

DECEMBER, 2012



## WASHTENAW CHAPTER

LEARNING DISABILITIES ASSOCIATION OF MICHIGAN



### President's Report

As the year ends, we often take time to reflect on what we have accomplished and what we hope to achieve in the new year. There were so many highlights for me: Senior Awards, both dyslexia programs, the Preparing for Tomorrow Conference, to name a few.

In November I attended the LDA of Michigan conference in East Lansing and I was impressed by the caliber of the speakers I heard. Dr. Jerome Schultz was the keynote speaker and he used humor to elucidate a very serious topic – how stress impacts learning. He gave a neurological explanation of how stress chemically affects the brain and how it initiates a chemical reaction that actually deters learning. This topic has special relevance for the learning disabled because stress is such a part of their daily lives. He talked about how the whole family is affected by this stress and he gave some practical ideas for parents and teachers to help them identify and alleviate it.

I attended another workshop on fluency based on the program “Reading Naturally” where we learned some useful strategies for helping dysfluent readers. As a reading tutor I found the approach to be another set of ideas to ponder – I have used a few already.

As a member of the Washtenaw Branch of LDA of Michigan, I try not to forget that we are part of two larger entities – the State and the National LDA. As WLDA members, we can reap the benefits of being part of three active and vital groups.

I take so much pride in being president of WLDA because we are beginning to have a greater presence in the local LD community as we are adding to the services we already provide. Our website is an important venture that signals our desire to move into the electronic age (Thank you, Ruth Berean, we needed it!) There are so many new ways we can exploit this tool and we welcome the input of all of our members.

In the coming year the Board will be meeting in February for a “mini-retreat” where we will take the time to re-examine our goals and craft a more comprehensive mission statement. We updated our by-laws two years ago but we feel that we need to look at all our services in the light of an ever-changing world. Please follow our website as we proceed through the year. We will be offering a program on self-esteem and LD facilitated by a local psychologist.

We invite your participation in the work of our chapter, which is a beacon for the entire state. We hope that 2013 will be another great year of expanding services for the LD community.

Madelon Possley, President

PREPARING FOR TOMORROW CONFERENCE

NOVEMBER, 2012



Meredith Schindler checks in a student



John Milanovich presents on “Learning and the Brain”



*"I very much want our group to be a safe place, where we can end our isolation, be connected and work together to ensure the best possible options." - Brenda Meisels, September 1998*

## Brenda Meisels

For several years, Brenda Meisels has spearheaded the "Planning for Tomorrow" conference, which is a day-long event targeted at high school juniors and seniors with learning disabilities. Presenters from all over the county come together to offer up-to-date information, strategies and counsel to help these students as they approach their transition to college or the job world. Held at Washtenaw Community College, it is organized by Ann Arbor Academy. This is only the most recent contribution by Brenda to the

Learning Disabled Community of Washtenaw County.

Brenda joined WLDA 15 years ago when she was desperate to find help and support for her 10-year-old son who is a severe dyslexic. She not only re-instituted senior awards, but she also served as vice-president and president. Bringing her expertise as a social worker psychotherapist she helped raise the consciousness of the LD community especially in relation to the needs of dyslexics and their parents. She wrote several articles for our

newsletter sharing her trials, frustrations and joys. She is also, with her husband Murray, one of the founders of the Ann Arbor Academy, a school for learning disabled children. She worked tirelessly on their board for many years. She credits LDA for contributing to the amazing success of her son who recently graduated from law school and passed the bar exam!

While Brenda may feel some indebtedness to LDA, we feel her contributions are immeasurable.



Dr. Roger Lauer discusses the unique characteristics of the dyslexic brain.

## Review: Program on Dyslexia—May, 2012 By Jeanne Meszaros

On Wednesday, May 9, the Washtenaw Chapter of the Learning Disabilities Association of Michigan presented a program at Washtenaw Intermediate School District entitled "Warning Signs, Testing, and Diagnosis of Dyslexia." The three guest speakers, Roger Lauer, Ph.D, Kristen Chapman, M.A., and Joanne Martilla, Ph.D. addressed a packed audience of parents, teachers, LD adults, and interested others on what to look for at various ages and grades when dyslexia is suspected. Speakers also outlined what areas would be assessed in a language-literacy or neuropsychological evaluation, using language and specific examples that were clear and easy to understand. Suggestions were given to parents and teachers as to what to do "in the meantime" while awaiting a diagnosis.

Of particular interest to me, as a tutor of dyslexic students, were pictures comparing brains of dyslexic and non-impaired individ-

uals. Dyslexic students have brains that clearly show certain under-activated neural pathways in the back of the brain when compared to the general population. These students instead use certain auxiliary systems on the right and front portions of the brain more extensively. This largely explains why so many dyslexic students exhibit strengths in imagination and in areas not dependent on reading (such as math, computers, art, science, for example). This information, combined with a discussion of how and why dyslexia is affected by working memory, was what I took with me from this very informative, audience-friendly presentation.

Many thanks to Madelon Possley for her work in pulling all of this together.

Jeanne Meszaros,

WLDA Board Member and Tutor