

## Guest Commentary

# Boomers not condemned to silence

By Kristin Wells

Millions of baby boomers whose exposure to the bedlam of bombs blasting in Vietnam, the blare of hard rock and other life-long clangor are increasingly at risk for hearing loss.

Even the youngest of the baby boomers -- Americans born between 1947 and 1964 -- are approaching middle age and the consequences of decades in their high-decibel environment.

The good news, however, is that hearing loss can easily be diagnosed -- and for most people, digital hearing aids, many of which are not visible, can solve their hearing problems.

During May, Better Hearing and Speech Month, we at John C. Lincoln's North Valley Audiology, 18404 N. Tatum Blvd., worked with the Better Hearing Institute and our fellow hearing professionals across the nation to educate consumers about the need to make sure their hearing is healthy.

BHI is a national nonprofit organization that educates the public about the neglected problem of hearing loss and what can be done about it.

Many people associate hearing loss with advancing age, when in fact, hearing loss is also associated with exposure to loud noises, something that has surrounded many baby boomers since childhood.

According to BHI, two-thirds of people with hearing loss are below retirement age.

Symptoms of hearing loss include not being able to hear well in a crowded room or restaurant, having to ask friends to repeat what they are saying or not being able to hear sounds that others seem to be able to hear better.

Surveys published by BHI have found that:

- An overwhelming major-

ity -- 93 percent -- of consumers with hearing devices say the devices have improved their quality of life.

- Eighty-five percent say they are satisfied with the benefits they get from hearing aids.

- Specific improvements associated with better hearing health include more effective communications, better social life, better relationships at home and in the work place, improved emotional health, improved mental/cognitive ability and better physical health.

- Nine out of 10 respondents said their hearing aids improved communication in one-on-one situations, while more than 80 percent were satisfied by the instruments' performance in small groups and while watching television.

- Three of four respondents were satisfied with their hearing aids when outdoors, while listening to music, while participating in leisure activities, in the car, at a house of worship and in a restaurant.

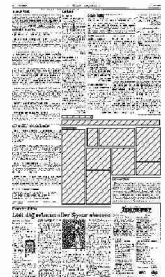
Founded in 1973 and based in Alexandria, Virginia, BHI is working to erase the stigma and end the embarrassment that prevents millions of people from seeking help for hearing loss. Their educational materials are designed to demonstrate that this is a national problem that can be solved and to promote treatment by showing the negative consequences of untreated hearing loss for millions of Americans.

I certainly agree with Dr. Sergei Kochkin, Ph.D., Executive Director of BHI, when he says "Too many people cling to the old, stubborn belief that wearing a hearing aid won't help fix their hearing problems."

We hope people, especially

baby boomers, understand that today's hearing aids work better than ever and can dramatically improve the quality of their lives.

*Editor's note: Dr. Wells is a doctor of audiology at North Valley Audiology. Call 602-494-6237.*



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