

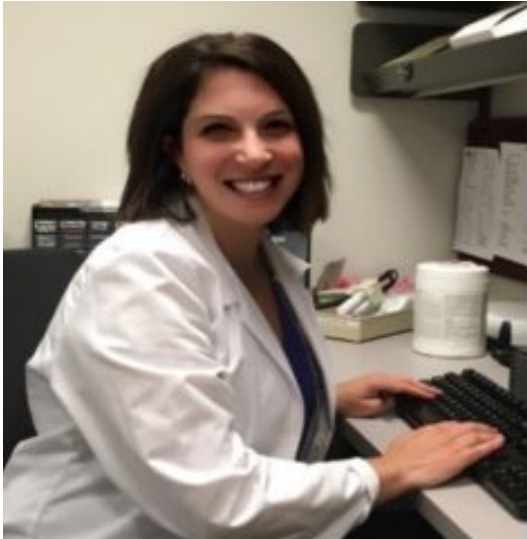


AVAA AMPLIFIER

Quarterly Newsletter of the Association of VA Audiologists

Spring 2023: AVAA Past, Present and Future Edition

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK:



A Look Back: A common highlight of this edition of the newsletter is reflecting on our past. Specifically, we wanted to honor the founder of AVAA and AVASLP, Dr. Doug Noffsinger.

Dr. Noffsinger, along with many others, was the visionary behind the AVAA and AVASLP. While it is easy to focus on today and look ahead to the future, it is also important for us to celebrate our past. In our work as VA audiologists, we have the privilege of learning from many exceptional leaders in our field.

Many of my preceptors and professors are beginning their transitions into retirement. I'm incredibly thankful for their coaching, leadership, and mentorship – I've learned powerful lessons from each of them. I encourage you too to reflect upon the colleagues and professionals that inspire, motivate, and teach you both now and in the past. If possible, reach out and thank them for their contributions to your success.

As audiologists, we work hard to stay current with the constant changes and updates to hearing aids and assistive technology. What remains unchanged is our need to connect with patients and colleagues. Communication, connection, and belonging are core to who we are as professionals and to the patients we serve. I think it is vital to periodically pause and step away from the technology to celebrate our progress and to remember our roots.

Please enjoy the pictures and stories our VA leaders have shared of Dr. Noffsinger. Thank you for sharing your memories of Doug. And "cheers" to continuing and evolving the amazing work of the many great audiologists that have come before us.

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Remembering Dr. Doug Noffsinger
- JDVAC 2023 Recap
- AVAA Awards
- AVAA Board Updates
- Pets of AVAA
- AVAA Soundbites



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Jessica Preston, Au.D.
AVAA President



AVAA tribute:



Doug Noffsinger

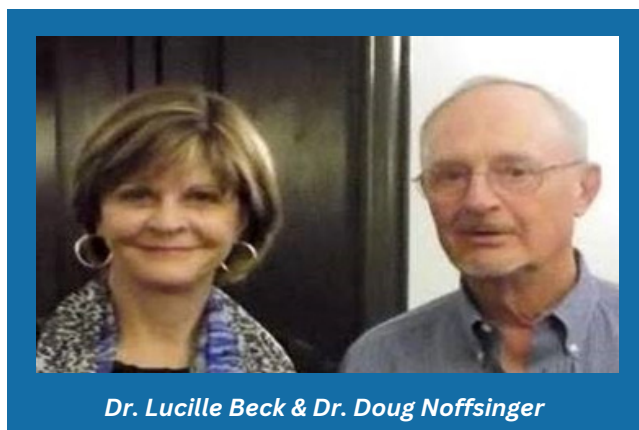
*Our colleague, friend, and AVAA founder, **Dr. Doug Noffsinger**, was an honored audiologist & chief of Audiology and Speech Pathology Service at the Greater Los Angeles VA Healthcare System. He retired in 2004, but wrote this letter reflecting on the history and vision for the creation of AVAA and AVASLP. Dr. Noffsinger passed away in March 2023.*

Looking Back

By: Dr. Doug Noffsinger

When I chaired the Audiology and Speech/Language Pathology Field Advisory Council in the 1990s and early 2000s, we talked often about the need to take what was then a superb nationwide collection of individual professionals and form a more cohesive body. It seemed to me and the Council that problems engendered by distance and by poor communication might be helped by forming national organizations. Dr. Lu Beck, our Director, agreed. In addition to providing a partial solution to communication problems, we thought national organizations and annual meetings might help us all identify better as part of larger groups with defined and important goals and missions.

We also thought that organizations that became the Association of VA Audiologists (AVAA) and the Association of VA Speech/Language Pathologists (AVASLP) could help in networking among members, would provide a vehicle to trumpet our successes and challenges through an annual national report from Dr. Beck, and might present us with opportunities to exercise more authority within and outside VA. We also recognized that national meetings could provide unbridled opportunities for education and dissemination of information.



Dr. Lucille Beck & Dr. Doug Noffsinger

Remembering Doug (continued)



West Los Angeles VA ASPS staff around 1982

Since we knew no better, we formed the two associations mentioned earlier. Although the birthing took much work which need not be detailed here, we were cognizant all the while that making a case for change to other VA departments, to industry, to agencies, and to the public often was enhanced by having our arguments made by individuals who represented established organizations that were recognized and valued for their goals and their membership numbers.

The organizations worked from the beginning. There were some fluctuations in direction, attendance, motivation, and pizzazz, but they generally worked, and often worked spectacularly.

I, at least, was satisfied that we had accomplished many of the things we had wanted to do. I was honored to serve as the first head of AVAA and received the Honors of the Association while I was still alive and coherent, an honor that thrills me still.

When we were thinking about creating the organizations, there were other problems of concern to us, big ones. Forming the AVAA and AVASLP were steps toward having mechanisms to deal with some of the bigger problems as well. Many of those problems concerned a divergence between what we were—well-trained, independent professionals—and how we were viewed by some governmental including VA's officialdom. Despite a professional evolution that had resulted in an Audiology and Speech/Language Pathology workforce in VA that was well-trained, well-regarded, and functionally independent to make patient-care decisions, we were regarded as somewhat less than that by parts of VA that dealt primarily with personnel and workforce issues. This had little to do with evil intent. It was primarily a holdover of personnel regulations and rules that had been little changed for decades.

Remembering Doug (continued)

Making fundamental changes in the old rules and regulations was a long effort full of hopes and disappointments and delay. I will not bore you with details of negotiations and battles that went on for years, both in and outside VA. Suffice it to say that after years of really hard work and inspirational leadership from Lu Beck, we finally got personnel folks and Congress and government unions and a host of other parties to either help us get to a hybrid Title 38 system, or at least not deter us. Just getting some folks to agree to not fight with us was often a victory. The new system promised to have its own problems and ambiguities, but it at least offered the opportunity for our colleagues to succeed and be rewarded based on their training, effort, and achievement, and to be less handicapped by antiquated notions of what kind of professionals we are.

I left after being a cheerful warrior in these affairs for many years. The struggles for implementation of the new world were just beginning, and it was already obvious as I exited my VA career that coordination of the effort nationwide to assure equal implementation on similar timetables at all facilities was, at best, a work in progress. As I have watched from afar, progress has been slow but in the right direction. This is inevitable in a system as complex as VA with almost as many competing interests as patients. "When you've seen one VA, you've seen one VA."

But it is progress, even if it seems too slow. One problem that must be dealt with honestly is the conflict between the kind of recognition/compensation system that is best for the organization, and the understandable desire for automatic recognition of academic degree status. I thought back in my active VA days that a system that combines recognition of training, effort, and achievement was best. I still do.



*Dr. Noffsinger and West Los Angeles VA
ASPS team having fun in costume*

***AVAA would like to thank Dr. Noffsinger's friends and
colleagues for the photo submissions for this newsletter.***

JDVAC 2023 RECAP

By: Kaitlin Thoden, Au.D.

JDVAC 2023 Conference Chair



After hosting the past two conferences virtually, JDVAC was back in person this year! The conference was held at the Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada. The conference theme was Whole Health- Bet on What Matters to You and it did not disappoint! We celebrated our 15th JDVAC this year and it was highly attended!



We kicked off the conference with a wonderful presentation by Cindi Wilson and several VA audiologists discussing the integration of Whole Health within the VA, followed by an amazing lecture on neurocognitive brain changes in hearing loss and the effects of hearing aid use by Dr. Anu Sharma. Dr. Judy Schafer partnered with Esteban Zuniga from blind rehabilitation to discuss dual sensory loss.

Dr. Elizabeth Lima provided several whole health moments for us to take a moment for ourselves, there was a recharge room, and whole health posters scattered around the conference center.

Monday nights social was a roaring good time. We had an outstanding turnout and everyone was dressed up in their best 1920's attire. We had a wonderful slide show of our vendors, awesome music, food, drinks, and of course a photobooth.



JDVAC 2023 Recap (continued)

Tuesday was a great day of learning with Dr. James Hall and Dr. Frank Lin, as well as several posters and field presentations. We also listened to our motivational speaker US veteran, Luis Rosa-Valentin who is a bilateral cochlear implant user, as well as a triple amputee. We ended the day with a spectacular Vegas show at Cirque du Soleil- KA at MGM grand.



Wednesday was our final day of the conference and was just as busy. Dr. Neil and Kay Cherian discussed mechanical considerations and approaches for tinnitus, Dr. Karen Lambert and Dr. Robin Pinto discussed vestibular clinical case studies and Dr. Melissa Papesh gave us a view into Auditory processing considerations. The rest of the day highlighted the work of VA and military audiologists, as well as our industry partners.

Our vendors showed up in force and were, as always, there to provide information and hands on experiences with their products. Without their support, we would be unable to host the conference.

We would like to thank everyone that attended and the countless volunteers. The conference would not be possible without everyone's hard work and dedication.

We hope to see you at JDVAC 2024 in California!



Looking for more JDVAC 2024 info? Follow us on social media for the latest updates!



JDVAC 2023 Executive Committee
Kaitin Thoden, Au.D. (left)
LCDR Seth Garcia, Au.D., Ph.D. (center)
Delia Karahalios, Au.D. (right)

AVAA 2023 Awards

Presented at JDVAC 2023



*Mary Kelly Bone, Au.D.
receiving the
ILT. Frank B. Walkup IV
Distinguished Service Award*



*Kathy Gates, Au.D.
receiving the AVAA Research
or Education Award*



*Christine Ulinski, Au.D.
receiving the AVAA
Honors of the
Association Award*



*David Jedlicka, Au.D. & Kaitlin
Thoden, Au.D.
receiving the AVAA
Customer Service Award*



*Mark Sanders, Au.D., winner
of the AVAA Innovation &
System Redesign Award*

AVAA Executive Board

Keeping with our "past, present, future" theme, we asked our most recent **AVAA past-Presidents** to reflect on their time and experiences on the AVAA Board.



Delia Karahalios, Au.D.

AVAA President 2021-2022

The saying begins, "When you've seen one VA..." In my three years on the AVAA board, that saying means something different to me now.

Serving as AVAA President, I have had the honor of connecting with, learning from, and growing alongside Audiologists across the nation. I have met and partnered with clinicians who serve in rural CBOCs and large metropolitan medical centers. The daily processes may differ, but the Mission is shared. I leave my seat on the board feeling more connected to my fellow VA Audiologists and feeling a greater sense of pride in my profession and organization.



David Jedlicka, Au.D.

AVAA President 2020-2021

Serving as AVAA President was the most meaningful experience of my career. During my time as President, I wanted to strengthen our relationships with other audiology professional organizations, improve communication between the AVAA board and its members, and ensure that the board continued to meet the needs of the membership.

We were able to surpass every goal that I set for the board because of the hard work and dedication from our fellow board members and volunteers in the organization. Despite the successes of my time on the board, my favorite part of the experience was meeting many amazing audiologists and developing new, lifelong friendships.

AVAA Board Updates (continued)

**JR McCoy, Au.D.****AVAA President 2019-2020**

Being a part of the AVAA board was a wonderful opportunity to work with a great group of people. There were a lot of challenges that year (COVID), but I think our board did a great job being proactive in representing VA Audiology.

**Christine Ulinski, Au.D.****AVAA President 2018-2019**

Being on the AVAA board was a fantastic experience, working with terrific, committed audiologists for the betterment of our profession.

One of the highlights from my tenure on the board was establishing the Externship Webpage for VA facilities to post their externships in a centralized location. This has allowed students and universities looking for VA experiences to go to one location to see options and afforded greater visibility for VA externship offerings.

Our Current AVAA Board Members::

*Jessica Preston, Au.D.**President**2022-2023**Michele Gortemaker, Au.D.**President-Elect**2022-2023**Kaitlin Thoden, Au.D.**Secretary**2021-2024*

AVAA Board Updates (continued)

Many thanks to our departing AVAA Board Members:



*Delia Karahalios, Au.D.
Past-President
2022-2023*



*Ilana Glick, Au.D.
Treasurer
2020-2023*



*Darrin Worthington, Au.D.
Member-at-Large
2022-2023*

MEET OUR 2023-2024 PRESIDENT-ELECT

*Danielle Crawford, Au.D.
Phoenix VA Healthcare System*

Danielle Crawford, Au.D., CCC-A currently works with the Phoenix VA Healthcare System as a supervisory audiologist at the Northwest CBOC.

What is your favorite part of being a VA Audiologist?

Everyone says this – because it's true – but my favorite part of being a VA audiologist is helping our Veterans. I cannot put words to how rewarding it is to bring the joy of hearing to these men and women who are so deserving! It is easy to forget in our busy days, but we make a BIG difference for a lot of Veterans and their families.

What is the funniest thing that has ever happened during your time at VA?

When working at the Nashville VA, an announcement came over the PA system where a woman calmly said, "There are chickens loose in the parking garage, there are chickens loose in the parking garage. If you have chickens in your car, please come get them, they are loose in the parking garage." We all got a big kick out of the fact that someone brought chickens to their appointment at VA. Hopefully the chickens were safely reunited with their owner!

Where is your favorite place to vacation?

My parents live in FL on the Gulf Coast, so I love vacationing there for the beach AND family time all in one visit!



AVAA Board Updates (continued)

MEET OUR 2023–2026 TREASURER

Jocelyn Sysko, Au.D.
Atlanta VA Medical Center

Dr. Sysko is the cochlear implant program manager and staff audiologist at the Atlanta VAMC.

**What is your favorite part of being a VA Audiologist?**

I love the variety of care and service that we offer. Not only in the breadth of practices that an audiologist would provide but wearing “different hats”. For example: Working with TBI, neuropsych, mental health, social work, low vision, whole health, mentorship, and other interdisciplinary care. I can say with pride that my colleagues and I truly do it all.

What is your best memory as a VA Audiologist?

Hands down, the Veterans you meet. Working with a Battle of the Bulge and a D-Day Veteran tops the list. They are just national treasures. My D-Day Veteran's family brought in a picture of him in uniform and I remarked that he looked just like Clark Gable. At that time he was about 99 years young, and he replied, “Yep, I was a real ladykiller!!!!” 😊 😊

What is your favorite dessert?

Regardless of the weather outside, mint chocolate chip ice cream!

MEET OUR 2023–2024 MEMBER AT LARGE

Stacey Sturgulewski, Au.D.
Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital

Dr. Stacey Sturgulewski is the Implantable Hearing Device Program Coordinator at the Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital.

**What is your favorite part of being a VA Audiologist?**

My favorite part of being a VA Audiologist is watching a Veteran's quality of life improve when provided with hearing aids or cochlear implants.

What is was your most rewarding VA patient experience?

The most rewarding part of my job is working with cochlear implant patients. I had a fairly young patient who was becoming more and more socially isolated as a result of his hearing loss. His wife was feeling disconnected from him. After he received his cochlear implant, he became more engaged and sought out opportunities to meet with family and friends. His wife told me that his cochlear implant saved their marriage.

What is your favorite television show?

Oh that's an easy question!!! Schitt's Creek is the best TV show of all time! I even learned how to “fold in the cheese” while watching it. 😊

Pets of AVAA

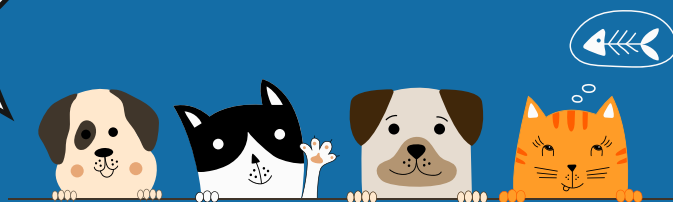


Coco is an almost 3 year old Australian Shephard. She has tons of energy and loves to go on daily runs and walks. Coco belongs to our current AVAA President, Dr. Jessica Preston from the West Haven CT VA. Dr. Preston is hoping that when Coco turns 3 in June, she will calm down a bit!

Meet Ekko! He is a sweet and gentle love bug. He can be found following his human parents around the house, playing with his cat sister Lili, or napping on the corner of the couch. He is a purring machine and wants to be friends with everyone he meets. Ekko belongs to Dr. Ilana Glick of the Miami VA.



**We want to see your
fur friends!**
**Email AssnVAAuds@gmail.com
so we can feature your pet!**





AVAA Soundbites



Support AVAA! You can pay voluntary dues at www.myavaa.org. Your dues support our externship database, the AVAA website and much more! Thank you for supporting AVAA!



Interested in volunteering to help with JDVAC 2024? E-mail Liz Gdula at: elizabeth.gdula@va.gov



Have an idea for AVAA Amplifier content? Suggestions for our AVAA website? Let us know! E-mail: AssnVAAuds@gmail.com



Keep an eye on your inbox for the AVAA Member Survey coming later this year! This is a great way for AVAA to get your feedback about how we can best serve our members. In order to reach as many VA audiologists as possible, please make sure your colleagues are registered to receive our emails by having them sign up with a non-VA email address at: www.myavaa.org



In the next AVAA Amplifier:
All things Extern!