



HLAA State and Chapter News

“Greater help comes from being part of a Chapter.”
– Rocky Stone

By Anne McDonald and David Abell

Looping Rhode Island: Improving the Quality of Life for Those with Hearing Loss

Last year the state of Rhode Island launched a public relations campaign asking residents to name what they like about their state. Rhode Islanders with hearing loss are now able to add one more to the list—15 hearing loops have been installed in nine different locations, with more to come. The year 2016 was a good one for hearing loops in Rhode Island, which saw the installation of nine of the 15 loops alone. Of those nine, six were installed in two public venues and three were in two churches.

The public locations include the Rhode Island State House and the North Kingstown Free Library. The State House put a loop system in five of its most used rooms in the fall of 2016, and in September 2016 the North Kingstown Free Library added an induction loop to their large meeting room. Also in the past year, two churches—Peace Dale Congregational and the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of South County, both in South Kingstown—installed a combined total of three loops in their facilities. Both churches installed a loop in their sanctuary, and the Unitarian Universalist Congregation also added one in the choir section.

On December 17, 2016, a special program was held at the North Kingstown Free Library to create awareness of this technology. The event was hosted by the library staff, the Friends of the North Kingstown Free Library and its Trustees, the Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities at Rhode Island College, and the HLAA Rhode Island State Association.

The well-attended program featured a dedication ceremony, a 50-minute presentation by HLAA National Hearing Loop Advocate Dr. Juliëtte Sterkens, and a panel of local users who told how the induction loops have made a difference in their lives.

Local audiologist Sara Carnevale Fearon helped attendees determine if their hearing aids had telecoils to enable more people to experience the loop. HLAA Rhode Island Chapter Member David Abell, who coordinated the event, presented awards to Friends of the North Kingstown Free Library Vice President Mariann Callahan and Sherlock Center Associate Director Mary Anne Pallack to recognize their efforts in providing funding for the loop. Headsets were available for those who needed them.

As the keynote speaker, Dr. Sterkens began by presenting some quick facts about hearing loss and the benefits of hearing loops in large venues for those with hearing loss. She discussed the results of a study of 900 hearing aid users who showed their understanding in a looped setting was twice as high compared with a non-looped setting.

Highlighting the very successful looping efforts in Michigan and Wisconsin, Dr. Sterkens strongly encouraged those present to speak up about hearing loops. Advocacy ranges from placing a note in a church collection basket to filing an ADA complaint. While the U.S. lags behind Europe in loop installations, we are slowly catching up, thanks to vocal advocates across the country, like those right here in Rhode Island. And, as if to punctuate this point, audience member Walter Young spoke about the new hearing loop installation at Peace Dale Congregational Church, which was accomplished only through the strong support from church members.

The program concluded with a panel of four individuals with hearing loss answering questions from moderator Betsy Dalton on how a hearing loop helps them overcome barriers. The panelists, George “Herk” Herchenroether, Leah Canin, Stu Nunnery and Noel Ashworth, all said that loops have greatly improved the quality of their lives. An article on the event was even published on the front page of the *South Kingstown Independent*, a local newspaper.

The prime mover behind the program was David Abell, HLAA member and hearing loop advocate for the HLAA Rhode Island State Association. David has been advocating for hearing loops since 2012 and also serves as



Above: David Abell, hearing loop advocate and event coordinator

Below: Keynote presenter Dr. Juliëtte Sterkens with panel members Stu Nunnery and Noel Ashworth looking on



Above: Walter Young of Peace Dale Congregational Church talks about the new hearing loop in his church



Photos © Robert Isso

technical advisor for local groups. He has created a statewide Rhode Island hearing assistive technology (HAT)/hearing loop database, which currently includes nine locations with hearing loops and 16 locations with other HAT systems.

David's goal was to get other HLAA members inspired and involved in advocating for loops in more places. To achieve that, he sensed that it might be easier to gather people to first work on a single event, so he reached out to the Rhode Island State Association and chapter members asking for volunteers. It was encouraging that several people responded to his call, helping with publicity, contacting audiologists, and other tasks.

The strong collaboration between HLAA State Association and Chapter Members David Abell, Myron Waldman and George "Herk" Herchenroether made the event a great success. One attendee commented, "Juliëtte carried the day with good information and great spirit with the panel providing content."

The HLAA Rhode Island State Association is continuing to strategize ways in which we can successfully get more hearing loops installed in our state. **HLM**

Anne McDonald and David Abell are members of the HLAA Rhode Island State Association and HLAA Rhode Island Chapter.

Finding Support in HLAA Chapters

HLAA chapters provide strategies and support that are modeled after Rocky Stone's self-help philosophy. They offer emotional support, camaraderie, tips and techniques for living with hearing loss, and technical information about hearing assistive devices. Chapters meet regularly and feature speakers and discussions on all kinds of topics such as hearing aids, assistive listening devices, TV captioning, cochlear implants, how to communicate with your spouse and family members, hearing in public places and meetings, coping at work, and much more.

Hearing loss is a daily challenge. Chapters are a place where it's okay not to hear well. You will be surrounded by others just like you—others who know what it's like to live with hearing loss and who truly understand your situation. Remember, you do not have to hide your hearing loss. You do not have to face hearing loss alone.

Consider joining an HLAA chapter today! For more information about chapters or to find one near you go to hearingloss.org>support>State Orgs and Chapters, or contact Erin Mirante, national chapter coordinator at emirante@hearingloss.org.