

America's Getting in the Hearing Loop

Get in the
Hearing Loop

A Joint Project of the
Hearing Loss Association
of America and the
American Academy
of Audiology

By Stephen O. Frazier

After the many years of ambling along, then moving up to a trot, the movement to make places accessible with hearing loops now seems to have advanced into a full-fledged gallop. Only weeks away from the 3rd International Hearing Loop Conference, this is a good time to review what progress has been made since its predecessors in making awareness and availability of hearing loops more prevalent in the United States.

"Can You Hear Me Now?"

If the answer is, "You can? Jolly good!" then you'll know it's October 5, 2013, and you're in Eastbourne, England, where hearing loops are being used at the 3rd International Hearing Loop Conference.

For many not familiar with the term "hearing loop," it's the most recent name given to audio frequency induction loop systems or AFILS that, through a silent electromagnetic signal, can transmit sound to a hearing aid or cochlear implant simply by the user switching on the hearing device's telecoil.

The successful 2nd International Hearing Loop Conference was hosted by HLAA and the American Academy of Audiology (Academy) in Washington, D.C., June 2011. It marked the culmination of the first year of the Get in the Hearing Loop initiative undertaken jointly by HLAA and the Academy in 2010 to raise awareness and availability of loop technology among the public and hearing health care professionals. During the inaugural year of the campaign, loop installations picked up steam nationwide with looping the 14,000-seat Breslin Center arena at Michigan State University being by far the grandest of such installations.

This consumer-driven movement to make assistive listening systems in the United States hearing aid compatible through the use of hearing loops ambled along for many years with some success which started in Holland/Zeeland, Michigan, and spread to communities scattered around the country, such as Tucson, Albuquerque, Oshkosh, Rochester, New York, and elsewhere.

The HLAA/Academy initiative and the looping conference raised the visibility of the movement and spread the word to advocates for people with hearing loss scattered around the nation that their community, too, could get looped. It also caught the attention of some people in the audio-visual industry and helped them realize that induction loop technology is a legitimate alternative to infrared and FM assistive listening systems preferred by a large segment of people with hearing loss since it precludes the need for a borrowed headset for the majority of them.

The turning point for loop awareness might have been the temporary installation of a loop at the Kennedy Center for a production of the hit Broadway show *Wicked* during HLAA Convention 2011 and the subsequent word of mouth created by an article on its enormous success which appeared in *The New York Times*. All of a sudden hearing loops had the attention of the national media. More articles appeared in major publications and trade journals and the topic was discussed on National Public Radio.

A Sampling of Developments Since the Start of the Get in the Hearing Loop Campaign

- With funding from a generous grant, HLAA has offered the services of Juliette Sterkens, Au.D., as a hearing loop advocate. She has taken a sabbatical from her professional practice and is traveling the country to present work-

shops on hearing loop technology to HLAA Chapters, hearing care providers and others interested in learning how hearing loops work and to benefit those with hearing loss.

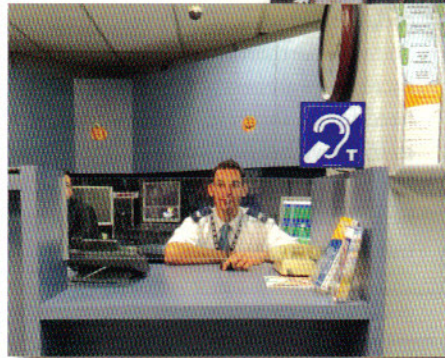
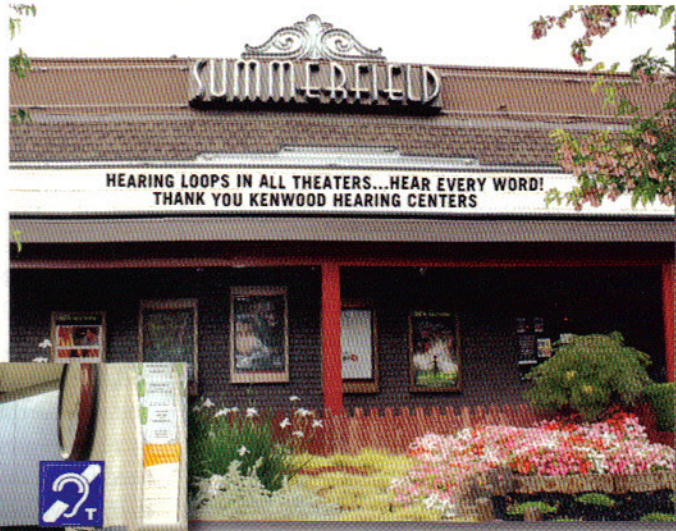
- Williams Sound has announced a partnership with German loop manufacturer Humantechnik GmbH to make loop equipment available to its audio-visual dealers. "We feel the U.S. marketplace is once again receptive to induction loop products," stated Paul Ingebrigtsen, president of Williams Sound.
- Listen Technologies announced a partnership with UK loop manufacturer Ampetronic who will bring hearing loop equipment and installation training to its national network of 1,200 audio-visual dealers, a technology previously a mystery to many on their staffs.
- Two and three-day hearing loop design and installation training workshops have been held throughout the country in cities that include Albuquerque, Atlanta, Reno, Rochester and elsewhere. The training was offered by Hearing Loop Products, a leading hearing loop design and equipment company.
- New York City's Taxi and Limousine Commission officials announced that all new taxis will have factory-installed hearing loops and the city's 450 plus subway information booths are being looped with funds from federal stimulus monies.
- Also in New York City, Riverside Memorial Chapel installed hearing loops in three separate chapels in their historic 19th century Upper Westside building. The Notier, Verlee, Langeland & Yntema Funeral Home chain in Michigan have not only looped each of their facilities, they've run newspaper ads informing the public of those installations.
- Amtrak has installed countertop loops at the information and some ticket counters at Penn Station in New York

and Union Station in Washington, D.C.

- The U.S. Department of Transportation is considering requiring hearing loops in future passenger rail and subway cars.
- In Michigan, the new Kalamazoo-Battle Creek Airport was opened with gates and concourse looped, becoming the third looped airport in Michigan and thus enabling announcements, such as delayed flight explanations, to broadcast directly to hearing aid telecoils.
- With the support of a \$72,000 Shelby Foundation grant and funds from the Hearing Loss Association of Sarasota, 14 Sarasota performing arts theaters have been looped.
- In Wisconsin, the historic 1,200 seat Grand Opera House in Oshkosh and the 2,100 seat Fox Cities Performing Arts Center in Appleton now have hearing loops.
- The intimate 150-seat Adobe Theater in Albuquerque joined a growing list of performance spaces both large and small that offer patrons induction loop technology.
- Each theater of the five-screen Summerfield Theater complex in Santa Rosa, California, now boasts a hearing loop, as do the six auditoriums of the Cinerom multiplex in Torrington, Connecticut, and other small independent

Right: Summerfield Theaters (Kenwood Marquee). Photo by William Diles, Au.D.

Below: Amtrak Customer Service Booth, Pennsylvania Station, New York City. Photo by Albert Chen



multiplex and single screen theaters around the county.

- The major multiplex movie chains such as Cinemax and Regal are converting their old analog sound systems to digital and including neck loops along with the headsets available on loan to people with hearing loss at their ticket booths.
- It's not on the scale of the loop installed in the 14,000-seat Breslin Center at Michigan State University, but the University of Iowa's first hearing loop system was installed in the 84-seat Medical Laboratories lecture hall and the university has plans to install systems in five other classroom, research and performance spaces.
- Three churches in the Omaha area and one in Lincoln became the first looped churches in Nebraska. This prompted an inquiry about the technology from a church 500 miles away in the Nebraska panhandle.
- The number of looped churches in New Mexico grew to nearly six dozen while in Wisconsin it has now exceeded 200 with thousands of others across the nation offering loop systems as their primary assistive listening system or as a supplement to existing infrared and FM systems.
- Following the lead of a senior housing project built earlier in the Tucson, Arizona, area where all houses were

pre-wired with loops during their construction, a 75-apartment senior living community was recently built in Tempe that incorporated loop technology.

- Loops have not yet made it to McDonald's but in Wisconsin, the Culver's fast food chain has even looped a drive-in window.
- The media presence of looping has exploded with new websites going up regularly, some with not only text but with video and audio demonstrations of how loop systems improve audibility for users. Three sites have lists of known looped facilities.
- *The Washington Post* offered two major articles—one on hearing aids and one on hearing loops—with an image of how different hearing loop designs suit different environments.
- *The New York Times* October 2011 hearing loop article quickly became the paper's second most e-mailed article of the prior 30 days.
- The April 2012 issue of *National Geographic* displayed a page on hearing loops which was received in some four million mailboxes.
- An article on hearing aids in the April edition of *Costco Comments* carried a sidebar promoting hearing loops to more than eight million readers prompting a deluge of e-mails seeking more details from its author.

Collective Effort

David Myers, Ph.D., has been reported as saying, "The explosion of interest—evident in loop initiatives in more and

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Grand Opera House, Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Photo by Max Hermans

Hearing Loops *cont. from page 35*

more states and cities, with support from hearing professionals and now from the audio-visual industry—is breathtaking.” He went on to say. “I’ve never been more optimistic about the ultimate success of our collective effort to make assistive listening directly hearing aid compatible and, by enabling hearing aids to become wireless loud speakers, to increase consumer satisfaction.”

With more audio-visual firms getting into the looping business, the pace of the movement could conceivably now become a full-fledged run as facilities race to get in the hearing loop. That’s great because every person with hearing loss has a horse in this race and we’ll all be winners when, anywhere in the country, we can simply push a button and “Get in the Hearing Loop.”



Steve Frazier is the New Mexico Chapter coordinator for the Hearing Loss Association of America and chair of the Loop New Mexico Committee. He served on the HLAA/

American Academy of Audiology Get in the Hearing Loop joint task force and now serves on the HLAA Hearing Loop Steering Committee and on the hearing aid dispenser licensing board in New Mexico. He can be reached at hlaanm@juno.com.

More on Audio Loops

www.hearinglink.org/loopconference

The 3rd International Hearing Loop Conference will be hosted in October 5-7, 2013, by Hearing Link in Eastbourne, England.

Get in the Hearing Loss Campaign

www.hearingloss.org/content/get-hearing-loop

Learn how your community can get in the hearing loop.

www.aldlocator.com

www.hearinglosshelp.com/loopedbuildingsbystate.htm

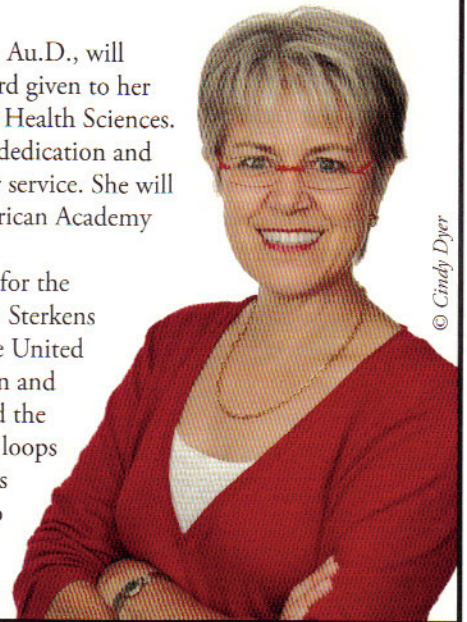
www.loopamerica.com/loops.aspx

www.hearingloop.org

Juliëtte Sterkens Honored

Hearing Loop Advocate Juliëtte Sterkens, Au.D., will receive the Humanitarian of the Year Award given to her by her alma mater, the Arizona School of Health Sciences. She is being honored for her exceptional dedication and leadership through outstanding volunteer service. She will receive the award next March at the American Academy of Audiology NOW Convention.

In her role as hearing loop advocate for the Hearing Loss Association of America, Dr. Sterkens collaborates with HLAA volunteers in the United States to further the organization’s mission and increase awareness about hearing loss, and the need for an increase in the use of hearing loops to improve hearing accessibility. She offers her public speaking and advocacy skills to help HLAA Chapters start hearing loop initiatives of their own.



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