



January 2009 e-NEWS RID REGION III REPORT

Submitted by:
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Region III Representative

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We have many great updates for you, and we lead with a tribute to a dear colleague who passed suddenly this month (in lieu of a Michigan RID article). I also offer my apology for failing to submit Indiana RID's December e-NEWS article in time for publication; you will find that below as well. I wish you all a prosperous and safe new year!

The Epitome of Distinguished Service: A Tribute to Doris Watkins

By Helen Boucher, Michigan RID President and Kelly Flores, RID Region III Representative

With contributions by Daniel Burch, Agnes Foret, Ben Hall, Martha Meginley and Maureen Wallace

"Some people come into our lives and quickly go. Some stay for awhile and leave footprints on our hearts. And we are never, ever the same." – Flavia

Doris Watkins, CSC, longtime Michigan RID (MIRID) and RID member, past MIRID board member, and mentor to many, passed peacefully in her sleep on January 12, 2009. She leaves behind a legacy of truly distinguished and adamantly humble service, as well as a host of memories of her kind, generous soul.

Doris, a child of deaf parents, joined RID and MIRID in the early 1970s and, in the first years of the newly established testing system, received a CSC. She was a founding member of MIRID (but did not consider herself to be so) and told stories of attending the new chapter meetings when Agnes Foret was one of the first board members. According to Agnes, Doris was someone she could count on, always willing to work, and dedicated to MIRID and RID. Later, due in part to the influence of those early meetings of MIRID, Doris began board service that would span more than 25 years. She served as MIRID secretary, president, and treasurer. It was during this time that former RID president and then Ohio Chapter RID president Ben Hall served with her as a Region III president. When asked about that early time in his career, Ben responded with this memorable anecdote:

"Doris, always with a smile, was quick to do what was necessary to help someone, to solve a problem, or to move an issue forward. She loved people and the profession. I had the great fortune to work with her when we first pulled together the Region III President's Council. I remember during one meeting with the Region III Presidents we were wrestling with a particular dilemma on our hands. We went on and on and on worried about the impact one decision or another...what will happen if we do this or if we do that. It drug out forever with no clear consensus. Finally, Doris said, 'You know, worrying about what may or may not happen is like a rocking chair, it keeps you real busy but you don't get anywhere. So, let's stop going back and forth on this, make a decision and stick to it.' We all laughed. Her gentle humor broke the ice and eased the tension in the room. She went on to detail what should be done. We were smart enough to follow her advice. I often think of her comment when I see a rocking chair."

Doris was also active with Michigan Deaf Association and local chapters of MDA and MIRID. She often donated materials, copies, time and money to each organization. As recently as the last MIRID newsletter mailing, Doris offered to copy, fold, staple and stamp to save money for the organization and be of service. Maureen Wallace, retired Division on Deaf and Hard of Hearing State Interpreter Coordinator, recalls a time in the early 1990s when the State of Michigan was under severe budget cuts; Doris would drive almost three hours round trip from Kalamazoo, MI, to help out by volunteering in the DODHH office. She would assist with mailing newsletters, phones, testing and other tasks without expectation of compensation.

Doris not only served her professional organization, she also assisted students and novice interpreters in many ways. She worked at Michigan Career and Technical Institute until retirement in 1993 (and after that time as a contractor) and she was always doing kind deeds for those students. She would sometimes purchase outfits for them so the students would have new clothing for job interviews. She often recruited fledgling interpreters to assist her with registration during workshops. Doris would pay for costs associated with traveling to the workshop so that the new interpreters could afford to go (and to encourage their involvement). She even occasionally paid for their state testing fees. At national and regional conferences, Doris would often purchase videos and books with particular people she was mentoring in mind.

One fond recollection from Daniel Burch, past RID President, from his days as a student is as follows:

"Shortly after being introduced to American Sign Language, my teacher and second mother Alberta Westman-Krzyston took me to a Michigan Association of the Deaf meeting. I thought we were going out to dinner at a restaurant. Being a poor college student at the time, I was looking

forward to a decent meal. Does that tell you how progressed I was in ASL??

When we opened the door and went in, there was a room full of people standing around, signing in what seemed like a million different conversations! Then upon some unknown signal, everyone stopped and sat down for what became a three hour business meeting.

At one point of time I knew they were talking about coffee. But, for the rest of the meeting I sat there in a daze of signing what I assumed were questions and answers and something to do with money. I ended up with eye strain and a major headache from concentration.

After it was all over, I found out there were two interpreters in the room. One of them was Doris Watkins. Leta Jorgenson was the other for those of you who remember.

When I found out Doris could hear, I immediately confronted her with my student righteous indignation and demanded of her why she didn't interpret for me! Her response has stayed with me throughout my career, 'To truly understand deafness and Deaf people, you have to be willing to experience them on their own terms, in their own way, at their own time, and in a way that the experience of the communication barrier is so profound that it stays with you forever.'
She helped shape me to the interpreter I am today, and in setting me on a life course, Doris Watkins will stay with me forever."

Her spirit of service extended to community, friends and family. Doris served as an interpreter at the Immanuel Lutheran Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan, for 26 years. Holidays would often find her baking hundreds of loaves of bread to give as gifts. Doris was an avid reader and usually had a Danielle Steele novel in hand. Martha Meginley remembers Doris' kindness in her interactions with Martha's father during his final year; Doris was often one of the few people who could engage him in conversation, and never failed to go when called to interpret for him. Doris doted on her kitties. She was so very proud of her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, and spoke of them often. If one ever asked about all of her contributions, Doris would downplay her role. She was incredibly humble. Yet, she never failed to clearly convey her dreams and goals for her beloved MIRID. Doris was a mentor; not just to us, but to countless board members, and we valued her experience with MIRID and RID. It is with a truly heavy heart that we write this; we, and all of Michigan RID, will miss her very much.

A service in her memory will be held at 11:00 AM Saturday morning, February 7, 2009 at Immanuel Lutheran Church, 3000 W. Main St., Kalamazoo, MI 49006. Memorial contributions may be made to MIRID or the Michigan Deaf Association. Kalamazoo Gazette. January 18, 2009.