

WIRED FOR SOUND

The newsletter of the Hearing Loss Association of America, Albuquerque Chapter

Albuquerque Chapter Closes

ABQ Chapter Board

From Self Help for the Hard of Hearing (SHHH) to the Hearing Loss Association of Albuquerque we have served our community and the population with hearing loss since 1988.

Self-help groups are less popular now and our attendance has reflected that change. Between live attendance and zoom attendees we have been lucky to have 10 or 12 people at our meetings over the past year since we moved back to live meetings at the Deaf Culture Center.

In spite of repeated requests for help, our board has dwindled to a core group who have carried the load, and frankly, have experienced burnout as a result of the effort needed to serve so few members.

Later in this newsletter is a plea to continue to carry out the mission of HLAA with education, advocacy, support and information. We all can continue to teach others what those of us with hearing loss need in all the various situations in our own lives.

The End of an Era for an Invisible Condition

Stephen O. Frazier

For most people, hearing loss is a medical issue. For those of us who live with it, it's a social and emotional one—and far too often, a lonely one. Rocky Stone, founder of the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA), called it “the invisible condition,” and he was right. You can look perfectly fine while struggling to connect with the world around you. That disconnect shapes your days,



This decision was not reached lightly. It has been more emotional for some of us than others, but the vote was unanimous. We find ourselves faced with a model for our meetings that is not sustainable.

This will be the last newsletter that we publish, and we thank all of you who have supported the chapter over the years. Naming everyone would undoubtedly omit someone important, so we will not try, but you know who you are. We could not have achieved what we did without standing on the shoulders of those who came before us.

With warm goodbyes, a few tears, and a resolve to continue our individual efforts at hearing loss support.

*Your HLAA Albuquerque Chapter Board,
Rod Rodríguez, Bobbi Rodríguez, Carol Clifford,
Jim Dillow, Jim Twobig and Mary Clark*

your relationships, and your confidence in ways that are hard to explain to anyone who hasn't lived it. For many of America's seventy million people with hearing loss, it's an inconvenience; for up to twenty million, of the over 70 million Americans estimated to have some hearing loss, though, it is literally disabling, and can even affect their ability to earn a living.

My own hearing loss progressed from mild to severe over the last thirty-five years. During much of that time, I held a variety of leadership positions in the Albuquerque chapter of HLAA. That's why

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Our Chapter email HLAAbq@gmail.com & Web page HearingLossAbq.org will remain online for a while.

The Santa Fe Chapter has in-person (only) meetings for self-help and support. If you are interested in this option, contact John Hooper at 505-603-2994 or johnhooper.ref@gmail.com

We encourage members to continue supporting HLAA national and make use of their many resources, including online information and other online meetings. We also encourage you to support their national advocacy for the Hard of Hearing and advocate yourselves at state, city and local levels, including at restaurants and public venues.

HLAA is a volunteer association of Hard of Hearing people, their relatives and friends. It is a non-profit, non-sectarian educational organization devoted to the welfare and interest of those who cannot hear well. Membership in the national organization is automatic with any donation (separate from any Chapter dues). A \$45 or more donation to National HLAA provides a subscription to the bimonthly publication Hearing Life.

**For more information:
www.HearingLoss.org
(301)657-2248 voice**

No More Meetings

The Albuquerque Chapter Of HLAA Is Closing



Recognizing that continuing operations and member meetings is unsustainable, the Board of the Albuquerque Chapter has decided to close the chapter.

We will cease accepting donations immediately. If you have HLAA Albuquerque as your charity for Smith/Kruger Rewards, please change it to another charity. We will continue providing updated information by email and on our Web site for a while.

We have tried to recruit younger leadership to no avail. I (the Editor) think we could get help from members or students, but what we need is new leaders. The distinction I make is that leaders own responsibility for the chapter's success.

Current board members are having health challenges (including family members) or have other commitments that have exhausted our strength and capability to continue carrying the chapter as it has operated. Even reducing the tempo was considered, but would not really solve the problem.

Since the Pandemic, attendance has steadily dropped to a level that does not justify the efforts required. Even after we began meeting in person in January 2026 at the Deaf Culture Center (DCC), (and we greatly appreciate the support the DCC has given us) attendance has leveled at about a dozen, including Zoom.

It's possible that the HLAA paradigm has outlived its usefulness with a generation that gets information mainly online. Google searches with AI cannot give wise advice, but they can quickly assemble a fair description of the consensus among experts on any well-posed question.

We want to thank our long-term members for their support over the years our Chapter has been in existence.

the news that the chapter is dissolving hits so hard. It feels like losing a friend—or an entire circle of friends.

The chapter began in the late 1980s, organized by Virginia Carr and eleven other hard-of-hearing Albuquerque residents. They built a newsletter, held meetings, signed up new members, and reached out to raise awareness of hearing loss locally. When I joined in the mid-1990s, membership had fallen off to just seven dues-paying members. With the passing of long-time member Roger Proctor in 2021, I am now the sole survivor of those 7 members.

The seven of us were determined to keep the chapter going. With help from Albuquerque's newspapers and radio stations, the chapter grew again. It grew because people needed it. They needed a place where they didn't have to pretend to hear, where they didn't have to apologize for asking someone to repeat themselves, where they could learn how to navigate a world not built with their communication needs in mind. HLAAAbq provided that place.

By 2010, the chapter had nearly 200 dues-paying members, plus regular visitors who came when a program topic interested them. These were people with serious hearing loss—people who would not be helped by today's over-the-counter devices. We held meetings on both sides of the river, one week apart, each drawing up to fifty people or more. We offered educational programs on living with hearing loss and on devices that could supplement hearing aids. We staffed tables at health fairs, answering questions from people who had never met someone with significant hearing loss. We shared information that hearing care providers often didn't have time to present. Karen Twohig and other members with cochlear implants mentored individuals considering the procedure, and helped them adjust afterward.

The chapter also brought nationally known experts to Albuquerque. HLAA's national Executive

Director once spoke to nearly 300 people at a chapter meeting. Dr. Pat Kricos, former president of the American Academy of Audiology, presented to the chapter, as did Dr. Juliette Sterkens, an internationally recognized expert on hearing loop technology. Audiologist and looping pioneer Bill Diles traveled from the Bay Area to present at an all-day seminar we organized for hearing care providers.

Our Loop New Mexico initiative—organized and originally led by Los Alamos engineer Jim Ogle, assistive listening retailer Sally Schwartz, our longtime revered advisor Dr. Carol Clifford, and myself—won HLAA's first national "Get in the Hearing Loop" award. Over the years, the chapter earned awards for Best Newsletter, Best Website, and more. The Albuquerque HLAA chapter did all of this freely and generously for decades. It changed lives—mine included. We raised awareness, and we built a community that mattered.

Then COVID-19 arrived. In-person meetings ceased, replaced by digital ones. By the time it was safe to meet again, leadership was burned out. No new volunteers stepped forward, and Albuquerque lost a vital resource for people with hearing loss.

The chapter offered aural rehabilitation, education, and exposure to technologies—like hearing loops—not well known elsewhere. Without HLAA, people with hearing loss can still search online, ask an AI questions, or buy hearing aids over the counter. But most don't know what questions to ask.

Technology can give information, but it cannot give belonging. It cannot give the relief of sitting in a room full of people who understand your frustration without explanation. It cannot give the encouragement that comes from seeing someone who has walked the same path and come out stronger.

I hope that someday a new Virginia Carr will appear, gather a committee of dedicated volunteers, and once again bless Albuquerque with an organization devoted to serving those who live with Rocky Stone's invisible condition.

An Open Letter

Ginevra Ralph

Dear Carol, Rod, Bobbi, Mary, and Jims:

I just want to let you know how much you all have meant to me on multiple fronts over recent years.

I will truly miss “going to Albuquerque” once a month to see you and to let me pick your brains as we all puzzle out how to improve the landscape of hearing access.

I appreciate your tolerance with all my questions, and the opportunity to write some regular “thought pieces” as I watch my acquaintances navigate that landscape. I appreciate Carol jumping in and helping my grandson’s student in a rural school in Taos, sending him a pediatric scope to help understand what she was/wasn’t hearing. I appreciate Rod’s editing and newsletter skills. I appreciate Mary’s unswerving tenacity after decades of advocacy. And I appreciate Bobbi swinging by in Eugene to say hello!

In short, I will miss you. If anyone wants to stay active on monthly zooms, please let me know and I will be sure you get the link for the Center for Hearing Access. I will be thinking of all of you!

Best wishes,

Ginevra Ralph,

Director of Cultural & Community Services
Director, [Center for Hearing Access](#)

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NEWS RELEASE

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Auracast™ Audio Technology Arrives in Albuquerque

Stephen Frazier

Auracast, a new Bluetooth® technology that can transmit audio to a nearly unlimited number of receivers at once, has arrived in Albuquerque. Grace Lutheran Church and Albuquerque Hearing and Balance—both early supporters of hearing loop assistive listening technology—are the first two known local users of this emerging sound transmission technology.

In both locations, the Auracast system supplements an existing hearing loop system, giving hard of hearing visitors another way to receive clear, direct audio through compatible hearing aids, earbuds, or borrowed receivers. Grace Lutheran Church selected the Infinium Auracast system,

manufactured in the United States by WilliamsAV and engineered for commercial audio/visual environments. Infinium is a patented, modular Auracast™ broadcast audio system that delivers real-time, high-fidelity audio for assistive listening, multilingual events, and audio description. The system was installed by Pace Audio of Albuquerque. Visitors can connect to the Auracast signal using Auracast-enabled hearing aids or earbuds, or they can still borrow a receiver with earphones from the church.

At Albuquerque Hearing and Balance, Mike Langner, a licensed retired radio engineer, elected to install the Taiwan-based MoerLabs TVHear-More™ transmitter for both the East and West Side waiting rooms. Although labeled as a TV streamer,

the device is a flexible Auracast™ audio transmitter also intended for use in classrooms, conferences, and other modest-sized public venues. By

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chaining multiple units, a synchronized broadcasting system can be created to serve larger spaces.

In this instance, the system will be used to demonstrate Auracast technology to prospective hearing aid customers and to waiting room visitors who use Auracast-enabled hearing aids or earbuds. Earbuds and some hearing aid will require the use of a smartphone to connect to the Auracast at any of the above three locations, but many Auracast-enabled hearing aids can connect by themselves using a built-in Auracast scanning capability if there is only one signal present.

Auracast systems are already being adopted worldwide in settings large and small. Installations range from the Sydney Opera House in Australia to the tiny WYO Theater in Sheridan, Wyoming. Other examples include Stadium Taranaki in New Plymouth, New Zealand, and Blackwell Hall at Oxford University in the United Kingdom. Addi-

tional examples of Auracast applications can be found at departure gates at Frankfurt Airport in Germany and in the auditorium at the International Convention Centre in Sydney, Australia. In this country, performing arts spaces and places of worship are expected to be joined by baseball stadiums, public transit vehicles, gymnasiums and other large gathering places as decision makers become more familiar with the technology and the possible benefits it offers to them and to the general public.

More information about Auracast is available at <https://www.bluetooth.com/auracast/>. A list of nearly 100 Auracast-enabled devices, a sampling of known installations, and additional information about the technology are available at

<http://www.loopnm.com/Auracast.html>.

Shutting Down Is Not Failure

Mary Clark, Programs

After first being incorporated in 1988 we've evolved, through the analog era, to the digital, and now in the AI age. We are facing the status quo for 2026, where the popularity of self-help groups like ours have evolved to be less popular than in the past.

We can take pride in the accomplishments of our chapter over the years and leaving a legacy where hundreds of people have learned more about

- Hearing aids
- Assistive listening devices
- Loops
- Coping strategies
- Updates in research on hearing loss
- Interpersonal dialogues that helped both the experienced PWHL (person with a hearing loss) and the newbie

We've advocated for loops, ALD's and captioned phones. We hosted hands-on conferences so

people could experience solutions for themselves. We've had speakers who were nationally recognized experts in the field of hearing loss. We've had speakers who were just like us, who shared their personal experiences. We've signed on to support legislation both in our own state, and nationally. We've introduced hundreds of people to the resources of HLAA.

We can't look at this decision as failure, but as a reflection on the legacy we have created.

The end of one era doesn't mean it's the end of our advocacy for others with hearing loss. We just need to find our individual comfort zones for achieving that. There are multiple groups on Facebook that discuss hearing loss and rely on member's feedback. There are blogs that reach a number of people that we can add our input to. We can continue to speak up when we are at the doctors office, church, dentist appointments, etc. This is still carrying out our mission of advocacy, information, education and support that HLAA has promoted all these years.

Let's be proud of our accomplishments and the legacy we are leaving.

