



**AMERICAN HEARING
RESEARCH FOUNDATION**

Research. Education. Community.

Making new discoveries possible for more than 60 years

AHRF funds novel research to better understand and overcome hearing and balance disorders of the inner ear

The thing about human ingenuity is that you don't know where that next great idea will come from—who the next big thinker will be.

Our ambition at the American Hearing Research Foundation is to make that next transformative discovery possible.

About AHRF

At the American Hearing Research Foundation (AHRF), we recognize the boundless potential of new ideas. That's why we focus our resources on providing seed grants for novel research to better understand and overcome hearing and balance disorders of the inner ear, funding five to ten research projects each year, with an average grant of \$50,000. We also work hard to educate the public about these life-altering conditions, which are inextricably linked to people's quality of life and their ability to meet the challenges of day-today living.

Tracing our roots back to the first-ever successful operation to restore hearing, AHRF has been making new discoveries possible for more than 65 years. Founded in 1956 by Dr. George E. Shaumbaugh, Jr., our mission is to better understand why we lose hearing and balance functions and to learn all that we can about how to preserve and restore them.

An enduring legacy

- Advancing research and knowledge to help people with hearing loss and balance disorders was the life's work of Dr. George E. Shaumbaugh, Jr. (1903-1999). The American Hearing Research Foundation is his legacy.
- In 1938, Shaumbaugh was instrumental in developing and performing a groundbreaking surgical technique called fenestration. Together with Dr. Julius Lempert (1890-1968), Shaumbaugh performed the first-ever successful operation to restore hearing, using this technique.
- Fenestration restored hearing specifically to people with otosclerosis—a condition that leads to hearing loss when spongy bone grows in the middle ear, ultimately preventing the small bone known as the stapes from vibrating. The stapes must vibrate for hearing to be possible.
- Fenestration led the way to more advanced techniques. Today, fenestration has been replaced by another class of procedures known as stapedectomies, which remove the damaged stapes bone and implant an artificial one. Once again, researchers associated with AHRF were instrumental in the development of these leading-edge procedures.

AHRF in the making

- AHRF exists thanks to the generous donations from individuals and organizations who understand the tremendous impact that loss of hearing and balance function has on people's lives.
- In 1940, the Chicago Community Trust provided a \$10,000 grant to build and equip a laboratory at Wesley Memorial Hospital in Chicago. Later, in 1942, grants from the John and Mary R. Markle Foundation of New York kept the lab going and helped establish a temporal bone histopathology laboratory. The temporal bone is part of the skull that encloses the hearing and balance systems within the inner ear.
- More gifts, given in 1944 from grateful patients of Dr. Shaumbaugh and Dr. Eugene L. Derlacki, a prominent otolaryngologist and a co-founder of AHRF, helped them build and equip a hearing clinic at Northwestern University Medical School. This was the first clinic of its kind and proved to be the genesis of many pioneering diagnostic procedures.
- The establishment of that hearing clinic at Northwestern paved the way for the creation of the Mid West Hearing Foundation in 1956—which later became known as the American Hearing Research Foundation.
- Since those early years, AHRF has broadened its geographic scope and impact. We invite you to learn more about our 60-plus year history and accomplishments by viewing our historical timeline on our website.

Mark R. Muench – Chairman



“Over the 20-odd years I’ve served on the AHRF Board, I’ve been astounded by the technological advancements we’ve seen in the medical community’s ability to treat hearing loss and other disorders of the inner ear. But there’s still a very long way to go. And I genuinely believe that AHRF continues to have a vital role to play in advancing research so we can better help people affected by these all-too-often life-altering conditions.”

Mark R. Muench brings apt business experience and acumen to his role as Vice President of the AHRF Board. For 25 years, he was involved in the business and information technology sides of delivering quality healthcare to consumers in an evolving marketplace with shifting healthcare delivery models. Muench recently retired from his role as Vice President of Cerner, the leading U.S. supplier of healthcare information technology solutions that optimize clinical and financial outcomes. Previously, he was Associate Partner of Accenture, a global professional services company providing a broad range of solutions in strategy, consulting, digital, technology and operations. Muench holds his MBA in Finance and Financial Management Services from the University of Illinois and his BS from the University of Notre Dame.

Alan G. Micco, MD – President



“Every time we see that AHRF-funded research was directly related to positive advancements in the understanding and treatment of hearing and balance disorders, we’re reminded of just how important our work at AHRF is.”

A practicing surgeon-educator and leading expert in otolaryngology and neurotology, Alan G. Micco, MD, brings extensive medical knowledge and clinical experience to his roles as President of the AHRF Board and Chairman of the Research Committee. Micco is on staff at Northwestern Memorial Hospital (NMH). He also is a Professor in the departments of Otolaryngology, Neurological Surgery, and Medical Education at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, where he heads the section of Otology and Neurotology. In addition, Micco is the residency program director in the Otolaryngology Department and a Fellow of the Hugh Knowles Center.

David J. Wuertz, CFA - Treasurer



“Every year, AHRF funds more than \$350,000 in early-stage research grants. On a grand financial scale, that may not sound like a lot. But in terms of hope and the potential for bringing us closer to breakthrough discoveries to help people with hearing and balance disorders, the possibilities are countless.”

As Treasurer of the AHRF Board, David J. Wuertz brings more than 25 years’ experience in developing investment strategies and financial plans for a wide range of clients. He has successfully built, analyzed, and managed investment portfolios for dozens of not-for-profits, corporations, trusts, and individuals. Wuertz holds an MBA in Finance from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University. Currently a Vice President and Investment Officer at Associated Bank, a top-50 publicly traded U.S. bank holding company, Wuertz also has worked in financial planning at the Feldman Securities Group and Northern Trust Global Investments.

Marvin T. Keeling - Secretary



“Only in recent years have hearing loss, Meniere’s disease, and other debilitating disorders of the inner ear gained broader media attention and public awareness. But for more than 60 years, AHRF has held steady in its abiding commitment to advance research to help people struggling with these often-under-addressed conditions.”

Marvin T. Keeling has a successful history of building businesses in the medical, telecommunications, software technology, and finance industries. For more than 50 years, Keeling has been active in community development and management. And he has been an initiator of capital and idea development through philanthropic activities and foundations. Currently, Keeling is Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the Keeling Family Foundation, a 32-year-old 501(c)(3) nonprofit that has supported many charities through a variety of fundraising activities—including VetTech.US, a program dedicated to training and preparing veterans for the IT career field while collecting and recycling/re-purposing electronic waste. The Keeling Family Foundation also runs the Veteran Employment Today (VET) program, which serves the Chicagoland area’s homeless, unemployed, and underemployed veteran population. Keeling also served on the Board of the St. James Hospital.

Donna S. Whitlon – Research Committee Chair



“The anatomy of the cochlea, particularly the wiring of the local spiral ganglion neurons, captured my imagination over 35 years ago. Now, I am interested in a critical clinical question: How can we help to protect against or repair hearing loss? I have always appreciated the idea of this Foundation, its enthusiasm and its focus on stimulating new ideas and helping to get them off the ground.””

Initially trained in biochemistry, researcher-educator Donna S. Whitlon, PhD, brings over 35 years of experience in auditory neuroscience to her roles as AHRF Board member and Chairman of the Research Committee. As a Research Associate Professor in the Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery Department at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, Whitlon has aimed to find new interventions to prevent and repair damage to spiral ganglion neurons in the cochlea, a cavity in the inner ear essential for hearing. Through her research, she works to uncover new mechanisms of spiral ganglion neurite elongation in hopes of informing drug discovery. She has served as a grant reviewer for the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Joan Wincentsen – Executive Director



“AHRF honors its time-tested legacy of fueling hope and determination in the advancement of scientific knowledge to overcome hearing and balance disorders of the inner ear. The need to better understand and address these conditions has not gone away. And our commitment to the cause remains steadfast.”

Joan Wincentsen brings tremendous determination to her role as Executive Director of AHRF. She recognizes the meaningful contributions the Foundation has made over the last 60-plus years and is driven to help AHRF build on that heritage. Wincentsen has more than a decade’s worth of experience in nonprofit management and administration through her work with the association management firm, Apex Management & Special Events, Inc. Earlier in her career, Wincentsen worked for 20 years in communication project management—including time as a communications consultant with the compensation and benefits consulting firm, Hewitt Associates—and as a freelance writer. Her well-honed skills in fundraising, budget management, program development, and marketing all are great contributors to the strength and success of AHRF and its mission. A lifelong Illinoisan, Joan earned her MA from Northwestern University in English and her BA in Mathematics and English Literature from the University of St. Francis.

AHRF Discovery Grants

About the grant

AHRF typically funds five to six Discovery Grants for studies that investigate various aspects of hearing and balance disorders related to the inner ear. Grants may be up to \$50,000 for one year of research. Priority is given to investigators early in their careers who need seed funds to generate results and data that can be used to support applications for larger grants (i.e., NIH grants) in the future. Special consideration is given to studies that address Meniere's disease or the causes of sudden hearing loss.

Research topics

Proposals should relate to the hearing or balance functions of the ear. Both basic and clinical studies may be proposed that investigate aspects of the auditory and vestibular systems, including but not limited to genetics, neurotology, anatomy, auditory processing, molecular and cellular biology, therapeutic studies, and investigations of current or experimental devices (i.e., cochlear implants).

AHRF Discretionary Grants

In some years, AHRF identifies one or two studies that show outstanding promise. At its discretion, AHRF may award a study with the **\$75,000 Birtman Grant**, or the **\$65,000 Richard G. Muench Chairman's Grant** for exceptional scientific investigation.

- The **Birtman Grant** is named for Georgia Birtman, a Chicago school teacher who was a significant benefactor of the Foundation.
- The **Muench Chairman's Grant** honors Richard Muench's commitment to improve hearing health. Serving 27 years as AHRF Board Chair, Muench was instrumental in increasing the organization's annual grant funding which helped launch careers for new investigators.

Bernard and Lottie Drazin Memorial Grants

AHRF offers up to five \$1,000 awards to otolaryngology residents to support research projects during their residency. To be eligible, residents must be from the Chicago programs (Northwestern, Loyola, University of Illinois, University of Chicago, and Rush) or schools represented by members of our Board or Research Committee (Washington University, St. Louis, MO; University of Miami, FL; or Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, TX).

Your gift to AHRF fuels hope for new discoveries and cures. No amount is too small. Every dollar you give helps fund scientific research at universities and hospitals throughout the United States to better understand and overcome hearing and balance disorders of the inner ear—conditions that affect millions of Americans. We deeply appreciate your giving. It makes progress possible.



**AMERICAN
HEARING**

**RESEARCH
FOUNDATION**