

# *A Brief History*

## Series: The Beginning

by

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To address the need for a knowledgeable, problem-identifying and solving organization representing Deaf and Hard of Hearing government workers, several Federal employees came together to discuss the plausibility and direction of establishing a professional organization. Little by little, ideas, concerns and trends were exchanged through emails and task force meetings. Executive Director, Secretary, Treasurer and Board Members at Large were appointed as interim officers in 1997. The team succeeded in soliciting, gathering, analyzing and summarizing all possible concerns and suggestions from the potential members and leaders. At the same time, they consulted a professional organization development specialist to strategize and structure a dynamic, flexible and stable professional organization with empowerment and leadership opportunities in mind.

In addition to the initial start-up actions, there were a few other active groups to consider: a National Training Conference planning committee and the Annual December Luncheon planning committee for Federal Government Employees. Acquisition and merging of these two groups into the new organization underwent major discussion and negotiation. At this early stage, the organization also provided support to a group of Federal ASL interpreters and other service support personnel that required planning attention. With information gathered and strategic objectives in place, bylaw articles were carefully drafted to reflect a working partnership and leadership. As a result of team collaboration and effective communication, the bylaws were presented at the National Training Conference in 1998 with favorable commendations.

A preamble, vision statement, mission statement and bylaws were drafted by a core team of the founders and were thoroughly reviewed by the Board. After the Board's review, the documents were elevated to the general public via several meetings and at the 1998 National Association of the Deaf conference at San Antonio, Texas. The results were astoundingly accepted. From here, the team proceeded to "add flesh to bones" for the new organization. General membership meetings were held every year at the Biennial National Training Conference and alternative Biennial DHHIG Miniconference.

An initial board meeting was held in September 1998. The officers were appointed according to the adopted bylaws: Executive Director Eric Spanbauer, Vice Executive Director Ashton Dunbar, Secretary Jim B Bishop and Treasurer Ric-Olin Lyles. The remaining were Board Members at large (please see the names of DHHIG Founders at the end). The

Advisory Council, consisting of different regional representatives were nominated and accepted. Several board committees were formed with eager volunteers and leaders.

A charter was drafted and submitted to the State of Maryland. After reviewing an application, IRS granted a determination letter for status of nonprofit 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization in 1998. To this day, DHHIG is recognized as a professional organization serving the best interest of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Government employees at several levels: Federal, State, local and quasi governments. The professional organization has gained recognition from the Office of Personnel Management, Capitol Hill, The White House and other Federal and State agencies and other Deaf/HOH professional organizations.

Within five years, funding grew from an initial hundreds of dollars to an operations budget of more than a quarter of a million dollars. DHHIG is supported solely by voluntary contributions and available resources. A website was designed and implemented to build and improve open communication. It also draws off professional knowledge, skills, talents, and builds camaraderie among our members, volunteers, leaders, officers and other stakeholders through various communication technologies and the Internet. With an inclusive vision, membership has steadily grown from 25 to over 2,000 members across the nation.

It should be noted that prior to establishing DHHIG, there were a couple of well meaning efforts to provide support to government employees. In the year of approximately 1975, a group of Federal employees formed and was chartered as the Federal Employee Section under National Association of the Deaf. Due to low membership participation in the last few years, it folded in 1996. A year later, a new group resurfaced and addressed some rudimentary issues and concerns. It was the persistence and tireless volunteer work of the DHHIG founders that laid the groundwork for the successful organization DHHIG is has become today.

### ***DHHIG Founders:***

Jim B. Bishop; IRS. Billy Bowman, SSA; Betty Dodds, NOAA; Ashton Dunbar, USDA; Vic Galloway, Ed.D., US Dept. of Ed; Nancy Jenkins, Esq., US Dept. of Ed.; Ric-Olin Lyles, Charles Mokotoff, NIH; Sue E. Pressman, Ph.D., US Dept. of Ed.; Paul Singleton, DOD; Eric Spanbauer, Dept of Army; and Mark P. Tessier, DOT