



Wake Chapter Newsletter Feb 2026

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[Our March Meeting: Taking a Close Look at Caption Glasses](#)

Caption glasses are generating significant excitement because they offer a revolutionary, real-time and hands-free way for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals to engage in conversations.

By using speech recognition technology powered by artificial intelligence, these augmented reality devices project subtitles directly onto the lenses, allowing users to "see" what people are saying in real-time.



The Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) Wake Chapter will offer a free in-person and Zoom program on Thursday, March 26, that will feature a demonstration of caption glasses from Captify, a leading player in this fast-evolving field.

This program will run from 7 to 8:30 p.m. and originate at the Kirk of Kildaire Presbyterian Church Fellowship Hall. The church address is 200 High Meadow Drive in Cary.

While Captify representatives will present via Zoom, we expect to have a pair of Captify glasses available at Fellowship Hall for participants to "test drive."

The Zoom link will be distributed to the Wake Chapter newsletter email list a few days prior to the meeting. If you know others who don't already receive our newsletter, please encourage them to email Steve Barber (steve.barber@earthlink.net) and ask to be added to the newsletter email list.

For in-person participants, beverages and snacks will be available during and after the presentation. The hall is equipped with a hearing loop, which will provide telecoil-equipped hearing aid or cochlear implant users with an enhanced listening experience. Captions will be provided for both the in-person and Zoom audiences.

HLAA does not endorse specific products or services. It does educate and advocate for a range of assistive technology options to help people with hearing loss understand, connect and stay engaged in their lives.

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[Raleigh Audiologist Details What's New in Hearing Aids](#)

Samantha Shopovick, Au.D., the president of [Now Hear This®](#), a Raleigh audiology clinic, reviewed the history of hearing aids from ear trumpets to the latest advanced technologies at a January 22 meeting of the HLAA Wake Chapter.

Dr. Sam presented via Zoom and also was seen and heard by an audience gathered in the Fellowship Hall of Kirk of Kildaire Presbyterian Church in Cary. Following her presentation, Dr. Sam answered numerous questions from the audience (see following page).

In addition to tracing the history of hearing aids from the 1600s to today, Dr. Sam described the basic components and various styles of hearing aids.

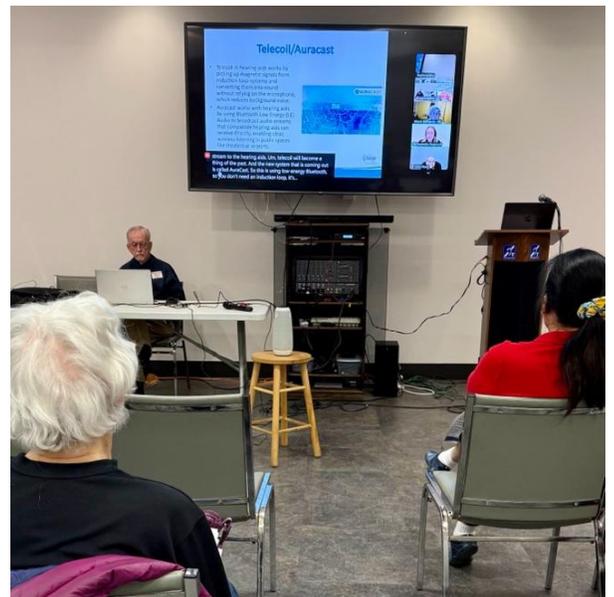
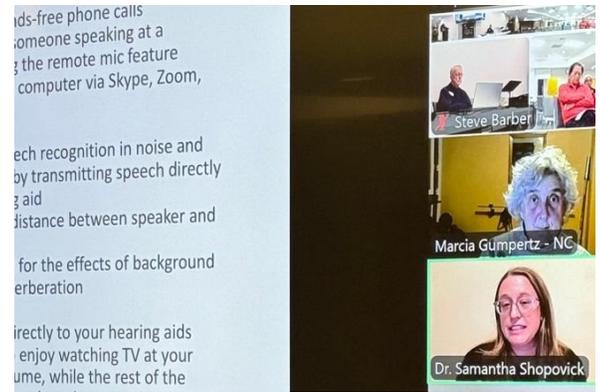
She explained various features that are available in hearing aids, including feedback suppression, artificial intelligence (AI), wireless connectivity, directional microphones, noise reduction, tinnitus relief, smartphone apps and health tracking.

She noted that prescription hearing aids generally include more advanced features than over-the-counter hearing aids, which are approved for use by adults with mild-to-moderate hearing loss.

In terms of the latest product offerings from several of the leading prescription hearing aid manufacturers, Dr. Sam provided information on the Phonak Audeo Infinio Sphere, Oticon Intent, Oticon Zeal, Starkey Omega AI and Widex Allure. These models incorporate features like deep neural network (DNN) chips, health tracking and extended battery life.

Looking ahead, Dr. Sam anticipates advances in biometric monitoring and real-time translation and broad adoption of Auracast, which employs Bluetooth Low Energy (LE) Audio to broadcast audio streams that compatible hearing aids can receive directly, enabling clear, wireless listening in public spaces like theaters or airports. She also is intrigued by clinical studies related to restoring hearing by regenerating hair cells in the ears of people with hearing loss.

For more details from the presentation, view [Dr. Sam's slides](#).



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[Dr. Sam Answers Your Questions](#)

Following her January 22 presentation to Wake Chapter members about the latest innovations in prescription hearing aids, Samantha Shopovick, Au.D., answered a variety of questions.

Below is a sampling of the questions posed to Dr. Sam, who is the president of [Now Hear This®](#), a Raleigh audiology clinic. Questions and answers have been edited for length and clarity.

Q: How would you compare the speech recognition technology today with a hearing aid from, say, three-to-four years ago?

A: Dr. Sam: I don't recommend upgrading that fast because you're not going to notice a huge difference in sound, but once you hit the five-year mark, improvements in technology become noticeable. A lot of my patients say the newest technology sounds brighter and more colorful.



Q: Can you tell us more about hair cell regeneration research?

A: Dr. Sam: Stem cell research is in progress. They don't have a lot of data yet, but from what I've read, hair cell regeneration currently appears more promising for children. Research is in its early stages, though, so it may be 10 years or more before we see significant benefits.

Q: What is the biggest misconception you deal with from clients?

A: Dr. Sam: We have to remind clients that hearing aids are not a cure for their hearing loss. They are here to help you, but you must do other things like work on communication strategies and aural rehabilitation to retrain the brain on how it's hearing. Some people are nervous to try hearing aids at first, but they realize the benefits once they wear them in their day-to-day life. It's rewarding when they come back for a follow-up appointment.

Q: What is a good speech-to-text app for my smartphone?

A: Dr. Sam: Popular speech-to-text apps used by my patients are Otter.ai and Ava.

Q: Are there Auracast-ready hearing aids available?

A: Dr. Sam: All hearing aid manufacturers are beginning to incorporate Auracast into their products. When Auracast broadcasts become more readily available you'll need to take your Auracast-ready hearing aids to your audiologist for a software update.

Q: Is there a hearing aid that's waterproof?

A: Dr. Sam: All the hearing aids I've talked about [in my presentation] have an IP [ingress protection] rating of 68, which basically means they're waterproof. They can be submerged for eight-to-10 hours and they'll still work. I wouldn't recommend swimming with them just because you don't want to lose the aid, but if you accidentally get in the shower or jump in a pool wearing your aids, you're going to be just fine.

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[Your Input Sought on Evolving Technologies](#)

If you have hearing loss and are interested in technologies you use now and may use in the future, your opinions could influence the work of [TDIforAccess](#), a nonprofit focused on fostering full accessibility, equity and inclusion for the Deaf and hard of hearing in information and communications technology.

Jan Withers, the retired director of the North Carolina Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the chair of the board of TDIforAccess, would like to meet with a small group of Wake Chapter members to learn about your concerns and ideas with respect to the accessibility of current and emerging technologies.



TDIforAccess spends significant time making sure current technologies are fully accessible as they evolve.

“A good example is TV which, of course, has been around for decades,” says Withers. “There currently is an active effort, through the FCC (Federal Communications Commission) rulemaking process, to upgrade TV standards. We are coordinating a large group of stakeholders – including HLAA – to ensure proposed rules strengthen TV accessibility features such as captioning.”

TDIforAccess defines emerging technologies as technologies whose development, practical applications, or both, are gaining prominence from a background of nonexistence or obscurity. Emerging technologies monitored by the organization include artificial intelligence (AI), the internet of things (IoT), autonomous vehicles and wearable devices.

Your input will help TDIforAccess better understand issues of concern related to the accessibility of evolving technologies – both current and emerging – and surface ideas for addressing them.

If you're interested in participating in a conversation with Jan, please send an email to Steve Latus (slatus@comcast.net) by March 8. He will coordinate a date, time and location for the conversation.

[Scholarship Program Application Deadline March 31](#)

The application deadline for the 2026 edition of the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) Wake Chapter scholarship program is Tuesday, March 31.

The program is for high school seniors who reside in Wake County and are seeking acceptance at an accredited university, college, community college or trade school.

Application materials are found on the [HLAA Wake Chapter website](#). They've also been distributed to the Wake County Public School System and most other public and private high schools in Wake County.

Recipients will be announced in May.

In addition to residing in Wake County, applicants also must have a moderate hearing loss or more and wear a hearing aid or cochlear implant. Financial need is not a consideration. The \$750 award will be sent to the recipient when s/he begins classes.

The program is funded by generous donor support of the Wake Chapter team in the North Carolina Walk4Hearing, a hearing health awareness and fundraising event held annually in October.

[Register Now for HLAA 2026 Convention in Louisville](#)



Join us at HLAA's 41st Annual Convention, June 10-12, 2026, in Louisville, KY – home of the Kentucky Derby, the Urban Bourbon Trail, the iconic Louisville Slugger Museum & Factory and more!

The convention, which will be held at the Galt House Hotel, brings together hundreds of people with hearing loss from around the United States to learn, discover and connect. Check out the latest technology and hear from health and industry experts during a series of empowering events designed to help you live your best life with hearing loss.

For more details, including registration rates, visit [HLAA 2026 Convention](#). "Early Bird" registration rates are available through March 16.

HLAA will employ real-time captioning during every plenary session and workshop in addition to hearing loops in all rooms. You can also experience Auracast in all workshop rooms. Sign language interpretation is available during plenary sessions and by request for education workshops.

[Charlotte Chapter Earns HLAA Recognition](#)

The Hearing Loss Association of America has recognized the Charlotte Chapter for communications excellence.

In the award citation, HLAA says the Charlotte Chapter "effectively utilizes websites, social media platforms, newsletters, and printed materials to convey the messages and mission of HLAA."

In addition to the Charlotte Chapter, several other organizations and individuals have been named recipients of HLAA 2026 awards. [All award recipients were announced in February](#)

[Date Set for 2026 Walk4Hearing](#)



The 2026 edition of the North Carolina Walk4Hearing will take place (rain-or-shine, as you can see from the accompanying photo from the 2025 event) on October 11 at WakeMed Soccer Park in Cary.

Look for more details on this hearing health awareness event in the coming months. The walk serves as the primary source of Wake Chapter's funding. [GO TO Page 1](#)

Tech Focus: Streamed vs. Live Audio Mix Options

Most hearing aids (HAs) and cochlear implants (CIs) now offer streamed and, possibly, telecoil audio sources. Streaming sources might include your paired smartphone or an audio source such as a TV streamer or a remote microphone. Streaming from your smartphone is usually automatic when you place or receive a phone call. But for other streaming, or telecoil inputs, the source is usually selected using a smartphone app, or in some cases a button on the HA or CI that cycles through the available sources.

If you're streaming from any source in a noisy situation, it may help to reduce or block your HA or CI from processing the live audio, so you hear the streamed audio without any live audio (or noise). How much that helps you depends on how much natural hearing you might still have in either ear. If you have little or no hearing in either ear, you could make a phone call or stream music in a noisy room and hear better than someone with natural hearing. The better your natural hearing is, the less help you'll get from reducing or blocking the live audio processed by your HA or CI. But when you're in noise, any help is useful.

Many HAs and CIs do have a way to control the volume of the streamed audio and the live audio. That's usually called a "mix option." There are two main ways that different brands of HAs or CIs do this:

- 1) Some only allow your audiologist or hearing instrument specialist to change the amount you hear from the live audio whenever you are streaming something. You can tell them how much mix you want, but it's fixed, and you can't control that yourself.
- 2) Others provide a feature in the app that allows you to independently control the volume of both the streamed audio and the live audio.

It can be noisy in a lot of places where you might be streaming audio and need to not hear the live audio. You might be watching a movie on a plane while the engines drone on, listening to music while riding in a car while wind and tire noise make it difficult, or trying to hear a phone call in a noisy room. Lowering or blocking all the live audio with a mix option can be your superpower.

Whether your HA or CI has such a feature and whether it's user controlled or hearing health provider controlled isn't determined by brand alone. It depends on the specific model of your hearing device. Plus, even if your model offers a user-controlled mix option, you might want to ask your fitter to make it available in your app. If you're not sure whether your current hearing device has a mix option, or how it works, your hearing health provider can tell you.

If you're in the market for a new hearing aid or thinking about eventually getting a CI, put it on your list of features you're considering. When you choose a new hearing aid or choose a CI brand, there are a lot of technical features that vary across the brands and models. Some of the features are difficult to understand, especially for people who are not "techies." Not all providers will explain the details of features like a mix option and may not even activate the feature if they don't think you are likely to use it.

If you don't have a mix option, and if your hearing device has a sensitivity setting, you still might be able to block live audio when streaming. If you lower the sensitivity setting, it tells your hearing device to block live sounds with volumes below a certain level. Normally, the benefit of lowering the sensitivity setting is to block the quiet parts of a noisy situation, but you can lower the sensitivity more (or all the way) and block most live sound. So, lowering sensitivity a lot can be a second way to approximate a mix option.

Hearing loss is not for sissies. But it can be better for techies.

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State Council Seeks Member with Hearing Loss

The North Carolina Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing currently has an opening for a consumer with hearing loss.

The council advises the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Public Instruction on matters pertaining to services provided to deaf and hard of hearing individuals and their families.

At full strength, the council includes 28 members, including three hard of hearing consumers and a representative from the Hearing Loss Association of America. The current HLAA representative is Wake Chapter member Steve Latus.

Visit the [council's webpage](#) or contact Latus at slatus@comcast.net to learn more about the council and the membership application process.

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