

By Brenda Battat



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From the Executive Director's Desk



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I was delighted to represent HLAA at the first International Hearing Loops Conference, September 25-27, 2009, in Europe. The conference was held in Winterthur, a city of 100,000 inhabitants just 18 minutes by train from Zurich, Switzerland.


The conference opened with a reception and greeting from Siegfried Karg, president Pro Audio Winterthur and chair of the organizing committee, along with the organizers Marcel Bobeldijk, president European Federation of Hard of Hearing People, and Barbara Wenk, president Pro audio schweiz. Ampetronic Ltd, a United Kingdom company, was the main sponsor of the conference. Julian Pieters, CEO of Pro audio schweiz, also welcomed attendees and spoke of the fundamental passion in his company that is a legacy of his father and founder, Leon Pieters, whose goal was to combat ignorance about hearing loss and put his engineering skills to work to benefit hard of hearing people. During the reception, yodelers and an alphon duo provided some Swiss folklore.

In Europe, emphasis is placed on standards for audio loop installations where the international standard, IEC 60118-4:2006, is used. Audio loops were introduced in Europe in 1946 and the first standard, which was developed in 1981, was revised in 1988 and again in 2006. The approach when using the standard is to set the loop to a specification and then if telecoil users encounter difficulty, they should look into the programming of their hearing aids, cochlear implants, and telecoils. The approach in the United States is more likely to be testing by listening and feedback.

Back at Home

The Hearing Loss Association of America® renovated the national office space in Bethesda, Maryland, last October to include a new conference room designed to be hearing-friendly for meetings and presentations. Thirteen of the 15 HLAA National Board of Trustees members and one-third of the staff have hearing loss; therefore, it is important that staff and board meetings are completely communication accessible.

Putting into practice what we learned about the importance of standards during the conference, we have installed a low-spill audio loop, donated by Ampetronics, which was placed under the carpet during the renovation and set to standard. Microphones, donated by Revolabs, work well with the loop and give us high-quality sound. We also have an infrared system for when meetings need to be confidential, and we always schedule CART (Communication Access Real-time Translation) at every board meeting. We are grateful to long-time friend and member of HLAA from Canada, Colin Cantlie, who donated a 42-inch Panasonic Viera Plasma HDTV for CART and PowerPoint presentations. Our thanks go to Joe Duarte of Duartek, a Virginia-based assistive technology company, for donating his time to coordinate the set-up of the audio/visual and hearing technology. Through his expertise and generosity we now have a state-of-the-art hearing friendly conference room.

The Winterthur conference was packed with information. David Myers, HLAA member from Michigan, also attended and provides us with a report on the conference on page 21. 

Brenda Battat is executive director of the Hearing Loss Association of America® and can be reached at battat@hearingloss.org.

A view of the state-of-the-art communication accessible conference room at the HLAA National office in Bethesda.



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