

In Service to Mankind

How Sertoma impacts the lives of those who serve our communities

By Russell Nay, 4/1/17



The 2016 charter members of “Sertoma Collegiate Club @ USF Tampa” pose for a photo during the club’s charter ceremony.

Every day she goes to work, Amy Davis improves how people experience life.

In August 2000 — four months after Davis got her Master’s in speech-language pathology — she worked at Canterbury Wood Elementary in Annadale, Virginia where she helped deaf or hard of hearing preschool to 6th-grade students improve their communication skills.

One of her clients was a preschool girl who wanted to be in an upcoming school play but struggled with normal speech and couldn’t say the lines she was given.

Davis, however, provided speech-language therapy, and she was able to recite her part before the day of the performance.

The girl's lines included her own name and the phrase "mom and dad."

Her parents, who were sitting in the audience on the day of the show, got to hear and understand their daughter say "mom and dad" for the very first time.

"She was able to be understood," Davis said. "I remember looking (into the audience), and her parents were crying. From the beginning of my career, that would stand out as (a client) I will never forget..."

Now, as a clinical instructor at the USF Speech-Language Clinic, Davis works with speech-language pathology graduate students in helping improve the lives of Tampa Bay community members who come to the clinic for speech-language therapy. Being an instructor means Davis must play the role of both medical professional and professor. On average, she said she meets four to seven times a day with clients who need speech-language therapy and students who need counseling. She also has to find the time to be a teacher and make treatment plans.

"It's very important because while you're balancing the medical and professional part of things, you're teaching your students how to do so as well," she said. "It all funnels back into the main mission of educating graduate students to become certified SLPs (speech-language pathologists)." Davis' specialty as an SLP is in pediatrics.

Davis was involved with hearing health initiatives and community service since childhood.

Before she was born, both her parents were members of local Florida branches of national

nonprofit Sertoma. Founded in 1912 in Kansas City, Missouri, Sertoma's motto is "SERvice TO MAnkind."

Now, Sertoma clubs exist across the country, and Sertoma members (Sertomans) work to meet various civic service needs in their own communities. The organization's flagship cause is promoting better hearing health through its "Safe-Ears" program and national walk campaign CELEBRATE SOUND Don't Walk in Silence®. It also provides grants to universities with hearing health programs, scholarships for students who are deaf or hard of hearing and scholarships for students in the communicative disorders field. Davis was a scholarship recipient herself and was in Sertoma's teen program — "Serteens" — in high school.

Davis' father Craig McCart went from a part-time volunteer at the West Pasco Sertoma Club in 1974 to full-time employee and executive director of the Sertoma Speech & Hearing Foundation of Florida. According to a Tampa Bay Times article about a community dinner in McCart's honor, he served as the executive director for 18 years before retiring in July 2015.

While chairman of the board of the West Pasco Sertoma Club, he helped build the West Pasco Sertoma Speech and Hearing Center in New Port Richey when Davis was six years old. She said she can be seen in all the newspaper clippings covering the clinic's ribbon cutting.

After growing up in a family of Sertomans, Davis said being involved in a "helping profession" just made sense. She originally went to college for journalism but later changed her major after her mother told her about an opportunity to shadow an SLP at the University of Florida. Her time as a camp counselor to children with communication disorders influenced her pediatric specialty.

"I was raised a community activist," she said. "I think I always wanted to make a difference in some shape or form, and communications was the way to do that."

Davis moved near Virginia to attend Gallaudet University — a private university for education of the deaf and hard of hearing — where she got her Master's and met her husband. She said the two came back to Florida in 2013 so they could be closer to family and because working as a clinician would allow her to improve more lives.

“I touch eight students a semester, but those eight students are going to graduate and touch how many clients over the course of their career?” she said. “That's what hit home with me when the job position (at USF) opened.”

Today, Davis co-advises the Sertoma Collegiate Club @ USF Tampa with USF Hearing Clinic Director Devon Weist. The two started the club with students in the USF Communication Sciences and Disorders Department and with the local Tampa Gem Sertoma Club. Both clubs partner with each other to put on community events and fundraisers for local hearing health initiatives. They recently partnered with USF's College of Behavioral and Community Sciences to host their own CELEBRATE SOUND Don't Walk in Silence®, which took place April 8 at USF.

“Being the Sertoma Collegiate Club Advisor was just something that made sense,” Davis said. “It's very rewarding to be the co-advisor and come full circle with the experience throughout my life.”