



AVAA AMPLIFIER

Quarterly Newsletter of the Association of VA Audiologists

Summer 2026

From the President's Desk



Dear Colleagues,

It is an incredible honor to serve as President of the Association of VA Audiologists. I look forward to working alongside each of you during the coming year. You make a meaningful difference in the lives of Veterans every day. Whether restoring communication, managing complex vestibular disorders, advancing tinnitus care, mentoring students, or embracing new technology, our work extends far beyond the clinic. We improve quality of life, foster independence, and create lasting human connection. As we begin another year, AVAA aims to highlight priorities: connection, communication, and growth.

Connection means strengthening our community across the VA system. Our members represent an extraordinary breadth of expertise, and we hope to create more opportunities for us to learn from one another, celebrate one another, and collaborate across facilities.

Communication means ensuring members know what AVAA is doing on their behalf. I want our organization to remain transparent, approachable, and responsive. Your ideas, concerns, and perspectives matter, and I encourage you to stay engaged throughout the year.

Growth means continuing to invest in the future of our profession. From supporting students and externs to expanding educational opportunities and promoting clinical excellence, we have an exciting opportunity to strengthen audiology within the VA while preparing the next generation of leaders.

This year, we also hope to recognize the incredible work happening every day throughout our system. Behind every innovative clinic, successful quality improvement project, mentorship story, or patient success is a colleague whose dedication deserves to be celebrated. AVAA exists because of its members, and I look forward to highlighting your accomplishments throughout the year.

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Follow us on social media!



From the President's Desk (continued)

I invite each of you to become involved, whether by attending our educational events, serving on a committee, contributing to the newsletter, mentoring a colleague, or simply sharing your ideas. Every voice strengthens our organization.

Thank you for the work you do each day on behalf of our nation's Veterans and for the passion you bring to our profession. I am excited for what lies ahead, and I look forward to serving you over the coming year.

With appreciation,

Paris Florence, Au.D.

AVAA President

president@myavaa.org



AVAA Announcements

Your 2026-2027 AVAA Board has been hard at work on some recent projects:

- New online voluntary dues payment method -Coming soon!
- Improved VA Audiology externship website layout and updates
- Ongoing exploration of a portal for externs to apply to multiple VA Audiology externships in one place
 - Continued AudiologyOnline presentation planning

Externship Planning 101

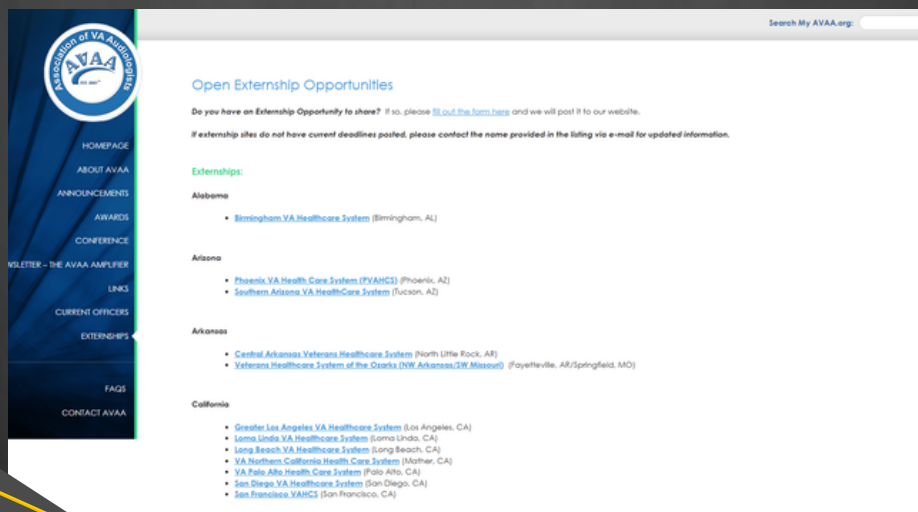
Is your site preparing for interviewing 2027-2028 externs?

AVAA's externship webpage is your ONE STOP SHOP for advertising your site's externship.

Universities across the country know about our externship webpage and direct their students to this page for the latest information about available VA externships.

Visit the AVAA Externship Webpage to review your site's posting or to add your site to our listing.

For some sample externship interview questions, click here to visit the Winter 2026 edition of the AVAA Amplifier.



Did you know? The VA National Audiologist Group e-mail only includes VA Audiologists. Send those 2nd and 3rd year students over to the AVAA externship webpage instead!

JDVAC 2026... Pure Magic!

There was definitely magic in the air at **JDVAC 2026**! Our annual conference of VA and Military Witches and Wizards was held in the bewitching city of Orlando, Florida in March 2026. This year's theme, "**Where Hearing Meets Magic**" did not disappoint!

We started off our wizardry training with a great presentation by **Dr. Joshua Alexander**, who taught us how to use our magical wands in AI-driven hearing aid fitting fundamentals. **Dr. Colleen Le Prell** and **Dr. Catherine Palmer** gave us new spells for measuring outcomes for hearing interventions. As every good witch and wizard knows, ethics is an important part of Audiology sorcery, so **Dr. Jennifer Stidley** lit the way to improving our ethical knowledge. We concluded our very busy first day with an enchanting evening at the *Magic After Dark Social*.

After a restful night's slumber in the dormitories of the DoubleTree at the Entrance of Universal Orlando, our group of wizards and witches returned to their studies, starting the day with a fascinating lecture on aging by **Dr. Michael Seidman**. We practiced the art of innovative speech in noise assessment with **Dr. Matthew Fitzgerald**. The headmistress of cochlear implants, **Dr. Camille Dunn**, used her crystal ball to tell us all about the future directions of these life changing devices. And of course, no JDVAC would have been complete without a visit to the Exhibitor Hall Alley, where our exhibitors showcased all of the tools and supplies that help us do our Audiology magic!

As our time at JDVAC 2026 came to an end, **Dr. Delia Karahalios** and **Dr. Mary Kelly Bone** showed us the importance of building strong teams among the houses of healthcare when working with Veterans with CAPD. **Dr. Dave Jedlicka** taught us the skills of how to be effective headmasters and headmistresses when working with new wizards and witches. And finally, all of the witches and wizards of JDVAC 2026 were spellbound by the presentation by **Kevin Quitmeyer** about the witchcraft that goes on at DLC every day!

And while muggles might say otherwise, we can solemnly swear that **JDVAC 2026** was better than good! We are excited to "rock on" at **JDVAC 2027** in Cleveland on March 22-24!



AVAA 2026 Awards

Presented at JDVAC 2026



***Michele Gortemaker, Au.D.
receiving the
1LT. Frank B. Walkup IV
Distinguished Service Award***



***Chad Gladden Au.D.
receiving the Doug
Noffsinger Honors of the
Association Award***



***Tara Zaugg, Au.D.. winner of
the AVAA Research
or Education Award***



***Stacey Surgulewski, Au.D.
receiving the AVAA
Customer Service Award***



***Ashley Zambetti, Au.D.
receiving the AVAA
VA Early Career Professional
Award***



***VA Pittsburgh Audiology -
Inpatient Management
Team (AIM), winner of the
AVAA Innovation & System
Redesign Award
(accepted by Dr. Zambetti)***



Meet your 2026-2027 AVAA Executive Board



Paris Florence, Au.D. - President

Paris Florence, Au.D. is the Vestibular Program Manager at the Washington DC VA Medical Center. She is passionate about vestibular disorders and developing the next generation of VA audiologists. She completed her Doctor of Audiology degree at Salus University after earning her bachelor's degree in Speech-Language Pathology from Xavier University of Louisiana. Paris serves on the Audiology Field Advisory Council (FAC). She enjoys finding new ways to improve patient care, build strong programs, and help move the profession forward. A New Orleans native now living in the Washington, DC area, Paris believes the best part of audiology is the opportunity to improve someone's quality of life; sometimes with technology, sometimes with education, and always through connection. When she's not at work, you'll likely find her reading, traveling, or spending time with her family and friends. Paris is honored to serve as President of the Association of VA Audiologists and looks forward to supporting AVAA's mission while strengthening the community of VA audiologists across the country.



Melissa Pereira, Au.D. - Past-President

Mel Pereira, Au.D., is the Audiology Section Chief for the VA Northern California Health Care System and immediate Past President of the Association of VA Audiologists (AVAA). She began her career as an active duty Army Audiologist and continues to serve today as a Major in the U.S. Army Reserve. Originally from New York and now happily calling Northern California home, Mel has learned that West Coasters usually soften the message while New Yorkers get straight to the point. Somewhere in the middle is where she tries to live. Mel has a hard time turning down a challenge, is convinced there's a solution to almost every problem, and has accepted that "this will only take five minutes" are some of the most dangerous words in healthcare. She enjoys mentoring others, building strong teams, and finding practical ways to make life a little easier for both Veterans and her colleagues. Outside of work, Mel loves traveling, experimenting in the kitchen, and spending time with family. As a proud mom and military spouse, she's looking forward to her husband's return from deployment and their next adventure together. She considers the friendships she's built through AVAA to be one of the greatest gifts of her career and is excited to continue serving the organization as Past President.

Meet the AVAA Board (continued)

*Molly Brown, Au.D. - President-Elect*

Molly Brown, AuD is the Chief of Audiology at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center in Charleston, SC. She is a member of the VA's Cochlear Implant mentoring team, which helps educate and mentor up-and-coming CI Audiologists. She has served on the JDVAC poster, student, and app committees. She received her AuD from the University of Pittsburgh in 2018. In her personal life, Dr. Brown is a mom to her 5 year old son, Elliott. She and her son enjoy spending time outside, particularly at Charleston's beautiful beaches and parks. She is also a voracious reader and is always looking for a good book recommendation and knits beanies for NICU babies in her spare time.

*Stacey Sturgulewski, Au.D. - Secretary*

Stacey Sturgulewski, Au.D. has been an audiologist at the Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital in the Chicagoland area for 18 years. Her area of speciality is cochlear implants and serves as the Co-Coordinator of the VHA Cochlear Implant Mentorship Program. In addition, she is also the Co-Coordinator of the VHA Quarterly CI Conference Calls. Previous to her role of AVAA Secretary, Dr. Sturgulewski served as the AVAA Member-at-Large. She has previously served as a Social Chair for JDVAC 2022-2025. Dr. Sturgulewski obtained her Au.D. from Rush University in 2005. As a native Chicagoan, she enjoys spending time in the city exploring new restaurants. After her days of working with patients, Dr. Sturgulewski loves to relax with a good book or take a walk with her favorite pup, Abby.

*Emily James, Au.D. - Treasurer*

Emily E. James, Au.D. works at the Pittsburgh VA as the student education coordinator and specializes in vestibular testing. She earned her Bachelor's in Linguistics at Carnegie Mellon University and Doctor of Audiology degree from Vanderbilt University School of Medicine then worked at a neurotology practice before joining the VA. Dr. James is part of the team at Pittsburgh VA expanding vestibular bedside testing to inpatient floors and the Emergency Dept. Off the clock, she volunteers as advisor for her sorority chapter at Carnegie Mellon University.

*Elizabeth Elkins, Au.D. - Member-at-Large*

Elizabeth Elkins, Au.D., is a staff audiologist at the Alvin C. York VA Medical Center in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. She earned her Doctor of Audiology degree from Vanderbilt University School of Medicine in 2014 and previously spent eight years practicing at the Swedish Neuroscience Institute in Seattle, Washington. Dr. Elkins has served on the JDVAC Registration/App Committee since 2023 and continues to volunteer with an auditory research lab outside of her VA role. She lives in Nolensville with her husband, two sons, and their dog, Stella. She is excited to serve as Member-at-Large for AVAA and looks forward to supporting collaboration and engagement within the organization.

Pets of AVAA



Meet Stella! Stella is the beloved companion of **Dr. Elizabeth Elkins**, Staff Audiologist at the Alvin C. York VA Medical Center in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. An 11-year-old Boston Terrier originally from Yakima, Washington, Stella is a seasoned professional in the art of mischief and firmly believes that any food left unattended on a table has been abandoned and is fair game. Don't let her age fool you—Stella remains delightfully lawless. She has been known to wiggle through fences with surprising determination, keeps a watchful eye on the neighborhood, and takes her self-appointed security duties very seriously. She'll let you know the moment a squirrel, delivery driver, or suspicious leaf enters her jurisdiction. When she's

not plotting her next caper, Stella is incredibly cuddly and affectionate. She's happiest snuggled up beside her favorite people, especially if there is a blanket to burrow under. Now entering her mischievous senior era, Stella is looking for a baby brother to mentor... or corrupt. Applicants should enjoy chasing, cuddling and understand that any unattended snack may mysteriously disappear.

Likes: Snuggles, neighborhood surveillance, escape artistry, and snacks she definitely wasn't supposed to have.

Dislikes: Closed gates, being told "leave it," and anyone suggesting she's "too old" for trouble.

Saber is a 7 year old kitty who grew up during the pandemic (where he received a ton of attention!). He was adopted at just 6 weeks old by **Dr. Rachel Kansky's** (Miami VA) family. Saber is very polite and friendly, always looking forward to meeting new visitors and getting more playtime.



We want to see your
fur friends!
Email newsletter@myavaa.org
so we can feature your pet!





Looking for a cool, sweet treat? We've got an awesome, less-mess Frozen S'Mores recipes that is perfect for those hot summer days!

FROZEN S'MORES

Ingredients

- 1 packet instant chocolate pudding
- 16 oz Cool Whip, divided
- 1 (7oz) jar marshmallow fluff
- Graham crackers, halved
- Mini chocolate chips



Mix 1 packet of instant chocolate pudding with 8oz of Cool Whip. Mix 1 (7oz) jar of marshmallow fluff with 8oz of Cool Whip. Place halved graham crackers in a lined baking sheet or dish. Spread the marshmallow mixture over the graham crackers. Add a layer of mini chocolate chips. Spread the chocolate mixture over the chocolate chips. Top with another layer of halved graham crackers. Freeze for 3 hours, then slice and serve.



Have an idea for the next issue of the AVAA Amplifier? Let us know!

E-mail us at:
newsletter@myavaa.org

