

We salute 12 extraordinary individuals who boldly support a tinnitus cure.

Meet Melanie West: ATA's Desert Rose

By WES BREAZEALE, ATA DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

Compassionate. Focused. Driven. These are words that describe ATA Board member Melanie West's work with tinnitus patients and ATA. But they are also words that can describe Melanie herself. Her journey to come to grips with tinnitus has been long, but one that has helped shape who she is and her dedication to those suffering with tinnitus.

For as long as she can remember, Melanie has heard a noise in her ears. As a child she didn't realize that this wasn't normal. But as she got older and was able to tell people about it, she was frustrated to find out that her problem was often not considered to be serious, or in some cases even real! After doctors and psychologists told her that it was all in her imagination, Melanie felt frustrated and defeated. Previously a strong student, Melanie's grades suffered as she fell into a bit of a funk. Fortunately, all was not lost.

Overcoming Adversity

As awareness of tinnitus grew, Melanie was able to get some help and learned to manage her tinnitus. She became a real estate agent and even opened her own public relations firm specializing in real estate developers. With success behind her, Melanie was able to semi-retire in the 1990s and enjoy the fruits of her labors. She then spent many years traveling with her husband Jerry and focusing on some of her personal interests. However Melanie's tinnitus unfortunately returned with a vengeance following a car accident in which she was rear-ended. The perceived volume of her tinnitus shot up, and the tone, one she had acclimated to years before, changed to one that was much more bothersome.

Faced with this change, Melanie decided to fight it head on. She came out of retirement to become the personal assistant to Michael J. A. Robb, M.D., former



Melanie and Jerry West

ATA Board member and founder and owner of the Robb Oto-Neurology Clinic in Phoenix, Arizona.

In her new role, Melanie was able to work extensively with others suffering from tinnitus. And it was through her work with Dr. Robb that she first became aware of ATA. She worked closely with Dr. Robb and became familiar with ATA's staff as well.

Fighting Tinnitus Head On

Two years ago, Melanie contacted ATA and said that she wanted to start a satellite *Jack Vernon Walk to Silence Tinnitus* in the Phoenix area. The first ever *AZ Walk to Silence Tinnitus* was a huge success, raising nearly \$20,000 and helping to firmly establish the protocols necessary for a successful satellite event. Last year, Melanie brought her talents to the ATA Board of Directors. She has added a new perspective to the Board – that of both a tinnitus patient and someone who has also extensive exposure to the clinical side of tinnitus through her work with Dr. Robb. This year, Melanie co-chaired the second annual *AZ Walk to Silence Tinnitus* on March 24, 2012. She also turned 60 in February and Jerry threw her a birthday party to celebrate with all her friends and family. Those who love Melanie came from as far and away as Guatemala to share in this special day with her. However, instead of birthday gifts, she asked guests that if they really wanted to do something special for her, that they should bring a check made out to the American Tinnitus Association to support the 2012 *AZ Walk*. As a result, Melanie raised over \$3,100 for her "AZ Birthday Team" to add to the \$15,700 overall total (and counting!) for the event.

From all of us at ATA we thank you Melanie for your support and dedication to ATA's mission of silencing tinnitus! ☺☺