



# WYOMING FAMILIES FOR HANDS & VOICES

*"What works for your child is what makes the choice right."*<sup>TM</sup>

**Volume 14**  
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## **2020 WYOMING ATHLETIC CLUB TENNIS CALCUTTA**

*The 2020 Tennis Calcutta was a great success! A huge thank you to everyone that worked hard to put on the event and everyone that supported it.*

## HANDS & VOICES UPDATE

Many changes have taken place over the last six months within the Wyoming professionals that work with families of kids with hearing loss and their teachers. In August 2019 Janine Cole retired as the WDE Deaf/Hard of Hearing Outreach Supervisor, and Billie Wortham stepped into that position. Nancy Pajak retired from her position as the EHDl Supervisor, and Audiologist at CDC+ Audiology at the beginning of 2020. Kalley Ellis will replace Nancy at the CDC+ Clinic and Bradley Bakken & Sarah Fitzgerald will continue with the work at the EHDl Office. Also, the Parent Information Center Director, Terri Dawson has also retired. The staff at Hands & Voices is grateful for the opportunity that they have had and will continue to have to work with these amazing individuals. They know the importance of hearing screenings, follow up, early intervention, the value of parent to parent support, etc. We can't thank them enough for the work they do in Wyoming. Throughout this newsletter you can read bios about them.

This December Hands & Voices sponsored a Signing Santa Event. The children colored Christmas pictures, ate cookies, and enjoyed their candy canes and toys from Santa. It was a very enjoyable Saturday afternoon!

On our insert you can read more about an upcoming Bowling Night in Casper that is taking place in conjunction with WYHI. The insert also contains information about our 2020 Parent Training in June!! You won't want to miss this year's training. It is going to be our best one yet!!



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# WYOMING ATHLETIC CLUB'S 6TH ANNUAL TENNIS CALCUTTA

By Kim Reimann

**Question:** What does dinner, tennis, silent auctions, friendships, and hearing loss have in common?

**Answer:** The Nokes Family – Eric, Sarah, Taylor, and Mackenzie

For the past six years, Eric Nokes has worked tirelessly to raise awareness about hearing loss in children and help support Wyoming Families for Hands & Voices. Eric is the Director of Tennis at Casper's Wyoming Athletic Club (WAC). He is also married to Sarah, and the father of two amazing daughters – Taylor and Mackenzie.

Several years ago, while living in Oregon, Eric and Sarah's three year old daughter was diagnosed with a hearing loss. At this point in time that the Nokes Family was introduced to a whole new world: audiologists, early interventionists, communication opportunities, Hands & Voices, and Hands & Voices' Guide By Your Side Program – when a local Guide contacted them to ensure that the family was connected with proper resources and offered support raising a child with hearing loss. Shortly after Mackenzie was diagnosed with a hearing loss and fitted with hearing aids, the Nokes Family returned to Eric's hometown of Casper, Wyoming. Eric settled into his job as the Director of Tennis at the Wyoming Athletic Club while Sarah was busy navigating the Casper community and getting the girls settled into their prospective schools and activities. While older sister Taylor attended the local elementary school, Mackenzie received early intervention services from the local Child Development Center (CDC) where she received essential services that helped support her to successfully transition into a mainstreamed kindergarten class. Mackenzie is now a very poised, mature, independent, and confident fourth grader who creates pamphlets for her teachers to give them tips about herself and how to interact with a person with hearing loss!

Through Sarah's interactions at the local Child Development Center with Mackenzie's speech pathologist, Sarah eventually became a hearing screener for the CDC. Sarah now works in a different capacity at the CDC. Over the years, Sarah and Eric have also become involved with Wyoming Families for Hands & Voices, attending conferences, parent trainings, family fun events, acting as a contributing member on the Hand & Voices board - all culminating with Sarah becoming a Guide for Wyoming's Guide By Your Side Program when it started in 2018. Things have come full circle for the Nokes Family.

Six years ago Eric organized the first Tennis Calcutta to benefit Wyoming Families for Hands & Voices. This year's event was held on January 24-26, 2020.

Each year of the Calcutta, the first night (Friday night) starts off with a dinner, bidding on tennis teams, and presenters from Wyoming Families for Hands & Voices, sharing their story of raising a child with hearing loss. For the past two years, Mackenzie has presented her story and experience with an audience of 65! Saturday holds the traditional Point Match Challenge – the best part of the tennis Calcutta. This is where competitors bid money to see if they can score a point against Tennis Director, Eric Nokes. It is so much fun to see all the camaraderie and friendly competition between tennis players and the Tennis Director – especially when Eric's daughter's Taylor and Mackenzie take their chance to play against Eric. It is very clear that the WAC's tennis community cares deeply for and has formed a wonderful friendship with Eric and his family. This has been evidenced with the large turn out and support for this fund raiser. The Tennis Calcutta has become our largest fundraiser!

A-M-A-Z-I-N-G! The Tennis Calcutta has become Wyoming Families for Hands & Voices largest supporter. Thank you Eric, Sarah, Taylor, and Mackenzie! All of this because an amazing young lady was diagnosed with a hearing loss at three years old; because her father wants others to become aware of hearing loss in children; because her family has so much to offer other families; because Eric has tirelessly spent many hours planning a tennis tournament; because the proceeds from this tournament will continue to have a positive impact upon Wyoming children with hearing loss and their families. This is truly an example of the Dalai Lama's quote: Just as tiny ripples spread out when a single pebble is dropped into water, the actions of individuals can have far reaching effects!



## KALLEY ELLIS

I am honored and excited to be selected for this highlight! I little bit about me, I am the youngest of 3, growing up in Idaho and later Utah. I completed my Bachelor of Science degree in Communication Sciences and Disorders at Utah State University (Go Aggies!). It was during my junior year at Utah State, while taking an audiology class, when I realized just how amazing the ear and process of hearing are, and I knew audiology was what I wanted as a career. I then completed my Doctorate in Audiology at Idaho State University. I knew I wanted to work in pediatrics, because I wanted to be a helping hand in providing children with the appropriate care and management of their hearing loss so they could not only develop speech and language appropriately but achieve all they wanted in life. Knowing this, I worked to get as much pediatric experience as I could, including completing my 4th year externship at the Pediatric ENT of Atlanta (PENTA) where I saw pretty much everything in pediatric audiology.



It then came time to apply for jobs, and I happened upon one in Wyoming. I never imagined myself living in Wyoming, but the job was pediatric focused, so I applied. Fun fact, the same week I applied, Nancy Pajak, whose job I was applying for, happened to be in Atlanta for a conference. Talk about serendipitous! As we talked, I was amazed by everything Wyoming programs and families had achieved in helping kids with hearing loss. When I was later offered the position, I was incredibly honored and excited to have the opportunity to further help kiddos with hearing loss, their families, and the state with all things hearing.

My job is split down the middle between the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) program and CDC+ Audiology. With the EHDI half, I am the Program Audiologist, providing audiologic assistance across the state. Additionally, through EHDI I help train all nursing staff across the state on newborn hearing screenings, as well as providing training on late onset hearing loss screenings to the 42 child development centers in the state. The second half of my job is providing audiologic assessment and management to children birth-21 years of age at the new CDC+ Audiology Clinic located in the Child Development Center in Casper, Wyoming. This clinic, which was formerly known as the Wyoming Pediatric Audiology Specialty Clinic (WPASC) has expanded to now including hearing aid fitting and management (Yay!).

I love my job and I truly love Wyoming and its unique beauty. If you have any suggestions on places to see and/or things to do, please let me know! I look forward to meeting you all! A great big thanks to Wyoming Hands and Voices for allowing me this opportunity and for all the program does for kiddos with hearing loss and their families across the state.



## BILLIE WORTHAM

I met my husband, Ross, of 39 years at Casper College and after that we both then attended the University of Wyoming where I received my bachelor's degree in Speech Pathology in 1981. During this time I was able to do some audiology and fell in love with it. I then pursued my Masters of Audiology from the University of Wyoming and we moved to Oregon for Ross to attend Optometry School. We both worked in Portland Oregon for 8 years receiving our medical training. During this time both of our children, Mallory (33 years old) and Cheyenne (31 years old) were born.

We had always dreamed of having a joint private practice and that brought us back to Wyoming where we were both born and raised. I was born in Rawlins and Ross was born in Worland. We settled in Bridger Valley and were there from 1991-2011. The communities of Southwest Wyoming treated us just like family and this is where we raised our family. I had a private practice for medical and educational audiology and served medical clinics and schools in Southwest Wyoming.

In 2011 we relocated to Riverton to care for aging parents and were so thankful for our time in Bridger Valley. It was very hard to leave. At that time I applied and was accepted to be an Outreach Consultant for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students with the State Department of Education and served students in 23 school districts and several Child Development Centers and trained districts for hearing screenings to identify students with hearing loss. I then had the opportunity to spend three years on the Continuous Improvement Team working on State data reported to the Office of Special Education Programs in Washington D.C. I now serve as the supervisor for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Outreach Services and have returned to my area of expertise and passion.

My office is in Riverton and I now cover the Western side of the State. We find Riverton to be a great place to live as well with many kind people. I love Wyoming and can't imagine living anywhere else. Both of our children and their spouses live in the State and we were blessed with our first grandchild this year! Wyoming is full of good people and wide open spaces and I feel so fortunate and honored to live here and be able to do what I love.



Billie, her daughter Mallory, and her husband Ross at our 2013 5K

## NANCY PAJAK

Nancy Pajak grew up in a large family on a farm/ranch in North Dakota. She completed her undergraduate degree in Speech and Language Pathology at the University of North Dakota. Following her time at UND, Nancy worked as an SLP for school districts in Minnesota. Colorado State was where she chose to get her Masters in Audiology. Nancy worked as an educational audiologist in Wyoming school districts (Natrona County School District No. 1, Casper; and Laramie School District No. 1, Cheyenne) for eight years before moving to Washington in 1987. While in the Seattle area Nancy worked in both clinical and educational audiology settings. Upon returning to Wyoming Nancy became the supervisor of Deaf & Hard of Hearing Outreach from 1992-1994. In 1995 Nancy became the Family Service Coordinator for the Development Preschool and Daycare (Region 11, Albany County). It was also during this time frame when Nancy began working on Newborn Hearing Screening for Wyoming children alongside the state Part C Coordinator - Mitch Brauchie. In 1999 efforts resulted in legislation passing to require newborn hearing screening in Wyoming birthing hospitals and required all hospital birthing staff to be trained on screening protocols and appropriate follow up referral processes. Again in 2007 legislation was passed to allow hospitals to be charged a fee so that the newborn hearing screening programs could be fiscally sustainable. Nancy understood the critical importance of timely diagnosis for infants who failed the newborn hearing screening and their families. This was the impetus for developing an audiology clinic for infants, toddlers and preschoolers located in Casper. In collaboration with the University of WY Speech and Hearing Clinic and Child Development Services of Natrona County, audiology services appropriate for pediatrics were offered in Casper approximately every six weeks from 2008 to 2019. In 2019 audiology services offered at the Child Development Center of Natrona County (CDC+ Audiology) became available on a full-time basis. Nancy also recognized the critical need for parents to be fully informed and engaged as they learn to manage their child's hearing loss. As a result, a Parent Advocate is integrated into the processes and procedures available to families at the CDC+ Audiology Clinic. Identification of children who develop hearing loss as infants, toddlers and preschoolers was also developed under Nancy's guidance. In collaboration with the Child Development Centers throughout the state, Wyoming's youngest citizens can receive an age appropriate hearing screening using a uniform screening protocol with calibrated equipment at 42 sites across the state. Wyoming is currently the only state which consistently makes this type of hearing screening available to children throughout their state. Nancy marveled at the ability of the people of Wyoming to come together to support the development of screening, diagnosis and early intervention for infants, toddlers and preschoolers with hearing loss. She considers herself very fortunate to have had the opportunity to do the work! Nancy and her husband Mark have been married for 32 years. They live in Laramie WY. They have two sons; Luke lives in Denver and Patrick lives in Seattle.



Bradley, Nancy and Sarah

## JANINE COLE

I grew up in Indianapolis, Indiana the sixth of eight kids. I moved to Wyoming at the age of 17 to start College, never having been in the state before. I met my husband Jim in Laramie, WY my senior year of college. We have 3 kids: Luke is an attorney in New York City; Ben in an engineering student at UW; Gabrielle a graduate of Southern Oregon University in Ashland, Oregon who is currently working in St. Louis at a non-profit, with plans to go to graduate school in Chicago. As a young Girl Scout, I took a sign language class at the Indiana School for the Deaf. This planted the seed to go in the direction of deaf education. My undergraduate degree is from UW in Elementary Education. I then attended Lewis and Clark College, in Portland, Oregon for my Special Education degree with an emphasis in Deaf Education. I worked for the Wyoming Department of Education for 30 years. I began in Casper at the School for the Deaf, as a TOD for students ages preschool-6 grade. In 2000, when the school closed, my family and I moved to Cheyenne to work as an Outreach Consultant for the state. In 2004 I became the Supervisor for Outreach programs, a job I loved and will always feel was the best career I could have imagined. I always worked with amazing people and met wonderful children, parents and families. My retirement job is at STRIDE Learning Center as a Preschool Early Childhood Specialist and Special Education/Teacher of the Deaf. I work at the preschool building and in the community serving children ages 1- 5. I love it but it is a steep learning curve especially with the paperwork- great for my aging brain. I have many of great stories and memories though the years, mainly revolving around the travel. Spending the night at rest areas due to a blizzard, being chased in a state car, to name a couple. I will miss WYHI and seeing all the TODs, Interpreters and of course the kids!



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## TEEN SCENE - Outside of My Comfort Zone: What I Learned

*By Gabrielle Reimann of Casper*

As most college students know, internships can be a great way to get experience and explore careers in the field that they are studying. While not a necessary part of the college experience, they can be extremely helpful. I had been considering the possibility of an internship when I received an email from the Department of Vocation Rehabilitation (DVR). The email that DVR sent described an internship that had a focus on Microbiology and Cell Signaling.

This internship was to be held at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in partnership with their Biochemistry and Molecular Biology department. What astounded me about this internship was that they were looking specifically for D/HH students studying life sciences. They were looking for students like me. I applied within a week of getting the email, once I got two professors to agree to serve as references for me.

And then I forgot about the internship because I did not want to get my hopes up. Yes, they were looking for D/HH students, but I did not think I was the "right" kind of D/HH student they were looking for. I grew up oral. My sign was clumsy and mediocre at best. I was not involved in Deaf culture. I figured that the program was looking for students who attended Gallaudet University or Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT). About a month later I heard back from the program. I got in! I would be working in a genomics lab studying cancer cells. I would be living in a dorm with three other Deaf students: one from Gallaudet, two from RIT. I would spend the summer in Knoxville, Tennessee.

It was a whirlwind of a summer. I flew out to Tennessee at the start of June, stepping into the unknown. Working in the lab was an incredible experience and really opened my eyes to the life of a researcher. I learned how to culture cells. I learned how to make buffer solutions. I learned how to do fluorescent staining on the cells. I learned how to run different kinds of microscopes. I learned how to write scientifically. I learned how to present to a scientific community. I learned how to make mistakes.

That summer was more than learning about to how to research cancer cells. It was also about learning to be comfortable in my identity as a deaf individual. Growing up in the state of Wyoming, I have spent my entire school career being the only deaf kid in elementary, middle, and high school and that has continued into my college career at the University of Wyoming and in my area of study. I was alone in the mainstream and as a result, I fit in with the hearing world very well. While the Academic Bowl program had given me some exposure to the Deaf community I had never really connected with any of the students there – three short days of competition simply isn't enough. I was very nervous to meet my roommates. I was worried that they would think that I didn't really belonged in the program.

Instead I got to know them and they got to know me. We shared our life experiences and laughed together and learned together. The three ladies I lived with and others in the program were very patient with me as I navigated a language unfamiliar to me – waiting for me to get my sign out, suggesting signs that would work better, and teaching me new signs. By the end of the summer I had no worries about chatting with them. I was able to communicate clearly with them. I went to different places in the city with my friends – to coffee shops, to farmer's markets, stargazing, etc. I spent a summer outside of my comfort zone and as a result, my comfort zone expanded. I grew as a communicator – comfortable with who I am and my past experiences. If I had to sum up the summer and the program in three bullet points it would be:

1. It is okay to make mistakes.
2. Being able to communicate with others is important.
3. Never, ever forget sunscreen. (This last point is important. I got the worst sunburn in my life in Tennessee. The sun has got to be stronger in the South! I have permanent scarring from my sunburn!!!)

I really truly would encourage others to step outside of their comfort zones, to be persistent and fearless in communicating with others. To know that making mistakes is how we learn and it will be okay. As for D/HH college students who read this article and are interested in participating in this program, look up Research Experiences for Deaf Students at the University of Tennessee. It is always worth a shot to apply.



### TERRI DAWSON After 29 Years, PIC Founder & Director Retires

January 31, 2020, will be longtime PIC Director Terri Dawson's last day. She founded PHP of WY, Inc and wrote the first US Dept of Ed grant for the Parent Information Center in Sept 1990. When asked what she will miss most, Terri stated the it was relationships with families, educators and others across the state that meant so much to her. "I was so lucky to have met and worked with so many amazing folks, who care so much for our kids! While I won't miss traveling on icy, wind-swept roads to do a training or go to an IEP, I will really miss supporting families. I am so thankful to all the current and past PIC staff and Board members who worked so hard to make my job look easy!"

Terri and her son Ted.