Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing 49th Biennial Convention Opens in Orlando, Fla.

The Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (AG Bell) opened its 49th biennial convention at the Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek in Orlando, Fla.

Established in 1890, AG Bell is the only national organization dedicated to the listening and spoken language outcome for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. Its membership consists of professionals such as Listening and Spoken Language Specialists, audiologists, speech-language pathologists, early interventionists and teachers of the deaf; parents and families of children who are deaf or hearing learning to listen and talk; and adults who are deaf or hard of hearing who use spoken language and hearing technology to communicate.

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Attendees from throughout the U.S. and 20 countries traveled to Orlando to take part in the 3-1/2 day conference that offers the latest information in hearing technologies, early intervention, and therapeutic and educational approaches for individuals who are deaf who seek a listening and spoken language outcome. In addition, the convention will host its seventh research symposium funded by the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, National Institutes of Health, and the Deafness Research Foundation entitled "Re-Modeling the Deafened Cochlea for Auditory Sensation: Advances and Obstacles" that will discuss stem cell technology and inner ear hair cell regeneration.

"It's a surprise to many that deafness is the leading sensory birth difference in the U.S. today," said AG Bell president John R. "Jay" Wyant. "In fact, more than 90 percent of children who are born deaf are born to hearing parents with no history of deafness in their family."

Because of Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) legislation enacted in 2000, more than 90 percent of children are screened at birth for hearing loss, catching many of these children earlier than ever before. However, "improving follow up and intervention services remain a critical need," concluded Wyant. Legislation to reauthorize EHDI and expand intervention services is currently being considered by the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee in the U.S. Senate. It passed the House by a voice vote in early 2009.

The convention's keynote speaker is Lee Woodruff, contributor to ABC's "Good Morning America," a best-selling author and a mother to four children, including one with a severe hearing loss. Woodruff's husband, ABC news anchor Bob Woodruff, suffered a traumatic brain injury while covering the war in Iraq. Their best-selling book, "In an Instant" is an account of her family's journey to recovery. Woodruff will speak Saturday,
June 26 at 8:00 a.m.

The convention also features an exhibition hall of more than 60 exhibitors who will demonstrate the latest in hearing technology as well as feature early intervention programs, schools, university programs, professional preparation programs and communications technology.

The Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing helps families, health care providers and education professionals understand childhood hearing loss and the importance of early diagnosis and intervention. Through advocacy, education, research and financial aid, AG Bell helps to ensure that every child and adult with hearing loss has the opportunity to listen, talk and thrive in mainstream society. With chapters located in the United States and a network of international affiliates, AG Bell supports its mission: Advocating Independence through Listening and Talking!

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