



Appleton
Fox Cities
Wisconsin

SPONSORED BY:

[HOME](#) [NEWS](#) [SPORTS](#) [LIVING](#) [ENTERTAINMENT](#) [VIEWS](#) [MULTIMEDIA](#) [OBITUARIES](#) [WEATHER](#) [BUY SELL SHOP](#) [CUSTOMER SERVICE](#) [SUBSCRIBE NOW](#)
[Life & Style](#) [Crave Blog](#) [MomsLikeMe.com](#) [Living Well](#) [Food](#) [Beer Man](#) [Good Neighbors](#) [Health](#) [Special sections](#) [Special moments](#)


GET POST-CRESCENT NEWS ON THE GO

[Our mobile site](#) | [Text alerts](#) | [iPhone site](#)

Hearing loop system coming to Fox Valley locations as hearing aids go 'Wi-Fi'

BY CHERYL ANDERSON • POST-CRESCENT STAFF WRITER • AUGUST 16, 2010

[Comments \(1\)](#) [Recommend](#) [Print this page](#) [E-mail this article](#) [Share](#) [Type Size](#) [A](#) [A](#)

Since St. Gabriel Parish in Neenah has begun using its newly installed hearing loop, the pastor has become the brunt of some good-natured ribbing by parishioners, who in some cases are hearing him for the first time.

ADVERTISEMENT

"It allows for a lot of jokes," the Rev. Richard Allen admitted with a chuckle.

What's no joke, however, is the joy hearing a sermon has on members like Jerry Van Handel, 70, of Neenah, who is nearly deaf and has not heard a church service for more than a year and a half, despite using hearing aids. And now, "when I put my T-coil on I don't hear the background noise like you do in church otherwise, and I didn't have to turn it up as high," he said.

Dubbed "Wi-Fi" for hearing aids, a hearing loop, in essence, turns an individual's hearing aid into a speaker for the PA system of a large facility, delivering customized sound from inside their ears.

Looping the Fox Valley and beyond has become the mission of Dr. Juliette Sterkens and her husband, LeRoy "Max" Maxfield, founders of Fox Valley Hearing Loop in Oshkosh. Sterkens has practiced as an audiologist in the Fox Valley since 1983. Maxfield, who recently retired from Oshkosh Corp., designs and installs the hearing loops along with Curt Maas from Arrow Audio in Kimberly, which installed the loop at St. Gabriel.

The loop system consists of a microphone to pick up the spoken word, an amplifier to process the signal that is then sent through the induction loop and a wire placed around the perimeter of a room or sanctuary to act as an antenna that radiates the magnetic signal to the hearing aid. It results in improved speech understanding because the listener receives a clear signal without any background noise. About 60 percent of hearing aids have this antenna, also known as the telecoil or T-coil, and can pick up the sound.

While hearing aids can significantly enhance the quality of life for most people with hearing impairments, "there is this misconception that hearing aids make one hear normal," said Sterkens, who also owns the Oshkosh-based Fox Valley Hearing Center with audiologist Dr. Candy McGinnis. "They've made remarkable improvement, but hearing aids have a limited range. So they will work within normal conversation distance ... but if you are exceeding 14, 15, 20 feet ... people with hearing aids have a

lot of difficulty."

Sterkens moved to the Fox Valley from the Netherlands where hearing loops have been in use since the '70s. Yet they have been slow in making it across the ocean to the United States for several reasons, she said. Many U.S.-made hearing aids were made small (so no one could see them) and did not have the T-coil built in. Plus, audio companies were more inclined to use FM listening systems.

Responding to numerous requests from hearing-impaired patrons, the Fox Cities Performing Arts Center had a hearing loop installed in one of its ticket agent stations in the lobby a few weeks ago.

"If someone with a hearing impairment comes in and has a T-coil on their hearing aid or implant, they can just turn that on and then they can hear anywhere within the ticket window lobby," said Tammy Ebben, director of event management and access services. The PAC also is installing a hearing loop in its Kimberly-Clark Theater in time for its Access Services Open House from 3 to 7 p.m. Oct. 14. It also is actively pursuing grants to install a loop system in the main theater, Ebben added.



[Purchase this Photo](#)

Don Houdek assists Gene Bocklin with locating the switch on his hearing aid to change it to the new loop system at Thompson Community Center. (Photo for The Post-Crescent by Kasi Koshollek)

ALSO LOCALLY LOOPED

All Saints Episcopal and St. Fidelis Friary, both Appleton; First Presbyterian, Our Savior's Lutheran, Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran, St. Thomas Episcopal, all Neenah; First United Methodist, Waupaca; St. Katherine Drexel (St. Mary's site), Kaukauna; St. Mary Catholic and St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran, both Winneconne; Neenah, Waupaca and soon the Appleton public libraries.

ADVERTISEMENT

Follow Us Anywhere



[More Entertainment Headlines](#)

"We have always had, since we opened, the infrared listening device system," she said of the system that transmits sound by invisible light beams. "And that's in our main theater and our Kimberly-Clark Theater. ... The hearing loop can run concurrently with that system. And then it just reaches out to so many more people because there are people that don't want to wear the equipment ... and say, 'I'd rather not go to the show.' With this they don't have to be embarrassed of any of that. They can just come in, turn it on and they'll be able to hear."

Thompson Community Center director Amy Putzer introduced its new hearing loop before Wednesday's weekly Golden K Kiwanis gathering held in the center's meeting room, which measures 52 by 50 feet and accommodates about 300 people. It was a light-bulb moment for those among the 60 or so who had a T-coil, soliciting several thumbs ups.

The community center has had assisted listening devices in the past, but using a visible device again added to the stigma of hearing loss for those who take advantage of the center's programming. The hearing loop is a more discreet option.

"We do everything from presentations to theater to musical performances to a whole bunch of different meetings that use the microphone," Putzer said. "We kind of have a mixed bag of how it will be used. So I'm excited to see what the reaction is going to be, and it might influence the number of people who come to certain things."

Thompson Community Center friend Jean Long Manteufel, CEO of Long's Senior Transitions and owner/operator of A-1 Moving & Storage, both in Appleton, was so impressed by the system she had seen at Evergreen Retirement Community in Oshkosh, she recommended the center also install one. Long Manteufel was instrumental in securing the financial commitment of nearly \$3,000 from Haviland Hearing Aids and from her parents, Jerry and Gladie Long.

The cost of a hearing loop system is based on the size of the space in question and the amount of work necessary to install it, said Maas, who was contacted by Sterkens because he was already working in the audio/video field for churches and schools.

"We do a lot of assessments, and there are some technology issues that have to be addressed," he said. "Some of the old churches have ... knob and tube wiring, an older style of wiring they used when they first started doing electrical wiring. ... The way a hearing loop works is we send out a current through a wire that is looped around the perimeter to the other side of the room to the amplifier so it generates a magnetic field. If that old knob and tube wiring is still in use, it's doing the same thing with power. ... That generates a very loud buzz."

Installing a loop is best done and cheapest during construction.

Now that the hearing loop is in place at St. Gabriel, Van Handel, who also is a member of the Knights of Columbus council that meets there, is suggesting they use a microphone during the meeting so he can catch what he has been missing.

Concerning the jokes at Father Allen's expense, parishioner Dan Lella, 77, of Neenah, who got hearing aids in November, said it's only natural.

"Now we can hear," he said. "Before we had a good excuse."

Cheryl Anderson: 920-993-1000, ext. 249, or canderson@postcrescent.com

Fox Jazz Fest brings professionals, students to stage

Filmmaker to document Packers fans' passion

Movies: 'Machete' is bloody fun

Warner, Hasselhoff, Palin to go 'Dancing'

ADVERTISEMENT



Partners: **Jobs:** CareerBuilder.com **Cars:** Cars.com **Apartments:** Apartments.com **Shopping:** ShopLocal.com **Homes:** Homefinder.com **Dating:** eHarmony

Appleton Post-Crescent | Fond du Lac Reporter | Green Bay Press-Gazette | Manitowoc Herald Times Reporter | Marshfield News Herald | Oshkosh Northwestern
Sheboygan Press | Stevens Point Journal | Wausau Daily Herald | Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune | Go Door County | Packers News | WISinfo

[HOME](#) | [NEWS](#) | [SPORTS](#) | [LIVING](#) | [ENTERTAINMENT](#) | [VIEWS](#) | [MULTIMEDIA](#) | [OBITUARIES](#) | [WEATHER](#) | [BUY SELL SHOP](#) | [CUSTOMER SERVICE](#) | [SUBSCRIBE NOW](#) | [Site Map](#)

[Terms of Service](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [About Us](#) | [Subscribe](#)

Copyright ©2010

Use of this site signifies your agreement to the [Terms of Service](#) and [Privacy Policy](#) , updated March 2009.