



Wake Chapter Newsletter

May 2026

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[Caption Glasses Program Rescheduled for Zoom Only](#)

We're trying again.

The March program on caption glasses that was marred by technical and scheduling problems has been reset for Thursday, May 28, at 7 p.m.

This time, the event will be conducted solely on Zoom. The program will not include an in-person element.

Our presenter will be Tom Pritsky, the co-founder and chief executive officer of [Captify](#), a leading player in the fast-evolving caption glasses field. The Captify exhibit at the HLAA 2025 Convention (pictured at right) attracted significant attention.

Caption glasses are generating significant excitement because they offer a revolutionary, real-time and hands-free way for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals to engage in conversations.

By using speech recognition technology powered by artificial intelligence, these augmented reality devices project subtitles directly onto the lenses, allowing users to "see" what people are saying in real-time.

The Zoom link will be distributed to the Wake Chapter newsletter email list a few days prior to the meeting. If you know others who don't already receive our newsletter, please encourage them to email Steve Barber (steve.barber@earthlink.net) and ask to be added to the newsletter email list.

HLAA does not endorse specific products or services. It does educate and advocate for a range of assistive technology options to help people with hearing loss understand, connect and stay engaged in their lives.

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Summer Social Returning to Raulston Arboretum in June

All HLA Wake Chapter members are invited to a summer social on Sunday, June 28, at the JC Raulston Arboretum in Raleigh. This beautiful location has proved popular for our previous two summer socials.

We've reserved Room 109 in the arboretum's air-conditioned education center, and the chapter will provide a light lunch from 1:30 p.m. to 3 p.m. You are welcome to bring family and friends. It's a chance to meet and socialize with others while enjoying a sandwich, salad, chips, desserts and a beverage.

Please RSVP to Steve Barber (steve.barber@earthlink.net) by June 21.

Participants will have the option of checking out the arboretum's splendid gardens before or after the lunch.

Arboretum admission and parking are free. The arboretum is in west Raleigh near the NC State Fairgrounds. The address is 4415 Beryl Road.

The arboretum collects, evaluates and selects for introduction landscape plants for their most beneficial economic, ecological and aesthetic value. Its gardens are a living laboratory that reside in and complement the curricula of North Carolina State University.



Raulston Arboretum has proved to be a pleasant setting for our last two summer socials.

An Apology to Our Members



We apologize to our members for what happened at our March 26 meeting.

We experienced both technical and scheduling issues that night for our combination in-person and Zoom chapter meeting on caption glasses.

The caption glasses meeting has been rescheduled as a Zoom call (see Page 1 for details). We will hold off on conducting another hybrid (combination in-person and Zoom) meeting until we resolve all technical issues.

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Members Participate in “Community Conversation”



We were asked to speak up, and we did!



Members of the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) Wake Chapter provided input to the North Carolina Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DSDHH) on Saturday, April 25, during a “Community Conversation” held in Raleigh.

The two-hour event, one of dozens of small-group gatherings being held across the state this spring, allowed our members to share experiences where we encountered communication barriers related to our hearing loss. We also discussed services we'd like to see DSDHH initiate or enhance. DSDHH is gathering first-hand information from its wide range of “customers” as it prepares to create a strategic plan.

Our "Conversation" was led by DSDHH Director Tony Davis (pictured above at right) and held at the new headquarters of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services in Raleigh (left).

2026 Wake Chapter Scholarship Recipients Announced

Four outstanding area high school students with hearing loss are being recognized with college scholarships through the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) Wake Chapter Scholarship Program.

The chapter's 2026 scholarship recipients are:

Claire Aeschliman, Holly Springs
Joseph Brignac, Cary
Oliver Pierce, Raleigh
Wynn Plentl, Raleigh

The program provides \$750 scholarships to high school seniors with hearing loss who reside in Wake County and are planning to attend an accredited university, college, community college or trade school. In its seventh year, the program is made possible by the generous support of participants in the North Carolina Walk4Hearing, a hearing health awareness and fundraising event conducted by HLAA.

Learn more in the following pages about our impressive scholarship recipients.

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2026 HLA Wake Chapter Scholarship Recipient Claire Aeschliman

Claire is graduating from Holly Springs High School.

Claire's hearing loss journey

Claire has been implanted with a bone-anchored hearing aid (BAHA) to deal with conductive hearing loss resulting from microtia, a congenital deformity where the outer ear is underdeveloped.

During school, I use a mini microphone that wirelessly connects to my hearing aid and can pick up the softer voices of my teachers. It also allows me to connect my hearing aid to the audio of my computer for online assignments. Outside of school, I attend every microtia picnic I'm able to in order to support the community and learn more about accommodations I can advocate for.



“By the time I met Claire, she had already overcome many of the issues she had to work through in reference to her hearing loss,” says Tamara Barrett, Claire’s 11th grade English teacher. “Because of her hearing loss, Claire is a skillful reader. She reads for understanding, clarity and growth. I admire how effective she is as a student.”

School and other accomplishments

Claire is an excellent student and an accomplished dancer.

I've been able to maintain all A's in my classes throughout high school. Once you enter high school it's very difficult to get used to the workload and balance it on top of extracurricular activities. I have found a way to get through class and study in a way that works best for me without the threat of becoming overwhelmed and burnt out. I'm incredibly proud of myself for finding this balance.

Claire has been recognized with an Advanced Placement Scholar Award, participates in multiple honors societies and clubs, and volunteers at local elementary schools. She was a member of the Holly Springs varsity dance team for three years but began dancing competitively well before high school. Dancing while wearing a BAHA poses unique challenges since the external sound processor and the internal implant use magnets to connect with each other.

“As Claire has gotten older and more advanced as a dancer, we have learned that she needs a different magnet strength for dance class and performing than she needs regularly throughout the day,” says Kay Redford, Claire’s dance teacher for six years. “There have been times when her magnet disconnects when she is on stage and she has to either navigate how to reattach while dancing – and not miss a beat – or continue dancing without being able to hear the music.”



Future plans

Claire has been accepted for admission at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland.

I will be studying law and business. I chose Ireland because it was something new and exciting and I love traveling. As for the law major, I've just always been interested in the subject, and I hope to help families transition smoother after losing a loved one through wills and estate law.

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2026 HLAA Wake Chapter Scholarship Recipient Joseph Brignac

Joseph lives in Cary and is graduating from Enloe Magnet High School.

Joseph's hearing loss journey

I have profound hearing loss in my left ear, and I have been in the hearing loss community for my entire life. I've looked at just about every hearing aid technology under the sun. They rarely do anything for me, but I make do. I have used hearing aids in the past, but I currently do not use one.

Joseph serves the community in a variety of ways. He gleans crops with the Society of Saint Andrew and volunteers for children's events at the Kids Together Playground in Cary. He reads to children at his local library, plants trees at local parks and raises funds for Boy Scouts. Joseph was recently recognized with an Eagle Scout Award.

I have always been uncomfortable in my own body. This is not only because of my deafness but because of my physical disabilities. Cerebral palsy, however tame, is a hard thing to come to terms with, and physical therapy is a humiliating ordeal. The Eagle Scout Award makes me feel like I can DO things.



School and other accomplishments

"Joseph does not let deafness hold him back from interacting with the world," says history teacher Nora Hassan. "He is on his way to being an Eagle Scout and does well in the hardest academic curriculum we have at Enloe High School, our International Baccalaureate (IB) program."



"When he told me he was planning to sign up for our school's IB program towards the end of his sophomore year, I was so proud of him for all that he had accomplished to get to this point and for wanting to take the next step," says Megan Justice, who has taught Joseph in multiple English and interdisciplinary classes. "From my work with him across the years, it's clear that Joseph has the habits, skills, tenacity and confidence to enter a new space and plunge headfirst into the unknown."

In addition to scouting, Joseph's extracurricular activities include playing piano and improv, including improv competitions.

Future plans

Joseph's top college choices are the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and North Carolina State University.

I want to become an audiologist! I know it's a bit cliché, but the more I research it, the more it looks like something I would love. Hearing as a science is something that I've been exposed to my entire life, and each time I go to an audiology appointment, I find myself enthralled by the science and equipment behind it.

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2026 HLA Wake Chapter Scholarship Recipient Oliver Pierce

Oliver lives in Raleigh and is graduating from Belrose Academy (homeschool).

Oliver's hearing loss journey

Oliver has bilateral moderate sensorineural hearing loss and uses two hearing aids.

“One of Oliver’s greatest strengths is his willingness to be open about his journey,” says Michael Howard, who leads a small group that Oliver participates in at his church. “He does not shy away from difficult or personal conversations about hearing loss. Instead, he uses those moments to educate and encourage others, often explaining how hearing aid technology, including mobile applications and Bluetooth connectivity, has improved his ability to engage fully with the world around him. Through this openness, Oliver demonstrates both courage and a desire to help others better understand experiences different from their own.”



School and other accomplishments

As part of his homeschooling program, Oliver has taken multiple science classes with other students in a laboratory environment.

“He is an outstanding student who has demonstrated exceptional commitment to his academic studies, as well as creative outlets and significant volunteer projects,” says Christina Musser, who has taught Oliver in Honors Biology, Honors Chemistry and Honors Anatomy. “He has one of the most creative minds I have engaged with in classes. He can take the things he learns in class, carry them to another level, and then enjoy solving problems with the knowledge.”



Oliver has been an active volunteer at his church and was a committed Boy Scout. His project to attain the rank of Eagle Scout involved designing and building an amphitheater for a community of men recovering from addictions. One of his favorite personal achievements is scouting-related.

Each year my scout troop puts on a haunted house for charity. In 2023 I was responsible for planning it. I proactively emailed adult leadership to ensure we had funding for supplies, worked with patrols to solidify a script and created animations to explain the logistics for each performance. Finally, it was showtime. I led the scouts as we transformed our clubhouse into a haunted forest and rehearsed our story. As our customers arrived, I guided them through the spooky experience, entertaining them with jokes and scares. It is one of my greatest triumphs, raising nearly \$500.

“Oliver’s hearing loss has not hindered him – it has strengthened his resilience, sharpened his focus, and deepened his empathy for others,” says teacher Musser. “Rather than viewing it as a limitation, Oliver has transformed it into a source of determination and perspective that enriches both his work and his relationships.”

Future plans

Oliver has been accepted as an Honors Scholars student at Liberty University in Lynchburg, VA.

My goal is to leverage my passion for software engineering to create value in the world. By designing effective computer systems, I will serve others, potentially in the areas of robotics, medicine, information or even entertainment. First, though, I must learn to innovate and collaborate well. At Liberty University, I will be equipped to change lives, one line of code at a time.

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2026 HLA Wake Chapter Scholarship Recipient Wynn Plentl

Wynn lives in Raleigh and is graduating from Cardinal Gibbons High School.

Wynn's hearing loss journey

At birth, I did not pass the newborn hearing screening, and my parents chose spoken language as my primary mode of communication. From that point forward, I used the technology and devices that best supported my needs at each stage of my development.

I began with bilateral hearing aids and an FM system at just six weeks old. When my speech and language did not progress as expected, I received my first cochlear implant in my left ear at age two.

Speech therapy quickly became an integral part of my life. I knew I had to work hard to communicate like my hearing peers. For many years, I used a cochlear implant in my left ear and a hearing aid in my right, along with a Roger Pen assistive device during school and sports.

Therapy not only helped me develop clear speech, but also taught me the importance of self-advocacy, something that has been critical to my success in the classroom, on the soccer field, and in my social life.

As my hearing in my right ear declined, I received a second cochlear implant during my junior year. Today, I have bilateral cochlear implants and rely on them fully. I am incredibly grateful for the technology that allows me to hear and connect with the world around me.

School and other accomplishments

Wynn is a two-year member of the National Honor Society and has performed well in a rigorous academic program.



"Throughout the school year, I have been able to witness growth in her academic endeavors, especially in an advanced English course, a class in which she demonstrates an enthusiasm for learning," says Amy Rokita, Wynn's world literature teacher. "Not only is Wynn a strong student of literature, she also proves daily that she is a kind-hearted, warm-spirited and respectful human being."

Outside of school, Wynn plays club soccer at Wake FC. She is an animal lover, volunteering at Hope Reins and working as a kennel technician at Bayleaf Veterinary Hospital. She also has worked for a family friend, who is a dentist.

"Wynn is dependable, hardworking and consistently brings positivity to those around her," says Alexandra Boudreau, DDS. "While her strong academic and athletic records speak for themselves, Wynn's greatest strengths are the qualities that are often hardest to measure. As a business owner, I often look for what I call the 'unteachable' skills – integrity, work ethic, kindness and the ability to contribute positively to a team. Wynn possesses these traits naturally."

Future plans

Wynn has been accepted for admission at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.

My career goal is to graduate from the University of Tennessee pre-dental program to prepare me to attend dental school. I aspire to become a general dentist.

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[Registration Deadline Nears for HLAA 2026 Convention](#)



The registration deadline for HLAA's 41st Annual Convention, June 10-12, 2026, in Louisville, KY, is Monday, May 18. Visit [HLAA 2026 Convention](#) for more details, including registration rates.

The convention, which will be held at the Galt House Hotel, brings together hundreds of people with hearing loss from around the United States to learn, discover and connect. Check out the latest technology and hear from health and industry experts during a series of empowering events designed to help you live your best life with hearing loss.

HLAA will employ real-time captioning during every plenary session and workshop in addition to hearing loops in all rooms. You can also experience Auracast in all workshop rooms. Sign language interpretation is available during plenary sessions and by request for education workshops.

[Chapter Participating in DSDHH Wellness Event](#)

The Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) Wake Chapter will participate in a wellness event organized by the Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DSDHH) Raleigh Regional Center.

This free event will take place on Thursday, May 21, at Pullen Park Community Center, 408 Ashe Avenue, Raleigh. Join us in Room 11213 between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.

Participating will be a variety of hearing loss-related-vendors (state and local agencies), health care providers, nutrition specialists and the Raleigh fire department.

DSDHH is pulling together this event to enable Raleigh community members to come together and learn more about available health services. The event provides the chapter (and other vendors) with an opportunity to spotlight our activities and make more connections within our communities.

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Tech Focus: “Find My” Hearing Device Features

Many hearing aids and some cochlear implants now have a “Find My Device” feature you can use in conjunction with your smartphone. This article explains how the “Find My Device” feature works for hearing aids and cochlear implants that have such a feature. It’s important for you to know whether your model has a “Find My Device” feature, how to use it, and key limitations. You can ask your audiologist or an AI app like ChatGPT whether your model includes some version of “Find My Device” and get more details about your model. Some brands include both last known location and proximity tracking capabilities. Some brands only include last known location.

How these Technologies Work (if your model has them)

- **Last Known Location** uses a combination of GPS and Wi-Fi to estimate the location of your smartphone. Newer smartphones may also use “crowd sourced” Bluetooth to confirm the phone’s location. The smartphone remembers where the hearing device was last connected by Bluetooth to your smartphone and displays this on a map. Your hearing device must be on and connected to your phone before the Bluetooth connection is broken. The connection will be broken if the hearing device or your smartphone is off, or if the phone and hearing device are not within Bluetooth range of each other (typically 40-60 feet). A cochlear implant with a last known location feature will also break the connection if the external magnet is removed from your head.
- **Proximity Tracking** uses Bluetooth to determine approximately how far away your phone is from the hearing device while you are within range of the lost device. If your brand includes proximity tracking, when you are within Bluetooth range, your app uses a “hot and cold” indication of the strength of the Bluetooth signal to show how close you are to the device. For the proximity tracking feature, the hearing device must be on and able to connect with Bluetooth.

Key Limitations

- Both the hearing device and the smartphone must be powered on and connected with Bluetooth when the loss occurs.
- If the hearing device is off, or if its battery is dead, then proximity tracking will not work. So, it’s important to act quickly once you notice your hearing device is lost. Some cochlear implant models have a power-saving option that allows the user to select whether their processor is automatically turned off after a minute or two when it’s no longer connected to your head. So, if your hearing device has a proximity tracking feature, you may want to ask your audiologist to disable the automatic power-off option.
- If the lost device is moved by someone or because you lost it in a vehicle that’s moved, it’s not helpful to know where your smartphone was when the device was lost.
- **Signal Range Accuracy:**
 - Last known location accuracy can provide the location of your smartphone to within 30-120 feet. Accuracy can vary depending on whether you’re indoors, in a big city or in a rural area.
 - Proximity tracking only works within Bluetooth range (as noted earlier, 40-60 feet) but can be limited by intervening structures like walls. But once your phone manages to connect to your lost hearing device, the signal strength indicator can tell you whether you’re “hot” or “cold.” However, if someone moves a cochlear implant processor from the GPS-identified location, the proximity tracking won’t work.

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2026 NC Walk4Hearing Moves to November



The 2026 North Carolina Walk4Hearing, an annual hearing health awareness and fundraising event, will take place on **November 8** at WakeMed Soccer Park in Cary.

For many years, the event has been held on the second Sunday in October. That date this year is October 11, and we announced in February that the North Carolina walk would take place on October 11.

However, a scheduling conflict arose with the park, and the walk date was pushed back a month. The walk serves as Wake Chapter's primary source of funding.

The photo at left was taken during the 2025 NC Walk4Hearing on a rainy October 12.

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