

Marty: Something that I became aware of in the last few years is hearing loss as I started to have a feeling that I was losing some hearing, and my wife kept saying things, and I'd say what, and so forth.

But eventually I did have it checked and found out that I did have some hearing loss and so I got hearing aids and they do help.

And it's great.

And it made me certainly think about the effect of hearing loss on people who have much more of a difficult situation than I do.

So I'm glad to be able to get a chance to talk a little bit about that.

Here in May, May is better hearing and speech month and so we're lucky to have with us Michele Michaels, who is a hard-of-hearing specialist with the Arizona Commission for the deaf and the hard-of-hearing.

Michele, nice to see you again.

Michele: Great to be here.

Marty: And Michele has been with us before.

And also, for the first time a newbie, Ron Tallman is with us, and Ron is with the hard-of-hearing task force at the Arizona commission for the deaf and the hard-of-hearing and a board member of the local hearing loss association of America chapter in Sun Lakes.

Ron, nice to have you as well.

Ron: Thank you, Marty, great to be here.

Marty: Well, Michele, let's start with you.

Let's kind of let people know what better hearing and speech month is, what it's all about and what the focus is for folks.

Michele: Sure thing.

Well, better hearing and speech month is a national event where everybody across the country, audiologists, hearing aid dispensers, people working in the hearing loss community, try to raise awareness of how important it is for us to be able to hear and speak if we have a communication problem.

That we need to be getting resources because our hearing and our ability to communicate affects our quality of life.

So that's what ACDHH is doing here today with this.

Marty: Well, let's just give you the chance to tell people what you'd like them to know.

What do you want everybody to be aware of or to know about during this month when it comes to hearing loss?

Michele: Well, you know, if you suspect you have hearing loss or someone else is telling you that you do, you want to go ahead and get that checked.

Maybe talk with your primary care physician or go to your local hearing healthcare professional and have them check it out and see if something is going on.

It's important to keep track of that because, you know, over the long run that hearing loss is usually progressive and it kind of sneaks up on you.

And you find yourself maybe starting to isolate, don't go out as much, maybe not engaged as much, and that can affect our overall health, even leading to early dementia in some cases.

Marty: Michele, let me back up just a little bit, and as I said when I introduced you you're from the Arizona commission for the deaf and the hard-of-hearing.

Let's let people know what that is, what the actual reality of that is, what the commission is and what it is that you do.

>> Michele: Okay, sure thing.

So ACDHH is a state agency.

We're celebrating our 40th anniversary this year in August.

And we exist to help improve the quality of life of people with hearing loss.

Also people who have speech difficulties.

So we serve the deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind, and speech disabled.

We have a number of programs and services.

Information referral is a lot of what we do.

But we also do outreach and education.

We train people on how to communicate with somebody who's deaf or hard-of-hearing.

We license American sign language interpreters.

We also have a really great free telephone program.

So if you're listening at home and you realize you have trouble hearing on the phone, just contact us and we'll get you set up with a phone that will work for you.

Marty: How do they contact you?

What's the best way to find out more about the options that are available to people?

>> Michele: Give us a call, 602-542-3323.

Marty: Okay. And is there a website for people to go to?

Michele: There is a website, WWW.ACDHH.org.

Marty: Okay.

Is there legislation involved with the hard-of-hearing, anything specifically, things that are mandated like workplace type of legislation and so forth?

Michele: Oh, sure, you bet.

There's a lot of federal legislation. The most popular legislation that there is is the Americans with disabilities act which was passed in 1990 by President Bush SR.

And so the ADA affects a lot of what we do.

I can go to a movie theatre and request a captioning device or an assistive listening device because of the ADA.

There's also state ADA here in Arizona, and other things, the EOC, the department of justice.

They all have different things that they can do for us to make sure that we get what we need.

Marty: That's good.

Ron, let's talk a little bit about your situation.

Now, you have actually have an -- I didn't actually mention that Michele actually has hearing aids, but you have a different situation.

Ron: Yes, I am bilateral with cochlear implants.

Martin: How long have you had those?

Ron: Three years now.

Marty: And so did you have a sudden loss of hearing or what happened?

Ron: I wore hearing aids for 15 years.

And then some time in early 2013 or late 2012 I went deaf, all sound turned off. Hearing aids no longer provided me an avenue to understand speech.

It was just like somebody had blown a trumpet at me.

So I took the hearing aids off, and I start getting smart, what's next?

What's next I can do to hear again.

I made an appointment with my primary care physician.

I made an appointment again with an ENT specialist, and I started research on cochlear implants.

For an individual who wears cochlear implants, hearing in some avenues is very much a challenge.

But in normal speech environment it is very good.

Marty: So -- well, let me know what that is, what a cochlear implant is.

Ron: It's a surgical device.

Hearing aids are an amplifier.

They are placed on your ear and you can turn them up, you can turn them down to

meet just about any situation you're in.

A cochlear implant is surgically implanted.

There are -- it's a series of a processor, a receiver and electrodes that go down into the cochlea.

My certain brand has 16 electrodes and those are threaded into the cochlea, and lay next against the hearing nerve and provides us an ability to hear.

It is not perfect but it does work.

Marty: So you're like the \$6 million dollar man.

That's great.

Ron: ROBO Ron I get called a lot.

Marty: Well, I'm guessing that was quite a miraculous thing for you.

Ron: Yes, it is.

You go deaf and it impacts not only yourself but everyone around you, hearing loss does.

It is an isolation feeling once all sound turns off, especially for an individual who goes through this experience later in life as I did at age 62.

You feel isolated, alone, forgotten at

times.

And it takes a little bit even after they turn the cochlear implants on, it takes some time to get used to it.

The brain is going to have to learn to hear again, and once that starts you have to go through rehabilitation to exercise the brain to remember the sounds that you heard when you were a hearing person.

Marty: But the miracle is really the fact that the brain can adjust to that and can relearn.

Were there -- I'm just imagining that there could have been some frightening things, some aspects of that like suddenly going deaf, especially as you say, at an older age and I don't know -- it doesn't matter how old you are, you're not 16, but then all of a sudden just, well, like going out in traffic or driving a car or something like -- I'm just thinking of a lot of different things that must have been kind of frightening for you.

Ron: Yes, it has been.

I don't have any problems driving a car, that's not an issue.

But there are items which we don't do anymore because you have to think about what you're doing and what's on your head.

I don't want -- I'll just go ahead and say it. Each one of these was about \$30,000.

Marty: So you're not going swimming is what you're telling me.

Ron: Exactly.

I have one I can wear in the pool, but I don't work anywhere near water with these things.

So I try to --

Marty: A lot of adjustments.

Michele, let me talk to you again, and let's remind people as -- you're not 16 but people are -- maybe that are listening that are younger, and they're not thinking about this, but what are some things they should know about preventing hearing loss, especially like progressive hearing loss.

Michele: Right, exactly.

One of the things we try to stress is that there are over a million people in Arizona who're hard-of-hearing like me and Ron,

You know, who have lost our hearing or

losing our hearing. And one of the main reasons that we lose our hearing oftentimes is noise, exposure to noise.

So we know that young kids using noisy toys, they're listening to their iPods and things like that, and they got the ear buds right next to their eardrum for hours and hours on end.

And that slowly starts to cause hearing loss.

So if we're doing that we want to make sure that we limit how much time we're spending with music blasting into our ears.

Also think about things that you're doing at home.

Are you riding an ATV?

Are you mowing your lawn, leaf blowing?

All of those exposures to noise accumulate over time and that causes that progressive hearing loss.

Marty: Well, we do want to remind people again that May is -- what's the official title of the month?

Better hearing and speech month.

Michele: Yeah.

Marty: There we go. So this is the time to think about it.

If you have any questions about your hearing, maybe you suspect that you have some hearing loss and so forth and you'd like to get more information, again, Michele, remind people where they can go to find out more.

Michele: You can go to WWW.ACDHH.org or give us a call at 602-542-3323.

Marty: All right.

Thank you very much for being with us.

And Ron, thank you for sharing your experience with us.

I appreciate it.

Ron: Thank you.

Michele: Thanks.