

Shown are (left to right) Dr. Trent Westrick, patient-care coordinator Robyn Couzens and Dr. Gail Brenner, awaiting clients in the reception area of Hearing Technology Associates LLC.

Easy LISTENING

Hearing Technology Associates LLC offers freedom from the isolation of hearing loss

by **AMANDA HAMM HENGEL** | photography by **ROB HALL**

Close your eyes for a moment and listen to what is going on around you. The Center for Hearing and Communication says 36 million people in America suffer from hearing loss and do not hear everything as well as they should. While the auditory sense is generally one that is taken for granted, the reality is that not being able to hear clearly should not be taken lightly.

"People who know they have hearing loss generally wait seven years to seek help," says Gail B. Brenner, Au.D., owner of Hearing Technology Associates LLC. "But when gone untreated, hearing loss can lead to other health-related issues, including anxiety, depression and low self-esteem."

As a practicing audiologist for the past 34 years, Dr. Brenner is familiar with the misconceptions people have about hearing loss. She has learned to adapt to these misconceptions by maintaining a "hands-on, high-tech, personal practice," while embracing the fact that this is not a condition reserved for the elderly. In addition, Dr. Brenner is nationally and internationally known for her work with people

who experience intrusive tinnitus, where a person may hear a sound in one or both ears when no external sound is actually present or detected by others. She understands how important managing and deterring the advance of further hearing problems. With offices in Bala Cynwyd and Philadelphia, she is able to help people of every age and every condition.

"The most important thing is that we do not compromise on a person's ability to hear the best they can," Dr. Brenner says. "That is our main job. [Our patients] have a quality of life to maintain."

Hearing Solutions

Depending on the results of a baseline hearing test, there are a number of options Hearing Technology Associates LLC can offer a patient that will improve one's hearing capabilities. With technology advancing the way it is, Dr. Brenner says there are solutions for every person in every price range.

"We are experts at finding the right instrument for the person and their lifestyle, prescribing the correct instrument and programming it properly," she says. "Sometimes hearing in-

struments can be enhanced by Bluetooth, where the hearing instrument becomes a wireless headset. We can also bring the TV transmission into the headset, smartphones or even flip phones."

Despite the vast capabilities of today's hearing devices, Dr. Brenner says their abilities are not based on size.

"[Hearing instruments] have become very discrete and fashion conscious," she says, noting her practice offers only the most state-of-the-art devices. "They are easy for the end user to operate."

Incidentally, Hearing Technology Associates LLC was the first audiology practice in Pennsylvania to be fitting Lyric, the only fully invisible, extended-wear hearing instrument. This instrument is an extremely convenient and discrete option for patients who are concerned with making lifestyle changes to meet their hearing needs.

"You can sleep in them and shower in them," Dr. Brenner says of the new devices. "You can wear them 100 percent of the time, which is an exciting advancement in hearing technology."

Hearing Protection

Dr. Brenner says utilizing hearing protection is the best way to prevent hearing loss, and Hearing Technology Associates LLC offers a variety of hearing-protection options, from custom swimmer earplugs to musician's earplugs. She says the practice offers solutions for every hearing need.

"Anyone exposed to noise should think about protection," Dr. Brenner says. "If you go to a concert or if you work in a noisy environment that requires you to shout to the person next to you, you should consider hearing protection."

Dr. Brenner also suggests that although everyone should get their hearing checked, anyone over the age of 40 should definitely consider it.

"We do not want to neglect our hearing," she says. "Just like you get your eyes checked, you should get your ears checked. ... We help patients reclaim their lives. We are experts in the world of hearing, and we have the expertise and the knowledge to help our patients in the best ways possible."

Hearing Success

Veronica Lyster's 90-year-old aunt, Evelyn Schoener, did not realize she was having hearing problems. What she did know was that she seemed to be missing important conversations, and people were getting annoyed when she asked them to repeat themselves.

"I told her, 'Listen, maybe the next time you see the family doctor, we will ask if they have a suggestion about where we can find out about hearing aids,'" Lyster says. "I did not tell her where we can get hearing aids, because with the elderly you have to take it step by step, so I just suggested we find out about them first."

Lyster and Schoener were referred to Hearing Technology Associates LLC, where they met



Dr. Trent Westrick testing a patient's hearing



Dr. Brenner, with Kim Baumann in the testing booth

with Trent Westrick, Au.D., an audiologist who has been working with Dr. Brenner for the past four years. Lyster says she and her aunt could not have been happier with the referral.

"They are very congenial," she says. "It goes from the doctors right down to their staff. They have everything they need right there to help you."

Lyster says Dr. Westrick was very thorough, and helped with everything from questions about cost, insurance coverage and explaining which hearing instruments were the best options.

"They make you feel like you are the only patient there," she says, adding that the doctors are always on time and encourage follow-up treatment to make sure a patient's hearing instruments are working properly. "[Dr. Westrick] doted over her and made her feel so special, answering all her questions calmly and patiently."

Dr. Westrick says part of his patience comes from a personal understanding of how hearing loss can impact one's life. Affected by genetic hearing loss himself, he knows the good and the bad that come with hearing aids by understanding how to live with hearing loss.

"If you look at the bigger picture, it affects people's well-being, or lack thereof," he says, noting that hearing loss affects not only the person suffering from the condition, but family members as well. "It can cause people to withdraw and avoid situations. This has a more global, psychological impact, which people are unaware of."

Lyster says her aunt was understandably nervous about her initial appointment, but she is so happy now that she has been fitted with her hearing instruments and has been utilizing them for several months.

"It was the best referral we have ever received from our family doctor," she says. "I wish

there were more physicians out there in the world like [Dr. Westrick]."

While it may seem as though one's auditory sense is one of least importance, life can be isolated and deprived without it. As Helen Keller once said, "Blindness separates us from things, but deafness separates us from people." ■

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