Give your hearing a boost with Amigo!

In noisy restaurants and crowded rooms, even high-tech hearing aids could do with a helping hand. But it takes more than just any old FM system to provide one.

Several factors make the new Amigo T5 transmitter worth looking into. It’s robust and reliable, for a start. Easy to use with either the ear-level R2 receiver or the body-worn R5 receiver with neck loop. Compatible with most hearing aids - and most people’s budgets. All this from a company you know and trust.

With choices of receivers and transmitters, you’ll be able to take Amigo virtually anywhere and here better, no matter how noisy it gets!

Amigo – FM made friendly.

Contact your hearing care provider to try Amigo for yourself!
www.oticonusa.com
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Amigo – FM made friendly. Contact your hearing care provider to try Amigo for yourself! www.oticonusa.com
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Ray Thorn is legislative assistant to Congressman Chris Van Hollen.

Rep. Chris Van Hollen is the congressman from Maryland’s 8th District.

FOUNDER

Howard E. “Rocky” Stone
(1925-2004)

In 1979, Rocky Stone founded the organization as Self Help for Hard of Hearing People (SHHH).

The Hearing Loss Association of America is the nation’s foremost membership and advocacy organization for people with hearing loss. Hearing Loss Association of America opens the world of communication to people with hearing loss through information, education, support and advocacy. The national support network includes the Washington, D.C., area office, 14 state organizations, and 200 local chapters. Our clear, straightforward message has changed the lives of thousands of people: Hearing loss is a daily challenge you can overcome. You do not have to hide your hearing loss. You do not have to face hearing loss alone.

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“Even though he’s deaf, I wouldn’t be surprised if he grows up to be a professional musician!”
—Melissa Li, mother of Brandyn, implanted at 16 months

DISCOVER the music lover inside of you.

Brandyn realized his love and talent for music after he was implanted with the HiResolution® Bionic Ear System. HiResolution Sound Processing is designed to help you appreciate the nuances and details of music.

Read more about Brandyn’s bright future with HiResolution Sound at www.BionicEar.com/RealStories.

Connect and Discover™
We walked for a better tomorrow for people with hearing loss. And we talked about hearing loss to everyone we know.

Walking for a Better Tomorrow
In Appreciation

Congratulations, everyone, and a whopping thank you for your hard work and support for the 2007 Hearing Loss Association of America Walk4Hearing.

We exceeded our goal in the 2007 Walk4Hearing. We doubled the amount of money we made in 2006. We doubled the number of walkers who walked. We more than doubled the number of people who heard our message. And, we are on the move to make hearing loss visible to the American public. We have never done anything on this scale before in the history of our organization. And you are making it happen.

In New York and California, Illinois and Texas, New England and Georgia, Colorado, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and the national Capital region, thousands of us worked together and walked together to carry our message throughout the country.

Who Walked? Who Gave?

Each and every one of us who took part in our 2007 walk has made this remarkable result possible. To name them: our very generous national and local sponsors; Ronnie Adler, an enthusiastic and upbeat national walk coordinator; tireless chairs and organizing committees; energetic and enthusiastic team captains; walkers who joined us rain or shine; and all the thousands of donors who heard your message and supported our cause.

Over the Top

We whizzed past our goal of $560,000, and when the last dollar was counted, we had reached over $600,000. That is an extraordinary accomplishment. But, all of us who have been part of this know that our walks are about far more than money. We are walking to reach all those who need our help. We are walking to raise awareness that hearing loss is a serious public health issue. We are walking for a better tomorrow.

Who Are We Who Did This Amazing Thing?

We came from every part of the hearing health world: physicians; audiologists; hospitals; hearing aid specialists; manufacturers of hearing aids, cochlear implants and assistive devices; rehabilitation specialists; staff of implant centers; and students in training. We came from mainstream corporations, foundations, government, and the media.

We were people with hearing loss and people with normal hearing. We were families, friends and colleagues. We were longtime members of the Hearing Loss Association of America and people who had learned about us for the first time. We were babies in backpacks, toddlers in wagons, teens and grandparents, boomers and generations x, y, and z, service dogs and household pets. We were an impressive throng.

The Vista

In Southern California, we walked with a view of the Pacific Ocean and the Queen Mary. In Colorado, the Rocky Mountains loomed in the distance. In Chicago, we walked by Lake Michigan in 88 degree heat—a foretaste of the brutal temperatures that caused the following day’s marathon to be suspended, In western Michigan, the wind was brisk. In New York, the sunshine was brilliant.

We walked on different days and at different times of the year. We walked in different states. We walked in different weather. No matter where or when we walked, there were high spirits, crowds of all ages, and a feeling of festivity. Balloons bobbed and banners flew. T-shirts of all colors were emblazoned with team names.

Color was everywhere. The Phonak team walked in Chicago wearing neon green shirts. The Orange County team walked in California sporting bright orange ones. Cochlear America teams walked in many walks wearing their bright yellow caps. Teams wearing every known color walked to spread the word.

And did we have fun! Disc jockeys, clowns, face painters, bounce castles, balloon sculptures, ice cream trucks, craft tents, rock bands, a gigantic inflatable bear and sponsor exhibits kept the crowds amused—kids and adults alike. Abundant supplies of coffee, juice, water and snacks boosted our energy. Some of us raced through the course. Others of us ambled along. All of us came away exhilarated.

As Carrie and Dave Welter wrote to their Augusta, Georgia, walkers: “What a day! Unbelievable and successful! For those of you who missed it, it’s a shame. For those of you who were there, it was terrific, wasn’t it? For those of you who worked so hard, please pat yourself on your back and know that you are greatly appreciated.”

Our Impact

You might ask, “What good does a one-day walk do when we have hearing loss all year long?” The answer of course is that the impact of the walk is not just one day. It begins far before the walk and lasts long after. The preparations and discussions (including hearing loss) take place for many months before. The money generated is spent on programs for many months after. The momentum builds year after year.

The obvious and measurable impact comes from the money. It can make possible a completely new vision of what we can do. Not only is the walk providing key funding for national programs; it is also raising money in sums never before available at the local level.

Just imagine the opportunity we now have to reach into communities all over the United States and find those people with hearing loss who need our help. Just think of the ways we can increase accessibility for all of us with hearing loss. Just see the good

continued on page 8
we can do with the money we make. The possibilities are enormous.

Not so easy to measure, but even more important, is raising awareness of hearing loss as a public health issue. Yes, the Hearing Loss Association of America is about helping ourselves and each other to manage our hearing loss. Yet, there is another critical piece necessary for a better future. It is making people with normal hearing aware that hearing loss disrupts communication and therefore our lives in ways that they have never realized. Can you imagine a world in which everyone you knew, from your brother, to your boss, to your bank teller, to your tennis partner, understood that?

Rippling Energy
What we are doing—the thousands of us involved in the walk—is taking those first steps to change the world.

We are educating the people in our lives about hearing loss. As we talked about the walk and asked for support, we talked about the challenges we face and how important HLAA has been in our lives. We talked with our friends, our neighbors, and our colleagues.

“I became aware of the Walk 4Hearing program through a search online. I thought to myself this would be a great opportunity to raise money for this cause. I never imagined I would meet so many wonderful people that I could connect with on the same level as myself through this experience.”

—Chris Stern, South Grafton, MA

We talked with our tennis and golf partners, our bowling teams, and our book clubs. We talked with our little league and soccer league parents, and fellow members of the PTA. We talked with the managers of our grocery stores, banks, dry cleaners, and car dealerships. We talked with fellow members of our congregations.

Whether or not they ultimately donated money (and most of them did), they listened to what we had to say and learned more than they had known before about hearing loss. In addition, each time we saw the Walk-4Hearing thermometer rise, we knew that our “awareness thermometer” was rising at the same time.

We asked for help from our families and friends and they rallied to our support. They gave money and raised money. They decorated walk sites. They wrote articles for newspapers. They rigged up sound systems and set up tables. They painted faces. They made signs. They ferried equipment. They registered walkers and passed out T-shirts. They kept track of funds. They organized teams. Parents walked for children. Children walked for parents. Friends walked for friends. Sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, grand-

“The weather was perfect, the turnout was good, the endless supply of free Costco muffins and Starbucks coffee made the early wake-up easier to take, and the surprisingly good food. The margaritas at the Mexican cantina across the street made the post-walk cool down that much nicer.”

—Grace Tiessen, Pasadena CA
children, and cousins walked. All of them became more aware of hearing loss and the impact it has.

We brought in new volunteers and invigorated the veterans. Walkers found us on the web and through posters at the library. Parents spread the word and enlisted other parents. School and college students took us on as projects. Former members reconnected. We could feel the energy rippling from person to person.

**Onward and Upward**

When you look at the remarkable changes that have come from our 2007 walk, imagine what we will be able to do as we grow our walks. Imagine 50 or 100 walks. Imagine how we can advance the mission of the Hearing Loss Association of America.

Imagine how we can reach out to people who need us. Imagine tens of thousands of people talking to hundreds of thousands of people about hearing loss. There really is a brighter future out there. Come join us and help make it happen. 

Anne T. Pope is president of the Hearing Loss Association of America Board of Trustees and lives in New York City. She can be reached at president@hearingloss.org.

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"I became involved in Walk4Hearing to assist in raising awareness about hearing loss, especially in children. I am the proud mother of a three-year-old boy with bilateral profound hearing loss. He has a cochlear implant and is doing really well. I not only surpassed my fundraising goal but was able to make a difference in educating people about hearing loss."

— Eileen Solla-Diaz, Yorktown Heights, NY

"Planning and fundraising for the 2007 National Capital Area (Washington, D.C.) Walk4Hearing was a fun, feel-good activity for me. I sent out requests for support via e-mail. Some decided to join my team, raise funds and/or walk with me. Some contributed. Some volunteered to register people. Some people ignored my request. I was able to leverage my $100 contribution with $1325 to be divided between the Hearing Loss Association of America and our local chapter."

— Linda Webb, Baltimore MD

When Walk4Hearing was first started, there was no walk in the Midwest. The following year when I heard that Chicago was sponsoring a walk, I jumped at the chance. Why? HLAA has been a huge part of my life for nearly 20 years. The local organization changed me in ways that would never have happened had I not walked in the doors of my first local meeting. I was so inspired, I decided to spearhead a walk in St. Louis this spring.

— Mary Stodden, St. Charles, MO

Walk4Hearing continued on page 10
For a complete update of sites and dates and other information, go to www.hearingloss.org. To find out how you can participate as an individual or as an HLAA Chapter or other organization, go to www.hearingloss.org.

Walk4Hearing Sites as of February 15, 2008

Safety Harbor, Florida: April 12
Atlanta, Georgia: April 19
St. Louis, Missouri: April 26
Longmont, Colorado: May 3
Westchester/Mid-Hudson, New York: May 3
Southeast Michigan: May 3
Rochester, New York: May 4
Columbus, Ohio: June 7
Grand Rapids, Michigan: June 21
Northern California: September 21
Permian Basin, Texas: September 27
Houston, Texas: November 1
Garden State, New Jersey: October 18
New York City: October 19
Chicago, Illinois: TBA
New England Region: TBA
National Capital Area, Washington, D.C.: TBA

Top 25 Fundraisers
Everyone on this list raised over $2,000. The top earner raised over $12,000. Congratulations to all!

Lori Ali (Downstate NY)
Louise Allen (Long Beach, CA)
Brenda Battat (DC)
Pam Foody (Downstate NY)

John Friedewald (Chicago)
Sally Friedewald (Chicago)
Mary Gosnell (DC)
Jeannette Kanter (Rochester, NY)
Paul Lurie (Chicago)
Michael Meystel (Newtown Square, PA)
Sue Miller (Rochester, NY)
Anne Pope (Downstate NY)
John Pope (Downstate NY)
Karen Ratner (Downstate NY)
Al Robles (Downstate NY)
Kate Schwerin (Downstate NY)
Robert Seidner (Downstate NY)
Ellen Semel (Downstate NY)
Sherry Shuster (Long Beach, CA)
Sandy Spekman (Downstate NY)
Eileen Solla-Diaz (Downstate NY)
Donna L. Sorkin (DC)
Evelyn Starr (New England)
Grace Tiessen (Long Beach, CA)
Teri Wathen (Houston)

The Top Teams
So many teams raised more than $1,000 that we have had to restrict the list to those who made more than $2,000. Imagine how many people they talked to about hearing loss!

Pope Gang $18,728
M.J. Diaz and Family $17,018
Roo’s Crew $10,660
HLA-LA $8,922
Walk for Will $8,620
Maryland Dream Team $6,316
Tiessen’s Tigers $4,900
City Slickers $4,760
Schiff Hardin, LLP $4,625
Long Beach Locals $4,364
Wathen Walkers $4,046
Jeannette Kanter’s Team $3,883
Marion the Librarian Team $3,830
The Rat Pack $3,792
Lise & Koso’s Kilometer Kickers $3,675
Cochlear Americas (DC) $3,660
NJ Team $3,587

Marcia’s Maniacs and Friends $3,545
Albany Allstars $3,491
Phonak Hearing Systems $3,375
Foody’s Bunch $3,330
Kate’s Gang $3,195
Walk4Jake $3,085
Royal Oak Rowdies $2,979
Chesco Chargers $2,873
Team Temper $2,868
Gramps United $2,712
Paul Lurie’s Friends $2,536
FHSR $2,530
Valley Sunshine $2,511
1Way4Gran2Hear $2,476
Cochlear Americas (Longmont, CO) $2,435
Orange County Walkers $2,430
Finntastics $2,420
The Sunflowers $2,390
Longmont Hearing Trailblazers $2,345
Harry Potterers $2,335
Music To Our Ears $2,330
The Unherd Nerd Herd $2,290
Crocker’s Crocodiles $2,265
Jared’s Crew $2,207
Kobylak Kommando $2,200
Denver Chapter team $2,186
Team Chris Stern $2,130
Wolff Pack $2,070
Cochlear Americas (Chicago) $2,061
Wild Wild Philly $2,029
The X Factors $2,006

National Sponsors
In addition to hundreds of local sponsors, the following national sponsors gave to the Walk4Hearing:

Advanced Bionics
American Academy of Audiology
Cochlear Americas
T-Mobile
Sennheiser
Southwest Airlines
Sprint

To be a National Sponsor, contact Christopher T. Sutton at CSutton@hearingloss.org.
The Hearing Loss Association of America Convention is a highly interactive and communication accessible event for all people who are affected by hearing loss. The program includes dynamic speakers and an informative research symposium. In addition, our Exhibit Hall hosts an array of hearing loss related products, services and information.

The program also offers a wide variety of educational workshops, general sessions, and special events as well as opportunities to meet other people with hearing loss, healthcare and rehabilitation professionals, educators and vendors. Attendees can enjoy hands-on testing of hearing assistive devices and telecommunication products in the Exhibit Hall.

**Popular Topics in Four Tracks:**
- Hearing Technology
- Advocacy and Access
- Relationships and Communication
- Healthy Living and Working

**Workshops Include:**
- The Basics of Achieving Comfortable Listening with Your Hearing Aids
- Connect and Discover with Bluetooth Technology
- The Hearing Aid Tax Credit: Progress and Prognosis
- Digital Television Transition: the Good, the Bad, the Ugly
- Wheel of Communication: Strategies for More Effective Communication
- Networking from Your Couch
- Better Hearing: Improving Acoustical Environments for Small Meetings and Conference Rooms
- Accessing Today’s Telephone Technology

**Communication Access**
All sessions, workshops, and major events at the convention are real-time captioned. Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs) are provided free of charge by request at the HLAA Registration Desk. Sign language interpreting services are provided at all major events. If you have assistive listening devices that you can use during the convention, bring them with you.

**Association Banquet**
Please join us for the annual Association Banquet where you'll enjoy truly tasteful dining coupled with fine entertainment. Ticket availability is limited so please register in advance. Banquet tickets are included in the cost of the Full Activity Package. If you are purchasing your tickets separately, the cost is $70 in advance or $75 at the convention.

**Block Party**
This year’s opening night party is going to be held at the Grand Sierra Resort’s bowling alley. HLAA has the run of the house because we’ve reserved all 50 lanes for two hours of bowlerama madness! Start thinking about naming your team and

---

**Rocky Stone Scholarship to Convention 2008**
The Board of Trustees established the Rocky Stone Scholarship Program to encourage people with hearing loss to attend Hearing Loss Association of America annual conventions. Founder Rocky Stone was a staunch believer in our conventions where people could learn and benefit from mutual support. He believed lives were changed after attending a communication accessible convention focused solely on people with hearing loss.

For more information about the scholarship and nomination form, go to [www.hearingloss.org/convention/RSSScholars.asp](http://www.hearingloss.org/convention/RSSScholars.asp). The deadline to apply for Reno is April 11, 2008.
Ollie Cantos is Keynote Speaker for Opening Session at Convention 2008
During the Opening Session on Thursday, June 12, 5:30 p.m.
Olegario “Ollie” D. Cantos, VII, special counsel to the acting assistant attorney general for civil rights in the U.S. Department of Justice will be the keynote speaker. His engaging personal style and ability to convey thoughts have solidly established him as a national leader who is known throughout the world.

Mr. Cantos is well known in Washington, D.C., as one of the highest-placed persons with a disability in the federal government today. He began his work at the Justice Department in August 2004 when he was commissioned for his current position. Mr. Cantos recently returned to this post after having served two consecutive terms of service as associate director for domestic policy at the White House, where he led the implementation of the President’s New Freedom Initiative, the agenda for advancing equality of opportunity for people with all types of disabilities in information and assistive technology, education, employment, and every aspect of community living.

Blind since birth, Mr. Cantos is known well beyond the Nation’s Capital boundaries for his ability to network and bring stakeholders together for a common purpose. He is a sought-after speaker who is an example of how people with disabilities can reach the highest levels of success in every area of life by exercising both the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

To learn more about him, go to www.hearingloss.org/magazine.

Convention continued from page 11

buying some snazzy retro bowling shirts. Not a bowler? Come anyway for the food and drinks, plus, a whole lotta laughs.

About Reno/Tahoe
When you’re finished with the daily convention activities, there’s plenty to do after-hours in Reno. Reno’s centerpiece is the Truckee River Whitewater Park, where rafters and kayakers can tackle the rapids without leaving town. Lining both banks of the river is the Truckee River Arts District, which hosts an array of art galleries, restaurants, and nightclubs. The Nevada Museum of Art, Fleischmann Planetarium and Science Center, and National Automobile Museum feature state of the art exhibits and programs. Interested in a tour? Try the Ghost Trail Tour, Boom or Bust Driving Tour, Historic Reno Preservation Society Walking Tour, or for the ultimate experience, try an airplane or helicopter tour.

The city capitalizes on its spectacular environs of mountains, lakes, river, ranchlands, and high desert that provide an array of outdoor adventures just minutes from the hotel and meeting rooms. Reno-Tahoe is the destination site if you love the outdoors. Enjoy biking, hiking, horseback riding, rock climbing, sky diving, hot air ballooning, sand boarding, fishing, golfing, soaring, hang gliding, and sailing.

About the Grand Sierra Resort and Casino
You don’t even have to leave the convention site to experience the excitement of Reno. The Grand Sierra Resort and Casino offers more than just gaming. New offerings at the resort include All City Live, a hip nightclub, and Nikki Beach Poolside, which features beach volleyball, a swim-up bar and nightly entertainment.

Celebrity chef Charlie Palmer recently opened two new restaurants, a steakhouse and Fin, the chef’s first seafood restaurant. Other food and beverage options include Dolce Enoteca e Ristorante that boasts a chic Hollywood atmosphere and The Reserve, a wine bar with enomatic dispensers for individual wine tasting. The Grand Theatre features some of the biggest names in entertainment and is home to the world’s biggest indoor stage.

Family friendly, the resort provides a 50-lane bowling alley, an Aqua Golf Lake-top Driving Range, a golf simulator, a Funquest Family Entertainment Center, a Clay Quest ceramics studio, a miniature golf course, an Olympic sized pool, and a Malibu Go-Karts center.

Hotel Accommodations
HLAA has secured a room block in the newly remodeled luxury rooms in the Grand Sierra Summit. Elegantly styled in contemporary fashion and designed for the highest degree of comfort, room rates in the Grand Sierra Summit are $141 for a single or double room.

Additional standard rooms are available through the hotel at the hotel’s current room rate. Please be advised that these rooms have not been remodeled for 20 years and are not as elegant or comfortable as the rooms being offered through the HLAA room block. Additionally, construction activities in the older tower may be likely at the time of the HLAA convention. You may book these rooms directly through the Grand Sierra Resort and Casino.

Grand Sierra Resort and Casino
2500 East Second Street
Reno, NV 89595
800.501.2651

Online Reservations for HLAA Room Block
www.hearingloss.org/convention/2008-hotel.asp

Convention News and Updates
Visit our website frequently for the latest convention updates. www.hearingloss.org/convention
CONVENTION REGISTRATION FORM
Hearing Loss Association of America Convention 2008

Reno, Nevada • June 12 –25, 2008

Please complete and return registration form by May 18, 2008.

Primary Registrant (name as it will appear on badge)

Second Registrant

Company / Organization

Address

City

State

Zip

Daytime Phone

E-mail

For quick and secure registration, go online to: www.hearingloss.org/convention

VALUE PACKAGES

☑ Full Activity Package (Best Value)

Hearing Loss Association Convention Full Activity Package includes:
• Unlimited Entry to the Exhibit Hall During Expo & Session Hours
• All Workshops, Demonstrations, & Featured Speakers
• Research Symposium
• Opening Session & Exhibit Grand Hall Opening
• Block Party
• Awards Breakfast
• Exhibit Hall Socials
• Banquet Reception & Dinner

Special Dietary Requests
☑ Vegetarian
☑ Kosher
☑ Diabetic

By 5.18.08 Onsite

Member
☑ $ 319
☑ N/A

Member Couple
☑ $ 558
☑ N/A

Non-Member
☑ $ 309
☑ $ 369

Student
☑ $ 200
☑ $ 225

More packages on reverse side.

☑ Education Package

Hearing Loss Association Convention Education Package includes:
• Unlimited Entry to the Exhibit Hall During Expo & Session Hours
• All Workshops, Demonstrations, & Featured Speakers
• Research Symposium
• Opening Session & Exhibit Grand Hall Opening
• Block Party
• Awards Breakfast
• Exhibit Hall Socials

By 5.18.08 Onsite

Member
☑ $ 259
☑ $ 319

Member Couple
☑ $ 439
☑ $ 499

Non-Member
☑ $ 309
☑ $ 369

Student
☑ $ 200
☑ $ 225

Please fill out form on reverse side.
ONE DAY PACKAGES

June 12 — Thursday Package
- Unlimited Entry to the Exhibit Hall during Expo Hours
- Demonstrations & Featured Speakers
- Opening Sessions & Exhibit Hall Grand Opening
- Block Party

June 13 — Friday Package
- Unlimited Entry to the Exhibit Hall during Expo Hours
- All Workshops, Demonstrations, & Featured Speakers
- Awards Breakfast

June 14 — Saturday Package
- Unlimited Entry to the Exhibit Hall during Expo Hours
- All Workshops, Demonstrations, & Featured Speakers
- Exhibit Hall Social

June 15 — Sunday Package
- Research Symposium

Package Total $ _______________

Individual Tickets
- Banquet Reception & Dinner $70 x ______
  Special Dietary Requests:  □ Vegetarian  □ Kosher  □ Diabetic

Individual Tickets Total $ _______________

Membership
- Individual $35
- Couple/Family $45
- Professional $60
- Student* $20
* Please enclose photocopy of current student identification card.

Membership Total $ _______________

Contribution
Contributions help support the education, advocacy, and support efforts of the Hearing Loss Association of America throughout the year. Donors will be listed in the Convention Program if received by April 18, 2008.

Contribution $ _______________

Payment Information
- Check enclosed (payable to Hearing Loss Association of America).
- Please charge my:  □ AMEX  □ VISA  □ MasterCard  □ Discover

Cardholder’s Name

Card Number

Exp. Date

Cardholder’s Signature

Please return your completed form with payment to:
Hearing Loss Association of America
7910 Woodmont Avenue, Suite 1200
Bethesda, MD 20814
www.hearingloss.org/convention
Phone: 301.657.2248  tty2249
FAX: 301.913.9413

Cancellation Policy The following policy applies to refunds of registration fees:
If a registrant cancels between January 16 and March 31, 2008, they will be refunded 75% of their registration fees and event tickets.
If a registrant cancels between April 1 and May 15, 2008, they will be refunded 50% of their registration fee and event tickets.
Cancellations made after May 15, 2008, will not be refunded.
Cancellations must be received in writing. Cancellation dates will be determined by USPS post marks or e-mail receipt date.
The national board of trustees will hold a meeting during the convention. New board members will be installed at the meeting. This year, there is one candidate on the ballot for a regional representative. Only current members who live in the following states can vote: Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma.

Please fax or mail your ballot by April 15, 2008, to:
HLAA
7910 Woodmont Avenue, Suite 1200
Bethesda, MD 20184
ATTN: Nominating Committee
Fax to: 301.913.9413

Member Identification Number: ____________________________
(Appears on label of Hearing Loss Magazine)

Zip Code: ____________________________

OFFICIAL BALLOT

Hearing Loss Association of America Board of Trustees 2008 Election

Please return by mail or fax, postmarked by April 15, 2008, to:
HLAA National Elections • 7910 Woodmont Avenue, Suite 1200, Bethesda, MD 20814 • Fax: 301/913-9413

The following candidate is presented for election to the HLAA Board of Trustees. Only current national members who live in the Mid-West Region may vote during this election. Please read voting instructions carefully.

1. Use only the ballot provided.
2. Write Membership Identification Number and zip code in the space provided at the top of this ballot. Ballots without this information will be disqualified.
3. In the case of a Couple or Family Membership, both spouses have one vote. Each spouse must use this same form (Spouses vote in the second column where indicated.)

MID-WEST REGION — OH, IN, MI, WI, IL, MN, IA, MO, ND, SD, NE, KS, OK

SPOUSE VOTE

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Walking the Halls of Congress with Ray Thorn

Walking the halls of Congress is something not many of us get to do. Yet, people across the country are welcome to visit their congressional representatives anytime in their office both in their home states and in Washington, D.C.

The Hearing Loss Association of America is no stranger to the halls of congress. Our founder, our executive directors, staff and members from across the country have advocated and testified for numerous laws that directly affect the lives of people with hearing loss.

Currently, one of the front-burner issues is the Hearing Aid Tax Credit Bill. The logistics of introducing a bill, getting sponsors and HLAA members involved is an education in how the law works. Behind the mechanics are people working hard to make the lives of all Americans better.

Brenda Battat, HLAA acting executive director, has been working on this bill with Rep. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) and his staff for three years. Brenda told me about Ray Thorn, legislative assistant to Van Hollen. “You have to meet him. He’s a great guy, sharp, and he has a hearing loss. Let’s see if we can interview him.”

Ray Thorn, 30, was born in Boston and moved to Wisconsin at age six, then to Illinois, then to Texas by age 10. His father, a mechanical engineer, relocated frequently; so Ray experienced life around the United States. He is the eldest of three children.

Ray has a bachelor’s degree in political science from Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri. (Trivia: Westminster is the small liberal arts college where Winston Churchill delivered his “Iron Curtain” speech in 1946.) He also holds a master’s degree in international affairs from American University’s School of International Service in Washington, D.C. Equipped with this educational pedigree, a long-burning desire for public service and an interest in healthcare issues, Ray appropriately landed in Congressman Van Hollen’s office.

I had the privilege of walking the halls of Congress with Ray Thorn, a dynamic congressional assistant who happens to have a hearing loss. We had a quick half hour with Ray to ask some questions and shoot some photos. (“We,” meaning Brenda Battat, Cindy Dyer, photographer, and Andy Bopp, director of regulatory affairs at the Hearing Industries Association.)

Giving us his undivided attention while getting right to the point, Ray talked about his career in public service, his work on the Hill, and about his hearing loss while we walked through the Longworth House Office Building, one of the three buildings for the United States House of Representatives. And, yes, the hallows halls of Congress do echo.

Hearing Loss Magazine (HLM):
What is your role as a legislative assistant for Congressman Chris Van Hollen?

Ray: I primarily monitor domestic legislative issues related to healthcare that deal with National Institutes of Health research funds, Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security and how to move these issues through the legislative process. Healthcare is an issue that affects all Americans; so I know this is very important work.

HLM: Do you want to concentrate on healthcare issues or move into international affairs, since your master’s degree is in this field?

Ray: I don’t have a five-year plan, as they say. I am enjoying what I am doing now.

HLM: What is a typical day for you?

Ray: (Smiling). There is no typical day here, it is like a continuous fire drill—I handle multiple issues and try to stay abreast of them for the congressman. We just have to keep the congressman prepared for it all. We’re sensitive to the quick development of current events and have to stay flexible throughout the day.

HLM: Do you work directly with the congressman? Is Rep. Van Hollen accessible to you?

Ray: Yes, Congressman Van Hollen is very accessible. As his leadership responsibilities increase, it does become more difficult to get time with him, but we regularly meet with him on a wide variety of legislative issues. There are also moments where we can just chat with him.

Ray: I was first diagnosed with hearing loss and got hearing aids at age three. My mom noticed I was not responding or developing as quickly as I should, so I may have been born with the hearing loss. My parents and I communicated via sign language
Hearing Aid Assistance Tax Credit Act

The Hearing Aid Assistance Tax Credit (H.R. 2329) will provide a $500 tax credit for people 55 and older and those with dependent children. The legislation has already been co-sponsored by 71 members of the House and a companion bill, S.1410, has been co-sponsored by seven Senators. The bill will ultimately come before the House Ways and Means Committee.

In an effort to boost awareness of the Hearing Aid Tax Credit Bill, the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA), the Hearing Industries Association, and the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing have been collaborating on a series of events to recognize congressmen who are supporting the bill—especially members of the Ways and Means Committee that will have influence on the bill’s fate.

To date, three events sponsored by Hearing Industries Association have been held to honor representatives in PA (Rep. Hart), MD (Rep. Van Hollen), MI (Rep. Camp), LA (Rep. Becerra), TX (Rep. Lampson). Michigan and Los Angeles are planning similar events.

Each program took on a similar format with young children first leading the group in the Pledge of Allegiance followed by local consumers giving testimonials regarding the importance of hearing aids to their daily lives. A father explained how he could not afford a hearing aid for his daughter who he recently adopted from Russia.

A retired minister also spoke to the issue of how hearing aids take a huge portion of a retired person’s income.

The congressional representatives addressed each group and all of them stated that they will focus on this issue which they realize is of great concern to many people.

In Washington, D.C., Representative Chris Van Hollen was recognized last October 2007 for his support of the hearing aid tax credit. The Hearing Loss Association of America–Maryland Affiliates, the Hearing Loss Association of America–Maryland Affiliates, the Hearing Loss Association of America–Maryland Affiliates, and the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (AG Bell) hosted a dinner on Capitol Hill for consumers with hearing loss and Rep. Van Hollen.

Photos courtesy of Hearing Industries Association; Andrew A. Wagner, photographer.

Andy Bopp, director of regulatory affairs at Hearing Industries Association, presents a megaphone to Rep. Van Hollen to proclaim the message of better hearing with hearing aids.
Ray Thorn continued from page 17

(they do not have hearing loss). As I grew older and adapted to the hearing aids, I communicated like anyone else as I caught up in my development as a child. Unfortunately, I do not know sign language anymore. I had to take speech therapy lessons growing up because of a cleft lip and cleft palate.

HLM: Did you use assistive technology beyond the hearing aids through school? How about in your job now?

Ray: Going through school and college, I did not use assistive devices. However, I sat at the front of my classes so I could make sure I heard my teachers and professors. I did this so that I could give myself a better chance to succeed.

One of the reasons I went to Westminster College was the small professor-to-student ratio. I knew I was going to be able to hear my professors because of the small class size. All the classes I took at Westminster did not have more than 30 people in them, including my freshman year. By the time I was a senior, there were about 10 people in my classes. I could have gone to a large university, but I would not have been comfortable and I think there would have been times when it would have been difficult for me to hear in certain classes. My experience while going to graduate school at American University was similar to my undergraduate study.

In my current position, I communicate like any person who doesn’t have a hearing loss. I do not use any assistive devices on the job. Sometimes it is a little difficult to hear in a large crowded noisy reception room because my hearing aids pick up every sound and amplify it. This causes me to be more focused on the person with whom I am having a conversation. Most of the time I do not have difficulty hearing people over the phone. In hearings and briefings, continued on page 33
House Releases 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act for People with Disabilities

On December 21, 2007, the U.S. House of Representatives released a discussion bill, the long-awaited “Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act.”

The bill proposes to amend the Communications Act—the main statute that impacts the telephone and video programming industries—to add new consumer protections that will ensure that people with disabilities do not get left out or left behind as telephones and television programming increasingly rely on digital and Internet Protocol (IP) technologies. See a summary of the bill, at www.hearingloss.org/magazine.

Immediate Action Required

Your letters could make sure that there really is 21st century electronic communication for people with disabilities. (Additional Action Steps will follow. Please stay alert by reading the HLAA E-News, free, online by signing up at www.hearingloss.org.

Please send letters to the following House members, who are the leadership of the House Energy and Commerce Committee (the committee that is assigned this bill). Ask each of them for their sponsorship:

House Members

Rep. John Dingell, (D-MI), Chairman
House Energy and Commerce Com.
Room 2328
Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Rep. Ed Markey (D-MA), Chairman
House Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet
Room 2125
Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ranking Minority Members

Rep. Joe Barton (R-TX)
Room 2109
Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Rep. Fred Upton (R-MI)
Room 2322A
Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Send letters to your own representatives if they are members of the House Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet, which will review the bill first. Regular mail is preferred. The list of subcommittee members and their addresses is at www.hearingloss.org/magazine.

Please send copies of your letters to COAT, the coalition spearheading this effort. COAT advocates for legislation for people with hearing loss.

COAT c/o AAPD
ATTN: J. Simpson
1629 K Street N.W., Suite 503
Washington, D.C. 20006

Infant Hearing Screening Bill

A bill to reauthorize the infant hearing screening program was introduced in the House of Representatives in February 2007. H.R.1198 was introduced by Rep. Lois Capps (D-CA), Rep. Jim Walsh (R-NY), and 23 other members of the Congress. At the time of going to press, the bill was moving through committee and should come to the House floor for a vote next.

To see if your representative is supporting the bill, go to www.hearingloss.org/magazine.

Go to www.hearingloss.org/magazine for national updates on the following:

- Direct Access to Audiology Services
- FCC Proceeding on Hearing Aid Compatibility Rules
- Cordless Phone Manufacturers to Make All Handsets TIA-1083 Compliant
- Wisconsin Senate Introduces Health Insurance Coverage of Cochlear Implants for Children

Brenda Battat is serving as acting executive director until that position is filled. Since 1989, she has worked on public policy issues for our organization and is the recipient of numerous awards for her nationally-recognized work in advocacy for people with hearing loss. She can be reached at battat@hearingloss.org.
“[With] Comfort Contego she was immediately able to hear normal conversations without any difficulty.”

I recently purchased the Comfort Contego for my 95 year old mother-in-law.

With her profound hearing loss, estimated to be nearly 90%, she has purchased three different expensive sets of hearing aids plus had dozens of visits to audiologists and ENT physicians over the past 3 years with no real benefit.

When I gave your Comfort Contego to her, she was immediately able to hear normal conversations without any difficulty. She was able to attend a weekly lecture at her independent living facility and hear every word - for the first time in over 2 years. In addition, she can now hear and converse with others in the dining room of her residence for the first time in years.

Many other hearing impaired residents at the Dublin, Ohio facility were amazed at the benefits to my mother-in-law’s hearing improvement. I strongly urge you to find a way to advertise to this group of elders which are often much better served with a product like your Comfort Contego than with marginally effective hearing aids.

I was able to find your incredible product only after hours of sifting through many internet sites. I am most disappointed that Audiologists and ENT physicians did not suggest this product several years ago.

Dublin, Ohio, January 11, 2008
Philip E. Eggers

Comfort Contego™ is a High Definition digital wireless FM Assistive Listening system. The HD sound is crisp and clear and the small units have a distinctive look and feel with easy to read digital screens. The Contego units have built-in microphones that are adjustable for maximum customization of sound with omni-directional or directional sound based on conditions. The volume setting for the transmitter can be remotely adjusted from the receiver. The Comfort Contego sends its signals encrypted to prevent electronic eavesdropping, an industry first. Use with or without hearing aids. To learn more about Comfort Contego, ask your Audiologist, or go to www.comfortaudio.us
Premium Digital Hearing Aids

Are premium hearing aids worth the money? Mark Ross lays out the practical implications and helps you evaluate what is best for you.
A "premium" or "top of the line" hearing aid is one that incorporates the most technologically advanced and potentially useful features currently available. One recent trade journal article defines the difference between a premium hearing aid and other models as the inclusion of automatic and innovative features. The more of these that are included in an aid, the greater the likelihood that it would be considered a premium or top of the line model.

The designation also carries with it the explicit promise that the overall benefits that one achieves with a premium hearing aid will exceed those obtainable with a more economical hearing aid. However, keep in mind that it is also a hearing aid that invariably comes with a price tag commensurate with the elite label.

According to the article, the determining consideration in moving from an entry level (less expensive) hearing aid to a premium (more expensive) model is the user’s lifestyle, that is, whether he or she leads a busy, active life in different listening environments, or whether social time is spent in quiet, less demanding listening environments.

The ability to hear better with these aids is not mentioned in the article. Convenience is stressed and not hearing. The reason for this, I suspect, is that there is little or no clinical evidence that directly compares the hearing performance of premium aids with other hearing aids.

Affordability Matters

The final factor in recommending a premium hearing aid for a particular person is, again according to the above-mentioned article, based on budgetary constraints. No matter what a person’s lifestyle, a premium hearing aid should be recommended only for those who can afford to pay the "premium" price.

The intention is to try to meet a person’s listening needs within the limits of affordability. A premium hearing aid, therefore, would be reserved for those who have an active life, are socially active, and can afford to pay a "premium" price for the convenience of the special features.

Cost Versus Benefit

In our society, we are conditioned to believe that "you get what you pay for." We are accustomed to quality differences being reflected in the cost of an object or service. The notion that this also applies to hearing aids does not seem strange to us. If someone has listening needs that require the inclusion of the latest automatic and innovative features, and can afford the premium cost, why shouldn’t this person purchase what he or she desires (and presumably needs)?

While perhaps, one can make a social policy argument against this notion, a more telling reason is that the presumed listening benefits of a premium hearing aid have little or no support in the hearing aid literature. In other words, the idea that people are getting extra hearing benefit commensurate with the additional cost is debatable. Evidently, many people who purchase premium hearing aids feel the same way, since industry figures show that fully 26 percent of such aids are returned for credit.

The Digital Hearing Aid Race

In recent years, the sheer number of new features introduced in digital hearing aids has been enormous. The various hearing aid companies are in a constant and intense competitive race to introduce new ones in order to differentiate themselves from their competitors. Different hearing aid models, incorporating what is presented as some "revolutionary" new development, seem to be introduced every year or so. Capturing or maintaining market share—the economic imperative—is clearly the driving force.

In the ideal world, no new hearing aid feature would be introduced until its presumed listening benefits were evaluated and substantiated with human beings. From what I can see, this does not happen very often. Instead of evidence of the clinical benefit of some newly introduced feature, what we get is promotional material presented as self-evidently positive. (Who can argue with hearing aids that employ "artificial intelligence," nano-technology, or include a 128-channel adaptive noise reduction circuit?)

It is difficult for anyone, consumer or professional, not to be impressed when reading this material—I know that I am. It all sounds so logical—but we do have to keep in mind that a marketing description, no matter how appealing or self-evidently obvious, is not equivalent to a well-controlled clinical (not laboratory) research study.

Highlights of Newer Hearing Aid Models

With the rapid introduction of new models, it seems that the features highlighted in a previous generation of premium hearing aids are now being included in this year’s “entry level” or “affordable” models. The features haven’t changed; the presumed advantages of last year’s model are still as relevant (or irrelevant) as ever.

Features of Currently-Labeled “Affordable” Hearing Aids

We can get some idea of what constituted a previous generation’s “premium” hearing aid by looking at a table from the article cited above in which the characteristics of 25 “affordable” hearing aids are briefly described.
Hearing Aids
continued from page 23

Some of the more common features included with these currently-labeled affordable hearing aids are:

- **Wide Dynamic Range Compression (WDRC).** This feature automatically varies the amount of amplification applied to an input sound signal. Soft sounds may be amplified somewhat more than louder sounds, with the intention of making them audible, but still soft. Loud input sounds will receive less amplification, but should still sound loud, although not uncomfortably so.

  The goal is to "package" the range of input sounds into a person’s usable residual hearing range, i.e., the area between the impaired thresholds (e.g., 60 dB) and the point where sound becomes unpleasantly loud (let’s assume, 95 dB). Ideally, there would be a volume control permitting the user to override, at least to a certain extent, the WDRC circuit (to allow for situational and personal preferences).

- **Adaptive Feedback Management.** A number of hearing aids on this list include an effective feedback control circuit that uses a technique that does not modify the frequency response of the hearing aid. When an acoustic squeal occurs, the hearing aid automatically identifies the offending frequency and creates an internal cancellation signal. An effective feedback management system will permit a user to increase the gain of a hearing aid by 10 or 15 dB without feedback occurring. Open ear fitting would not be possible without this development.

- **Channels and Bands** (sometimes these terms are used interchangeably). The term “channel” usually refers to the ability to modify compression characteristics, while “band” refers to the ability to change the degree of amplification of the band (separate from the other bands). The hearing aids listed in this table display a considerable range of the number of channels and bands offered. We should note that there is little clinical evidence for the presumed benefits of more than two channels and three or four equalization bands.

- **Directional Microphones.** Many of the hearing aids listed in this table include directional microphones. Directional microphones deemphasize sound signals arriving from the sides and back of a listener relative to those arriving from the front. Some directional microphones are adaptive, changing characteristics depending on the location of the noise source(s). Some are automatic, with the aid itself “deciding” when to switch from the omnidirectional to the directional mode.

  Directional microphones work best when users are close to the sound source and position themselves so that the primary signal is in front of them while competing sounds are at the side or rear (not always possible).

According to Dr. Mead Killion, hearing aids that are judged to provide a “high fidelity” signal for someone with normal hearing would also deliver the highest speech perception scores in noise for someone with a hearing loss. And, these do not necessarily have to be this year’s "premium" hearing aids.

- **Noise Management/Reduction Programs.** Many of the hearing aids on this list include an explicit reference to some sort of noise control program. These increase user comfort when listening to speech, but speech perception ability is not necessarily improved. As far as I know, when noise (like other people talking) and speech occur simultaneously, it is not possible to eliminate one without affecting the other. Still, some people do find a noise management program a desirable feature, one that makes the listening task less stressful.

- **Automatic Telecoil.** With this feature, the hearing aid telecoil automatically activates when a telephone is placed next to it. It thus obviates the necessity of the user switching to the “T” position. Originally, this feature did not permit reception of signals from neck loops or floor loops, but this has been corrected (using a different memory). This feature can be helpful to someone who has difficulty, perhaps because of arthritic fingers, in switching the hearing aid to the “T” position.

**2008 Hearing Aid Features**
According to the websites, refinements in the operation of adaptive directional microphones and noise management systems seem to be the primary focus of this year’s top of the line hearing aids. For both of these topics, the promotional materials imply that speech perception (or comfort) in noise is improved with the new model. However, peer-reviewed studies on human beings that support these claims seem to be lacking (or are hard to find).

Another creative development includes binaural wireless connectivity, where two aids “talk” to one another and work in concert. In addition to greater convenience for the user (since one adjustment controls both aids), this capacity may eventually lead to improved localization and speech perception in noise. Another development is the inclusion of data learning (or logging); this feature not only records the listening programs a person selects, but can also “learn” someone’s volume preference and adjust the hearing aid setting accordingly.

In addition to these innovations, one can find many other appealing descriptions of new products by the various hearing aid manufacturers. It makes me wonder what the hearing
aid companies have in store for us next year and whether this year’s crop will then be relegated to the entry or mid-level categories.

**What is Hearing Better Really All About?**

It does seem to be getting a bit overwhelming and I think it may be time to go back to basics and to focus on what a hearing aid is supposed to do—help someone hear better. We’ve known for years what it takes to do this: a hearing instrument with a large dynamic range that delivers a wide-band, undistorted speech signal into the residual hearing area of the hearing aid user (which is located between the thresholds of hearing and discomfort).

It is only after this has been achieved that the convenience and contribution of special features become relevant. They are important, true, but mainly in specific situations, for specific purposes (such as open-ear fittings), and for the convenience of some automatic function. Hearing better is still what it is all about.

**Killion Correlation Study**

Mead Killion, Ph.D., demonstrated the fact that this can be achieved in a recent publication, *Proceedings of the 2006 International Conference on Hearing Care for Adults*. He reports some interesting conclusions in his examination of seven different digital hearing aids. In his study, he had normal-hearing people listen to music through the hearing aids and judge the fidelity of the recordings.

He also measured the ability of two groups of people with hearing loss to understand speech in noise. As expected, both speech perception and fidelity scores varied considerably between the hearing aids. Proving, once again, that all hearing aids are not the same.

What is perhaps his most significant finding was the “nearly perfect correlation between: a) the fidelity ratings to live music of normal-hearing subjects; and, b) the hearing aid’s ability to deliver high intelligibility in noise for subjects with hearing loss.”

According to Dr. Killion, hearing aids that are judged to provide a “high fidelity” signal for someone with normal hearing would also deliver the highest speech perception scores in noise for someone with a hearing loss. And, these do not necessarily have to be this year’s “premium” hearing aids.

**Is it Worth the Cost?**

So, is the current generation of premium hearing aids worth the cost? It’s impossible for me to say, since so much depends upon the individual’s history, communication needs, etc. We should also keep in mind the following: the more that people pay for a hearing aid, the greater their expectations regarding its performance.

Or, as Dr. Sergei Kochkin found in a past survey, the more someone spends for a hearing aid, the less likely he or she will be satisfied with the value received. Even though a premium hearing aid may be helping someone, in the person’s opinion, the help received may not be sufficient to justify the additional cost.

**What Would I Recommend?**

Unless, some current premium hearing aid includes some feature that demonstrably benefits a particular person—a possibility not to be ignored—I’d suggest that a prospective user first consider hearing aids labeled as “entry level, basic, or mid-level.” As noted above, these are not primitive, outmoded devices, but sophisticated electronic instruments (and once “premium” aids in their own right!).

In terms of hearing improvement, in my opinion most hearing aid users will do as well with one of these as they would with a top of the line model. Plus, save a bundle of money!

Mark Ross, Ph.D., is an audiologist and associate at the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center (RERC) at Gallaudet University. He and his wife, Helen, live in Storrs, Connecticut. To find more Dr. Ross articles on technology for consumers, go to: www.pa-shhh.org and www.hearingresearch.org.

This article is supported in part by GRANT #H133E030006 from the U.S. Department of Education, NIDRR, to Gallaudet University. The opinions expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Education.

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**Hearing Loss Association of America**

**RENO Convention 2008**

**Online registration available now!**

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March/April 2008 25
Buried Treasure

Sound, so long buried and hidden from me, has become the “treasure” that enables me to experience fully the beauty of my life.
After trekking step-by-step through a muffled world, as if slogging along the bottom of a soundless sea, I have rediscovered sound—the treasure buried and lost to me for 18 years.

Having grown up experiencing the trials of a profound hearing loss, at 25, I felt I had “bottomed out.” The sounds I had known earlier in my life gradually shut down, and the deepening silence carried away all my hopes for the future. Like a great, disabled ocean-going vessel, my prospects sank slowly to the bottom of the ocean, submerged in silence beneath the waves. Now through the breakthroughs in technology, a cochlear implant has enabled my life to “resurface” with new ears, fresh eyes, and a willing spirit.

I was seven when I noticed the first subtle differences in my hearing ability. I struggled to hear my shoes hitting the sidewalk or a pen going across paper. Telephone conversations would gradually become more and more muted.

I was unable to comprehend song lyrics on the radio. Diagnosed as “genetic and sensorineural,” my hearing loss progressed slowly yet relentlessly throughout my adolescence.

Eventually, I was transferred from my neighborhood public school to one in a different area of Fairfax County, Virginia, that offered a mainstreamed program for deaf and hard of hearing students, with the added assistance of sign language interpreters. Many of the hearing classmates at the new school were acclimated somewhat to kids with hearing loss, but this was their neighborhood school, and we deaf students were bused into their territory for the special learning accommodations the school offered from all over the county.

Because I was considered deaf, yet spoke like a hearing person, I existed in a limbo-land that confused me as much as it did other people...Now through the breakthroughs in technology, a cochlear implant has enabled my life to "resurface" with new ears, fresh eyes, and a willing spirit.

Yet be unable to hear what they said. I couldn’t wear a sign announcing, “Hey everybody! Until I was seven, I could hear as well as you do.”

But because I didn’t fit fully into either the hearing or deaf world, my classmates often seized upon the opportunity to mock and coax me into doing embarrassing things.

One day during lunch, I was in the boy’s restroom where students were weighing-in for an upcoming wrestling match. Unfamiliar with the pre-match procedures, I was soon told I had to take off my clothes for the weigh-in as well. At first I resisted—until a few guys started to gang up on me. Finally, as I started to pull off my shirt, the laughter began and I knew the joke was on me. The prank was in innocent enough, but I was too new to have made friends or defenders. Unable to hear them, or sort things out through a familiar frame of reference, I found the situation frightening.

When I was in seventh grade, my hearing decreased and daily life struggles became overwhelmingly evident. At that time, my audiologist recommended a cochlear implant, just as the latest technology was emerging. Since it was relatively new and unheard of to me, I declined the offer. I succumbed to living with total deafness rather than succumb to the stigma of “having wires poking out of my head.” Even with sign language interpreters present in each classroom, I struggled academically and socially throughout middle and high school. English was, and still remains my first language, so devoting myself completely to sign language felt unnatural to me. In essence, I resisted indoctrination into the deaf world, yet never mastered how to be a deaf person in a mainstream environment.

**Workplace Accommodations**

In September 2003, I joined the Internal Revenue Service, Information Resources Accessibility Program (IRAP) Division, after several years in the private sector. As an information technology specialist, my core responsibilities included educating procurement officials on Section 508 (federal regulation ensuring all electronic information technology—software, computers, web pages—are accessible), Web content management, and contract administration. At the IRS, the IRAP division finds and implements accommodation solutions for over 10,000 disabled IRS employees.

Mike Royer, wife Alicia, son Joshua, and daughter Annie walk for hearing.
These accommodations can include assistance for persons who have low-vision, who are blind, or who have varying degrees of hearing loss, or dexterity/mobility issues. Workplace adaptations range from Braille display equipment, one-handed keyboards, to TTYs. When I began my civil service career, I used several accommodations such as TTYs, sign language interpreters and CART (Computer-Assisted Real-Time Translation) services at large conferences. I was unable to communicate one-on-one with several blind co-workers due to the inability to lipread tactfully and follow rapid eye movements. Eventually, my work-related performance started to show the impact of my prolonged hearing-related struggles.

**This Time...I Was Ready**

I married Alicia, who has normal hearing, in January 2004. Alicia comes from a very large family for whom gatherings are frequent events. Having to rely constantly on her to "interpret" conversations increasingly frustrated me, as I did not want to put her in a co-dependant position. Our first child, Annie, was due in October 2004, and I wanted every opportunity to hear and better interact with her. In addition, my commute to work involved using the subway system from suburban Washington, D.C., into the city. I grew more and more frustrated witnessing the occasional chaos on Metro rides to and from work. If a train broke down or experienced a delay, conductors attempted to comfort riders verbally over the intercom—which I struggled to comprehend.

This time when my audiologist suggested a cochlear implant, I was ready. On October 26, 2004, my implant was "activated" and I surfaced to the world of sound.

Now, three years after activation, I am uncovering acoustic treasures long forgotten during 18 years of profound hearing loss. I have rediscovered the joys of music through the latest technological gadgets such as the iPod and surround-sound home cinemas complete with booming treble and bass. Once again, I can appreciate the sounds of nature—clapping thunder and sheets of boisterous rain pounding my roof during thunderstorms—as well as my children’s joyful laughter (we since had our son Joshua). Sound, so long buried and hidden from me, has become the “treasure” that enables me to experience fully the beauty of my life. I can comprehend tone, clarity, and inflection in personal conversations, attend church without the use of assistive technology, and feel confident speaking on the phone with complete strangers. My speech comprehension levels went from a middling percentage pre-implant, to 93 percent post-implant. Arguably, that is better comprehension than most hearing people possess.

With the gift of sound now restored, I am able to partake of life’s simple pleasures once again. I marvel at my daughter’s budding musical talents as she conducts the “pots and pans band” with crescendos of pan lid “cymbals” and potted drum beats clanking and clattering through the house. If given the opportunity to re-live the past 18 years, I would elect to do it with a cochlear implant.

Not only do I revel in the joy of simple sounds, the cochlear implant also helps me stay current with all of technology’s other rapidly evolving trends. In an increasingly competitive world, I’m no longer at the bottom of the sea, I have resurfaced, fully equipped to hear life’s call, and go where it leads me.

The Creator, in infinite wisdom, endowed us with all five senses so that we might fully partake of life, and everything it has to offer. It seems miraculous that I can experience all five senses once again.

**Buried Treasure**

continued from page 27

Michael Royer lives in Reston, Virginia with his wife, Alicia, and their two children, Annie and Joshua. He is a member of the Hearing Loss Association of America and also serves on the board of directors of the Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People (NVRC) as finance chair.
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• Introduction to Hearing Loss
• Coping with Hearing Loss
• Hearing Assistive Technology
• Advocacy Resources and the Law

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Hearing Loss Association of America has more than 200 chapters and 14 state organizations. For a chapter near you, go to www.hearingloss.org.

What You Find...

In San Francisco, Where They “Put People Back on Track”
Marilyn Finn, president of HLA-CA talks about how chapters put people back on track. In the San Francisco Chapter Voice newsletter she writes the article “HLAA: Supporting Issues and Chapters.” Here is an excerpt of Marilyn’s article where she talks personally about membership as a national and chapter member. Read the entire article at www.hearingloss.org/magazine.

“Hearing Loss Association of America’s reach is long because of its double focus. One focus is on advocacy on local, state and national issues and legislation that affects the lives of people with hearing loss. The other focus, right alongside that, puts individual lives back on track through support, education and information in HLAA chapters. There is overlap.

Chapters are involved with community access, state organizations work for issues at the state level and support the chapters, and the HLAA national staff work on issues of national importance. Nevertheless the Hearing Loss Association of America focus is two pronged: issues and chapters, both making a huge difference.

“Does the average person who is hard of hearing know to ask ahead for communication access and what to ask for? Does that person know what to ask for in the workplace, at school, in hospital settings? In my opinion, woefully, no.

“We in the chapters are the ones who must reach those multitudes, one by one. My HLAA membership—both as a national member and a chapter member, has changed my life. I know that it can change the lives of countless others. This part is up to us. We have to create a better future for people with hearing loss and their families. Let’s increase our own chapter and HLAA memberships to touch some lives right here.”

For the last two years Marilyn Finn has served as president of the Hearing Loss Association of California (HLA-CA), a volunteer position. She served on staff in the HLAA national office in Bethesda, Maryland as Chapter Development Coordinator from 1999–2002.

In Milwaukee, Whose State Motto is “Forward”
In 1851, the official motto of Wisconsin became “Forward,” reflecting Wisconsin’s continuous drive to be a national leader. You don’t have to tell the members of the Milwaukee/Racine HLAA Chapter about moving forward. Just ask Eloise Schwarz.

Eloise is an advocate for the Milwaukee/Racine HLAA Chapter in Wisconsin. She sends regulars update to members of her chapter about the work she does on behalf of people who are hard of hearing. In a recent communication, Eloise talks about her work as an HLAA representative on the Governor’s Council for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People. She also talks about the chapter’s work on insurance coverage for hearing aids and cochlear implants.

Eloise is not alone. HLAA members are in the trenches working where you may not expect them. We want to salute all HLAA chapters and state organizations and the people who reach far into their communities and move forward on the issues important to people with hearing loss.

Thank you, Eloise, and all the HLAA chapter members across the country who do the same. View Eloise’s notes on advocacy at www.hearingloss.org/magazine.

In New Mexico, Where Communication Access is the Plan
One of an HLAA Chapter’s mission is outreach to let people know about hearing loss, hearing aids, communication access and more.

State Coordinator Stephen O. Frazier is one who doesn’t take that mission of outreach lying down. He wrote an article for Advance Magazine for Audiologists and the importance of telecoils to be able to use audio loops systems.

Steve wrote this article as a continuation of the HLAA New Mexico Loop initiative and another opportunity to put the name of the Hearing Loss Association of America before hearing care providers. Outreach works. To read “ALD Applications: Tell Patients About Their Telecoils,” go to www.hearingloss.org/magazine.

Stephen O. Frazier is New Mexico State Coordinator of the Hearing Loss Association of America.

Share Your Good Work
If you have a story you want to share about what is happening in your HLAA chapter or state organization, please send it to Editor Barbara Kelley. She accepts news items of 400 words or less. Submit items of interest electronically in Word doc. Send color photos in high-resolution JPG. We welcome photos with captions that will serve as news items. Send to Barbara at bkelly@hearingloss.org.

We will do our best to publish them either in Hearing Loss Magazine or in HLAA E-News, which is a free online newsletter. Sign up at www.hearingloss.org.
Message from President Anne Pope

The Board of Trustees voted to increase membership dues to $35 a year at the November Board meeting. The increase went into effect as of March 1, 2008.

In 1979 when our organization began, dues were only $7. In 1988 they increased to $12, with other increases over the years. Some of you may remember when a quart of milk cost 70 cents, a gallon of gasoline less than a dollar and a first class postage stamp only 25 cents. Prices are different today.

We hope you agree that there is nowhere else where people with hearing loss can benefit from a national advocacy presence, a website with reliable, organized, and archived answers to questions about hearing loss and assistive technology, the Hearing Loss Magazine, with credible, current information, over 200 local support chapters and 14 state organizations, discounts to annual national conventions and many regional conferences.

What else can you buy for $35, less than 70 cents a week, that will give you more information and encouragement to be a vital person in our hearing world? Please know that your Hearing Loss Association of America is here for you because you care enough to be a part of the national concern for hearing loss. We appreciate your membership.

Hearing Loss Association of Florida Calls for Applications

The Hearing Loss Association of Florida (HLA-FL) is seeking qualified individuals to serve on the HLA-FL Board of Trustees for a three-year term beginning October 4, 2008.

Who is Eligible?

Members of Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) who are Florida residents are eligible. HLA-FL is committed to assembling a board with a diversity of skills, backgrounds, hearing loss, and ages. Hearing applicants with sensitivity to the needs of people with hearing loss will be considered. Ability to work with others is essential. Positive thinkers with the desire to improve the quality of life for hard of hearing Florida residents are encouraged to apply. HLA-FL members can nominate themselves for the board or nominate another Florida HLAA member (with permission).

What is Required?

The board meets at least three times a year in locations that vary. Members are encouraged to attend all meetings. Costs of travel are the members’ responsibility. Members are asked to take active roles on standing and ad hoc committees. Meetings are presently held on Saturdays to accommodate employed members. Major committee work occurs between board meetings and is most often transacted by e-mail or chat room, and thus, Board members are required to have e-mail access. Reimbursements of previously approved expenses on behalf of HLA-FL are available to trustees upon request.

How to Apply for the HLA-FL Board

Application forms are available by contacting Richard Herring, Chair, Nominating Committee, 1317 Caloosa Lake Court, Sun City Center, Florida 33573-4869 or by e-mail at: rhmann@tampabay.rr.com. Applications must be returned no later than August 15, 2008.

A Message from the Lions Club International Foundation

There are people in the United States with hearing loss unable to purchase hearing aids due to their limited income. To address this need, Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF) and Rexton, Inc. are offering digital hearing aids through Lions hearing programs and Lions clubs. The program is rooted in the desire for Lions and audiologists to serve low-income people with hearing loss. (Eligibility for the program is limited to people at up to 200 percent above the federal poverty level).

Information about the aids offered by the program can be found on the Lions Clubs International website at www.lcif.org. Click on “Grants and Programs.”

LCIF is in the beginning phases of introducing Lions AHAP, so Lions clubs in your area may or may not be participating. To contact a club, go to www.lionsclubs.org, click on the “club locator” tool and answer the questions. You can contact a club president or talk with a Lion before one of the meetings. The program is only available in the United States.

LCIF provides grant funding to Lions for large-scale humanitarian projects too extensive for Lions to finance on their own. LCIF is the charitable arm of Lions Clubs International, the largest service club organization in the world. LCIF aids Lions in making a greater impact in their local communities, as well as around the world.

Jimmy Ross contributed this news. He is the chair of the Lions Clubs International Foundation.
Talking with Congressman Chris Van Hollen

Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) represents Montgomery County Maryland’s 8th District. He was elected to Congress in 2002 and lives in Kensington, Maryland, with his wife, Katherine, and their three children, Anna, Nicholas and Alexander.

There are 80,784 people with hearing loss living in Montgomery County. That is close to ten percent of the population who have a strong interest in hearing-related issues and affordable hearing aids.

Hearing Loss Magazine (HLM): Has Ray Thorn’s hearing loss influenced your position on healthcare legislation?

Van Hollen: My position on healthcare legislation from the start has been for universal healthcare coverage. I rely on Ray to provide good solid advice on healthcare issues, and he does that. He is the point person on healthcare issues and does a terrific job at looking at the whole spectrum of issues, analyzing them, and making recommendations on what approach to take. On the Hearing Aid Tax Credit bill, he can provide testimony from personal experience and he brings that to bear on other issues as well.

HLM: How would you describe Ray?

Van Hollen: You can’t find someone who is more hard-working, diligent, dedicated, or does a better job than Ray. We are very fortunate to have him.

HLM: Please comment on his hearing loss in your workplace environment. Does he need special communication accommodations?

Van Hollen: Ray wears hearing aids and he is able to work with staff and communicate like any other member. He has been effective in working well with colleagues in office and communicates effectively. Having hearing aids is essential to his work and daily life. He has never requested special accommodations, but if he did, we would be willing to provide them.

HLM: How can Hearing Loss Association of America members help get the Hearing Aid Tax Credit bill passed?

Van Hollen: People need to contact their members of Congress either in Washington, D.C., or in their district offices in their home states when they are back there. Let them know how important this bill is to the community and how the cost of hearing aids for people who need them often prevents people from buying them.

The most effective advocacy comes from personal stories and telling how this legislation will help them in everyday lives.

— Chris Van Hollen

By Barbara Kelley
Ray Thorn  continued from page 19

I try to be close to the people who are speaking, so I can understand them better.

HLM: Now for a few questions of the heart. Which living person do you admire the most?

Ray: My parents. Without their love, support and guidance, I wouldn’t be where I am today.

HLM: What movie could you watch over and over again?

Ray: That’s a hard one. I have many favorite movies, but I’m going to go with Star Wars (the original one).

HLM: Does having a hearing loss affect the way you look at healthcare issues or the Hearing Aid Tax Credit bill?

Ray: As someone who wears hearing aids, I definitely have a personal interest in this issue. But, I still have to look at it as objectively as possible, since it’s one of the many healthcare issues with which we are involved.

HLM: Tell us about the Hearing Aid Tax Credit bill and help us to understand how such a bill would be passed into law.

Ray: The Hearing Aid Assistance Tax Credit Act is currently referred to the House Ways and Means Committee, of which Congressman Van Hollen is a member. It is one of the most important committees in the House. It has a broad jurisdiction ranging from taxes to trade to healthcare to social security to income security. The Hearing Aid Assistance Tax Credit Act would have to be passed out of the Ways and Means Committee so that the full House of Representatives can consider and pass it.

To make House passage more likely, the bill needs more co-sponsors. That is why Congressman Van Hollen encourages people to call their representatives and ask them to co-sponsor the legislation. There is nothing more important than hearing from constituents. That is what the democratic process is all about.

The Senate also has to consider and pass the bill. If both the House and Senate pass the same version of the bill, it is presented to the President for his signature. Otherwise, the House and the Senate would have to reconcile their differences before the legislation is sent to the President.

HLM: How many voters does a congressman have to hear from before he starts listening?

Ray: (Holding up his index finger.) Just one. HLM.

Barbara Kelley is editor-in-chief of Hearing Loss Magazine and can be reached at bkelley@hearingloss.org.

Don’t miss Keynote Speaker Ollie Campos!
HLAA e-news

The HLAA e-news tells you what’s happening at HLAA national and in the HLAA Chapter network. It now includes the Legislative and Advocacy Update.

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self advocates it’s okay to feel that hurt when you disappear.

It’s okay to choose your battles according to your situations. And it’s okay to let the blame rightfully fall where it lies and not always on you for failing to speak up. 

Maggie Casteel, MS, CRC, is a late-deafened adult and long-time member of the Hearing Loss Association of America. She wears a cochlear implant and a hearing aid and is a passionate advocate for hearing assistive technology and participated in the HLAA Leadership Training for Hearing Assistive Technology. Maggie continues her advocacy efforts and is currently a vocational rehabilitation specialist for the VA Pittsburgh Health System serving disabled veterans. She also is a member of the HLAA Westmoreland (PA) Chapter.

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POOF!

When You Disappear Because You Can’t Hear

I’m a grown woman with the required number of letters behind my name to be recognized as a professional. I’m hardly larger than life, but, frankly, I’m not the fade-into-the-woodwork type, either. Yet, yesterday at my workplace, at a committee planning meeting in a room filled with my peers, I suddenly disappeared!

This would be astounding only if it had never happened before, or had never happened to anyone other than me. But you see, I’m a hard of hearing person so I know that it has happened to me before and, in fact, does happen every day to others like me.

It was an important meeting about a rapidly approaching big event. There were many details to confirm. Lots of important people were in attendance. It was crunch time. So, when the issue of the CART accommodation (Computer-Assisted Real-Time translation) was addressed, it was more expeditious to review the arrangements through the administrative assistant with whom I had solidified this planning. Better, I should allow all these important people to get on with this critical checklist and not expect them to slow the agenda to communicate appropriately for me; best not to draw attention to myself in a negative way and perhaps even have myself labeled as a cumbersome team player. After all, I want to be able to serve on other committees in the future. I want to keep my job, be respected and continue to be considered for advancement.

Being a competent self-advocate, however, compelled me to speak up for myself.

“I can speak to this issue, if you speak to me.”

“Oh, we’re just trying to confirm the arrangements and possibly schedule a dry run.”

“I can take care…”

Gone. The conversation had resumed around me and I was once again invisible.

In that instant, everything I have fought for on my own behalf vanished with me. I wasn’t another important person in the room among my colleagues; I wasn’t even a person in the room!

My eyes burned with the tears I suppressed as I struggled to maintain composure. Hardly a new feeling to be hurt and angry and disempowered because I don’t hear well enough to participate seamlessly in a group meeting—crushed again by something I cannot control and certainly would never choose. It never really fits that a seemingly competent professional should appear so but still require significant functional accommodation.

I carried nothing but bad feelings away from that meeting. Being treated in a way that deems you as a person, discounts you as a professional and overlooks you as an adult leaving you feeling like a child. And, I did. I felt helpless and frustrated. I childishy searched for relief and fantasized about vengeance from that oh-so-childlike hurt, that gut-level assault.

Then I realized that my expectations may have been as naïve and narcissistically childlike as my reaction. Perhaps the outcome had no other direction to take. I had expected professionals to interact as professionals and communicate with deference to me. My colleague’s behavior and their lack of sensitivity and awareness, particularly because they know me and my communications challenges, are unacceptable. I don’t need to own this on a failed self-advocacy level. In this case, they did hurt me. I expected too much of them and they accepted too little of themselves.

As people who are hard of hearing we will continue to experience sudden invisibility as a side effect. Devising tools and rationales to deflect the pain doesn’t take the place of a perfect world where the continued self-advocacy and awareness outreach we do is 100 percent effective. It just acknowledges that even for the best
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