



Our mission is to open the world of communication to people with hearing loss by providing information, education, support and advocacy.

## Chicago North Shore Chapter Newsletter

March 2021



### Dear Readers:

We would very much like to invite all former members of the local ICIC Chapter of HLAA to join us at The Chicago North Shore Chapter of HLAA.

Please let President Elaine McCaffrey, Liz Hupp, me or any one else in our Chapter that you happen to bump into (keeping social distancing in mind) know if you like to join our Chapter. For information about our group and its activities, please refer to the Chapter website at [www.hearinglosschicagonorthshore.com](http://www.hearinglosschicagonorthshore.com).

If anyone receiving this newsletter would prefer to not be on our mailing list, please let Liz or me know and it shall be done. Our email addresses appear on the last page of this newsletter.

Our Chapter will resume weekly support groups and monthly meetings following the North Shore Senior Center reopening of on-site activities. In the meantime, be sure to check out the following on-line meetings:

**“How Do You Hear”**  
March 8, 2021, 11 am

All are welcome at this virtual Open House to get acquainted with members of the HLAA Chicago North Shore Chapter and to learn how the group helps people with hearing loss. There will be open discussions on such topics as: How Would You Describe Your Hearing Loss? Do You Use Hearing Aids and/or Cochlear Implants? What Assistive Technologies Do You Prefer? What Strategies and Tricks Do You Use to Help You Hear? What Challenges Do You Have? We hope to see you there!

**To register for this Zoom Chapter meeting copy and paste this link into your browser.**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/join/zoom/register/tZwkdO-tqT8uGNDnFoAbmxWtPg8yowqZH0my>

**The link for the Zoom Meeting will then automatically be sent to your email address.**

### Need Assistance to Zoom?

For those of you who have not yet Zoomed with us, please consider the benefits. We are able to have weekly conversations and exchange of ideas such as face masks, strategies for remaining safe, things that make our lives easier, etc. We have the advantage of practicing speech reading as masks aren't worn. We've taught each other strategies for use of technology, such as Otter.ai and speech to

text apps or using Bluetooth while Zooming. We enjoy each other's company and would like you to join us.

You can join most Zoom meetings a few minutes early to test out your Zoom features.

Contact me for more information at [ElaineCMcCaffrey1@gmail.com](mailto:ElaineCMcCaffrey1@gmail.com)

## Hearing Loss Support Group

During the pandemic, the Hearing Loss Support Group, sponsored by the North Shore Senior Center, meets virtually, virtually every Monday from 11 am to noon. To join this group, please contact Ana Pinshower at [apinshower@nssc.org](mailto:apinshower@nssc.org) or 847.784.6079.

### 2020 - 2021 Chapter Sponsors

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We are very grateful to these Sponsors for their generosity and support of HLAA Chicago North Shore Chapter. **NOTE:** if your name or business is not listed correctly, please let us know.



**Thank you Liz Hupp for providing us with this recap of the March 8 meeting.**

At our chapter meeting on March 8, we heard about the grassroots beginnings of HLAA (then SHHH) from two people who participated in it.

Pat Clickener told of the early days in the basement of Rocky Stone's home, writing out letters by hand, then graduating to a single typewriter as the organization went from a handful of people to hundreds. No email, no internet; how to get the word out? An article in the *Wall Street Journal*, about Rocky's CIA career, had a tiny paragraph about him founding SHHH. That alone garnered [400] responses.

Another article in the AARP "Modern Maturity" magazine pulled in [over 2000] letters, from around the world. From that beginning came the conventions, the first of which was here in Chicago. Rocky was on the committee drafting the ADA, and made sure accommodations were not just sign language for the deaf, but also included services for people who were hard of hearing. His early advocacy efforts were crucial to the birth of the services we enjoy today, such as TTY (so important in the days before the internet!), phones and hearing aids being compatible, and captioning. (The first convention was "captioned" by someone writing furiously on an overhead projector screen!)

Our other speaker, Dick Meyer, had a different perspective: Rocky Stone was his uncle. Dick watched Rocky's drive and passion from an early age, and saw how Rocky was so deeply respected by his peers at the CIA. Dick served in the national SHHH leadership early on; he told how Rocky gave the organization the energy and far-sightedness needed for it to grow almost exponentially.

We also heard from Carolyn Young, an audiologist who was involved with the Chicago North Shore Chapter from its beginnings, almost 40 years

ago. Carolyn recruited me to be the next chapter president, passing me the baton, which I then passed to Elaine, our current chapter president. It filled my heart with such joy and amazement to hear this history. We can be proud to be part of HLAA! It is the largest organization in the US for people with hearing loss with paid membership. We do not see most of the current work the leadership does on our behalf, but we definitely, definitely benefit.

### Check It Out!

HLAA Chicago North Shore Chapter would like to remind you of our new **Lending Library!**

Chicago North Shore Chapter's Lending Library is now taking names of those who wish to borrow the Personal Hearing Loop.



Great for conversations between two to four people who use their telecoils, sitting 3-4 feet away from the loop allows them to understand each word that is spoken by the others. Imagine your own loop in your living room to watch TV or at the dinner table to understand conversations

Plus, we have a new addition to the Lending Library: a Phonak mini-mic compatible with Phonak hearing aid users who have a Roger X Receiver.



Contact Elaine McCaffrey to place your name on the list to borrow the Personal Hearing Loop or Phonak mini-mic.

## Advocacy Issues

### The HLAA Board of Directors Supports free Captioning for People with Hearing Loss on Video Conferencing Platforms During the COVID-19 Pandemic.

People with hearing loss have trouble communicating in many situations leading to isolation and loneliness during normal times. Today, amid COVID-19, things are even tougher. In-person conversation has moved online, leaving many people with hearing loss few options for connecting with family and friends, especially seniors who are most at risk for developing virus complications.

Free automatic speech recognition (ASR) captioning for people with hearing loss on video conference platforms like Zoom and Google could make all the difference. Today I pen an open letter to these companies.

#### An Open Letter o Zoom, Google & Microsoft

Dear Zoom, Google, Microsoft and other video conferencing providers,

Please make free ASR captions available on your platforms for people with hearing loss immediately. In most cases, the technology exists and is integrated into your platform behind a paywall. Providing this service for free for people with hearing loss would not only improve the accessibility of your product, it is also the right thing to do.

Communicating by video call has become the new reality in our COVID-19 world. Video calls are helpful for people with hearing loss because we can see the other person's face, which helps with lipreading. But in meetings with many participants, or even in one-on-one conversations with people using weak microphones or laggy internet

connections, video is not enough for understanding. Captioning is necessary.

The gold standard of captioning is Communication Access Realtime Translation or CART, where a live transcriber types what is spoken in real time. But technology is rapidly catching up and now a handful of high quality automatic speech recognition (ASR) options do exist. In these times of change, an ASR alternative can be acceptable for most communications.

### **What can Zoom do today to improve accessibility?**

Zoom provides the option to offer CART through its service, but CART requires the availability of a live transcriber in the meeting and is very expensive. This is unrealistic for most people with hearing loss living in this economic crisis brought on by COVID-19.

Zoom also allows for integration with Otter, a popular speech-to-text app used effectively by many people with hearing loss for its high quality ASR, but only for paid Zoom accounts. Zoom must remove this paywall for people with hearing loss.

### **What can Google do today to improve accessibility?**

Google has long been a leader in providing accessibility tools for people with hearing loss. Its speech-to-text app Live Transcribe is fast and accurate and its Live Caption app brings ASR captioning to digital media. Google falls short when it comes to its video conferencing product, which limits its ASR captioning to its paid G-suite customers. Google must remove this paywall for people with hearing loss.

### **What can Microsoft do today to improve accessibility?**

Microsoft offers free captioning through Powerpoint, Microsoft Stream and its Skype video chat (up to 50 people), but it restricts access to captioning for larger meetings behind a pay wall. Microsoft must remove the paywall for people with hearing loss.

Sincerely,  
Shari Ebers, founder, [LivingWithHearingLoss.com](http://LivingWithHearingLoss.com)



## **Success! Zoom Makes ASR Captioning Free for People with Hearing Loss**

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### **Over-the-Counter (OTC) Hearing Aids**

In 2017, Congress passed a law known as the Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017. This law creates a new category of hearing aids for people with mild to moderate hearing loss for purchase, presumably at lower cost than FDA-regulated hearing aids, without visiting a hearing health professional. **The Act, however, requires that the FDA establish regulations** that manufacturers of OTC hearing aids must meet to: (i) ensure the OTC devices are safe and effective for people with mild to moderate hearing loss; and (ii) to set standards for labels. See, <https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/over-counter-hearing-aids>. To date, the FDA has not issued these regulations. So, OTC hearing aids are not now legally available for sale.

Nevertheless, some manufactures are attempting to market devices that allegedly qualify under the Act. See, for example, [www.hearhealthjournal.com](http://www.hearhealthjournal.com). This is a very clever ad and someone could easily end up paying \$199 for a product they think is government approved but might not pass safety standards.

Please let me know if you would have questions or would like more information.

Best regards,  
Sharon L. King,  
[sking@slking.net](mailto:sking@slking.net)

Our thanks to Shari Ebers and Chapter member Sharon King for their work on behalf of the Hard-of-Hearing Community

**The following is an excerpt from the NIH division of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services regarding OTC hearing devices.**



A law established on August 18, 2017, as part of [the FDA Reauthorization Act of 2017](#), directed the FDA to create a category of OTC hearing aids for adults who might have mild-to-moderate hearing loss. As part of this process, the FDA must issue a proposed rule by August 18, 2020, and a final rule within six months of the close of the comment period on the proposed rule.

The FDA is establishing regulations that manufacturers of OTC hearing aids will need to follow. In general, these federal regulations will:

- Ensure that the OTC devices are *safe* and *effective* for people with mild-to-moderate hearing loss.
- Set standards for package labels to help buyers understand OTC hearing aids and who might benefit from them. The labels will also include warnings and other information you should know before buying or when using the hearing aid, such as signs that indicate that you should see your primary care provider or other health care professional.

Currently, hearing devices that you can buy directly (without seeing a health care professional first) are not intended for people with hearing loss.

Importantly, these devices, known as personal sound amplification products (PSAPs), are for people without hearing loss to boost their ability to hear certain sounds in certain situations, such as while hunting. PSAPs are not regulated as medical devices by the FDA. In contrast, the FDA will regulate forthcoming OTC hearing aids as medical devices for adults with hearing loss.

## Notable dates in March

- 3/3 World Hearing Day
- 3/14 Daylight Savings Time begins, set your clocks ahead an hour
- 3/17 St. Patrick's Day
- 3/20 Spring begins
- 3/27 Passover begins



Shop at [smile.amazon.com/ch/27-3871624](https://smile.amazon.com/ch/27-3871624) and Amazon will donate to the Hearing Loss Association of America Chicago North Shore Chapter.

Editors' note:

We frequently publish website links. If you have a problem with a link, please let us know and we will attempt to provide a printed copy of the reference.

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