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For Immediate Release

PRESS RELEASE

Lawrence Newman, Deaf Activist, Former President of the National Association of the Deaf, Dead at age 86

Lawrence Newman, a prominent Deaf activist, author, teacher and administrator died yesterday in Riverside, California. "Larry was a giant among men and is now resting," said his longtime friend, Gerald "Bummy" Burstein, also a Riverside resident and also affiliated for decades with the California School for the Deaf, Riverside. Newman was one of the founding instructors of the school, starting in 1953 when the school first opened, and later became an administrator there.

"He was a gifted writer and used his literary and writing skills to advocate for deaf and hard of hearing persons. He entertained many with his published writings and poetry," remarked fellow Californian Dr. Robert Davila, who is President Emeritus of Gallaudet University where Newman attended in the late 1940s. Davila entered Gallaudet as a preparatory student in the summer of 1948 just after Lawrence graduated. "His demise leaves a huge void. He was also blessed with a wonderful helpmate, Betty, and wonderful children," said Davila. Lawrence and Betty Newman married in June 1950 shortly after her graduation from Gallaudet.

Newman was named California "Teacher of the Year" in 1968 and was an early proponent of bilingual education for the Deaf in the modern era, always emphasizing the prime importance of education in the life of a Deaf child: "If deaf people could get an education, their minds would be set free and the kingdom of the world would be theirs," he wrote. Newman was also a prominent critic of the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf due to the association's promotion of a speech-dominated pseudo-pedagogy, as he explained in 1969: "A system that represses a deaf child's natural urge to communicate freely, that considers speech and lipreading more important than language and learning is absurd."

Newman continued his bold efforts at advocacy by participating in the nationwide May 19, 1982 protest against the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), after the network decided against captioning television programs using the Line-19 system. The network later reversed their decision and agreed to broadcast closed captioned programs using the Line-19 system, rather than the teletext method which they planned to develop. Newman was elected President of the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) and

served two terms from 1986 to 1990. In 1988, during his tenure as NAD President, a major protest erupted at Gallaudet University. Gary Olsen, who was the NAD Executive Director under Newman at the time, played a major role in starting the protest on Sunday, March 6, 1988 by leading a group of students and activists toward Florida Avenue soon after they got word that a deaf president was not chosen. Olsen himself the first to sit down in the street in protest, whereupon Gallaudet student Jerry Covell then inspired the protesters to march to downtown Washington, DC. Throughout the entire seven-day protest, Newman made himself available to the media and was an enthusiastic supporter of the protesters, stating later that the protest victory "marks the emancipation of deaf people from the shackles of limitations."

That spirit of education reform, for which Lawrence Newman was partly responsible for bringing into being, continued in the hearts and minds of many, and was put to the test from May to October 2006 when another major protest erupted on the Gallaudet campus. The protest, which had become necessary in order to protect Gallaudet's integrity as an institution of higher learning, was ultimately successful, leading to Robert Davila's installation as President in 2007.

In 1978, after serving more than 25 years as an educator, Newman was awarded an honorary doctor of letters degree from his alma mater, Gallaudet. He proudly used the honorary title, as other leaders in the Deaf community have done since 1851 when Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet was awarded an honorary degree by the Western Reserve College of Ohio. The third President of Gallaudet, Leonard Elstad, continued the practice until his death in 1990, and the current Gallaudet Board Chair is continuing the tradition. As Newman once wrote: "Education is to deaf people what the Golden Fleece was to Jason in mythology. He was willing to go through many trials and tribulations because if he could get the Golden Fleece, the throne in the kingdom of Greece would be his. If deaf people could get an education, their minds would be set free and the kingdom of the world would be theirs."

Newman was the author of two books: "Sands of Time--NAD Presidents 1880-2003," which was published by the National Association of the Deaf in 2006, and also: "I Fill This Small Space--The Writings of a Deaf Activist," which was published by Gallaudet University Press in 2009. He also wrote numerous articles for various publications, including a well known article on bilingual education in the May 1973 issue of Deaf American (Volume 25, pages 9-13).

"I met Dr. Newman in 1989 when, as NAD President, he gave a lecture at a community college in California," relates Gallaudet alumnus Brian Riley. "He regaled the audience in his inimitable style which was comprised of a mixture of swagger, intelligence and good humor--a style which has inspired many hearing parents over the years to enroll their Deaf children in schools for the Deaf where they could receive an appropriate education."

A memorial service which will be open to the public will be held on Thursday, July 7, 2011 at Mount Sinai Hollywood Hills, 5950 Forest Lawn Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90068. The service will begin at 11:00 a.m.

Follow-up note: Below is a link to download Dr. Newman's 1973 Deaf American article (vol. 25, pp. 12-13). The article is historic in that, not only does it break new ground in instigating a shift in pedagogical thinking, but the article shows the beginning stages of educators' attempts to implement the linguistic discoveries made by William Stokoe, which were only then, in 1973, beginning to be popularized. Newman referred to a type of signing that utilized mouth movements, manual signs and fingerspelling. Today linguists understand that he was referring to a "high register" of American Sign Language and have shown that the simultaneous use of two languages is not cognitively possible. (See Johnson, Liddell and Erting's famous 1989 paper: "Unlocking the Curriculum")

LINK:

http://saveourdeafschools.org/lawrence_newman_1973.pdf