

National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Ceases Operations

Long Legacy of Service to Deaf Community Celebrated

In a final morning board meeting, followed with an afternoon Archives presentation and an evening's formal reception on March 6, 2010, the National Fraternal Society of the Deaf (NFSD) officially ceased operations of the organization which pioneered Deaf entrepreneurship through selling fraternal life insurance. The Board welcomed nearly 100 members and guests to witness presentations commemorating the organization's long

109 year history of civic and social leadership, to honor visionaries Dr. Frank B. Sullivan and Al Van Nevel, and to formally donate the Society's extensive business records and societal artifacts to the Gallaudet University Archives.

During the evening, Board Chair Christopher McQuaid emphasized the significance of NFSD achieving closure through full accomplishment of its mission. NFSD was the first multi-million dollar business operated by, for, and with Deaf people, and served as a training ground for many Deaf entrepreneurs by providing life insurance and fraternal support at a time when no other insurer would offer coverage to Deaf people. At its peak in the mid 1980's, NFSD handled 17 million dollars in insurance policies and managed nearly \$1,000,000 in surplus funding. The Society's 13,000 members, including Canadians, and 167 North American divisions thrived nationwide as a vibrant community for socialization, networking, and charitable support. But, when civil rights and economic advancements during the last 25 years led to life insurance policies becoming widely available to Deaf people through the workplace and other sources, enrollment in NFSD insurance policies began to decline. Inflation and subsequently diminished surplus funding reduced the organization's fiscal competitiveness in the insurance business, and an agreement was reached in 2004 to protect and ensure coverage for the many remaining members by selling the NFSD insurance business to the Catholic Order of Foresters (COF), headquartered in Naperville, Illinois. The merger of NFSD insurance policies into COF became effective on January 1, 2005. After the merger the Board prepared for the gradual closure of the Society by approving a Plan of Action developed by Grand President Al Van Nevel.

Opening the evening reception in the Ole Jim at Gallaudet University, Board Secretary/Treasurer Peter Seiler (NE), who served as the Master of Ceremonies, introduced fellow Board members Christopher McQuaid (MD), Virginia Borggaard (MD), Roman Kazragis (NY), Mary (Cordano) Dall (IN), and Heidi Reed (MA). Board members James D. Jones (MN) and Benjamin Soukup (SD) were recognized as well, although unable to be present. With a slide show, "Who We Were", Board members Mary Dall and Roman Kazragis highlighted the Society's growth, evolution as an organization founded on the common bonds of Deafness and sign language, parallels to women's rights, and extensive influence within the Deaf community. With its multi-state network of insurance representatives and membership divisions, the Society was a leading presence in the lives of Deaf people who were impacted by major events during the past ten decades including the San Francisco earthquake, influenza epidemics, the Great Depression, World Wars I and II, and in the nationwide movement to advocate for driver's rights and captioned television.

Board Vice Chair Virginia Borggaard spoke of the Society's investment in the Deaf community through the leveraging of its funding and business experiences to establish the Dr. Frank B. Sullivan Foundation

as well as the Al Van Nevel Memorial Foundation. Among the Society's former Grand Presidents, Al Van Nevel and Frank B. Sullivan were remembered for their exemplary vision, accomplishments, and leadership in working with divisions and delegates as well as with the Board. Roberta Sullivan-Quinn, daughter of Frank, during the slide show created by Daphne Cox (a board member of the Sullivan Foundation), spoke of her father's business acumen in his nearly twenty years as the Society's CEO. Jonathan Van Nevel spoke during his slide show of his father's astute service provision and strategic planning, love of sportsmanship, and deep commitment to developing leadership among Deaf youth.

Throughout its long history, NFSD was well known for providing charitable support with scholarships and event sponsorships within the Deaf community. Following the sale of the insurance business and subsequent January 2009 sale of the Victorian home office building in Springfield, Illinois, the NFSD Board continued the organization's legacy of charitable giving by donating \$50,000 to the Dr. Frank B. Sullivan Memorial Foundation, Inc. to provide monetary support for qualified deaf and hard of hearing students pursuing undergraduate and graduate degrees in business and accounting, and for the eventual sponsorship of business seminars and workshops. In 2010, the Al Van Nevel Memorial Foundation was established to support scholastic and athletic excellence, sportsmanship, and leadership, and sponsorship of training seminars for aspiring entrepreneurs, and likewise received a \$50,000 donation from the Society. Both foundations are incorporated as 501C(3) charitable organizations.

Anticipating dissolution, the Society arranged in 2009 to begin delivering cultural archives and memorabilia to the Gallaudet University Archives. The Archives was given a check for \$20,000 in February 2010, to support the work required to catalogue and develop an NFSD exhibit. And, on March 6, 2010, during the Archives presentation on Society artifacts, Board Chair McQuaid presented Ulf Hedberg, Director of the Gallaudet University Archives, with an additional \$10,000 donation to support the continued preservation of NFSD materials. A final donation of \$5,799 was made on July 30th. Director Hedberg and Archivist Michael Olson were among the guests for the evening. As the evening concluded, a portrait of the Society's final Grand President, Al Van Nevel, was unveiled by his widow, Carol Van Nevel, and presented to Gallaudet University's President, Dr. Alan Hurwitz. Based on a photo taken during a Division No. 67 lunch in Springfield, Massachusetts in which he was the keynote speaker, the portrait's origins reflect the late Al Van Nevel's spirit of cherishing community connections and giving back to the community. The NFSD red, blue, and yellow carved wooden crest was on stage alongside the portraits of Grand Presidents Sullivan and Van Nevel. Each was donated to the Gallaudet University Archives.

The reception proceedings were videotaped by the Gallaudet Media Center for preservation along with "Who We Were" and other powerpoint slides from the evening. To see the NFSD archives at Gallaudet University, contact archives@gallaudet.edu.

To continue the Society's legacy of charitable giving, donations may be made to the Dr. Frank B. Sullivan Memorial Foundation, Inc., and to the Al Van Nevel Memorial Foundation. Please visit the foundations' websites for more information:

www.fbsullivan.org

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