

By Suzanne Roath

## A Midwestern Grocery Store Extends a Helping Hand



Suzanne (front) with husband Alan on the right. Behind her is her sister, Lisa and her husband George.

Suzanne Roath is an HLAA member from Madison, Ohio. She has enjoyed her job as a bakery clerk for six-and-a-half years at the Madison store #4097. The hearing loss workshop in which she participated was a Kathy Kooser program called "The Hidden Impact of Hearing Loss." Audiologists Paula Webster and Jane Kukula of Advanced Audiology Concepts, in Mentor, Ohio, sponsored and conducted the workshop.

Giant Eagle operates more than 400 retail locations, ranging in size from 120,000 square-foot supermarkets to small neighborhood markets and fuel and convenience locations. Visit their website at [www.gianteagle.com](http://www.gianteagle.com).

*Giant Eagle has been in business for more than 80 years, serving up quality products with a rich history of great customer service. But Giant Eagle also values its employees. Suzanne Roath from Madison, Ohio, answered our survey about experiences in the workplace. Here is what she wrote.*

I work in the bakery at Giant Eagle and using the phone is part of my job when it comes to taking orders over the phone. While I was on vacation this year my company updated and installed all new phones. My co-workers insisted that the telephone tech made sure my Ameriphone in-line amplifier worked with the new phone system. They explained to the tech that I was "hearing impaired" and I needed my amplifier in order to use the phone to take customer orders.

I couldn't help but smile when I saw how my co-workers stepped in. Most people would flinch at the thought of being referred to as hearing impaired. To me it was a sign that my workplace fully understood and accepted my hearing loss. I also realized that being open about my hearing loss on the job was, and still is, a positive thing.

### Growing Up with Hearing Loss

Childhood hearing loss taught me positive ways to ensure I understood all that was said. I learned techniques that worked well then and still work in my personal and professional life. I tried a hearing aid for the first time in my late teens, but found it was not as helpful as I had hoped. Before long it ended up in the drawer.

By my late thirties I realized that my usual hearing loss tricks and techniques worked well in quiet office settings but not while working directly with the public in noisy stores. My oldest sister, Lisa, whose hearing was perfect up to this time, was rapidly losing her hearing due to Meniere's disease. After her first cochlear implant, she donated her hearing aids to me. Once recalibrated and fitted to my ears, I attempted to adjust to wearing and working with the aids. Like my first hearing aid, these ended up in the drawer as well.

### A Great Suggestion

When I landed a job as a bakery clerk at a local Giant Eagle supermarket, I was open during the interview about my mild hearing loss and it was duly noted on my application. Within a few weeks it was all too clear that I was struggling to hear over the store's background music, machines and grocery carts rolling over tiled floors. I secretly worried that I would get caught spending considerable time rewriting customer orders so they were legible to the cake decorators. My written orders were a mess—important details crossed out, corrected, as many as three times because I couldn't hear what customers wanted.

I was aware that my co-workers were having to repeat directives and conversations but not how often. At my supervisor's suggestion, I made an appointment with my audiologist and retrieved my hearing aids from the drawer.

The appointment revealed that my hearing loss had worsened from mild-to-moderate to more moderate-to-severe. Quitting my new job was out of the question. My audiologist and I worked together to calibrate the aids to meet the changes in my hearing. She introduced me to hearing assistive technology and sent me to a hearing loss workshop. Giant Eagle gladly gave me the day off to attend the workshop.

The workshop was a godsend. I shared all that I learned with my co-workers because I knew their understanding would be the key to my success on the job. Through discussions with them, I've learned that I am surrounded by people who have hearing loss themselves or who have friends and relatives who do. Many were not aware of how much hearing aids have improved or how helpful assistive listening devices can be.

I've grown comfortable about being open about my hearing loss with customers, many of whom wear hearing aids themselves. We often laugh together about our "hearing loss moments." I'm thankful to Giant Eagle for urging me to see my audiologist and supporting me so I can do my job well and not let my hearing loss get in the way. **HLM**