



100 Years Ago, This Year, ConnOTA's Vision was Defined!

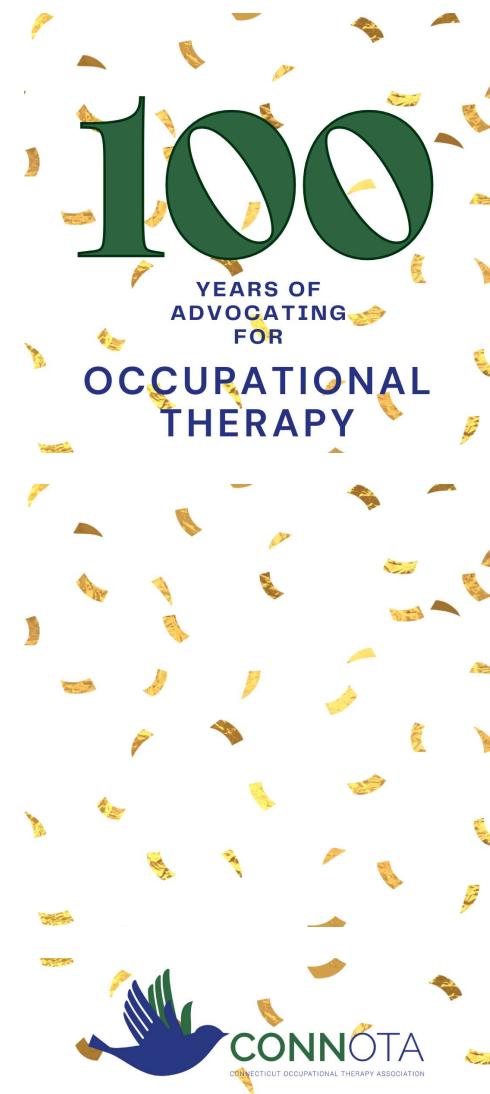
Honoring 100 Years of Vision and Purpose

This year marks a meaningful milestone for ConnOTA. One hundred years ago, in 1926, the vision and purpose of occupational therapy in Connecticut were clearly defined—laying the foundation for what would become ConnOTA's enduring role as a leader, advocate, and connector for the profession.

Early records describe occupational therapy as both purposeful and therapeutic: *"An occupation is that to which one's time and attention are given. Therapy is a medical treatment—something the patient does for himself, guided by a physician's prescription and a trained instructor, to further cure or rehabilitation."* This definition reflected a progressive understanding of health, participation, and recovery—principles that continue to guide occupational therapy today.

At that time, the Connecticut Occupational Therapy Society brought together physicians, therapists, and community members with a shared goal: to spread knowledge of occupational therapy and encourage its wider use throughout the state. The Society supported the profession by securing trained therapists for positions in Connecticut, advising on equipment and technique, circulating craft designs and models among practitioners, providing speakers for educational meetings, and publishing a quarterly bulletin to share ideas and leadership across the growing field. Notably, annual membership in the Society was just **\$1.00**—a small fee that reflected a big commitment to advancing occupational therapy in Connecticut.

Over the past century, ConnOTA has evolved alongside occupational therapy itself—expanding into new practice areas,



responding to changes in health care and education, and consistently promoting participation, inclusion, and well-being across the lifespan. What has remained constant is ConnOTA's commitment to:

- Supporting OT practitioners and students
- Promoting professional development and leadership
- Advocating for occupational therapy at the state level
- Fostering community and connection among members

As we reflect on this 100-year legacy of vision and purpose, we extend our deepest gratitude to ConnOTA members—past and present. Your dedication, passion, and service have shaped ConnOTA into the strong, resilient organization it is today. Whether through leadership, volunteerism, mentorship, advocacy, or engagement, your contributions have made a lasting impact.

We honor the vision defined in 1926, celebrate the work being done today, and look ahead with purpose as we continue advancing occupational therapy in Connecticut for generations to come.

1926

CONNECTICUT
OCCUPATIONAL
THERAPY SOCIETY



"Occupational Therapy will one day rank with anesthetics in taking the suffering out of sickness and with anti-toxins in shortening its duration."—THOMAS W. SALMON, M. D.

Share your
experience and
strengthen the
profession.



EMAIL JOBSHADOW@CONNOTA.ORG 

ConnOTA's Mentorship
Program creates intentional
mentor-mentee partnerships
focused on professional
development, leadership, and
career growth.



GIVE BACK TO THE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY COMMUNITY

Open your practice for a day and help students explore occupational therapy firsthand. ConnOTA's Job Shadow Program connects OT practitioners with students interested in learning what OT looks like in real-world settings.

EMAIL: JOBSHADOW@CONNOTA.ORG

A Career Shaped by Curiosity: An OT's Journey into Mental Health Leadership

An Interview with Michele Stillman, OTR/L

You've worked in a wide range of practice settings over the years. Can you share a bit about your career journey and what led you to your current role in mental health?

After working in sub-acute and long-term care settings and school system contracts, I was looking for change. At a break out session at a conference at Quinnipiac, I heard about work in mental health. I networked with OT's and years later when a position came up I applied for a position with DMHAS and was rejected. I started nursing school. A year or so later, I got a call and was asked for another interview. This time I got the job!

What do you enjoy most about working with young adults in mental health, and what keeps you motivated in this area of practice?

I really enjoy learning and, in this work, I am always learning. DMHAS is generous with training opportunities and I am able to expand knowledge relating to various diagnosis's and explore various treatment modalities. This learning paired with the opportunities to put what is learned into practice keeps this work fresh. With year and each new client come more complexities to navigate. This is a population and area of mental health that keeps me on my toes!

What does a typical day look like for you now, balancing direct care, supervision, and leadership responsibilities?

I hike up three flights of steps and pull together a plan that I will have to hold loosely! Things are always



“I am always learning, and that learning—paired with the opportunity to put it into practice—is what keeps this work fresh and meaningful.”

changing and I have to be able to flex as needed. We start each day w/ catch up from the day prior and morning meeting. I follow up with individual supervision of staff, meetings, assessments/consultations, group, documentation and may connect with staff near end of the day.

As a supervisor, what do you find most rewarding about mentoring other OT practitioners? What do you try to emphasize when supporting staff in mental health settings?

In a setting where OT needs can be very broad, I really enjoy helping OT staff identify and focus on OT objectives. I enjoy working w/ OT staff to identify the underlying deficit areas often relating to the hierarchy of cognitive functions. I also appreciate the opportunity to support OTP's in navigating interprofessional work relationships and system challenges. I love partnering with them to creatively address client and system problems.

You're also a registered nurse. Even though you're not practicing as an RN, how has that background influenced the way you think or work as an occupational therapist?

My background in nursing has helped me have a greater depth of understanding when I conduct chart reviews, discuss medication and assess a client holistically including medical history. I believe it has made me a better occupational therapist.

From your perspective, what makes occupational therapy such an important part of mental health care for young adults?

As OT's working in mental health w/ young adults, we promote function and independence, while helping our clients transition to adulthood. It is a big and challenging job with clients who often feel like they know everything and believe they do not need any help. We also often fight the uphill battle of co-morbidities of substance use and struggles w/ motivation. These clients' complexities and need for practical skills and executive function development require a team effort including the expertise of occupational therapists.

As the ConnOTA SIS Mental Health Liaison, what does that role mean to you, and what are you hoping to see grow or change in mental health OT across Connecticut?

After I completed my post professional OT training, I was looking for a way to continue my professional development which led me back to ConnOTA. I appreciate the opportunity to work alongside Lola Halperin who is a brilliant OT mental health educator and together bring opportunities for professional mental health presentations and discussions through MH SIS and CoP sessions. I appreciate the connection and shared experiences w/ OT's who want to develop their skill in mental health OT. It is a privilege to have the role of Mental Health SIS Liaison and participate in promoting

mental health in OT.

For students or practitioners who may be curious about mental health OT or stepping into leadership roles, what advice would you share?

Go For It! I often say to students I wish I had come to mental health OT earlier in my career. Through my work in mental health OT, I have gained a deeper understanding of people and how they manage their emotions and relationships. I understand better the impact of mental health disorders on people and have learned how to support and empower them in their recovery. I would encourage OT's no matter their area of specialty to build a strong foundation in mental health. You will be better for it and so will your clients.

Have a story to share?

Inspire future and current OTs by sharing your story with ConnOTA!

Email info@connota.org to become our next Spotlight Practitioner.



THINKING OF SOMEONE WHO DESERVES
AN AWARD?

**Stay tuned for 2026
Award Nominations**



A Recap on the Fall Conference



FEATURING:

- **Full conference hospitality**, including breakfast, lunch, and an afternoon snack
- **2025 Fall ConnOTA Awards**, celebrating excellence across the profession
- **Interactive Poster Session** showcasing innovative practice and research
- **Opportunities to earn CEUs** to support your professional development
- **Intentional networking opportunities** with OT and OTA colleagues

Keynote speaker Karen Jacobs, OT, EdD, OTR, CPE, FAOTA, shared practical, ethical strategies for using AI in occupational therapy—challenging practitioners to lead the change rather than be left behind. She encouraged attendees to reflect on their toughest challenges and explore how AI can help. Catch a short recap of her keynote on our Instagram.

Karen Jacobs: Our Keynote Speaker



Missed the 2025 ConnOTA Fall Conference?

Catch the highlights in our recap video on YouTube!



JANUARY 2026

CONNOTA UPDATE ON ADVOCACY

FROM OUR GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS TEAM



As the 2026 Connecticut legislative session approaches, ConnOTA is advancing key priorities to strengthen occupational therapy and protect access to care:

- Supporting Connecticut's participation in the OT Licensure Compact to improve workforce mobility and access to service
- Modernizing the OT Practice Act to reflect current standards and improve public protection

ConnOTA has also joined an interprofessional healthcare collective advocating to protect graduate student loan eligibility, critical for sustaining the future healthcare workforce, including OT.

We need your support. Please contact your legislators and stay engaged.

Click the QR Codes below to view initiatives

2026 ConnOTA
Legislative Brief



Graduate Student
Loan Eligibility

The 2025 Fall Award Recipients



Karolina Baclawski
**Emerging Leader
Award**

Susanne Gianitti
Award of Service

Dr. Michael Urban
Award of Merit



Jessica Trujillo
**Award of Clinical
Excellence**

Jamie Hegge
**President's
Award**

Kailene Rampone
**Fieldwork Educator
Award**



Melissa Olson
OTP - Scholar Award

Donna Sweeney
**Occupational Therapy
Educator Award (OTA)**

Dr. Sheelagh Schlegel
**Occupational Therapy
Educator Award (OT)**