

## **HLA-NJ News and Views**

**A Monthly Column from The Hearing Loss Association of NJ**

*By Peter Yerkes, Trustee, HLA-NJ*

### **Wake-Up Call from Hurricane Sandy**

While memory of Hurricane Sandy is still fresh, here are some lessons I learned. I hope they will help other people with hearing loss plan for the next super-storm. I don't pretend to be a climate expert, but it seems safe to say that we haven't seen the last of such disasters. For people with hearing loss, a mega-storm can lead to special problems.

### **Things I Wish I Had Done**

I should have checked out generators - and bought one. I wasn't in New Jersey for the Halloween storm of 2011, so I didn't realize how awful it is to live without electricity for five days or more. But a lot of friends and neighbors made the investment and did I envy them. They aren't cheap. Prices range from \$250 for a small portable with limited use to \$15,000 or more. They can be cranky and difficult to operate.

But they can make a huge difference—especially for people like me, who rely on rechargeable batteries to lead anything like a normal life. This includes batteries for my cochlear implant, which allow me to hear, batteries for my smartphone, which keep me in touch with the outside world, and batteries for my laptop. I am eternally grateful to friends, neighbors, community groups and even retail stores where I could get an electricity fix. But I wasted huge amounts of time, and scarce gas, trekking from one power source to another. And I hated imposing on friends, no matter how much they said they didn't mind.

### **Things I Am Very Glad I Had**

A smart phone and a laptop with rechargeable batteries; I complain bitterly every month when the bills for service on my cell phone arrives, but during Sandy it was nothing less than an emergency communications center. It gave me access to the Internet for weather and disaster information, and it provided e-mail and texting so I could stay in touch with family and friends. It needed to be recharged once a day or so but in a pinch I could recharge it in my car. My laptop had limited usefulness, since I had no Internet connections. But, and this was a huge plus, my wife and I could pop in a DVD into the laptop, turn on the subtitles on the movie and end a day of bitter cold and darkness with much-needed escape into the world of "Love Story" or "Inglourious Basterds."

### **Community Counts**

"Aid recipient" was a new role for me. I was amazed, and am eternally grateful for the network that quickly sprang up in my town and in other towns throughout the disaster area. Friends with electricity invited us for dinner and the night; a church opened its community room 24/7 to provide battery recharging stations, warmth and light, a steady supply of snacks, coffee and soft drinks, and three hot meals a day. Local retailers who had accessible electrical outlets made them available to everyone. I was

also delighted to see that FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, is working well once again.

### **HLA-NJ Announces Awards and Names New Officers**

As life returned to normal (for many people, at least), HLA-NJ held its Annual Meeting at the East Brunswick Public Library on November 17, where the agenda included elections, a mini-fair of vendors, and awards. Behind each award there is a story. The stories are inspiring, and show the breadth and diversity of HLA-NJ activities. One of those honored was John McEwen, executive director of the NJ Theatre Alliance, receiving the Leadership Award.

“John was instrumental in getting open captioning started at Paper Mill Playhouse back in 1996 - the first theater to provide this service - and has been an ardent advocate and supporter of captioning through the years - both in New Jersey and nationally (through the arts access conferences),” said HLA-NJ past president Arlene Romoff, in announcing the award. “In addition, he’s been supportive of assistive listening systems. John is the first person outside of HLA-NJ to be honored, and the first to be given a monetary award of \$1,000.” “The \$1,000 award is being given with the proviso that it be used at John’s discretion to further accessibility in the arts in New Jersey,” Ms. Romoff said. “We hope, for instance, that he might find ways to provide more captioned performances through equipment purchases, better scheduling or other means.”

Other awards included the Founders Award, to Carol Granaldi and Wayne Roorda; the Service Award to Marvin Schaab and Ken Keuhlen, the Spirit of HLA-NJ Award to Paul Arabas and Sandy Spekman, and the Chapter Leaders Award to Marie Nordling and Rosemarie Kasper.

The mini-fair of vendors has become another highlight of the Annual Meeting, and HLA-NJ is grateful to exhibitors providing information and hands-on displays of new equipment of interest to people with hearing loss. Sponsors included the state Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the N.J. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, CapTel and CaptionCall (manufacturers of phones offering real-time captioning), EnCom looping systems, the New Jersey Theatre Alliance, and Ask the Audiologist.

Do you have questions of experiences related to hearing loss you would like to share? Please contact me at [p.yerkes@comcast.net](mailto:p.yerkes@comcast.net).

To learn more about HLA-NJ, please contact Arlene Romoff at [info@hearingloss-nj.org](mailto:info@hearingloss-nj.org). We also invite you to visit [www.hearingloss-nj.org](http://www.hearingloss-nj.org), or to attend one of our local chapter meetings in Bergen, Monmouth/Ocean or Middlesex County, and our newest Morris County chapter. Dates, places and times for chapter meetings are available from [info@hearingloss-nj.org](mailto:info@hearingloss-nj.org).