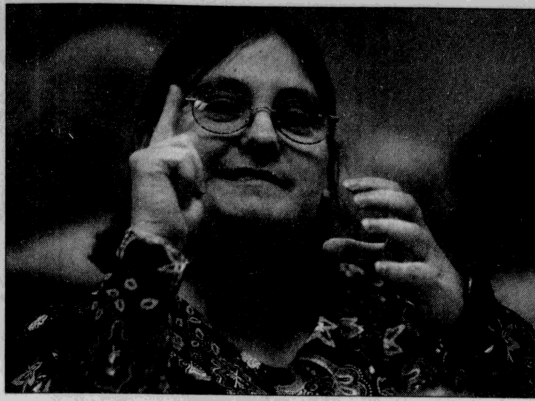




Star Photos by Jeff Taylor

Donna Williams (above) flashes another playing card while Kim Monhollen of Winchester signs to her fellow deaf competitors during a game of Wingo Saturday night at the War Memorial Building.



Wingo

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get if all cards are out of his or her hand within that card number. The first of many games Saturday was 35 cards for \$50.

No one made that, so the pot dropped to \$25 for the first person to use up his or her cards.

Jamie Nikstaitis of Front Royal played two hands, one for her husband, Art, who conducted that game, and one for herself. Jamie's touch was just the thing for Art's hand, which was the one that won \$25.

Jamie, who is hearing, said jokingly, "I might be nice and let him keep \$5."

Jamie signs with her husband easily after 18 years together, and he relies on her as an interpreter for people who don't know how to sign.

Those people weren't in abundance Saturday, with the majority of the hearing players being students of sign language.

Many are learning from Donna L. Williams, the outreach specialist for the deaf at Access Independence who also teaches American Sign Language at Lord Fairfax Community College.

Williams, an expert lip reader, said the turnout has been good for Wingo, offered by the Sign Language Organization, since it moved from Wardsville, W.Va., to Winchester in January.

The game raises some money for the nonprofit SLO, but registration for it also provides the prize money, Williams said.

Twenty-seven people played in January and 23 turned out in February, she said. "We had snow and ice, and they still came."

Thirty-one people kept an eye on their cards Saturday.

Many of the players come from Winchester and Romney, W.Va., where the West Virginia School of the Deaf is located, Williams said.

Kim Monhollen of Winchester said through signing that she comes every month because she likes playing cards, and it's fun to socialize with "new friends and old friends."

One of Williams' students, Charlotte Stuart of Woodstock, played for the first time Saturday. She said Williams is a wonderful teacher who got everyone excited to play.

Stuart works at the Perry Judd's printing plant in Strasburg, which has started to employ some deaf personnel. Now that she's learning to sign, she calls her work an "awesome experience."

Art Nikstaitis said he hopes the Sign Language Organization will grow larger in time, and the group will be able to engage in more activities, like traveling en masse to baseball or basketball games.

His wife added that games

such as Saturday's are part of a relatively limited selection of socialization choices for the area's deaf and hard of hearing.

It would be wonderful to go to a movie theater sometimes, rather than wait for a film's home-video version with closed-captioning, Jamie Nikstaitis said.

Williams said she is trying to encourage captioned films to come to Winchester. They're already shown at certain times in Martinsburg, W.Va., and Hagerstown, Md.

She said she's gone north to see films from time to time, but "I would love to see it in the area."

The Sign Language Organization will hold a silent supper on March 25 at Texas Steakhouse & Saloon, and May 18 is the date for the

first official meeting of the Apple Valley Chapter of the Virginia Association of the Deaf advocacy organization.

Williams is acting president of the new chapter.

The SLO plays Wingo every month but for April. The next Wingo will be on May 22 at the War Memorial Building.

The Sign Language Organization is also planning a big potluck supper in September at the War Memorial Building in honor of Deaf Awareness Week, Williams said.

For more information, e-mail Williams at deaf-outreach2001@yahoo.com or call 662-2361 via Virginia Relay 711 or TDD.

To use the relay, dial 711 and ask the operator to dial (540) 662-2361. The operator will relay the conversation.

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