

NW teacher taking on classroom noise

Educator awarded for work with kids who are deaf or hard of hearing

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THEY are familiar sounds: the steady hum of an air conditioner, the buzz of a florescent tube light, the screech of a chair leg scraping a bare floor.

For most people these annoying hums, buzzes, echoes and thuds are dismissed as background noise, but for those who are hard of hearing these sounds can interfere with everyday tasks, especially at school.

North Vancouver resident Tom Tylka became a resource teacher for the deaf and hard of hearing in 1979, and it was his students who made him aware of the effect of classroom acoustics.

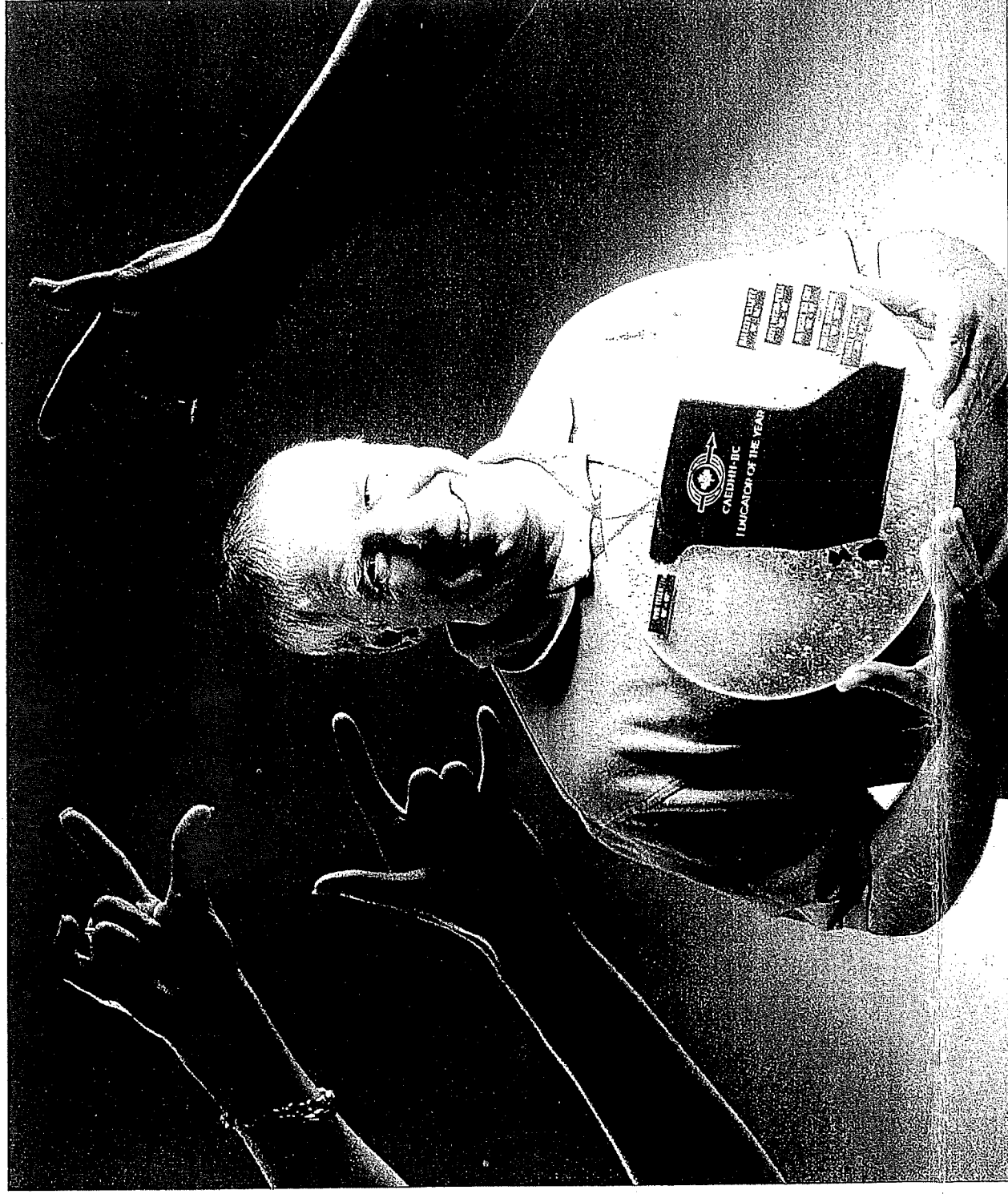
Some of the students told him they were having trouble hearing their teachers because their hearing aids were picking up all the unnatural ambient noise in the classrooms.

The schools' older lighting systems were the biggest noisemakers, so Tylka enlisted the help of a couple of UBC professors to take a look at the problem. They eventually brought an electrical engineering graduate student into a Vancouver school to measure the buzz noise of the lights there. He recommended changing the ballast cycle in the lights to reduce the noise. The ballast is what limits the current flowing through the light, and it generally operates at an audible frequency. However, that frequency can sometimes be changed to a level that cannot be heard by humans.

After learning about the light issue, Tylka sought out information about other noise concerns. He attended a conference in California organized by the Acoustical Society of America, and discovered that in the United States, there are design standards available for use in the construction of new schools or the renovation of old schools that address various noise concerns.

He explains that current plans for the new Sutherland school in North Vancouver include noise reduction measures such as housing the heating system outside the building so students won't hear the unit's mechanical noise. Sound-absorbing ceiling tiles to reduce noise inside the classrooms and double-pane windows to reduce the noise from outside are also planned.

Through his research, Tylka learned that reducing noise in classrooms can benefit students who are not hard of hearing as well. He notes a study that estimated kids in primary grades miss about one of every seven words their teachers say, and up to the age of 10, it is difficult for children to filter the extra noise typically found in a classroom setting. Those noises could come from within the classroom, from the hallways, or from outside the school. Tylka says a simple trick like placing a tennis ball half on the bottom of a chair leg could help reduce noise from chairs scraping across floors. He adds that learning is



NEWS photo Mike Wakefield

TEACHER Tom Tylka displays the Inspirational Deaf Teachers Award he recently received, while some helping hands spell out I Love You in sign language. Tylka is working to improve acoustics in classrooms to make it easier for kids to hear in school.

easier if you can hear the teacher properly. "I think it will be easier for many if we can legislate acoustics into our school renovations and our school buildings so all the children can hear better."

To further his cause of raising awareness about noise in schools, Tylka started a committee in 2001 called the School Noise Action Group. One of the purposes of the group is to get acoustic standards legislated into building codes.

For his effort to improve classroom noise conditions, and for his long teaching career, which he started as a science teacher in 1977 and later continued as a resource teacher for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, Tylka received the Inspirational Deaf Educators Award from the Canadian Association of Educators of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in October.

"It's just an honour to be recognized by this

association," says Tylka about the award, adding he was surprised when he got a standing ovation at the awards ceremony from more than 200 of his colleagues. This isn't Tylka's first teaching award, and among others is a 2003 award from the Western Institute for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, for which he was nominated by his students.

And he isn't the only award-winning teacher in the family.

In 2003, his wife Terry, who works with primary students in West Vancouver who are deaf or hard of hearing, also won the Inspirational Deaf Educators Award.

As a resource teacher, Tylka, who is now on long-term disability after a car accident, visited schools to work with children on language development, speech and more. A big part of his job was also helping the kids cope with various social issues that arose from integrating into a

predominantly hearing environment.

Tylka, who has three daughters of his own, explains that when he started teaching, careers were limited for hearing-impaired students, and it was difficult for them to get into professional fields. However, that has changed, and he recently found out a former student is attending medical school.

"What a thrill for me, but it's a thrill for them because the issue is where would that student be without the hearing loss?" he says of when he hears his students have overcome barriers and are pursuing their goals.

"Because the children of today are integrated they get to have friends who are deaf and hard of hearing and they get to see them every day, so it's really not a big deal for them. It's the world that we all live in. And it doesn't matter if you have a disability, just do the best you can and we'll all make it work."

publicnotice FINANCE COMMITTEE

2007-2016 Financial Plan Revision

Date: Monday, November 5, 2007

Time: 7:00 P.M.

Place: Council Chamber, City Hall, 141 West 14th Street

Purpose: The Finance Committee will consider a report regarding proposed 2007-2016 Financial Plan revisions.

Members of the public are invited to attend the Finance Committee Meeting. There will be an opportunity for the public to comment on the proposed revisions.

Copies of the report on the proposed Financial Plan revisions will be available on Friday, November 2, 2007, after 4:00 p.m. at City Hall, 141 West 14th Street or visit www.cnv.org/cityfinances.

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