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Los Angeles Black Deaf Advocates

By Yolanda Roberson

This article was prepared from a paper written for a class at CSUN by Yolanda Roberson, President of Los Angeles Black Deaf Advocates.

In American society there are many deaf organizations that deaf people like to join and feel part of the family and that the organization is "their second home." I discovered one which is different from others, one for minorities. I became so fascinated I decided to find out more about this organization and how it came into being. This organization is the Los Angeles Black Deaf Advocates, a local chapter of the National Black Deaf Advocates.

Background

The history of the National Black Deaf Advocates, Inc. begins in April, 1980, when a group of Washington, D.C. residents met with the director of Deafpride, Inc., a nonprofit community-based organization working for the rights of deaf people and their families. Those who attended the meeting were concerned about problems faced by Black Deaf people that prevented them from achieving their potential. They also wanted to identify Black Deaf role models and examine why there were so few such leaders. They proposed that a national conference be held to address these issues.

The isolation of the Black Deaf community was apparent. Although Black Deaf people were admitted into the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) by 1965, issues of the Black Deaf community were not part of NAD's agenda.

Those who met wanted to motivate the Black Deaf community and bring together shared experiences, ideas, hopes and talents. Goals were developed to recognize skills and strengths in the Black Deaf community that until then had been ignored. Linwood Smith and Carolyn McCaskill, both Black and Deaf, co-chaired a committee to assess response from the Black Deaf



John Reid, Matthew Proctor, Novella Merritt, Roslyn Guylan, Keith Giddie discuss the Black Deaf experience at April forum.

community about holding a national conference. By June, 1980, the committee had gathered overwhelming support and a year later, in July, 1981, the first BDA conference was held at Howard University, with nearly 100 people from the Black Deaf community attending. In 1982 BDA became a national organization. Its first chapters were in Washington, D.C., Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York. There are now 13 chapters, mostly in large metropolitan areas.

LABDA

NBDA's success influenced many Black Deaf citizens around the country and led a graduate of California State University, Jack Burns, to set up Los Angeles Black Deaf Advocates in 1987. LABDA now has about 75 members plus many non-members who come to socialize. About half of the members are active and are involved in committees such as the Deaf Festival, LABDA banquet and picnic committees, community forums, and other activities. The others come for information, to give their opinions on

Goals of LABDA

1. To better inform ourselves and the community about the rights and responsibilities of Black Deaf citizens.
2. To take positive action to improve and enhance the life and welfare of deaf persons in the Black community, scholarships for education and leadership training.
3. To identify, examine and disseminate information related to the impact of social, economic, educational, political, religious and health issues through the medium of forums, panels and workshops.
4. To encourage increased leadership development and job opportunities for Black Deaf persons throughout the southern part of the state and to further their potential.

different issues. The leaders of LABDA have a variety of skills and knowledge in education, leadership. They are highly motivated to



Officers of the LABDA: Seated, from left: Patricia Mosely, Recording Secretary; Yolanda Roberson, President; Alondra Little, Vice President. Standing, from left: Darby Burrell, Alternate Representative; Jack Burns, Ex-officio; Matthew Proctor, GLAD Representative, Charles Nero, Treasurer.

strengthen LABDA. They believe in helping others to achieve what they wish to be and do and encourage them to take turns in educating people about Black Deaf culture. Most of the active leaders have been recognized for their leadership skills, volunteering and community activities and have received awards for their dedication in different areas of LABDA.

The members and non-members of LABDA and NBDA differ in their mode of communication, degree of hearing loss and educational level. The variety of communication methods used by LABDA members ranges from ASL to oral only method. At the educational level, few Black Deaf people go beyond the high school level to get Bachelors and Masters degrees. A few Black Deaf people have doctoral degrees. Those people with doctoral degrees are active members of the NBDA and serve their people's needs. Most of the officers and leaders use ASL with the majority of the people who are profoundly deaf. NBDA provides certified interpreters for oral members and hearing people who are interested in participating. Because of limited education, some people feel they are not qualified to be



Matthew Proctor, Julie Rems, Jack Burns, John Reid, Alondra Little, get together at LABDA forum.

leaders. NBDA and the 13 chapter offices are there to encourage these people to participate and learn as much as they can.

Meetings

The Los Angeles Black Deaf Advocates meet every third Saturday, 1:00-3:00 p.m., at the Hawthorne Library, 12700 S. Grevillea Ave., Hawthorne. For further information write to Yolanda Roberson, President, LABDA, P.O. Box 2051, Gardena, CA 90247 or call (818) 885-0152, TDD.



Yolanda Roberson, LABDA President, as Miss NBDA, 1989-90.

Yolanda Roberson

Yolanda Roberson attended mainstream schools in Oakland and learned sign language at age 10 from friends who were students at the California School for the Deaf in Berkeley. She graduated from public schools in Oakland. She received an AA degree from Pierce College in Woodland Hills and attended California State University, Northridge, graduating with a BA in Liberal Studies. Currently she is working on her teaching credentials and Masters Degree in Deaf Education at CSUN.

Yolanda was Miss Black Deaf America from 1989-1990. As president of LABDA, as an advocate for the Black Deaf, and as a person who has chosen the field of deaf education for her career, she has strong feelings and goals. She would like to see more Black Deaf people attending universities. She would like to see them develop more leadership skills and learn to speak for themselves. She would like to see them more active in politics. She also believes that Black Deaf people should not limit themselves in the type of jobs they feel they are capable of doing and, finally, that individuals in her community should be aware of themselves as Black Deaf people and learn and study Black history and Black Deaf culture.

Yolanda attributes her success to her strong Christian beliefs and the family support and encouragement she received at home.