliate during her studies at the University of Kansas' Schiefelbusch Speech-Language-Hearing Clinic and she points gratefully to the benefits national affiliation has brought to the Kansas School for the Deaf. "Sertoma has been a wonderful partner for the School," said Caldwell. "There have been so many improvements in technology that help us better serve deaf and hard of hearing students but updating equipment is a very expensive proposition that just wouldn't be possible without Sertoma's support." Through its national affiliation with Sertoma, the School has received Sertoma grants over the years to update its audiology equipment and purchase two Ubi-Duo units for its dormitory and infirmary.

While keeping up with technology changes in equipment is important, equally important is keeping up with improvements in teaching methodology

and treatment models. Again, thanks to its affiliation with Sertoma, the School's audiologist and six speech/language pathologists have the financial means to attend continuing education classes that keep the staff at the top of their game to best serve students and their families.

At its Olathe campus, the School offers a traditional K-12 curriculum for both day and residential students, as well as a preschool program for children ages three and over. American Sign Language (ASL) is the school's first language but students actually receive a bilingual education with ASL used as the communication vehicle to teach English. Using a sandwiching technique, students learn to associate and translate the grammar and syntax of ASL to that of the English language, and vice versa. This bilingual education is critical in preparing the students to compete and succeed with their hearing counterparts in college classrooms and the workplace. The School also provides students the benefits of interacting with deaf adult role models. Caldwell says, "90% of deaf children are born to hearing families. And while it's important that the children learn to communicate in the hearing world and get a quality education, it's equally important that they see firsthand that they can grow up to become teachers, nurses, administrators or anything else they put their heads to."

The School also operates an outreach program that serves deaf and hard of hearing children across the state. Staff members routinely travel long dis-



tances to train teachers in both mainstream and special education classrooms on the most up to date communication and educational methodologies for their deaf and hard of hearing students.

The financial support generated for the School through its Sertoma national affiliation is not the only way in which the School benefits from its relationship with Sertoma. As an adopted agency of the Sertoma Club of Kansas City (of which Caldwell is a member), the School has a dedicated cadre of volunteers who give both their money and their time to support the School's annual fundraising event. Formerly referred to as "Deaf Sunday", the event was revamped this year and renamed RACE (Raising Awareness for Children's Education). Now expanded to two days, the event features a car show and contest, food booths and vendors, tours and demonstrations held at the neighboring Kansas Deaf Cultural Center (more on that in a minute), children's activities and education classes for parents of deaf and hard of hearing children.

Caldwell would like everyone to know just how much the staff, students and families of the Kansas School for the Deaf appreciate the support of Sertoma. And she would also encourage Sertoma clubs to seek out ways in which they might adopt an affiliate in their area so they, too, can help make possible the impossible.

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Across the street from the Kansas School for the Deaf, you'll find the Deaf Cultural Center. The Center began operating in December 2005 as a museum and archives repository for the School. Since then, the Center has become a nationally recognized resource center for the deaf and hard of hearing and routinely fields requests from individuals and organizations across the country for information and guidance on issues related to hearing loss.

Although not a national affiliate of Sertoma, the Center recently forged a new partnership with the Sertoma Club of Kansas City, thanks in large part to its Executive Director, Sandie Kelly. Kelly, who joined the Center's staff 18 months ago, retired from the School after 31 years of service that included the position of Community Outreach Facilitator currently held by Caldwell. ("A tough act to follow" according to Caldwell.) Kelly's experience with Sertoma literally comes from "both sides of the street" in Olathe and gives her a unique perspective on the relationships and benefits that come from being both a Sertoma national affiliate and an adopted agency of a Sertoma club. She sees the Center's relationship with Sertoma as a natural fit with the Center serving as a conduit to help spread information about Sertoma's mission while benefitting from the volunteer and financial support it receives from local Sertomans.

The Center is a privately funded 501c(3) nonprofit organization. Financial support comes from the Kansas Educational Foundation, established to help



support the Center, along with donations from the Sertoma Club of Kansas City of which Kelly is a member. In her dual role as both Executive Director of the Center and Sertoma club member, Kelly welcomes the support the Center receives while stating that support for the School must be the club's first priority.

One of the ways Sertoma club members serve the Center is by providing volunteers to promote attendance at its "Deaf Awareness Day at the K" fundraiser. This year's event will be held on September 26 when the Kansas City Royals host the Minnesota Twins at Kansas City's Kauffman Stadium. Club members help by promoting ticket sales with the Center receiving a portion of each ticket price to help fund its operations. Kelly points to this event as not only a great way to raise funds but a terrific way to raise the visibility of the deaf community and the work of the local Kansas City club.

Kelly says that many speech and hearing affiliates are struggling, particularly in the current economy. She encourages every Sertoma club to reach out and find an affiliate to adopt locally or sponsor as a national affiliate. "Affiliates are at the center of Sertoma's hearing health mission and clubs really miss a golden opportunity by not partnering with one of the many outstanding affiliates out there," she said. According to Kelly, partnering with an affiliate can make a tangible difference for both the affiliate and the club. "The affiliate benefits from the

financial and volunteer support it receives from the club; the club also benefits because affiliation bolsters the club's credibility in the community and helps promote membership by spreading the word about what the club does." She suggests clubs ask around their community, talk with their local chambers and search the web for affiliates. She also encourages clubs interested in developing an affiliate partnership to look into the Hearing Loss Association of America (www.hearingloss.org). This national association serves individuals with hearing loss and professionals in the field. With 200 chapters encompassing all 50 states plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, Kelly sees a wealth of opportunities for Sertoma clubs across the country to spread the Sertoma message, support service projects at the local level and acquire new members.

Kelly points to statistics that show 32 million people in this country have significant hearing loss and that 58,000 service men and women returning from Iraq do so with varying degrees of hearing loss. "These folks need help, information and resources but most important, they need to know they are not alone," she said. By seeking out affiliate partners, Sertomans can play a vital role in connecting these people with the resources they need.

For more information on sponsoring a Sertoma National Affiliate, contact Sertoma Headquarters (816-333-8300) and ask for Holly or Meghan. ♦