

Chapter on a Mission: Whatcom County Chapter

BY CARLA BEYER-SMOLIN

The 2022 HLAA Chapter on a Mission Award was awarded to the Whatcom County Chapter, WA at the 2022 HLAA Convention in Tampa, Florida due to their extraordinary advocacy activities. Two members of the Get in the Hearing Loop (GITHL) Committee, Cheri Perazzoli and Ann Thomas, have worked closely with the Whatcom County Chapter and submitted the following nomination that helped the chapter earn the Chapter on a Mission Award.

HLAA Whatcom County Chapter hearing loss advocates — 80 members (!) — are quietly building hearing-friendly communities wherever they go.

Led by President Larry Wonnacott (also an HLAA Washington State Association board member), Past President Mike Sweeney, Jerry and Joanna Olmstead, and Lou Touchette, this chapter is a star in the HLAA sky.

With monthly support and education meetings and a regular presence at community events, the chapter connects with people, building advocacy at the grassroots level. Mike Sweeney and others presented to the Bellingham City Council to advocate for hearing loops, and the crew has given several presentations to Western Washington University audiology departments.

These advocates generously share their own time, resources, and expertise. Advocate Lou Touchette created a guide for installing home hearing loops (and has installed several), and Lou and Mike installed a loop in Christ the Servant Church. Lou regularly donates equipment, too, and shared his hearing loss journey in a video for CaptionCall. “Loopin’ Lou” has looped several local hearing health provider facilities.

This phenomenal chapter donated \$1,500 to the Western Washington University Foundation to establish a hearing aid bank, and they continue to work closely with the university.

In 2019, the chapter piloted the Get in the Hearing Loop toolkit, helping us refine and target our materials for the very people who will be using them in their advocacy.

Thanks to a multi-year effort by the Whatcom County Chapter, the beautiful Lincoln Theatre in Mt. Vernon, Washington is looped. Led by Jerry and Joanna Olmstead, this group even stepped up to help the theatre

with fundraising for the loop. The now-looped theatre hosts not just movies, but community events, school recitals, meetings, and live performances.

I posed some questions to the chapter leaders to get some background information and learn about recent updates on their inspiring advocacy efforts. Here are their responses.

Why did the Whatcom County Chapter get started in advocating for loop installations? What was the motivation?

The early motivation was from Cheri Perazzoli and her “Let’s Loop Seattle” initiatives and the looping successes of Jerry and Joanna Olmstead in Anacortes.

How were the advocacy efforts received by the facilities personnel where you advocated for loop installations?

The reception has been positive. We have advocated for proper signage, training of personnel involved, and information being disseminated through web pages and mailings.

What were the challenges presented by the facilities personnel?

The challenges are often the cost of installation, who is going to do the work, and is this the best solution for access to hearing accessibility.

What successes stand out the most to you? What are some recent successes you’ve had?

The City of Bellingham Council Chambers loop started everything. With assistance from Cheri Perazzoli and Ann Thomas, we presented an outstanding PowerPoint presentation to the city. Lou set up a temporary room loop with hearing loop receivers and headphones. It was very well received.

It led to counter hearing loops being placed in 14 city venues in Bellingham: Bellingham Library, City Hall Council Chambers, City Hall main reception, City Council, Finance service counters, Permit Center,

Parks & Rec reception, Police Department, Legal Prosecutor’s Office, Municipal Court, ITSD, Human Resources, Public Works and the Whatcom Museum.

Some other recent loops that were advocated by our chapter: Anacortes Library and Senior Center, Burlington Library, Skagit County Emergency Management Facility. Mt. Vernon Woodside Lodge, Mt. Vernon Audiology & Burlington, Lincoln Theatre, Mt. Vernon Lutheran Church, Senior Center Bellingham, Christ the King Bellingham, and many homes in Skagit and Whatcom counties. Soon, we are hoping to loop San Juan Cruises— five ships that offer scenic and whale watching tours.

Has how the community responded to the loop installations?

We recently contacted the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator for Whatcom County and will be included in a Zoom meeting to attempt to get them involved in hearing accessibility. **HL**

Carla Beyer-Smolin is chapter and membership coordinator at HLAA. Reach out to her at cbeyer-smolin@hearingloss.org.



HLAA 2022 Chapter and State Award Recipients

Chapter on a Mission Award	HLAA Whatcom County Chapter, Washington
Up and Coming Chapter Award	HLAA Indianapolis Chapter, Indiana
Virtual Ambassador Award	HLAA Virtual Meetings Holly Cohen, New York Shari Eberts, New York Roxana Rotundo, Florida HLAA California State Association
	Chapter Support Toni Barrient, California Alan Katsura, California Ann Thomas, California HLAA Florida State Association



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