

Hearing Loop Victory: If at First You Don't Succeed, Try, Try Again

BY JULIËTTE STERKENS

With hundreds of successes under her belt in advocating for the installation of hearing loops in public places, audiologist Juliëtte Sterkens knows what it takes to get the job done. She shares some of her strategies with *Hearing Life* for turning those initial nos into triumphant yeses.

Recently, a reporter asked me how I've tackled a "No!" answer when advocating for a hearing loop. While I don't have all the answers, I'd like to share some of my strategies.

Make Personal Contact

I make a point of personally calling or visiting the individual and explaining why people with hearing loss, even when using hearing aids or cochlear implants, have trouble hearing. I describe how hearing loss is more about the *clarity* of sound than it is about the loudness. I discuss how hearing aids don't restore hearing to normal, regardless of the technology, and that these devices generally don't work in places with reverberation, background noise or beyond a few feet. I also educate them on how hearing loops work: A hearing loop sends the audio signal wirelessly and silently from the facility's microphone and sound system to those wearing t-coil compatible hearing aids or cochlear implants, to headsets (for those without t-coil hearing aids) and to special t-coil-equipped LoopBuds connected to an iPhone.

Show and Tell

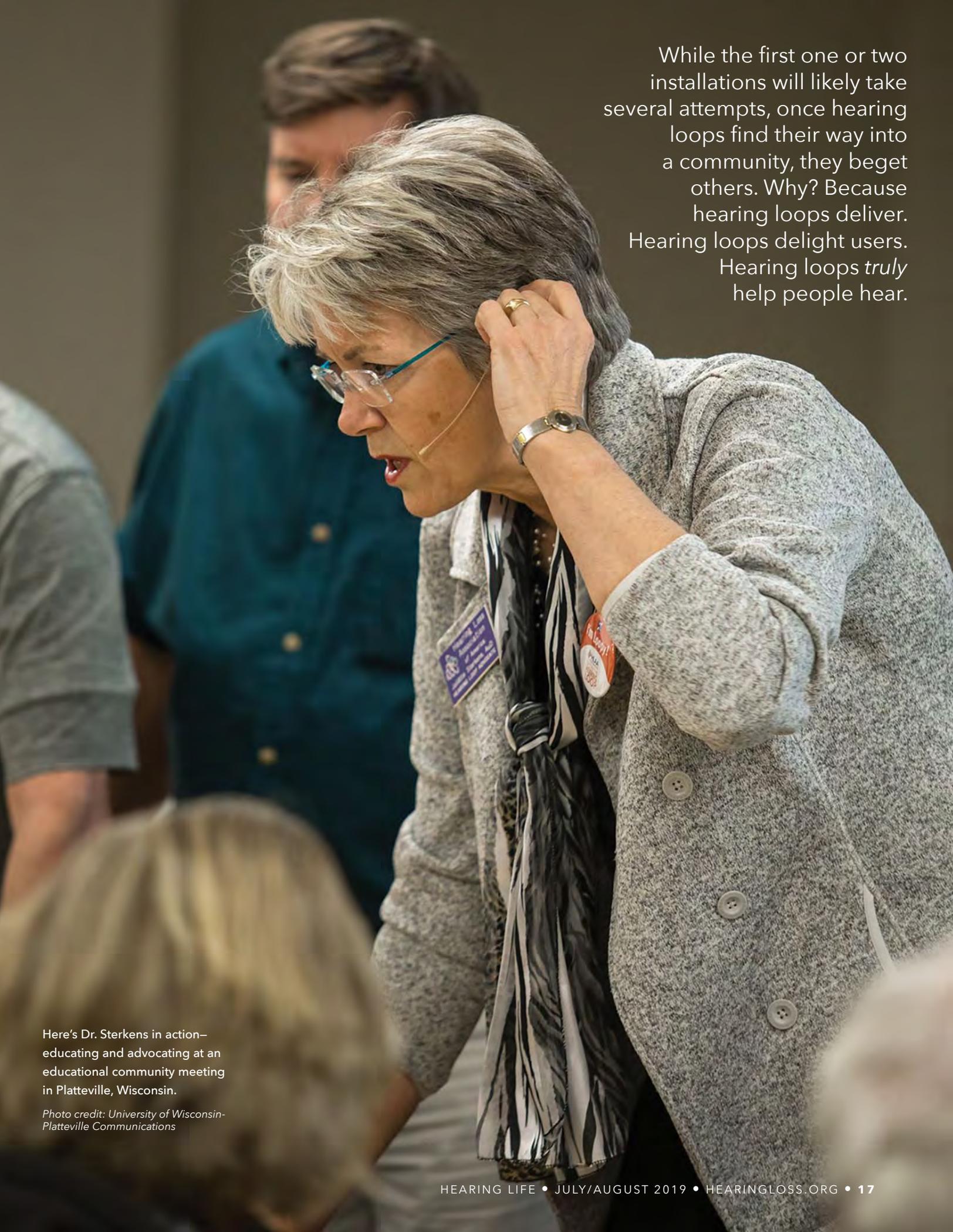
Most facility managers want to help and are receptive to my message. Of course, if a customer or patron of the facility writes a personal letter describing how they weren't able to hear or participate in events at that facility—or has already shared a success story—then I can be more effective.

Facility managers often are unaware of the difficulties people with hearing loss experience. So, to demonstrate, I play sound recordings made "outside" and "inside" of hearing loops. Not surprisingly, these sound demos can be eye—or maybe I should say ear—opening.

It's also useful to share people's positive experiences with hearing loops with the facility. Because hearing loops work so well, many testimonials include superlative language and tears of joy. I keep a collection of responses to hearing loops on LoopWisconsin.com for this purpose.



Look for this signage indicating there's a hearing loop in the facility.



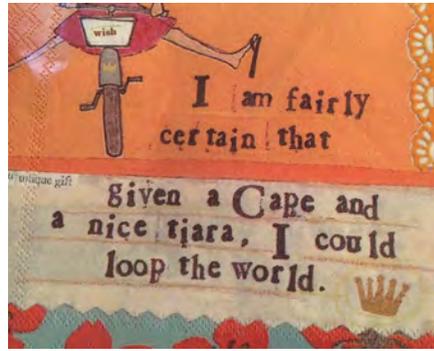
While the first one or two installations will likely take several attempts, once hearing loops find their way into a community, they beget others. Why? Because hearing loops deliver. Hearing loops delight users. Hearing loops *truly* help people hear.

Here's Dr. Sterkens in action—educating and advocating at an educational community meeting in Platteville, Wisconsin.

Photo credit: University of Wisconsin-Platteville Communications

Time It Right

Advocating for a loop is much easier if I know that a facility will soon be remodeled or renovated. The loop wire installation is usually less involved—and less costly—when carpeting is being replaced anyway. I often refer the facility to the websites of experienced loop installers where there are hundreds of hearing loop installation photos in a variety of situations and with different types of flooring—including terrazzo, tile, vinyl tiles and wall-to-wall carpet. I also point out that crawlspace and basements can make loop installations easier, as the wire can be placed



Here's Dr. Sterkens' motto beautifully depicted in a drawing re-created by her husband, LeRoy "Max" Maxfield.

underneath the floor cover of an auditorium, sanctuary or meeting room.

Be Sure to Meet Standards

I make clear that loops must be installed in accordance with the IEC 60118-4 standard to ensure an excellent listening experience. Hearing loop standards are set by the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), the world's leading organization for the preparation and publication of international standards for all

electrical, electronic and related technologies.

I also make sure that the facility understands that metal in the venue's structure can affect magnetic signals, which often increases the complexity of the installation and the final installation cost in order for the loop to meet the IEC standard. Therefore, a site visit by a qualified loop installer to evaluate these metal effects is nearly always required. I always bring copies of two useful and informative brochures, which are available for download from the HLAA website at hearingloss.org: "Best Practices for Hearing Loop Installation" and "A Guide to Understanding Hearing Loops."

Address the Cost

When cost concerns are brought up, I refer the facility to helpful blogs like "Let's Loop Wisconsin" at loopwisconsin.wordpress.com. But most importantly, I offer information on how other venues have handled the cost issue. For instance, many facilities don't realize that grant monies are available for certain venues such as libraries, spaces for the arts, and houses of worship. One specific example of this is King County's 4Culture, in Washington state, which funds technology to increase access to the arts.

Community foundations can be another avenue for monies. Many community foundations are willing to help fund a loop, particularly if it improves access for a population with a disability. In late 2008, for example, the Oshkosh Area Community Foundation in Wisconsin was funding a project to remodel the Oshkosh Convention Center at a time when the city had zero hearing loops. Thanks to several phone calls and a letter to the executive director of the community foundation, funding was secured just about two weeks before the carpeting was installed.

Get the Word Out in the Community

To increase attention to a need, I've found that a letter to the editor of a local newspaper can be of tremendous help. And the best part of such letters? They're free! There's also strength in numbers. Invite friends, family members and a local hearing health professional to speak up on your behalf or to write a short letter of support. A five-minute elevator speech at a city council meeting might even get your face and cause on a local city's TV channel.



While cost is always a concern, in the end, plenty of money can be found when people in the community learn that hearing loops improve the lives of people with hearing loss. Everyone knows someone with hearing issues. Hearing loss affects us all, directly or indirectly.

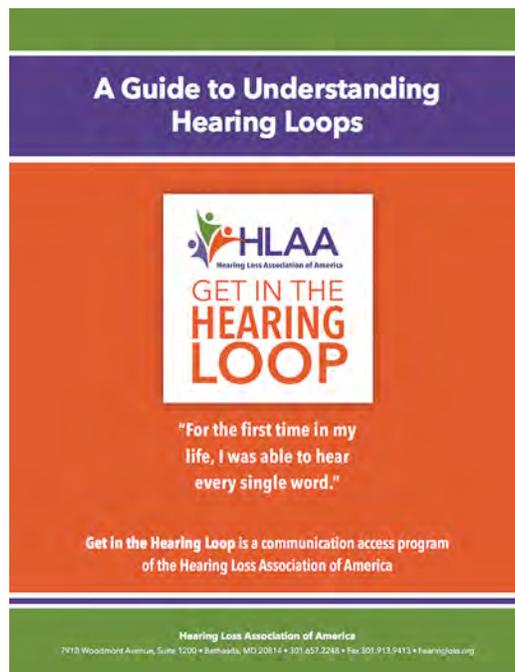
Interestingly, the executive director shared later that she'd hoped a loop at the convention center would convince other venues in the city to follow suit. She was right: Oshkosh now touts nearly 60 hearing loops, including in its Grand Opera House—which is more than 100 years old, a funeral home, a courtroom, the City Council Room, several retirement communities and the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Alumni Welcome and Conference Center.

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If All Else Fails, Use the Law

The last resort would be to play the ADA card. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) mandates the following of facilities: "In each assembly area where audible communication is integral to the use of the space, an assistive listening system (ALS) shall be provided." (It's important to also know that other than in courtrooms, assistive listening systems aren't required where audio amplification isn't provided.)

Public facilities are required to comply with the ADA. And in some states, even religious and private facilities must provide auxiliary aids and services and install assistive technology. For example, the California Unruh Civil Rights Act mandates that houses of worship



This brochure is available for download on hearingloss.org under "News & Media."

always provide accommodations. Other states don't go that far, but they may require a nonprofit facility to provide auxiliary aids and services if its space is rented to the public.

Finally, if a public facility is unwilling to comply with the law and doesn't provide an ALS, I refer consumers to the Department of Justice, where they can file an Americans with Disabilities Act Discrimination Complaint at ada.gov/complaint.

Raise Awareness of Your Success

Once a hearing loop is installed and working, be sure to send a public thank you note to the facility or a "Kudos for Installing a Hearing Loop" letter to the editor of your local newspaper.

Tag the facility with a "thank you" tweet, or tag and post a message on Facebook. Public shoutouts like these build positive public relations for the facility that installed the loop—and it also helps your cause. And who knows? It might even inspire other venues to follow suit.

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With thanks to HLAA Board of Trustees Member Cheri Perazzoli and HLAA Brand Ambassador Ann Thomas—both members of the Get in the Hearing Loop Steering Committee—for their help with this article.

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Social Media

Social media is a powerful tool to get exposure for your efforts and the hearing loop cause. Join Facebook groups that post stories, videos or testimonials about successful loop installations, and share posts you like. Venture out on Twitter by following other loop advocates and retweeting their posts. The Twitter handle for our HLAA Get in the Hearing Loop Program is @GITHL1.



Dutch-born audiologist Juliette Sterkens, Au.D., is on her encore career as HLAA Professional Advisor for Hearing Loop Technology. In this capacity, she advocates for the use of hearing loop systems to improve hearing access for consumers with hearing loss. She's known by many HLAA members for her lively hearing loop advocacy lectures at Chapter

meetings. Dr. Sterkens teaches audiologists, hearing aid specialists and audiology students about fitting hearing aids with correctly programmed telecoils, proper hearing loop installations, and how to get involved with looping. Her efforts have led to more than 725 loop installations in Wisconsin and many more around the United States. She's received several awards for her work, including Wisconsin Audiologist of the Year, the Humanitarian of the Year Award from the Arizona School of Health Sciences, the American Academy of Audiology Presidential Award, and the HLAA Technology Access Award. Dr. Sterkens can be reached at jsterkens@hearingloss.org.



GET IN THE HEARING LOOP

It's Time to Get in the Hearing Loop

Many people aren't yet aware of hearing loops or other technologies that can improve communication access and public engagement, or how they can enrich the lives of people with hearing loss, their families, friends, colleagues and even communities. The Get in the Hearing Loop Program is changing that—one loop, one advocate, one ADA request at a time.

Get in the Hearing Loop, a communication access program of HLAA, is dedicated to providing and promoting community education, advocacy on behalf of people with hearing loss, and consultation services to help venues of all kinds successfully implement hearing loop technology.

We dream of a world where people with hearing loss can thrive each day with communication access, full inclusion and equal participation in all aspects of life, everywhere they go.

For more information about hearing loops and the Get in the Hearing Loop program, visit hearingloss.org/programs-events/get-hearing-loop or email GITHLinfo@hearingloss.org.