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### Learn What's New in Hearing Aids to Start Year

Get 2026 off to a splendid hearing start! Join the HLAA Wake Chapter for a free program on “What’s New in Hearing Aids” on Thursday, January 22.

The event will feature a presentation by Samantha Shopovick, Au.D., the president of Now Hear This®, a Raleigh audiology clinic and a sponsor of the North Carolina Walk4Hearing.

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



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.

Voted “Raleigh’s Best” for five years in a row, Now Hear This® is dedicated to exceptional patient care. By using advanced programming methods like real ear measurements, this team helps people hear at their very best.

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## Holiday Lunch Social Earns Thumbs Up!

Thanks to the 19 festive folks who participated in the Wake Chapter holiday lunch social at Bocci Trattoria & Pizzeria in Cary on Sunday, December 7.

Special thanks to Steve Barber, who made arrangements with the restaurant and collected reservations from our members. It was a pleasant early holiday season gathering.



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## Discussing Hearing Loss with NARFE

HLAA Wake Chapter board member Wendy Cheng is a member of NARFE (<https://www.narfe.org/>), the National Association of Retired and Active Federal Employees. Below she shares her recent experience making a presentation to the NARFE Raleigh chapter about several hearing loss-related topics.

There are about 125,000 members in this association and every state has at least one NARFE chapter. The Raleigh chapter meets once a month for lunch and to listen to a speaker.

For the January 6 meeting, I spoke on the topic, "What the Hearing Aid Dealer Did Not Tell You." There were about 15-20 people at the meeting.

I spoke on the limitations of hearing devices with regards to their limited range and their limited ability to boost the signal-to-noise ratio. I talked about assistive listening devices and explained how crucial they have been in my life since I learned what they were in my last year of high school.



I did a little show-and-tell about the Roger On accessory that I use daily and showed them the Companion Mic system from MCK Audio. I also talked briefly about how veterans could receive services for hearing aid exams and fittings regardless of whether their hearing loss was service connected or not. I offered suggestions on how NARFE could better assist their members who have hearing loss.

Last, but not least, I talked about HLAA and mentioned that there would be a discussion on new features on hearing aids at our chapter meeting on January 22 [[see Page 1](#)].

I think the presentation was well received, and a few people stopped to pick up handouts and chat afterward. The chairperson of the chapter said he had a Roger On but didn't really know how to use it. So, he's going to bring it in at the next NARFE chapter meeting and, hopefully, I can troubleshoot his issues in using the device.

It was a great experience to be able to share my life story and explain more about hearing loss to NARFE members.

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## Applications Now Available for Scholarship Program

Applications for the 2026 edition of the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) Wake Chapter scholarship program are now available.

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 (<https://www.nclearingloss.org/wake>). They've also been distributed to the Wake County Public School System and most other public and private high schools in Wake County.

Submissions will be accepted from January through March, and 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.

The chapter has awarded scholarships to 14 high school seniors with hearing loss since 2020. The number of annual recipients has ranged from one to four.

## HLAA Supporting Accessibility Legislation

The Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) is asking all its chapters across the country to support the Communications, Video, and Technology Accessibility Act (CVTA), which will soon be introduced in Congress. The CVTA represents a critical update to federal accessibility law, helping ensure that people with disabilities – including people with hearing loss – are not left behind as technology continues to evolve.



Online streaming, video conferencing, and tools driven by artificial intelligence (AI) are essential for work, education, health care, and civic participation. But many of these services didn't exist the last time Congress updated accessibility requirements with enactment of the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act in 2010. Significant accessibility gaps remain, particularly related to captions, audio descriptions and accessible communication services. The CVTA fixes this by expanding and modernizing accessibility requirements for the tools that have become so important in the last 15 years.

HLAA's support is essential to show members of Congress the breadth of support for the CVTA. Together, we can ensure that communication and technology accessibility keep pace with innovation and people with hearing loss are fully included in every aspect of modern life.

HLAA is creating a list of CVTA supporters, and the Wake Chapter (and other HLAA chapters and state organizations) have agreed to be included on the list.

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## Tech Focus: Hearing Rehabilitation

Hearing rehabilitation (rehab) is a hot topic for new cochlear implant (CI) users, because many new CI users have had a profound hearing loss for some time ... a loss that even the best hearing aids could not fully compensate for. The CI can potentially provide a nearly flat audiogram at a "near normal" 20 dB up to about 8 kHz. (That doesn't mean normal hearing, because an audiogram only measures at a few frequencies.) That's a huge difference from what their brain might have dealt with perhaps for years. During all that time your brain has been boosting its perception process to make the most of the poorest frequencies. It will take time for it to adjust to not boost those frequencies.

Hearing aid users may also need time after getting new hearing aids before things sound better ... especially if it's their first hearing aid. If they're like many new hearing aid users, they may have put off getting a hearing aid for years as their loss got worse. If their new aids amplify certain frequencies substantially, when added to their perception trying to boost those same frequencies, speech may sound strange at first. But in time, their brain will gradually learn not to boost volumes for frequencies that are amplified closer to normal levels.

With a newly implanted CI, there are other reasons that rehab is likely to be needed.

- CIs only have 12 to 22 electrodes (depending on brand), which will stimulate thousands of nerve cells at the base of the mostly defunct hair cells. Each nerve cell provides a precise frequency for the brain. The electrodes are spread approximately evenly over the nerve cells, but that leaves the hundreds of nerve cells between electrodes (or beyond the first and last electrodes) that are stimulated by distant electrodes. It's amazing that the brain can eventually learn to approximate the frequency even for those nerve cells that are between or distant from the closest electrodes.
- The cochlea is tiny, space is limited, and turns near the apex are tight. Getting electrodes to those lowest frequencies is difficult. Very low frequencies may not sound great at activation but can improve.

The first time a CI is activated, the results can vary. Some users may understand somewhat distorted speech; others may find speech initially sounds like "bells and whistles." Depending on what their loss was like, users may perceive speech as sounding robotic, or like a "chipmunk on helium." It may be difficult, at first, to differentiate between male and female voices or to recognize accents. In extreme cases it can take days, weeks, or even months before their brain has reprogrammed its perception process to stop helping those frequencies. That's where rehab can help. Music may be awful initially, but if it becomes tolerable, it's a great rehab option. Choosing favorite songs to stream can help your brain gradually make them sound more like you remember.

Rehab can include both streamed and live exercises. Streamed audio can work well, but it's important to help your brain deal with live audio, too, because that has added the challenges of noise, reverberation and the effect of certain frequencies losing more energy than others the farther the sound travels.

Some rehab is automatic. Birds may sound great, but louder than you might expect. A toilet flushing might sound like Niagara Falls, or the air conditioner coming on may sound like an airplane, but if you remember what those sounded like when you could hear better, it's usually easy for your brain to recognize the source and make a connection, and in time, it will make such sounds seem normal.

There are many apps available for free downloading that can help. Some start with very simple sounds, words or sentences, but as your new hearing gets better you can advance to audio books with matching text that you can read, or TV captions that are in sync with the audio. These can be excellent rehab tools.

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