



Inside

FEATURES

- 4** President's Award
— Hoard
- 5** Tribute to Carolyn
Hoard
— Lubarsky
- 13** From the Gifts
of Others
— Hammons

DEPARTMENTS
& MORE

- 2** Editor's Corner
- 3** President's Message
— Schibbelhute
- 6** Board Officers
- 8** Conference Photos
- 10** Regional Directors
- 11** Directors at Large

Monica Byrne

Receives the 2005 Emma Mae Vilardi Humanitarian Award

By Michael Grand

Monica Byrne is the recipient of AAC's annual Emma Mae Vilardi Humanitarian Award. For nineteen years, Monica has been the registrar of Parent Finders National Capital Region (PF-NCR), a volunteer search and support group that helps people separated by adoption to search and prepare for a reunion with a birth relative. As registrar, Monica maintains members' files and the accuracy of the database containing the PF registry of over 12,500 birth records. In addition, she has been involved in over 1200 reunions.

Monica works an average of four to six hours a day. Most of that time is spent on the phone fielding inquiries, providing advice, making referrals, etc. When her children were teenagers, they often complained that their mother was on the phone more than they were!

Monica's attention to detail and her intuitiveness for seeking out relevant bits of information has helped countless PF members to be reunited with their birth relatives. She can coax, plead, cajole, bully or assert herself because of her strong belief in the principles of openness and honesty in adoption.

PF-NCR, established in Ottawa in 1976, is run by a volunteer board of directors. Since becoming the Registrar in 1986, Monica has been actively involved with the board and running the monthly public information meetings.

Monica is the Director of Search and Research, a private adoption search, reunion and counseling business. She is also copartner of B&M Books, which offers pre- and post-reunion workshops, public speakers and books on adoption. She also assists the International Social Service, assisting family members from many countries, including Germany, the Netherlands, England and Australia, to reunite.

Monica has served as the Canadian



Monica Byrne

continued on page 13

Emma Mae Vilardi Humanitarian Award

AAC began the Emma Mae Vilardi Humanitarian Award as a memorial to her after her death in 1990. Established by her husband, Anthony (Tony) Vilardi, the annual award has been given to recognize and honor a dedicated AAC member for his or her contributions to adoption reform.

Emma Mae became active in adoption reform after the death of her mother, an adoptee who never learned about her own heritage. Herself a genealogist, Emma Mae founded the International Soundex Reunion Registry (ISRR) 30 years ago in Carson City, NV. The Soundex Registry, which has now grown to

over 200,000 entries, provides an opportunity for birth family members and adopted persons in and beyond North America to register at no charge and be matched when both persons have registered. The word "soundex" refers to phonetic formula used by genealogists to match names by the way they are pronounced, as many family names change in spelling over time. Emma Mae is survived by her husband, Tony, who continues to make appearances at AAC conferences.

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**AMERICAN
ADOPTION
CONGRESS**



Families Rooted In Truth

Established 1978

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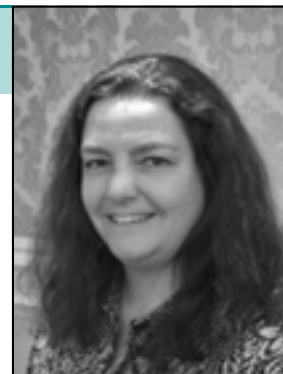
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Editor's Corner



Sharon Pittenger

One of things I enjoy about my job as editor of the *Decree* is the contact I am able to make with so many people interested in making positive changes to adoption policies and practices. It was quite delightful to be able to meet so many of you in person at the Las Vegas conference in July 2005.

In this issue, we hope to provide some information about the members of the 2005-2006 Board of Directors. While many faces will be familiar to you, there are some new people, and many of us have changed or added jobs this year. We feel very positive about our annual board meeting and the goals we generated, which Paul discusses in his president's letter. In addition to increasing membership in AAC, we would also like to have current members remain committed to AAC for many years. To echo Paul's statements in his letter, we as a Board are open to hearing ideas and suggestions from the members. Please refer to the contact information on page fifteen to reach any of us. *Decree* subscribers like to read the experiences of others; if you have a story about the conference to share, or you are willing to write an article about other adoption-related experiences or issues, please consider submitting it for publication in a future issue.

As change is inevitable, some former members are no longer serving on the AAC Board. Over the past two years, AAC benefited from the outstanding financial skills of Whitney Mintert, whose diligence and expertise as treasurer helped restore the financial integrity of our organization in a difficult time. She has stepped down after fulfilling a three-year term. In addition, the board accepted the resignations of Leah Weber, Jacinda Canfield, Deb Bullwinkel, and Tom McGee.

We are excited about upcoming issues of the *Decree*. The theme of the next issue is "Unusual Voices in Adoption," including thought-provoking articles on less widely discussed topics. In 2006, we are looking forward to an issue on "Parenting and Adoption" and also some history of the early days of AAC. If you have a suggestion for a topic or a theme you'd like to see featured, please contact me at spitty@teleport.com.



Paul Schibbelhute

From the President

I am truly honored that the AAC Board elected me President. I know I have my work cut out for me in taking over from Carolyn Hoard, who served as Legislative Director and President during her seven years on the board. I would like to thank Fred Greenman, another outgoing board member, for his years of legal advice to the organization and commitment to adoption reform.

At the annual board meeting in Las Vegas, the board concentrated on future goals. We identified five items as critical areas on which to focus:

- increasing membership in AAC;
- advocating for and supporting adoption reform legislation;
- fundraising;
- educating the general public; and
- planning future conferences.

One way we are already working to achieve these goals is by enhancing and updating our website. Specifically, a “members only” section is being planned to include *Decree* articles in PDF form and a legislation area that would provide members with materials on organizing a grassroots coalition, researching and using historical information. We anticipate that this section will assist AAC members in their efforts to pass new laws that would authorize the release of original birth certificates to adopted adults.

When we moved the date of our 2005 annual conference from spring to summer, many of our long-time members were unable to attend and asked that we return to a spring date in 2006. Other members have asked for the return of regional conferences. A board decision was made to delay the next annual conference to 2007. Our Conference Co-Chairs, Ellen Roseman and Sharon Pittenger, are exploring options for holding 2006 regional conferences in their respective regions (Southwest and Northwest). More information will be provided through AAC-News, our website and the *Decree* when these matters are decided.

Finally, I want you to know that we have a very dedicated and focused board that will work together to make AAC a stronger organization. I speak for all board members in saying that we are proud to be leading the organization in the next year.

2006 Nominations

The Nominations & Elections Committee of the American Adoption Congress is calling for the nomination of candidates for the Board of Directors. In 2006, three Regional Directors finish their first term; they are all interested in serving a second term. Regional Directors are nominated and elected only by members of their own region.

The name of a nominee must be submitted to the committee by a member of the AAC. If you wish to nominate someone for a board position or regional directorship, contact Richard Curtis, Committee Chairperson, to receive a Nomination Form.

All nominations must be submitted on the official Nomination Form by mail or email. Each nomination must include the full name, address, phone, fax and email of the person being nominated, as well as a brief statement in support of the candidate's nomination. Please specify whether the nomination is for a board position or the regional directorship. Nomination forms must be returned before January 31, 2006.

To request a nomination form, or to ask any questions about the election process, please contact:

Richard Curtis, Chairperson
AAC Nominations & Elections Committee
4930 E. Spruce Drive
Dunnellon, FL 34434
Email: flcurtis@aol.com

The committee is also interested in recommendations for state representatives. Additional information about the responsibilities involved can be found on AAC's website.

President's Award

Fred Greenman Receives AAC's Annual President's Award



Fred Greenman

By Carolyn Hoard

Each year at the AAC annual conference, the President recognizes an AAC member who has given tirelessly of his or her time and talent to meet the goals of the organization. The recipient of the 2005 President's Award was Fred Greenman.

Fred is a birth father who became an advocate for reform soon after reading about the New Jersey Coalition for Adoption Reform and Education (NJCARE) in the *New York Times* several years ago. He met with Jane Nast, Pam Hasegawa and others to discuss the New Jersey Coalition's efforts to pass adoption reform legislation in that state. When the Tennessee reform legislation passed in 1995, a lawsuit was filed to prevent the new law from taking effect. Fred, working with local Nashville counsel, provided his legal services *pro bono* through all of the state and federal court battles until success was achieved in 1999. When voters passed Oregon's Measure 58 in 1998, it too got bogged down in litigation. Once again, Fred volunteered his services without fee to assist the local Portland attorney defending the new law.

In 1999, AAC began working on the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption ("Convention"). When Congress introduced legislation to implement the Convention, Fred, along with other AAC members, visited legislators in Washington, DC, to lobby for changes in the bill. With the bill's passage, the next step was drafting regulations, a project that the State Department assigned to an outside consulting contractor. Once again, Fred and others traveled to

Washington on more than one occasion to present AAC's testimony. Drafting these regulations has been an arduous process with AAC opposing several sections and arguing to strengthen others. With each new draft, Fred authored AAC's significant comments. It has now been over two years since the last submission of comments by all parties. The State Department has still not made its final draft available to the public.

Fred is a New York attorney with a practice concentrating on commercial litigation, publishing and copyright matters. Despite the responsibilities of his busy practice, he makes himself available to AAC members and others

to assist with access to records legislation. He is committed to changing the law state by state until all adult adoptees are able to obtain copies of their original birth certificates.

As AAC's legal advisor for years, including his six years as a board member, Fred reviews our

contracts, revises the by-laws as necessary, monitors our financial investments and tax returns, assists with projects, and answers a wide range of questions on many topics from the board and the state representatives. Fred was responsible for the legal pursuit of AAC's former treasurer from the time her embezzlement was uncovered through her conviction and sentencing.

Fred was reunited with his daughter Jody in 1991 and travels to California yearly to visit with Jody and his granddaughter. He also has a son and grandson who live in New York.

*Fred is committed to changing the law
state by state until all adult adoptees
are able to obtain copies of their
original birth certificates.*

A Tribute to Carolyn Hoard

A Tribute to Carolyn Hoard

By Pat Lubarsky & the *Decree* staff

Many people in the adoption community come into our lives and yet few touch them in the same way as Carolyn Hoard. Whatever question is asked or task is requested of her, Carolyn finds a way to respond in an effective and friendly way. Those who have had the opportunity to work with her know that she always comes through with a good idea or plan, yet remains the ultimate team player. It's hard to imagine what AAC's leadership and the adoption community would be like today without her countless contributions. Carolyn worked tirelessly from the first moment she joined AAC in 1992, holding positions including Delaware State Representative, Legislative Director, Membership Chair, Conference Registrar, Vice-President, President, and now, Immediate Past President. Throughout her AAC career, she has remained a dedicated mentor and friend to all. Although she has completed her terms on the Board of Directors, she will not be far from the work she loves—reforming adoption practices through legislation.

Analyzing and making recommendations on legislation, especially those related to the Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption, are Carolyn's forte. She brings to these tasks her expertise gained in a long career in the legal community. Without having Carolyn's knowledge to lean

Throughout Carolyn's career as an AAC worker and director, her goal has remained focused on achieving unrestricted access to adoption records for all adult adoptees.

on, many of our state representatives and regional directors would not have been able to make the contributions that have moved adoption reform forward. Often working hand-in-hand with AAC's long-time legal advisor, Fred Greenman, she has been a valuable resource for all of us who find some of the legalese contained in proposed legislation almost impossible to decipher.

Carolyn's legislative activities began in Delaware in 1993. She successfully organized a coalition to defeat the Uniform Adoption Act and pass a bill that made it possible for most adoptees born in Delaware to obtain their original birth certificates. Carolyn has worked extensively with both Congress and state legislatures on adoption-related

issues, especially in attempting to have the United States Congress pass legislation implementing the Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption in a way that honors this historic treaty obligation. Although Carolyn avoids personal recognition for her work, others prevailed and, in 2001, the Congressional Caucus on Adoption named her an "Angel in Adoption." Throughout her career as an AAC worker and director, her goal has remained focused on achieving unrestricted access to adoption records for all adult adoptees.

Carolyn is the mother of five grown sons and daughters, including her son Eric, whom she relinquished in 1964. Eric passed away in 2002 before they had an opportunity to meet one another again. She also has eight grandchildren. Because Carolyn was unable to participate in the 2005 AAC Annual Conference, we could not express our appreciation and praise in person. Those of us who know her well sincerely hope this article will substitute somewhat for the applause Carolyn didn't hear in Las Vegas! Carolyn, good luck, and we look forward to many more years of your valuable help in achieving AAC's goals.



Carolyn Hoard

Board Officers



President,
New England Regional Director
Paul Schibbelhute

Paul is a birth father who was reunited with his birth son in 1998. During his search, he was deeply touched by all the help he received from those in the adoption community. Since then, adoption and adoption issues have become an important part of his life. Paul joined the AAC in 1998 and accepted the position of New Hampshire State Representative in 2001. He later became the New England Regional Director and now serves as AAC President.

From 2000 to 2001, Paul was a member of the New Hampshire Open Adoption Records Coalition (NHOARC), which supported legislation allowing adult adoptees access to their original birth certificates (OBC). Paul continued to work for legislative changes by leading the grassroots effort in NH that resulted in the passage of SB335 in 2004. With this legislation, New Hampshire became the seventh state in the U.S. to allow adult adoptees access to their original birth certificates. In 2005 Paul and three others co-founded ACCESS 2006, a grassroots effort to enact an access-to-information law in Maine that would allow adult adoptees access to their OBC. His activities in New England also include participating on the NH Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Commissioners Adoption Advisory Committee and serving as the vice-president of the Open Door Society – Adoption Community of New England (ODS ACONE). In addition, Rep. Charles Bass nominated Paul to receive the Angel in Adoption Award from the U.S. Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute.



Vice-President
Pat Lubarsky

Pat is a reunited birth mother who was found by her son, Bill, and reunited with him in 1996. She vows that secrecy must be eliminated from all aspects of adoption through education that will change public policy and personal awareness.

Since that time, Pat has been active in the DC/METRO CUB, and ABSN and served as the AAC Virginia State Representative, the Southern Regional Director, and the AAC Secretary and registrar for the Kansas City conference. Currently she is the AAC Vice-President. In the AAC, she sees a strong national organization with the potential to develop and carry out its common vision of openness and honesty in the entire adoption process. She believes that “AAC must strive to have adoption be seen by the public and the legislatures as an open system to be used only for the mutual benefit of all triad members. AAC will have achieved its goals when, under the highest ethical and moral standards, adoption serves the needs of the entire community.”

She resides in San Diego with her husband Al and also has two daughters and five grandchildren.

Support AAC While You Shop

We wish to remind you of our link with *iGive.com*. You can designate AAC as your preferred charity on that site and then use the site to make purchases from hundreds of different companies (books, clothes, office supplies, and more). AAC will receive a percentage of all purchases you make. Thanks!



Board Officers



Secretary,
Canadian Liaison
Nancy Kato

Nancy, a reunited birth mother from British Columbia, Canada, has been associated with the AAC since 1998. After she relinquished her daughter into the closed adoption system in 1971, they did not meet again until 1994. Today, they have a healthy, loving relationship, and Nancy is enjoying her two beautiful granddaughters.

Nancy is the president of the Forget Me Not Family Society, a volunteer, nonprofit, search-and-reunion support organization, with which she has been associated since the early 1990's. She is past secretary of the Adoption Council of Canada, is a member of the BC Adoption Network, and facilitates a monthly support meeting for those involved in search and reunion. Nancy has coordinated six national adoption conferences in BC and was involved in the 2003 NACAC conference in Vancouver, where she received the Adoption Activist of the Year award from the local organizing committee.

Nancy became involved in the AAC in order to share information on common issues, work toward openness, and create awareness. As newly elected secretary, she looks forward to working with a team impassioned about making a difference. Nancy will use her organization and business skills to help AAC fulfill its mission.



Treasurer,
Mid-West Regional Director
Melisha Mitchell

Melisha Mitchell joined AAC in 1997, a year after searching for and reuniting with the daughter she surrendered for adoption in 1967. Named AAC's Illinois State Representative at the end of 1998, Melisha worked closely with IL State Representative (and adult adoptee) Sara Feigenholtz in 1999 to help ensure the passage of legislation that allows adoptees, adoptive parents of minors and birth family members to exchange medical background information, letters, pictures and correspondence through the state registry; the 1999 law also introduced a way for birth parents and surviving non-surrendered children of deceased birth parents to file a waiver of confidentiality through the state registry. This past year, working with the Illinois Adoption Registry Advisory Council, Melisha drafted legislation that will extend the list of family members who can file a waiver of confidentiality through the state registry to the brothers and sisters of deceased birth parents starting in January 2006. In 2001, Melisha was the primary architect of legislation that ensures that all Illinois adoptees receive minimal background information on their birth parents through the state registry, and allows birth parents to confirm (or learn, as the case may be) the date of birth of the child they surrendered for adoption upon request.

In 2000, Melisha launched the White Oak Foundation, a non-profit organization offering a wide range of post-adoption services and programs to triad members with an Illinois connection. She has helped thousands of birth relatives, adoptees and adoptive parents successfully search for and reconnect with lost relatives since locating her birth daughter in 1996.

A longtime writer and editor with publishing companies in both Europe and the U.S., Melisha has been the Managing & Feature Editor of the *Decree* since 1998. She lives in Chicago with her Wheaten terrier.

Upcoming AAC Conferences

AAC plans to host two regional conferences in 2006. One will be held in the Bay Area in May 2006. The second, "Creating the Empowered Reunion," will be held in Portland, OR, on August 12, 2006. AAC's 28th International Conference will be in spring 2007.

For more information, visit AAC's website at www.americanadoptioncongress.org.

Conference High

Sally Howard and Carolyn Pooler



Tony Vilardi & Ken Watson



Russell Friedman



Annette Denny & Charmaine Voth



n-



"Getting to Know You" at AAC 101



Adam Pertman



Assembling thoughts on paper at AAC 101



Vince Wilson



Darcy Hammons



Patrick McMahon & brother, Scott Shields



Nancy Kato



Gerard Biscogno, Marvette Reid, Rita Ogueri, Stuart Knibb & Ismay Griffith from MercyFirst, Brooklyn, NY



President's Award to Fred Greenman is announced



Bonnie Abbott and daughter Ann Adornetto



Collette Glazebrook and brother, Trevor Jordan, with Marilyn Waugh



Carmen Troy, Vele' Henson, Sheila Reynolds



Amy Winn

Regional Directors

Richard Curtis Southern Regional Director

Richard began his involvement with AAC in 1996 and has presented several workshops focusing on both male adoptee issues and sibling reunions. He was appointed Florida State Representative in 2002 and elected to the Board of Directors as Southern Regional Director in 2003.

Richard was born, relinquished, and adopted in Cleveland, Ohio. In 1993, he searched for his birth family in the Cleveland area and found that both birth parents were deceased. He remains in touch with siblings and cousins. Following his search, Richard returned to Florida and joined The Circle of Hope, a local support group in the West Palm Beach area, and in 1998 co-founded the Adoption Triad of the Treasure Coast. Richard has now volunteered to be a spokesperson for FREE, a grassroots group exploring the possibilities of opening Florida birth records through legislation.

Richard retired in 1997 from his forty-year career in higher education. He holds a B.A. and M.Ed. degree. He and his wife, Carol, a real estate agent, currently reside in Dunnellon, FL, and have a combined family of six adult children and ten grandchildren, with whom they enjoy spending as much time as possible.



American Council of Adoptable Children (NACAC), the California Adoption Alliance, the Coalition for Adoption Reform and Education, the National Open Adoption Coalition, the Council for Equal Rights in Adoption, the Child Welfare League of America, the Post Adoption Center for Education and Research (PACER), and the YWCA Mentoring Program. She is treasurer for the Academy of California Adoption Professionals and is an advisor for "Safesoul," a center for the prevention of violence towards women. Ellen has published numerous adoption articles and is a regular speaker at adoption-related conferences around the country. She is well known for her passion for children's rights, openness in adoption and open records.

Ellen lives near San Francisco and has four daughters who joined her family through birth, foster care, and adoption.

Carolyn Pooler Mid-South Regional Director

Carolyn Pooler, an adoptee, was born in 1943 at the Willows Home in Kansas City, MO. Carolyn, who always wanted to know her roots, searched for her birth mother but found her deceased. After registering with the International Soundex Reunion Registry (ISRR), Carolyn was matched with her only living birth aunt. She eventually met her 96-year-old grandmother and now annually attends huge family reunions in Indiana.

Support groups, which bring triad members together to understand each other better, have become a burning passion for Carolyn. Carolyn has started groups in the Twin Cities and the Kansas City metropolitan area, including the Adoption Triad Support Network KC.

As the Mid-South Regional Director, Carolyn continues to look forward to building membership, promoting regional conferences, and facilitating harmony, peace and understanding among the triad, professionals and agencies. Carolyn and her husband live in the Kansas City area with their "collected" family of four children.



Ellen Roseman Southwest Regional Director Conference Co-Chair

Ellen Roseman has been working as an adoption placement consultant in California for almost twenty-four years. She emphasizes adoption openness and a focus on education. She has helped facilitate more than 1,850 infant and older child adoptions for couples, singles, and families abroad.

In addition to her roles in AAC, Ellen is a member of RESOLVE of Northern California, CaOpen, the North



Regional Directors

Sharon Pittenger
Northwest
Regional Director
Conference Co-Chair

Sharon joined the American Adoption Congress in 1996 when she began her search for her birth mother. She became the Oregon State Representative just before attending the AAC conference in Dallas in 1997, and found her birth mother later that year.



Since then she has been reunited with her birth uncle and members of his family. She is still searching for her birth father and family.

Sharon has served on AAC's legislative and fiscal development committees, and in 2003 she joined the Board of Directors as Publications and Public Relations (now the Communications) Committee Co-Chair. In 1996, she also joined the Oregon Adoptive Rights Association (OARA). She joined their Board of Directors, became the newsletter editor in 1997, and then became president.

Sharon, in her 17th year of teaching, teaches social studies at Oregon City High School. She volunteers at the Portland Center for the Performing Arts and enjoys gardening, remodeling and outdoor activities.

Directors at Large

Jane Nast
Education Director

Jane Nast is the adoptive parent of David and Karen and grandparent of Thomas Nast and Zoe Nast. Both David and Karen have met their birth families and have ongoing relationships with them. Jane, an art education major, taught kindergarten through college level courses, and holds a M.Ed. from Rutgers University.

As an AAC Board member from 1995–2001, Jane served as Legislative Director for one year and President for five years. She recently returned to the AAC Board. She is a founding member of the New Jersey Coalition for Adoption Reform and Education, (NJ CARE) and is currently working on adoption legislation. She has served on the boards of several adoption organizations and is on the Advisory Boards of Adoptive Families Magazine and the NJ Adoption Resource Clearinghouse (NJARCH). She is a recipient of the AAC Emma May Vilardi Humanitarian Award, the National Congressional Coalition's Angel in Adoption Award and the Adoption Forum Reform Movement Advocate Award. She has presented at conferences for the AAC, The Adoption Forum, The Adoption Connection, CWLA, CERA, Adoptive Parents Committee, Louisiana Advisory Board, and other groups. She has also appeared on the TODAY Show, MSNBC, the Joan Rivers Show, CNBC Live, CNN, Fox TV News, NBC Extra and many other local and national radio and TV shows.



Mary Martin Mason
Legislative Director

As Minnesota's State Representative and chair of the AAC's Legislative Committee, Mary Martin Mason's goal is to create change in adoption through legislation and reform. Along with other reformers, Mary spearheads a local Minnesota legislative effort to provide access to birth records for adult adoptees. Mary says, "My beliefs align with the AAC philosophy and mission. It is time to address the hurt and harm from closed records and to move forward in a healing manner. To do any less diminishes each of us whose lives have been altered by adoption."

Mary is a national spokesperson for fully disclosed adoption, a champion of birthfathers and an advocate for helping adopted persons fit into their world. She grew up in an open adoption in an era in which such adoptions were rare. Her adult son, Josh, has grown up in an open adoption with his birth mother, Lisa. An adopted person herself, Lisa was reunited with her birth mother and birth grandmother several years ago.

Mary is the author of *The Miracle Seekers*, *Designing Rituals of Adoption*, and *Out of the Shadows: Birthfathers' Stories*. Aside from writing, Mary's hobbies include travel, reading and gardening.



Directors at Large

Linda Woods Membership Chair

Linda Woods is a reunited birth mother and adoption advocate. For over fifteen years, Linda has been involved in many organizations dedicated to adoption issues and adoption reform, including her work with a volunteer search and support group in the New Orleans area and co-founding the Louisiana Adoption Advocates. In 1999, Linda became Louisiana's State Representative. As a member of the Louisiana Adoption Advisory Board (LAAB), Linda has represented this board at many events on a local and national level and has served as conference chair to bring various members of the adoption community together to discuss different perspectives, seek common understanding, and promote solutions that pertain to special needs adoption. Linda also has chaired nine state-wide adoption conferences, successfully attracting national speakers and drawing national attention. In addition, Linda has submitted written testimony in the House of Representatives on adoption issues and has lobbied the Louisiana state legislature for fourteen years. In 2001, Linda was recognized as an Angel in Adoption by the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute.

Linda is passionate about her work in adoption and, in particular, adoption reform to promote openness in adoption. Her contributions at the state and national level have increased Louisiana's stature and presence within the national adoption community.



Pam Hasegawa Communications Chair, Membership Recognition Chair

Pam, an adoptee, loves photographing people, advocates truth in adoption, and networks everywhere. After joining ALMA in 1975, Pam became a search buddy, then ALMA's NJ chapter coordinator, and eventually its public education director.



Photo: Patrick McMahon

When the Model State Adoption Act was released in 1980, Pam was stunned that a prestigious federal panel believed adoptees had a right to their original records. Realizing that helping people search did little to change the system, she modified her reform efforts toward this goal. After the model act recommendations were introduced in the N.J. Assembly in 1980, she began lobbying for legislative change with an ever-widening network of adoption advocates. With her support, the Presbyterian General Assembly voted to support the principles of the Model State Adoption Act in 1981.

Pam joined AAC in the mid-1990s and continues to promote the understanding of, as well as justice and compassion for, those who have been separated by sealed-records laws. One of her greatest pleasures is encouraging younger members of the triad to become involved by using their gifts of writing, speaking and helping others to understand the effects of secrecy on all persons affected by adoption.

Pam Hasegawa, founder and editor of Adoption News Services, invites *Decree* readers who wish to receive information on adoption-related conferences, legislation and media to subscribe by writing to adoption-news-service-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

Gift Subscription

Gift subscriptions to the *Decree* may be purchased not only for libraries (see p. 14), but for individuals who might want the *Decree* for themselves or, for example, for their waiting rooms, in the case of professionals or business persons who like to have thoughtful reading material available for clients. Gift subscriptions may be purchased for \$20 each by current members of AAC. Each recipient will receive a card notifying them of the gift and the name of the giver. To order, please complete the form below and mail with payment to **AAC Decree Subscription, P.O. Box 42730, Washington, D.C. 20015**. Please make check payable to AAC with the notation line marked, "*Decree gift subscription*."

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Telephone of member _____

Name of recipient _____
Address of recipient _____
City, state, ZIP of recipient _____
One-year (\$20) _____ Two-year (\$40) _____

From the Gifts Of

By Darcy Hammons

From the gift of others, I was able to attend my first American Adoption Congress (AAC) Conference in July 2005. It all started out easily enough.

I attended my first Post Adoption Center for Education and Research (PACER) meeting where I learned about AAC and shared with others about being an adoptee and my hopes of re-connecting with my birth mother and birth father. After the meeting, I went home, read up on AAC and decided to apply for the scholarship in hopes of attending the conference.

Soon after applying for the scholarship, I learned a hard truth: my birth mother wants nothing to do with me. In addition, my birth father ignored my letter. More positively, I found out I was accepted for the AAC scholarship. Even so, everything started becoming a little tougher.

After learning all these facts, I had to reflect upon them. It took me awhile to prepare for the conference by practicing to keep my emotions under control, worrying and packing. Here is where it became rough.

I attended the workshops and hoped I wouldn't feel out of place as the only newbie, the only one having a hard time, the only one trying hard not to let those emotions show through, and the only one who didn't belong. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

I learned so many things from this conference; I have built up in my mind a mental filing cabinet with everything sorted and filed by brilliant colors for easy access! And I access these files often in order to share my experience with others and to understand why it is I sometimes do the things I do:

- I learned the benefits of open adoption versus closed adoption (as was mine).
- I listened to many, many reunion stories and the struggles that they all started with
- I learned about the difference between shame and guilt. Shame—I *am* something wrong. Guilt—I *did* something wrong.
- I learned that all of us are searching to belong and that an adoptee is no different.
- I was reminded that laughter is a healing activity.

Most importantly, I learned that I wasn't alone and that I belonged.

I sincerely thank EVERYONE involved with this conference for sharing a part of themselves in their compassion, support, and understanding. Without them, I would not have had one of the best learning experiences of my adopted life!

A special "thank you" goes out to all of you who financially contributed to the scholarship fund. I hope that in reading a bit about my conference experience you can feel what it meant for me to be able to attend.

And to the next recipient of the American Adoption Congress Conference scholarship, welcome, enjoy, experience, and don't forget the Kleenex!

Belonging,
Darcy Hammons

Darcy Hammons was the 2005 Michael Wheeler Scholarship winner. She attended the AAC 2005 National Conference in Las Vegas.



2005 Vilardi Award

continued from page 1

Liaison on the board of the American Adoption Congress. She was Co-Chair of the Adoption Council of Ontario, an active committee member of the Adoption Reform Coalition of Ontario (ARCO), and currently represents eastern Ontario and Parent Finders Canada on the coordinating committee of the Coalition for Open Adoption Records in Ontario. More than one politician in the province has felt her searing judgment when they have failed to show the proper respect for birth kin. Monica has never backed down from telling her truth. The adoption activist community holds her in esteem for never failing to standing up for open records

continued on back cover

2005 State Representative Meeting

Las Vegas, NV

During the 2005 Conference, I attended the state representative meeting. In attendance were six of the seven regional directors, 20 of the 35 state representatives and a couple of AAC's legislation experts. We had a productive meeting that focused on how we can improve in communication, legislation and membership. Following are some of the ideas that were suggested:



By Bobbi Beavers

Communication

- Create a Members' Only section on AAC's website with additional information, such as state adoption laws, search information, adoption-related legislative activity by state and copies of *Decrees*;
- Prepare handouts for use in educating about adoption, including suggestions for educators, possible activities for National Adoption Awareness Month, a Birth Parent Bill of Rights to aid in pre-adoption decision-making, an explanation of the difference between open records and access to information, and information about the gains made in the 10 years since victory in TN;
- Write grants to corporations;
- Encourage local media and state public broadcasting stations to air adoption-related interviews, stories and documentaries;
- Send the *Decree* to social work schools and public and university libraries;
- Write letters, on AAC letterhead, to editors, legislators, the Surgeon General and others; and
- Participate in adoption triad workshops and discussion panels in counseling and social work schools, related professional associations and law schools.

Legislation

- Conduct in-depth research of your state's adoption law history;
- Check your state's website for any adoption-related issues or legislation, and report regularly to your regional director (RD) and/or Legislation Chair;
- Begin a Yahoo group about adoption legislation for your state;
- Meet with opposition groups;
- Create a power-point presentation for legislators and others; and
- Learn techniques for changing laws from professional lobbyists.

Membership

- Continue to discount membership dues after the first year;
- Co-host two regional conferences in 2006 and offer a national conference in 2007;
- Distribute membership information to public libraries and other places where public information is displayed;
- Connect with on-line reunion groups, Concerned United Birthparents (CUB) and adoption professionals;
- Join local triad and adoptive and foster parent groups;
- Begin or become involved with your state's adoption resource clearing house;
- Organize an International Soundex Reunion Registry (ISRR) Reg-Day in your local area;
- Train your replacement if you need to step down as state representative.

If you see an area in which you could provide some assistance to the organization, please contact your state representative or regional director.

Bobbi Beavers is the AAC Maine State Representative and happily reunited birthmother. A member of AAC since 1995, Bobbi has an MA Counseling, MBA, and BA in Chemistry. She is the co-founder of ACCESS 2006 (www.OBCforME.org) and recently recovered from Lyme Disease.

Upcoming Event

Adoption: The Spiritual Journey for the Human Family

*An all-day conference for adoptees,
birthparents, adoptive parents,
adoption professionals and
public policy makers.*

Saturday, January 21st, 2006

St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church
50th Street & Park Avenue, New York City
Co-sponsored by American Adoption Congress

Join speakers Paul Schibbelhute, Rev. Thomas F. Brosnan, Carol Schaefer, Michael Colberg, Lorraine Dusky, Adam Pertman, Sarah Saffian, Fred Greenman, Pam Hasegawa, Elizabeth Samuels, Rickie Solinger, Joyce Bahr, Ronnie Diamond, and others

Our day includes a series of four interactive panel discussions, beginning with individual journeys and continuing with the journey of the human family:

- Dealing with Grief and Loss
- Reconnecting and creating new relationships
- History of adoption and adoption law in America
- Society's future impact on adoption law and Practice

Register online at

<http://www.stbarts.org/boxoffice.htm>
or by phone at 212-378-0222.
Pre-registration fee: \$25
After January 1: \$35

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2005 Vilardi Award

continued from page 13

and compassion in adoption.

Unofficially, Monica assumes the roles of confidante, counselor, advisor, searcher, or mediator as needed. She has provided a friendly shoulder and unlimited advice to thousands of adoptees, birth relatives and adoptive parents. She is a wife and mother of four. As a birth mother at twenty, she lost her eldest daughter to adoption. With the help of Parent Finders, Monica was reunited with her eighteen years ago. Wanting to help others in similar circumstances, she has been at it ever since. She tried to resign from PF-NCR thirteen years ago, but she cannot seem to let go.

A full list of anecdotes would fill a volume, but here are a few examples:

Returning from an adoption conference in Toronto, after spending four days volunteering her time, she was looking forward to spending a relaxing trip home by train and catching up on her reading. Instead, a birth mother, going through all the normal trauma of a reunion, recognized Monica and monopolized her time all the way back to Ottawa. Four hours later, the woman got off the train, feeling healed, refreshed and with a greater understanding of all the issues involved in a reunion. Monica got off the train with a kink in her neck!

A typical weekend: an adoptee who was in town visiting birth relatives was left out in the

cold, literally, at midnight, by a birth relative, and called Monica for a place to stay. The next day, a board member of the Adoption Council of Ontario from Toronto also needed a place to stay and she exchanged one guest for another.

She is forever being drawn into conversations with strangers about adoption issues. As another example, once she called a long distance telephone company for general information about their rates. When the operator discovered Monica was with Parent Finders, she revealed that she was an adoptive mother in a major conflict with her adopted daughter and the adoptive father. It had to do with the daughter's wish to search for her birth family. Thirty minutes later, a perfect stranger had a much better understanding of what her daughter was going through and that it should not be perceived as a threat to their relationship. Yet again, a perfect stranger benefited from Monica's time, patience and experience.

Monica is a caring, compassionate, and committed worker for adoption reform and righting the wrongs of the past. Thousands of us have benefited from her energy, focus and most importantly, her friendship. She brings honor to the American Adoption Congress by being the recipient of such a prestigious award.



American Adoption Congress

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