

Livingston Gets In the Loop

BY STEPHEN O. FRAZIER

Deep in the heart of West Texas, Ollie Livingston established Livingston Hearing in the early 1960s with one solitary office. Today, Richard Davila II has grown the business into a chain of more than 90 offices across Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas, and he has his eye on potential locations in Oklahoma.

In 2019, Davila took on a new challenge when he decided that it was time for Livingston Hearing to “get in the hearing loop.” Encouraged by Albuquerque looping advocates to loop his offices there, Davila took a serious look at looping technology while attending the American Academy of Audiology’s (AAA) national convention. He was already aware of a new law in New Mexico, as well as an earlier one in Arizona, that mandated telecoil counseling for patients in those states. Excited by what he learned at the AAA convention, Davila decided it was time to make hearing loops and telecoils an integral part of his business.

Conrad Hilton once said of Texans, “they dream big dreams and think big thoughts, because there is nothing to hem them in,” and Davila certainly dreamed a big dream. He intended to loop every office in his company, but that was just a small part of his Texas-sized master plan. That plan also included the development of new processes and procedures and in particular, specific training that would ensure that Livingston team members throughout the southwest could properly counsel every candidate for hearing aids. Training would encompass not just the newest technologies available with the devices but also the many benefits that tried-and-true telecoil technology has to offer.

Implementation of Davila’s plan began with an Albuquerque training seminar for about 30 hearing care professionals from Livingston’s offices in New Mexico and Arizona. A number of workshops were conducted during the all-day training session, which began with a presentation by this writer on the consumer-driven looping movement that has emerged in the U.S. and abroad. Albuquerque assistive technology retailer and loop installer Romy Pierce gave the next talk, and then Amanda Edwards, Au.D., of Starkey Hearing Technology took the podium to introduce the various models that feature telecoils. After lunch, Juliëtte Sterkens, Au.D., HLAA’s hearing loop advocate, reviewed the benefits provided by audio frequency induction loop systems and telecoils to help both patients and hearing care practices. Dr. Sterkens also discussed the adjustment of telecoils for hearing loop use and then conducted a hands-on session using several Audioscan Verifit devices. These machines

employ a state-of-the-art technology for verification of hearing aid settings, including those for Bluetooth and telecoils.

The organization and implementation of Livingston’s loops and telecoils initiative fell to Debra Fisichenich, Au.D., Livingston’s vice president of Training and Education. Dr. Fisichenich organized the seminar and created the loops and telecoils webpage on Livingston’s intranet to educate the company’s audiologists and dispensers. She also produced an educational outreach page for its external website (www.lhac.com/our-products/assistive-listening-devices), where the public can find information on loop technology, along with links to other helpful resources.



Contacta loop mat

Dr. Fisichenich also reviewed and tested a number of looping alternatives. After experimenting with a variety of loop configurations and products, including perimeter and counter loops, her team selected loops that use copper looping tape that is covered by a clear plastic shield so that the loop is visible to patients, as well as a new Contacta product called loop mats. Like a chair loop, but larger and covered with carpet, these mats and the copper tape showcase the technology, while transmitting sound during the visual presentation to help clients connect what they are seeing with what they are hearing. The biggest advantage of the visible floor mat is that it makes the conversation and concept much easier for patients to grasp, because they have a visual of how the technology is set up and can see how it would work in applicable environments.

Every Livingston office has been equipped with Audioscan Verifit devices, and Dr. Fisichenich explains, “We are developing a best practices method to ensure hearing aids dispensed with t-coils are properly fit and have a transparent frequency response.” She adds, “The Audioscan Verifit is just the tool for the job. After all, a poorly fit t-coil or improperly installed looping system can be detrimental to the patient’s experience.”

A Livingston review of the Loop New Mexico website (www.loopnm.com) found that many of the cities served by Livingston offices had few, if any, venues that feature hearing loops, so. Davila built an advocacy com-

ponent into his master plan. This ensures that audiologists and dispensers are community advocates for the technology. To support this effort, Livingston displays the HLAA Get in the Hearing Loop (GITHL) logo in its extensive print and TV advertising campaigns and also links its website to the GITHL page of the HLAA website.

In communities where no loops currently exist, Livingston providers are encouraged to fit patients with telecoil-equipped hearing aids so patients can simply activate their telecoils—essentially doubling their hearing aids’ functionality—when local churches and performance spaces become looped in the future.

Livingston Hearing is, by far, the largest hearing care operation that currently promotes hearing loop/telecoil technology, but other offices across the country are also in the hearing loop. For example, Kenwood Hearing Centers in the San Francisco Bay area of California is a pioneer in the technology. Kenwood's Bill and Christine Diles first began demonstrating looping technology to their patients nearly 20 years ago and then launched a program that bundled a home hearing loop into the sale of telecoil-equipped hearing aids and included installation. Over the years, they installed more than 3,000 TV loops

in their patients’ homes before they stopped counting. The Diles also promote the looping of public venues in the four cities they serve. They surveyed their patients and found that, for those with telecoils and a home TV loop, 91% said they were “satisfied” or “highly satisfied” with their hearing aids. Only 29% of those without the technology reported that degree of satisfaction. At that time, there was only one American hearing loop manufacturer and, for a while, the Diles were the U.S. distributors for one of the major European hearing loop makers.

Other offices from coast to coast and beyond have also gotten into the act. Visiting the Websites of Faull Audiology in Jacksonville, Florida, and Ko’olau Audiology & Hearing Aid Services in Kailua, Hawaii, demonstrates the reach of the technology. Conducting a Google search of “hearing care and hearing loops” reveals websites of offices in nearly every U.S. state that promote looping technology and demonstrate a high level of commitment to it. Most have also installed loops in their waiting and fitting rooms where they counsel patients about hearing loops.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the role that patients have played in the adoption of looping technology. Telecoil-savvy patients have become earnest advocates after experiencing the benefits of hearing loops at HLAA chapter meetings and national conventions. They have been delighted to discover that loops can greatly expand their ability to hear—particularly in large, public venues—by transmitting sound directly to their hearing devices. These patients are perhaps the greatest advocates of all for inspiring venues and other businesses in their communities to “get in the hearing loop.” **HL**

Stephen Frazier is an HLAA hearing loss support specialist. He served as an HLAA chapter coordinator in New Mexico for 10 years and also held numerous positions in the Albuquerque chapter. Steve served for nearly eight years on the Speech-Language Pathology, Audiology and Hearing Aid Dispensing Practices Board of New Mexico and is a founding member of the HLAA Get in the Hearing Loop Program steering committee. He heads the award-winning Loop New Mexico initiative and is the founder and co-chair of the Committee for Communication Access in New Mexico. His articles on hearing loops, hearing loss and noise pollution have been published in numerous periodicals, including Sound and Communications, Technologies for Worship, Hearing Health, Hearing Life, Hearing Review, Hearing Journal and others. Steve’s articles are posted at sofnabq.com, and he can be reached at LoopNM@gmail.com.



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