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A paid supplement to Chico News & Review

brought to you by **Chico Hearing Aid Center**

A one-of-a-kind rapport

CHICO HEARING AID CENTER HAS BEEN MAKING CUSTOMERS HAPPY SINCE 1949



“We live in a noisy world, and sooner or later it can take a toll on your hearing,” said Deanna McCoy, owner of Chico Hearing Aid Center. McCoy came to work at the center under her father—former owner Larry Main—in 1998, and bought the business upon his retirement.

McCoy, who holds state and national certification in Hearing Instrument Sciences as well as advanced certification in audioprosthology, explained the business’s familial roots go even deeper.

“The Havens [who owned the business from 1985 until 1992, when Main took over] are like my adoptive grandparents, so I basically grew up around the business.”

In fact, Chico Hearing Aid Center has been serving the local community—and even managed to keep a modern variation of it’s original phone number, Fireside 2-8132—since May of 1949. McCoy maintains the center has been successful through the years by offering exceptional service and establishing a one-of-a-kind rapport with patients.

“The first thing a lot of patients get when they walk through the door is a hug,” she said. “This is a family business and a lot of our patients are like extensions of that family.”

“I have one family who I just fit the third generation, and several who we’ve served for two generations. A lot of them ask about how my kids are doing and like to update us on what their own children or grandchildren are doing, we have a deeper relationship than just providing hearing aids. Most of our patients come through patient referrals.”

McCoy acknowledged that needing a hearing aid can be traumatic for some people. “We help people realize they’re not alone. Hearing loss is very common, and getting more so.

“The biggest thing is reassuring patients that it’s common, and that hearing aids aren’t big bulky things you need to be ashamed of. People used to feel similar about eyeglasses, but now nobody thinks twice about them. Hopefully in five or ten years, that will apply to hearing aids.”

McCoy said our grandfather’s primitive, oversized contraptions have gone the way of the earhorn.

“Hearing loss is a lot more noticeable than a hearing aid. When you’re having to ask ‘What? What was that?’ or answering questions totally off the wall, people notice. They don’t really notice many hearing aids. We’ve had lots

of patients whose family members don’t even know they got hearing aids until they tell them.

“A lot of people don’t realize they have hearing loss because it comes on gradually,” she continued. “Your body automatically learns to adapt as the loss progresses until it gets so bad that everybody’s screaming at you. You don’t realize you aren’t hearing the crickets chirping or the birds singing like everyone else is, because you don’t know what your missing if you can’t hear it.”

Though cosmetic advancements are a boon, McCoy said the technological advancements are even more impressive.

“People used to get them 20 years ago, try them once and stick them in a drawer. Back then we couldn’t do much more than amplify sound and change frequencies a little bit, but not much. With computerized hearing aids, there are endless possibilities.

They can make everything comfortable, so people can understand speech in noisy environment, bring in the sounds that are important to them while keeping loud, unwanted sounds at a comfortable level.”

Hearing aids can be expensive, starting around \$1,200 per pair and climbing to more than \$6,000 per pair. Chico Hearing Aid Center is one of two providers in

Chico that accepts MediCal and the only one that accepts California Children’s Services. Financing options are available, and the center also participates in the “Ear of the Lion,” a Lion’s Club-organized charity that refurbishes hearing aids and fits them to people who otherwise couldn’t afford them.

McCoy recommends those with hearing concerns go straight to her office—or one like it—to get a hearing evaluation. Though they are not medical personnel, they are trained to distinguish between medical problems and issues that could benefit from a hearing aid.

“Most importantly, protect your hearing while you have it,” she added. “Even a few minutes of loud noise can do permanent damage.”

“This is a family business and a lot of our patients are like extensions of that family.”



**Chico
Hearing Aid
Center**



Retiree rejoices at the gift of true hearing

Two wonderful things recently happened to 74-year old Paradise resident Gary Dreier—on Valentine’s Day, he married his girlfriend of almost two years. He also recently got new hearing aids, excitedly crediting Chico Hearing Aid Center for restoring the “gift of true hearing.”

“Deanna (McCoy) and her staff make it so pleasant in that office,” he said. “They will bend over backwards for you. It’s like a family. I cannot praise them enough, because I simply don’t have the words they deserve.”

“It’s true,” his new wife, Frieda Dreier, chimed in. “He marvels about his new hearing aids. When we’re at a restaurant, now he can hear the conversation over the background noise. Before, dishes clanking would overpower the conversation. We have hardwood floors in our house, and he used to grumble about them echoing in the kitchen. But he doesn’t anymore. It’s been wonderful, and I’m so excited for him.”

The Dreiers attend Calvary Chapel in Magalia, an experience that has become more enjoyable since he can hear more of the service. “I don’t know how else to say it, except that now I can really hear,” he said. “Before, it was very noisy in church. I couldn’t distinguish the preacher’s words very clearly, but now I can.”

Gary also notices the difference while he and Frieda volunteer in their 8-year-old grandson’s classroom at Cedarwood Elementary School in Magalia.

“Mostly what we do is let them read to us,” Dreier said, adding how much more fully he enjoys it now that he can hear every word.

Dreier was born in North Dakota and raised in Washington

state. In 1955, he enlisted in the U.S. Army, served in California and stayed in-state upon being discharged. Following stints in the lumber industry as a truck driver and heavy equipment operator, he retired from the California Department of Forestry and moved to the Paradise area in 1981.

He admits some of his hearing loss might be from loud noise on the job, but he said he enjoyed working around powerful-sounding equipment. He was especially descriptive remembering the sounds of driving trucks.

“You take a frosty morning in late fall, with that diesel snorting, the sound of that exhaust with just so much muscle,” he said, flexing an arm to illustrate. “Of course, now I know it wasn’t so nice for my hearing.”

Dreier remembers first becoming aware of his hearing loss from family members.

“It started with my children and grandchildren, who started saying I never hear them. So I thought I’d better get an exam.”

He purchased his first set of hearing aids from a vendor in Paradise, an experience he calls the biggest mistake of his life. “I had to take out those hearing aids all the time. They started screaming at odd times.”

Today, he enjoys a high-tech set of hearing aids, as well as a satisfying personal relationship at Chico

Hearing Aid Center. “It’s like night and day between the two,” he said. “I can trust Deanna. I love her, and I love the staff in her office. It’s hard to explain a person like her—it’s so unusual in this day and age to find a person I can look in the eye and trust completely.”

Dreier removed one of his tiny, state-of-the-art digital hearing aids to show how complex it is.

“When I put a phone to my ear to talk, it will equalize the sound in both ears,” he said. “I can hear what’s being said to me in both ears. Isn’t that something?”

“When I put a phone to my ear to talk, it will equalize the sound in both ears. Isn’t that something?”

Prevent hearing loss

SMALL STEPS TO REDUCE YOUR RISK OF HEARING LOSS

Here are some simple steps to reduce your risk of hearing loss, as provided by the Better Hearing Institute:

- If you work in an at-risk occupation, check with your employer to make sure you have adequately protected your hearing according to **OSHA REGULATIONS**.
- **LIMIT EXPOSURE** time to noisy activities.
- **WEAR HEARING PROTECTION** like foam or silicone plugs or muffs. Foam plugs are available at pharmacies while muffs and specialized ear protection can be purchased at your local hearing aid office, sporting good stores or safety equipment stores.
- At home, **TURN DOWN THE VOLUME** on the television, radio, stereos and MP3s.
- **WEAR EAR PLUGS** or muffs when using loud equipment (i.e. lawn mowers, power saws, leaf blowers).
- **BUY QUIETER PRODUCTS** (compare decibel ratings, the smaller the better).
- Reduce the number of **NOISY APPLIANCES** running at the same time in your personal environment.
- **AVOID MEDICATIONS THAT** can be dangerous to your hearing. Ask your physician about possible affects on your hearing.

Hearing aids for the professional

When you think of hearing aids, you probably don't automatically think of sleek, cutting-edge technology, but maybe you should start. The past several years have seen dramatic improvements to hearing aids designed for professionals on the move, adjusting automatically to changes in your environment and the electronics you're interacting with. Here are some modern features of Phonak hearing aids that may take you by surprise:

- **STEREOZOOM:**

Enables wearers to narrow the "beam," focusing on a single speaker while suppressing other interfering sounds.

- **AUTO ZOOM:**

Automatically tacks and focuses on speech, regardless of direction, without having to face the speaker.

- **SOUNDFLOW:**

A real-time adaptation to the listening environment, changing to four configuration points—calm situations, speech in noise, comfort in noise and music.

- **ICOM/TVLINK:**

Connects aids to Bluetooth devices or televisions.

- **DUOPHONE:**

Aids will distribute the sounds of a telephone conversation to both ears.

- **SOUNDRECOVER:**

Improved audibility of high-pitched speech sounds—like those of women and children—and better clarity in all listening environments.

Marriage counselor no longer relies on reading lips

"One of the first things I noticed was hearing my little girl in the back seat of the car—it was a very powerful moment."

Pamela Moline remembers that day in 2006 when she used a pair of hearing aids for the first time. It wasn't long after making a chance stop to have her hearing checked while out running errands. Moline never realized what she was missing out on: details of a conversation, the punch line to a joke, her child's voice—now she's genuinely grateful to have regained a sense that a lot of people take for granted.

"When you realize people are laughing at a joke, it's pretty confusing," she explained. "And it's not easy to keep asking someone to repeat themselves."

The change in Moline's life becomes especially poignant when considering her career. For the past 30 years, she's been a family and marriage therapist, a position that requires her utmost attention. It can be especially challenging for her to hear women and children—which make up a large part of her clientele—because of the high frequency of their voices. Without her hearing aids, she'd be lost.

"If I forget them, it will be a stressful day at work," she said.

The 54-year-old mother of three attributed her hearing loss to hereditary nerve-damage. Working for six months at the Burbank Airport without ear protection likely only exacerbated the problem. Moline spent almost a decade overcompensating for her hearing loss, which meant sitting at the front of the room in classes and making sure she could see the person's face in order to read their lips.

She eventually developed a heightened level of concentration.

"As a mother, you can't get back those precious moments."

Moline, who has run a private practice in Chico since 1989, said hearing aids have come a long way in the past couple decades. Modern aids have the ability to amplify the tones a particular person is missing, rather than simply make everything louder. She says hers are comfortable and hardly noticeable, fastening behind her ears with a small, clear tube that goes

inside the ear. Moline's set cost in the neighborhood of \$5,000, a fifth of which was covered by insurance. She was able to pay the rest off in installments.

For Moline, being able to hear again—to be part of the conversation, to be 100 percent present for her clients and, most importantly, her own children—is priceless.

"Hearing is a beautiful thing, and it's a complicated thing," she said. "And to not be able to hear people or nature, you're missing out on a very important sense."

Moline also uses her disability (she calls her hearing loss "severe") as a tool in her practice, giving her clients the courage to make adjustments in their lives—no matter how small. But she feels the biggest difference in her own life and credits her family for supporting her in acknowledging her hearing loss and encouraging her to make her own adjustments.

Needless to say, the past five years have been life-changing for Moline and her family, as she's been able to take part in those times with her children that seemingly flash by in a matter of seconds. Moline puts it best:

"As a mother, you can't get back those precious moments."



Grandmother-to-be takes delight in the world of sound

Jenita Johnson-Rodriguez is expecting her first great-grandson this year, and one of the things she looks forward to most is hearing him. "I'm looking forward to Dylan arriving, and hearing the first sounds he makes," she said during a recent interview. "Whether it's a gasp, a cry, or first words, I won't miss hearing it."

The vibrant 64-year-old suffered for years with hearing loss, and regrets all the experiences she missed because of it. "There are so many beautiful sounds in the world," she said. "It's one thing if you're not listening, but another if you can't hear them. I look back on what I've missed, and this is a new world now to me."

Years ago, Johnson-Rodriguez got clumsy hearing aids that didn't work well for her. "I went to a national hearing aid store. I got hearing aids that weren't comfortable, so I kept taking them out. Things sounded tinny and people treated me differently as soon as they saw those hearing aids," she said. "They'd get up in my face—my personal space disappeared."

Johnson-Rodriguez put together all the experiences that contributed to her hearing loss. She grew up near the Alameda Naval Air Station, where she remembers running out on the playground to see the jets take off over her school. "I certainly didn't realize then what it would do to my hearing."

Living in the Hayward area, she worked in the pits for drag races. "I was doing things I'd never dream would hurt my hearing," she said. "I just thought it was exciting."

A turning point came when she and her partner, Judy Johnson, were staying at a Holiday Inn in San Francisco. The hotel manager called their room to ask them to turn their TV volume down—twice. Johnson-Rodriguez knew she had a problem then, because she didn't think it was loud at all.

"I was really embarrassed—Judy had noticed I had problems hearing," she said. "I finally had to admit, yes, I did turn things up a little loud."

After two separate friends recommended Chico Hearing Aid Center, Johnson-Rodriguez made the appointment she'd been putting off.

"I went in very skeptical," she said. "I'd had all bad experiences with this type of thing. But I met Ashley, and she is a very personable young woman. She did a hearing test, and

I was diagnosed with 80 percent deafness in my right ear and 60 percent in my left. My range of sounds was extremely narrow."

Johnson-Rodriguez admitted the hearing aids came at a cost she could not pay outright, but Chico Hearing Aid Center worked with her to find a solution.

"When it came down to finances, they made me a payment plan that fit my budget, and not theirs, or the company's timeline. It seemed just as important to them that I got the right hearing aids. The financing was so affordable and convenient."

Johnson-Rodriguez described the differences new hearing aids have made in her life. "It just blew me away when I put them in the first time. I can sleep in them. It's nice to hear when things go bump in the night. I never take them out, except to take a shower. Remember that light rain we had the other night? Before, I couldn't hear raindrops. I know it sounds trite, but when you haven't heard those things for awhile, you really appreciate it. The next morning I heard the birds singing outside. I said to Judy, I knew we had birds out there, but I didn't know they were singing."

"I look back on what I've missed, and this is a new world now to me."

You're not alone

MILLIONS OF AMERICANS YOUNG AND OLD SUFFER FROM HEARING LOSS

Many of those who suffer from hearing loss are embarrassed to seek treatment because they assume (incorrectly) that hearing loss is a disability that affects only the elderly. As illustrated by these statistics compiled by the American Academy of Audiology, the likelihood of hearing loss increases with age, but Americans both young and old can unnecessarily struggle with hearing problems. In other words, you're not alone.

• AGE-RELATED HEARING LOSS:

Presbycusis, or hearing loss related to aging, is a combination of changes to the structures of the inner ear, blood flow, the hearing nerve and how the brain processes speech and sounds. One in three people over age 60 have hearing loss, while one in two people over age 85 have hearing loss.

• HEARING LOSS IN ADULTS:

About 17 percent (36 million) American adults report some form of hearing loss, and more than half of the people with hearing loss are under 65 years old.

• WORK PLACE HEARING LOSS:

Approximately 30 million American workers are exposed to hazardous levels of noise on the job, while another 9 million are at risk for hearing loss from

other agents like solvents and metals. 15 percent (26 million) Americans between ages 20 and 69 have high-frequency hearing loss due to exposure to loud sounds at work or during leisure activities.

• HEARING LOSS IN CHILDREN:

Approximately 12 percent of American children ages 6 to 19 have noise-induced hearing loss. Exposure to concerts, MP3 players, fireworks, movie theaters and noisy toys are likely causes.

• HEARING LOSS IN INFANTS:

More than 4,000 babies are born with hearing loss in the U.S. each year. It is important to get your infant screened for hearing loss, as sound processing plays a critical role in early development.

The signs of hearing loss

HEED THESE COMMON WARNING SIGNS THAT OFTEN GO UNNOTICED

The signs of hearing loss can go unnoticed by the person losing their hearing, because it is a gradual process the body adjusts to. Here are some common indicators, provided by the Better Hearing Institute.

You might have hearing loss if you...

SOCIALLY:

- require frequent repetition.
- have difficulty following conversations involving more than two people.
- think other people sound like they are mumbling.
- have difficulty hearing in crowded places like conferences, restaurants, malls or cafes.
- have difficulty hearing women or children.
- turn your television up to high volumes.
- respond inappropriately in conversations.
- have ringing in your ears.
- read lips or have to see someone's face while they're talking to you.

EMOTIONALLY:

- feel stress from straining to hear what others are saying.
- feel embarrassed to meet new people.
- feel nervous about trying to understand people.
- withdraw from social situations you once enjoyed.

MEDICALLY:

- have a family history of hearing loss.
- have diabetes, heart, circulation or thyroid problems.
- have been exposed to loud sounds for a long period or single exposure to one explosive noise.

Finding the right fit

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO CHICO HEARING AID'S PROCESS

VISUAL OTOSCOPIC EXAM

This determines whether there is an accumulation of cerumen (ear wax) or other foreign objects in the ear canal, a damaged eardrum or other conditions that would require outside assistance.

DISCUSSION BETWEEN PATIENT AND SPECIALIST

A complete hearing and lifestyle history is discussed to reach an understanding of the patient's particular needs. Should the patient have hearing loss, this conversation allows the Chico Hearing Aid Center to choose appropriate hearing instruments, counsel the patient on realistic expectations and prepare them for potential issues that might arise.

HEARING EVALUATION*

Testing begins with pure tone air and bone conduction tests that identify the type and degree of hearing loss the patient is experiencing. They also use three different speech tests—one to verify the pure tone test accuracy, one to determine what sound level is comfortable for the patient and then one to determine the patient's cognition of speech.

**to see how you can benefit from hearing aids.*

REVIEW OF TEST RESULTS

The specialist will explain the test results and make recommendations for hearing instruments, clarifying why a particular instrument best fits the patient's needs.

IMPRESSION OF THE EAR

For a custom fit, a silicone imprint is produced and sent to the hearing aid manufacturer.

FITTING

The hearing aid is fitted to the patient's ear and adjusted to their comfort level. The patient is educated on how to maintain the aids, clean them and what to expect. Follow-up visits are scheduled once a week for one or two months to adjust the instruments as the patient becomes accustomed to it.

FOLLOW-UP

An appointment to clean, maintain and adjust the aids will be scheduled every three months in addition to an annual hearing evaluation. As the aids reach the end of their expected life, the Chico Hearing Aid Center will advise the patient on the newest technology.

Hearing aid technology discussed

Q & A WITH CHICO HEARING AID CENTER OWNER DEANNA MCCOY

CAN YOU HIGHLIGHT SOME OF THE MAJOR ADVANCEMENTS IN HEARING AID TECHNOLOGY?

The ear horn went out of style in the 1800s, and the first ear-worn hearing aid was made in the '1960s. Before that they used what was called a body aid, just a little box you carried around—they even made a special bra for the body aid. Before that, the box was the size of a suitcase. Before that, the box was too big to move so you just stayed in one place. In the early '90s, they came out with the first hearing aid that went completely in the canal, so you can barely see it. In 2006 they came out with the first slim tube aids, which have this unit behind your ear you can't see from the front. Two years ago, they came out with invisible hearing aids that you can't see at all, except for the little string you pull it out with.

ASIDE FROM LOOKS, WHAT WERE THE DRAWBACKS OF THE OLDER HEARING AIDS?

People used to take their hearing aids out when they talked on the phone because they would squeal. When you cover the hearing aid, the sound is going out of the receiver and back into the microphone in an endless loop, just like during a concert when the singer steps too close to a speaker and you get that awful squeal. On a smaller scale, that's the same thing the hearing aids were doing. Now, when you get on the phone your aids will switch over to a different program automatically to avoid that and switch back when you hang up. Being able to leave the hearing aid in and talk on the phone, as well as not over-amplifying ambient noise have been huge improvements.

WHAT HAS CUSTOMER FEEDBACK BEEN LIKE SINCE THE RECENT IMPROVEMENTS?

We had a lot of hearing aids that people weren't happy with. People couldn't understand in noisy environments, which is the number-one complaint to this day. Now, people are amazed.

Even lower technology now is so much better and people understand in noisy environments comfortably. We're able to address that far better than ever before, to a great degree of success.

WHAT DO YOU PREDICT FOR THE FUTURE OF HEARING AIDS?

Our top-of-the-line now will very likely be our entry-level in five or six years. The newest technology now is doing a better job of recognizing where speech is coming from so it can pinpoint specific speech and zero in on it. The hearing aids send signals to each other to be able to bring speech sounds in, while the ambient noise—including noises coming from behind the listener—are brought down. I can't even imagine where it's going, but the technology is always improving.

DO YOU THINK PEOPLE WHO DON'T HAVE HEARING LOSS WILL START USING HEARING AIDS?

There are people who do that now. Sales reps in the hearing aid industry who are traveling on the road all the time can answer their phone through their hearing aids. It does two things for them—first, they have hands-free communication and secondly, it reduces the road noise in the background. For voice-activated phones, if somebody calls and your phone recognizes them, a voice in your hearing aids will say their name so you know who is calling.

HAVE THE ADVANCEMENTS IN TECHNOLOGY MADE YOUR JOB EASIER?

No, it makes my job harder, but we have a lot more satisfied patients. I have so many more things I can do for someone, but I have to attend a lot more training to become familiar with all the new technology.

Now we are able to make it the most comfortable and most natural sound for the patients by adjusting for their particular lifestyle, perception and level of hearing loss.



**Hearing aids are smaller than they appear*



**Hearing aids are smaller than they appear*



Meet the Chico Hearing Aid Center Staff

ANGELA MUNOZ



Angela Munoz is the first smiling face people usually see when they walk into Chico Hearing Aid Center or the voice on the phone when they call. As receptionist, she is responsible for filing and organization, phone reminders for appointments and warranties and scheduling. She is also trained to do the minor repairs and maintenance on hearing aids to assist patients more quickly.

ASHLEY MAIN



Ashley Main is a fully-licensed hearing aid dispenser currently studying for a National Board Certification. She has worked at Chico Hearing Aid Center for over two years, beginning as a receptionist and now working as a specialist. Having a second dispenser allows the center to better serve and devote more personal time to their patients.

LYNDA SHERMAN



Lynda Sherman has been with Chico Hearing Aid Center for five years as the front office manager. Her primary duties include patient accounting, data entry, and scheduling. However, she is also trained to do minor repair and maintenance on hearing aids to help people on the spot if a specialist is unavailable.

DEANNA MCCOY



Deanna McCoy is a Certified Audioprosthologist, having completed a comprehensive course for upper-level education in hearing instrument fittings, surpassing all state requirements for her position. She continues required education and training on the most current technology and studies, enabling her to serve her patients with a higher standard of care. Deanna has been with Chico Hearing Aid Center for 14 years, leading the office as owner for the past eight.

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