

**2023 DOT SOWERBY PIONEER AWARD RECIPIENT****John Comer**

*For his many contributions to Dysphonia International, formerly the NSDA, including service as the Western Regional Coordinator and a past Board Member, using his considerable leadership skills to support, educate, and raise awareness about spasmodic dysphonia and related voice conditions.*

In 2015, the National Spasmodic Dysphonia Association, now Dysphonia International, created the **Dot Sowerby Pioneer Award** to recognize an individual who has made a significant positive impact on the voice community. For the ninth year, Dysphonia International is proud to bestow this award. We wish to recognize **John Comer** for the commitment and leadership that he has shown for many years. He is an enthusiastic, empathetic, and organized leader who has served the Dysphonia International community in a variety of ways. This is the first award under the organization's new name.

John Comer was in sales and marketing before his retirement. He has assisted with the formation of new support groups and has helped to expand existing ones. He served as a panelist at Regional Symposiums in Minneapolis and Denver, which he helped organize. He has participated in clinical research trials and has visited university speech-language pathology classes to speak about spasmodic dysphonia. He has written several articles for us on voice recognition systems and supporting our organization.

John is a valued member of the Support Network Committee. He has worked with support groups in Minnesota and California, as he resides in both states. As a Regional Coordinator, he mentors, nurtures, and encourages Support Group Leaders and refers new contacts to the local support groups. His territory covers both the Midwest and the West. He also serves the western part of Canada. He formerly served as a Central Regional Representative and as a Coordinator for the Plains Region.

In responding to a support group survey of our leaders, we heard these comments about John Comer: "He keeps us well-informed. He is a great resource and very willing to help. He really cares and is very involved and helpful." In his article from 2012 published in *Our Voice*, John stated: "All of you who are involved with spasmodic dysphonia ARE our organization whether you are a person with the disorder, family member, or a healthcare professional. Please support your SD community and the goal of eventually finding a cure for this disorder that impacts our lives in various ways." Dysphonia International salutes **John Comer** for his ongoing service and is most grateful for his extraordinary work on our behalf.



I appreciate receiving the Dot Sowerby Pioneer Award. To even be considered for an award named after our tireless crusader for spasmodic dysphonia is such an honor. I imagine Dot couldn't make the meeting because she was away winning more Gold Medals in Track and Field. What a trooper and inspiration to all of us, on and off the field. I started my NSDA journey in Washington, DC, at a symposium. That event kindled my efforts to assist in any way that I could. I don't remember when I started, a long time ago, as the Western Regional Representative for the NSDA. Time flies, and now I am the Western Regional Coordinator for Dysphonia International. Some of you folks may not know your geography well, so in case you didn't know, Knoxville, TN is in the West! I joke about this all the time, but the truth is that my counterpart in the East has more people in her region. My job is to connect with SD patients and get them involved with a support group or at least an area contact. I have enjoyed connecting with all these people over the years and have met many of them face-to-face. Being able to connect with a person who shares our voice issues, frustration, and lack of proper diagnosis has been very rewarding. I have seen our organization grow and have the ability to fund research. Many of us have participated in studies at the NIH, Harvard, Mt. Sinai, and a number of universities around the country. I have been pleased to be a part of this outreach, research, and increase in the number of folks who connect with Dysphonia International. Thank you for the award and especially for being honored with an award named for our warrior, Dot Sowerby.

John Comer