



Dot Sowerby Pioneer Award Recipients

Former President and founding member of the NSDA Board of Directors and now Dysphonia International, Dot Sowerby, has led by example as a leader in volunteer service for many years. Her outstanding contributions include writing the books, *Speechless* and *Speechless No More*, attending and educating numerous healthcare professionals at medical and speech conferences across the United States, and leading the Voice Disorder Support Group of Greensboro, NC. In 2015, the NSDA established the Dot Sowerby Pioneer Awards to recognize all of her tireless efforts and honor the outstanding work of an individual who is a 'pioneer' through their volunteer service. Listed below are the recipients of this award.

2015 Recipient: Pat Hill

Area Contact Person Coordinator, Pat Hill, has served in this role since 2009. Every year, she communicates with over 200 Area Contact Persons with passion, warmth, and positive energy. Prior to serving in this role, Pat was the Regional Coordinator for Southern California and the Southwest Region from 2007-2009. During this time, she was responsible for starting NSDA Support Groups and revitalizing others. Pat's determination to make a difference in the SD community can be seen through her hard work and tireless dedication that she has provided throughout her years working with the NSDA.

2016 Recipient: Karen Adler Feeley

Karen Adler Feeley has made many contributions to the NSDA as an author, moderator, learning consultant, and leader in the NSDA support network. She has worked on the Planning Committee for several NSDA Leadership Days programs and has coordinated a number of opening and closing activities during these events. Overall, Karen uses her creativity, communication, and planning skills to help promote education about SD. As the author of, *Easier Done than Said: Living with a Broken Voice*, Karen has helped to raise awareness about SD by sharing her personal experiences with SD. We salute Karen for her outstanding contributions to the NSDA and the SD community.

2017 Recipient: David Barton

An extraordinary, dedicated, and tireless NSDA leader, David has served as the past President, Bulletin Board Moderator, Executive and Support Committee Member, and International Communications Director during his time with this organization. Since 1995, he has supported the NSDA and traveled from his home in New Zealand to attend as many meetings in the United States as possible. As one of the founding Moderators of the NSDA Bulletin Board in 1997, David has done everything in his power to 'pay forward' all the help and support he received from the NSDA when he was first diagnosed with spasmodic dysphonia. He has made an incredible impact on the lives of those in the NSDA community, and its members are most grateful to him for his longtime involvement and leadership.

2018 Recipient: Charlie Womble

Since 1992, Charlie has been involved with the organization, lending his financial and leadership skills wherever needed. He joined the NSDA Board of Directors in 1993 and served as Treasurer from 1997-1999. Charlie has also participated as a panelist during Leadership Day and regularly serves as a moderator during the breakout sessions at the Annual NSDA Symposiums. His dedication continues to be seen today, as he is the serving Chairman for both the Audit and Investment Committees. Today, Charlie continues to be a leader and role model for those in the spasmodic dysphonia community.

2019 Recipient: Mary Bifaro

Since 1999, Mary Bifaro has led The SD Support Group of Charlotte, NC, and thus began 30-plus years of service locally. She leads six meetings a year and writes a newsletter following each meeting. In addition, Mary and the group have conducted holiday NSDA fundraisers, and NSDA walk fundraisers. Mary's dedication to the NSDA is also evident on the national level. In 2003, Mary was invited to join the NSDA Board of Directors, and in recognition of her role with the Support Network, a new position was created in 2005 called the Support Services Director. In this role, Mary oversees support activities and serves as a liaison to the NSDA Board. Within this role, she writes quarterly issues of *Voices of Support* highlighting the work of the support network; chairs NSDA Leadership Workshops in conjunction with our annual meeting; and helps with a host of other NSDA Support Leadership projects. Mary is a creator of acronyms for various NSDA-related activities, and the one that sums her up perfectly is Nothing Stops Determined Advocates. Mary's dedication, passion, and leadership makes her the heart of the Support Network.

2020 Recipient: Carol Doles

Carol Doles is a dedicated NSDA leader who serves as the Eastern Region & Canada Coordinator and who founded the Greater Columbus and the Central Virginia support groups. She is also part of the Support Leadership Committee and is an Administrator of the NSDA Support Leadership Facebook Group. In addition, she has served multiple years on the planning committees for the Leadership Workshops. According to Carol, "I felt humbled and honored to receive the award. Dot was among the first to welcome me and let me know that I was not alone in my journey with SD. Dot provided valuable mentorship and included me in her network of leaders. These leaders have all supported, taught, and encouraged me every step of the way. My goal has been to follow these great examples and let every person know that a community awaits them. Living well with SD is within their reach."

2021 Recipient | Marcia Sterling

Marcia Sterling joined the NSDA Board of Directors in 2004 and served as Treasurer from 2007 until 2020. She has led the Silicon Valley SD Support Group for 15 years. She has done various fundraising activities to benefit the NSDA, including organizing the three Northern California groups for the 2020 Walk for Talk. Marcia has represented the NSDA in Dystonia Advocacy Day, and she has participated in SD research. In 2015, she received the Midge Kovacs Annual Award with two other groups from northern California. Marcia helped with the books, *Easier Done than Said: Living with a Broken Voice* and *Speechless No More*. Marcia shared, "I'm so honored to have received the Dot Sowerby Pioneer Award. It means a lot, and I'm proud to walk in the footsteps of such a role model!"

2022 Recipient | Larry Kolasa

Larry Kolasa was the Founding President of the National Spasmodic Dysphonia Association (NSDA), starting the organization from his dining room table in 1989. Larry was employed as an independent life insurance and securities sales professional for years. The Million Dollar Roundtable Foundation, with which he is associated, has helped fund a number of NSDA projects. Larry has always had a passion for running. He has run 38 marathons in his lifetime. In 1998, he ran a fundraiser for the NSDA called "Running for Research." This award was presented to Larry by its namesake, Dot Sowerby, in April 2022. Both have served on the Board since the organization started in 1989. Larry passed away in November of 2022, and for over 33 years, he gave his time, tirelessly raising money to fund research and fully supporting the organization's growth to become Dysphonia International. Larry was a pioneer who embodied steadfast commitment, strong dedication, and selfless service. A tribute to Larry can be found here: <https://dysphonia.org/larry-kolasa/>

2023 Recipient | John Comer

John Comer has impacted the work being done at Dysphonia International in several ways. He 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.

2024 Recipient | Bruce Menk

Bruce Menk is an enthusiastic, empathetic, and organized leader who has served the Dysphonia International community in a variety of ways. Bruce served on the Dysphonia International Board of Directors from 1993-1999, as President from 1995-1997, and as pro bono Legal Counsel from 2000-2020. He was welcomed back to the Board of Directors in 2020 after his retirement. Bruce served in the practice of law for 47 years. He has lived with adductor spasmodic dysphonia since 1989. He was diagnosed by Dr. Daniel Truong in 1990. He continues to receive successful Botox injections from Dr. Truong. Bruce has undergone speech therapy and one of his daughters is a speech pathologist. We conducted a brief interview with him in 2018 during our annual symposium.