

## History of the Ohio Association of the Deaf

The Ohio Association of the Deaf, founded in 1961, was formerly called the Ohio Deaf Motorists Association. Three founders, two deaf gentlemen and one hearing businessman met in 1960 to discuss auto insurance companies' discriminatory practices against deaf drivers due to their deafness. These visionary founders, Robert O. Lankenau, Dick Petkovich and David W. Wilson, a hearing businessman, met with auto insurance companies to convince them that deaf drivers were capable of operating a vehicle and had the ability to obey traffic laws. One day they formed a meeting with several auto insurance agents, including Thomas Osborne who formed a partnership with David W. Wilson, co-founder of the Ohio Association of the Deaf. Thomas Osborne decided that a proposal was needed to form an organization to protect civil rights of deaf drivers.



The proposal stemmed from a report submitted by a Colorado judge named Sherman Finesilver who brought national attention to the safe driving records of deaf drivers in 1960. He published articles about their driving records, compiled statistics, and conducted defensive driving workshops for them around the country. This publicity was a benefit to deaf people and helped focus increased attention on their safe driving records.

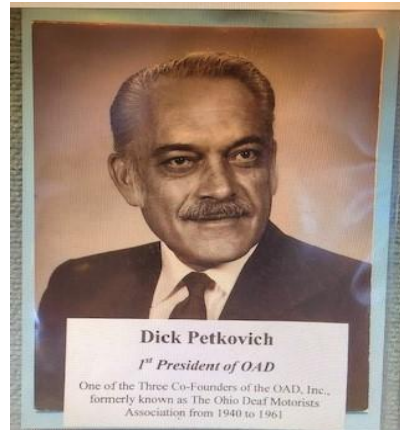
(source: National Association of the Deaf)

During OAD's founding on February 23, 1961, ten OAD district chapters were created. One spring day during the same year, OAD's founders and their colleagues met with Ohio Governor Frank Lausche during the signing ceremony at the state capitol. OAD became an official 501(c)3 organization with Ohio Governor Lausche's signature.

The first OAD Convention was held in Cincinnati in 1962, the birthplace of the National Association of the Deaf, founded in 1880.

(Source: <https://camcca.wordpress.com/edmund-w-booth-deaf-forty-niner/?fbclid=IwAR10seZg72Z22AC7EU-HSqZODBAQEP-EjWxoqEz8v0fQlhI31d5s-4uKP3w>)

OAD elected its first officers: Dick Petkovich, President; Thomas Osborne, Vice-President; LeRoy Duning, Executive Secretary; Robert O. Lankenau, Recording Secretary; Lonnie Irvin, Treasurer, and Herman Cahen, Financial Director.



**Dick Petkovich, 1st OAD President**

Ohio Association of the Deaf's Executive Board enjoyed close fellowship with officers from nine OAD district chapters: Cleveland #1; Cincinnati #2; Columbus #3; Akron #4; Toledo #5; Dayton #6; Lima #7; Youngstown #9 and Portsmouth #10. Mansfield was the only district chapter that did not survive after a few years due to the low number of members. District chapter officers shared a strong bond with their parent organization and many events planned in each district were met with much success.

OAD state officers and their spouses traveled around the state to see how each district chapter was faring with their service to its deaf community. Suggestions were made for improvement and several district chapter officers earned a special recognition from the state for their outstanding service in the Ohio Deaf Community.



Ohio Association of the Deaf, a member-serving organization, produced an active membership drive and its enthusiastic membership rose to 1,032 in 1980 during Harvey Katz's leadership as OAD President. Katz, with the help of Minnie Hawk, OAD Membership Drive chair, were instrumental in setting up an incentive program for OAD Regional Directors regarding their efforts with the membership drive in their district chapters.



**HARVEY KATZ    1,032 OAD members in 1980    MINNIE HAWK**

Regional directors of each district chapter participated in state convention meetings during the odd years to propose bills on services to improve quality of life for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Ohio.

Prior to OAD's founding, Ohio's Deaf Community did not have complete access to human services. Human service providers displayed a lack of understanding or insensitivity towards deaf people and perceived deafness as a 'deficiency', and their impaired ability to communicate effectively. To alleviate this situation, Ohio Association of the Deaf engaged in a joint project with the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission (ORSC) in 1965, to establish a program called D.E.A.F. which was for training deaf clients into preparing for the job market. Dr. Ernest Hairston was named director of the D.E.A.F Program. It was housed within the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation agency in Columbus.



**Dr. Ernest Hairston**

The project was federally funded, with matching money provided by the Ohio Association of the Deaf. This was the first time that a member-serving organization provided the base money for a federal grant. Over 20 vocational rehabilitation counselors throughout the state worked with deaf clients by referring them to job training programs in Columbus. Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission had contributed towards planning and developing every specialized program for the Deaf in Ohio, including the Central Ohio Psychiatric Hospital Unit, Columbus' Comprehensive Program for the Deaf, and Columbus Technical Institute.

The creation of the ten Community Centers of the Deaf (CCDs) was the brainchild of Robert O. Lanckenau, president of the Ohio Association of the Deaf. This proposal was discussed in a meeting of the Advisory Board on Deafness under the auspices of the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission in the spring of 1978. Lanckenau and Frank Gattas, Program Specialist with ORSC, set up meetings with Vocational Rehabilitation counselors in Columbus to form partnership with Community Centers for the Deaf (CCD) in



Ohio's cities. This helped eliminate BVR's waiting list by referring deaf and hard of hearing clients to other services through CCDs' assistance.

Ohio Association of the Deaf sponsored workshops for parents of deaf children, interpreters, and health service providers in the early 80s, and worked closely with the National Association of the Deaf. Some of the highlights of OAD's special programs / events were as follows: 1981 Essay Contest for Deaf and Hard of Hearing high school students at OSD and other Ohio public schools; sports tournaments held in OAD district chapters; its Grand Ball in even years and the Miss Deaf Ohio Pageant, a favorite event among young deaf people.

In 1973, the invention of the acoustic telephone coupler was a major breakthrough in telecommunications for deaf people, and recycled tele-type machines, known as TTYs, were brought to Ohio. Robert O. Lankenau, OAD President, collaborated with Dick Rosenberg, AT&T consultant from Cincinnati, into bringing TTYs to Ohio. Lankenau set up his own tele-type machine repair shop in Akron, Ohio and trained several male OAD members into repairing and refining TTYs before sending them to homes of deaf people. This helped Ohio's Deaf Community have communication access with friends and hearing individuals also.



TTY Machine, 1970s



Testing TTY Machine, 1971

In 1978, Robert O. Lankenau joined a committee with Dr. Harold Johnson, chair of the Deaf Education Teacher Training Department at Kent State University, to learn more about the benefits of the American Sign Language, and to train new teachers in future work with Deaf Children in Ohio's Public Schools. This is in relation to the Education for All Handicapped Child Act, known as PL 94-142. (This was later renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1990). (Source): <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/94/s6>

In 1979 Ohio Association of the Deaf's officers teamed with the officers of Cincinnati #2, and the NAD Board to make preparations for the Centennial Convention of the National Association of the Deaf, which was held in Cincinnati in July of 1980. This convention drew over 2,000 participants from all over the country.



**Souvenir cup from NAD's Centennial Convention in Cincinnati  
July 1980**

During the early part of the 1980s, OAD President Robert O. Lankenau and past OAD President Harvey Katz collaborated with the national officers of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf to set up Interpreter (Quality) Evaluation Services. Its responsibility was to form a type of assessments to evaluate ASL interpreters' skills to determine eligibility for employment in the Ohio Deaf Community.

In 1988, a group of devoted OAD members campaigned actively for the Ohio House Bill 216 on American Sign Language to give high school and college students an opportunity to take ASL classes for future interpreting jobs in Ohio. Testimonies given by deaf lobbyists were heard in the Ohio State Legislature and the bill became a law with Governor Richard Celeste's signature in 1989.

As the years progressed, Ohio Association of the Deaf saw a decline in membership in the mid-1990s when a new generation of leaders came in. They had a different vision of OAD's future and became a board-ruling group. In 2003, OAD's 10 district chapters were dissolved and their financial accounts were moved to its parent organization for safekeeping and for special events upon request by the districts. Many of its popular events: The Miss Deaf Ohio Pageant and Grand Ball were eliminated. OAD set up four regions during that year but this system did not succeed after two years

due to the lack of initiative by its Regional Representatives, and growing concerns over divided opinions on issues and erosion of trust between the members and the OAD Board, due to their fear-mongering attitude and manipulation. This heightened OAD members' anxiety levels which may have contributed mostly to the decline of membership.

One former OAD member, before his untimely passing in 2016, had foreseen OAD's trouble when he learned of its illicit financial practices that later sparked the investigation within the Office of the Ohio Attorney General. In 2016 members were alerted of OAD's incomplete financial reports, but no one took action at that time because they were told OAD's EIN was "still active" and not in trouble with the IRS.

OAD's corruption scandal re-surfaced in 2016 when stolen funds in the amount of \$6,190 that belonged to another deaf organization was given to OAD by a former social committee chair of that organization. The Office of the Ohio Attorney General was alerted of the alleged theft through a letter from an unnamed association. The Ohio Attorney Office opened an active investigation of OAD's alleged deceitful financial practices in November of 2017.

On September 14, 2019, OAD's acting secretary called an emergency meeting in Columbus, Ohio and quorum was met for a vote to relieve two OAD officers of their duties due to theft of over \$170,000 from OAD accounts and four investments for personal purchases without OAD members' knowledge.

Ohio Association of the Deaf's preserved history is not at all lost, because some of its historical documents, going back to its founding, are stored in the archives. Location of this is kept a secret until investigation on OAD's deceptive practices is completed.

In 2020 Ohio Association of the Deaf began with a clean slate when a new breed of law-abiding officers / citizens came in with a better vision to improve quality of life for the Deaf Community in the future.