HLAA
Hearing Loss Association of America
Rochester Chapter

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Volume 40, Number 3

November 2026

Featured Presentation

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 3

NOON - 1:00 PM AT ST PAUL'S PARISH HALL AND ON ZOOM:

Sergeant Major Retired US Army Jason Richards.

"Veterans and Hearing Loss"

With November recognized as National Veteran and Military Families Month, our featured presentation will address hearing loss and the help available for our local servicemen and women.

We welcome you to join us and our special guest, Sergeant Major Retired US Army Jason Richards. He is the Veterans Outreach Program Coordinator for the VA Finger Lakes Healthcare System. Sgt. Major Richards will share stories of his 30-year career with the US Army, including a year in Iraq, his retirement, and his transition from serving soldiers for three decades to providing outreach and services to veterans in the Greater Rochester area.

Stellar Supporters Meets November 11th

By Sue Miller

Our Chapter's Stellar Supporters are all of you who generously donate your time and effort to make our chapter one of the best in the country, but do not serve on the board. We meet three times a year, the 2nd Wednesday in November, February, and May.

Please plan to attend our first Zoom meeting of this new program year on Wednesday, November 11th, from 7:00 - 8:00 p.m. One of our chapter's star techies, Dan Brooks, will be joining us to talk about Assistive Listening and Alerting devices, Apps for your phones that can help you communicate better, hearing loops and Auracast, and any other technical comments/ questions you might have. Bet this will be the fastest hour any of us have ever experienced!

Please be watching for an email from Charlie Johnstone that will include the Zoom link for this educational gathering.

Additional November Meetings and Programs

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 3

10:00 AM - 11:00 AM IN PERSON, ST PAUL'S VESTRY ROOM: HOPE Session: 'Hearing Other People's Experiences': Joe Kozelsky

Prospective, new, or experienced hearing aid users informally share their experiences, questions, and hearing loss journeys.

11:00 AM - 11:30 AM AT ST PAUL'S PARISH HALL: Conversation and light refreshments.

11:30 AM - NOON AT ST PAUL'S PARISH HALL: Chapter announcements and business meeting.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10

7:00 PM - 8:30 PM ON ZOOM: Board of Directors Meeting

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 11

7:00 PM - 8:00 PM ON ZOOM: Stellar Supporters Meeting

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 18

8:00 PM - 9:00 PM on Zoom: *Hear Together*: Kristin Bergholtz CCC/SLP./Carly Alicea Au.D/ Ph.D . For parents and caregivers of children with hearing loss. See page 2 for details.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19

10:00 am - 2:00 pm: Assistive Device Demonstration Center: Technology Team. In person. Lifespan, 1900 South Clinton Avenue. See Page 2 for details.

7:00 PM - 8:00 PM ON ZOOM: Book Club

NEXT MEETING: TUESDAY, DECEMBER 1: Origin of NTID/RIT and how it cares for its students with Dr. Gerry Buckley, NTID President Emeritus

Please check our Chapter Website `hearinglossrochester.org` for any changes

Thank you to our members who are bringing refreshments to our November meeting: Mary Chizuk, Peter Leas, Truda and Bob Slocum, and Dan Wolf.

Captioned Entertainment Around Rochester

JCC Center Stage - Tickets and information are available at www.jcccenterstage.org or (585) 461-2000. Please specify "Captioned Area". Tickets are $35-40 with discounts for JCC members, full time students and seasonal subscribers. All captioned performances are on Sundays at 2 pm. The theatre has Auracast and an FM system,

The Little - The Little Theatre offers hearing-assist options, including amplification headphones (also usable for descriptive listening) in all theaters. Theatres 1, 2, 4, and 5 have Hearing Loops, and personal captioning devices are available—ask at the box office. Open-caption screenings run on Thursdays and the first Sunday matinees when available (some films lack OC versions). Open-caption showtimes are listed at thelittle.org and on social media.

Robert F. Panara Theater, named in honor of RIT's first Deaf professor and founder of the NTID Drama Club, has a rich heritage of offering challenging, entertaining, and provocative works of theater, all created for both Deaf and hearing audiences. Information about upcoming performances are online at https://www.rit.edu/performingarts/panara-theatre#upcoming-events.

The REV (Merry-Go-Round) Theatre in Auburn uses a state-of-the-art FM Assistive Listening System, with each device equipped with its own induction loop. Learn more about their productions at therevtheatre.com.

GEVA Theatre Center - Open Captioning for patrons with hearing loss is provided during the 1st Saturday matinee and both performances of the final Wednesday of each Wilson Stage Series production, and the first Saturday matinee of each Fielding Stage Series production. When booking your seats, mention your interest in open captioning in order to secure the most advantageous view of the display on the right of the stage.

RBTL Live Theater - Open Captioning, provided by HLAA, is available for most 1 pm Sunday matinee Broadway subscription shows and select additional performances. A text display scrolls dialogue and lyrics in real time. The auditorium is Auracast enabled. Reserve caption-view seating or request captioning for other events at 585-222-5000 or mail@rbtl.org..

Roc Cinema has a hearing loop and some Saturday matinee movies are open-captioned.

OFC Creations Theatre at Winton Place has an FM system and receivers with hearing loops for T-coils.

Other Theaters - Regal Theatres, Cinemark Theaters, AMC Theaters, and Movie 10 all indicate on their websites that they have closed captioning devices available by asking at the box office. The Strand Theater in Brockport, has individual displays on goosenecks available .

Assistive Device Demo Center

Our chapter proudly sponsors the Assistive Device Demo Center, offering members and the public an opportunity to explore the latest devices designed to ease hearing loss challenges. At our demo sessions, you'll find Signaling-alerting devices, Captioned telephones, and Personal assistive listening devices, with special focus on TV listening and noisy environments. Knowledgeable chapter members will be available to answer any questions.



Join us on the 3rd Thursday of each month, October through June! The next session is **Thursday, November 19th**, from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm at Lifespan, 1900 S. Clinton Ave. Sessions are free and open to everyone. We look forward to seeing you there!

Hear Together: Parent & Caregiver Support Group on November 18th

by Carly Alicea, Au.D., Ph.D.

Hear Together is a supportive community for parents and caregivers of children with hearing loss. Sponsored by HLAA, the group offers a welcoming space to connect with others who understand the joys and challenges of raising a child who is hard of hearing or deaf.

Meetings provide time to share experiences, learn practical strategies, and explore topics such as early intervention, school supports, communication choices, advocacy, technology, and social-emotional well-being.

Whether you're new to a diagnosis or further along, Hear Together emphasizes connection and encouragement. For meeting details, visit HLAA's national event calendar or contact **kristin@canalsidespeech.com**.

Donate Your Unused Hearing Aids

You may donate your unused hearing aids to the The Finger Lakes Region Lions Hearing Foundation to be refurbished for those in need.

You may drop them off at Ontario Hearing, 2210 Monroe Ave, or bring them to a chapter meeting.

Open Door Mission Donations

The Open Door Mission appreciates your donations of gently used clothing and personal items. The needs of our unhoused and immigrant neighbors remain great. Marlene Sutliff and Bill Marshall will collect donations at the October 8 meeting. Thank you for supporting HLAA Rochester and our community.

HLAA New York State Conference

By Steve Wolfert

On October 2-4, 2026, the HLAA New York State Association – the umbrella group of all HLAA chapters in New York State – held its first State Conference since 2022.



More than 170 people from throughout New York and surrounding states – including 41 from the Rochester area – gathered in beautiful Saratoga Springs, NY. With a theme of *"Hear Well—Live Well,"* the attendees heard from renowned experts in the field of hearing loss, and was entertained with fun games, an award-winning a Capella singing group, and Billboard Chart artist Sherry Anne, who herself has hearing loss.



Included among the speakers were Rochester's own Dr. Gerry Buckley, Dr. Megan Fox and Dr. Ophir Handzel; as well as Wynne Whyman, Katherine Bouton, Shari Eberts, Dr. Jeffrey Shannon, Dr. Katrina Stidham, Dr. Tina Childress, Toni Iacolucci, David Owen, and HLAA Executive Director Barbara Kelley.

Best of all was the opportunity for everyone to greet old friends, make new ones, and enjoy a city known for its historic mansions, quaint shops and restaurants, museums, spas, mineral waters, horse racing heritage and, of course, the beautiful fall foliage.

Watch for news of future HLAA New York State conferences. Until then, thank you to everyone for attending what proved to be a memorable event!



Barbara Kelley Highlights HLAA's Legacy and Impact

By Bruce Nelson

At the New York State Association Conference in Saratoga Springs, Barbara Kelley, Executive Director of the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA), delivered an inspiring presentation celebrating the organization's history, achievements, and vision for the future. She reflected on the growth of New York's HLAA chapters from their beginnings in the 1980s to the vibrant statewide network that exists today.



A central theme of Kelley's remarks was HLAA's commitment to putting people first. She emphasized that individuals with hearing loss should be recognized not by their condition, but as people with unique talents, experiences, and aspirations. This people-centered philosophy, combined with HLAA's culture of inclusion and consistent mission, has helped the organization remain a trusted and influential voice for decades.

Kelley also highlighted HLAA's innovative partnerships, including collaborations with Hasbro's Peppa Pig brand and Lilly,Eli Lilly & Company which have helped expand awareness and connect with new audiences. These initiatives demonstrate the organization's ongoing effort to promote understanding and support for people with hearing loss in creative and meaningful ways.

Advocacy remains at the heart of HLAA's work. Kelley described the organization's leadership in shaping communication access provisions within the Americans with Disabilities Act and advancing the Communications and Video Accessibility Act. Through engagement with agencies such as the FCC and NIH, as well as policymakers on Capitol Hill, HLAA continues to ensure that the lived experiences of people with hearing loss help shape national policies and technology development. She concluded by expressing gratitude for New York's dedicated volunteers and their commitment to helping people live well with hearing loss.

Portions of articles from the HLAA NYS Conference were developed with support from AI-based writing tools to ensure accuracy and readability.

Communication Access Today and Tomorrow

By Bruce Nelson

At this year's conference, Wynne Whyman of the Center for Hearing Access delivered an engaging presentation on the future of communication access for people with hearing loss. Her central message was clear: the goal is not simply better technology, but better access to communication.



Conference attendees experienced several forms of communication access firsthand, including CART captioning, hearing loop technology, Auracast, and sign language interpretation. Whyman emphasized that these tools provide clarity, participation, and inclusion, allowing people to engage more fully in meetings, performances, worship services, and community events.

A major focus of the presentation was Auracast, the new Bluetooth broadcast audio technology that is beginning to appear in theaters, churches, transportation facilities, and public venues. While Auracast holds tremendous promise, Whyman stressed that it is still evolving. Challenges remain, including device compatibility, installation standards, and audio latency. She encouraged attendees to be patient as manufacturers and facilities continue to refine the technology.

Importantly, Whyman urged hearing aid manufacturers not to abandon telecoils. Hearing loops remain one of the most reliable and widely used assistive listening technologies available today. Her recommendation was simple: when purchasing future hearing aids or cochlear implant processors, look for devices that support both telecoils and Auracast.

The presentation also highlighted the importance of advocacy. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, facilities that provide amplified sound should also provide assistive listening access. Whyman encouraged people with hearing loss to ask for accommodations, use available systems, and report problems when access falls short.

As she concluded, communication access is not just about technology. It is about ensuring that everyone can connect, participate, and belong.

Enhancing Well-Being While Living with Hearing Loss

By Bruce Nelson

At this year's hearing loss conference, advocates and authors Shari Eberts and Katherine Bouton shared an honest and inspiring conversation about what it truly means to live well with hearing loss. Drawing on their own experiences, both speakers emphasized that hearing loss is far more than a medical condition. It is an emotional, social, and lifelong journey that requires resilience, adaptation, and self-advocacy.

Both women described years of denial and frustration before reaching acceptance. Katherine Bouton spoke about losing hearing in one ear at age 30 and delaying treatment for more than two decades, while Shari Eberts reflected on the stigma surrounding hearing loss in her family and how it shaped her early attitudes. Their stories highlighted an important message: accepting hearing loss can open the door to new opportunities, connections, and purpose.

A recurring theme was that technology alone is not enough. Hearing aids, cochlear implants, captions, and assistive listening devices are invaluable tools, but successful communication also depends on emotional acceptance and effective communication strategies. As Eberts explained, living well with hearing loss rests on three pillars: technology, self-advocacy, and a positive mindset.



The speakers also addressed listening fatigue, a very real challenge for many people with hearing loss. They encouraged attendees to practice self-care through activities such as yoga, Pilates, reading, meditation, and simply taking breaks when needed.

The session ended on a hopeful note, celebrating advances in technology, growing accessibility, and a future in which hearing loss is met with greater understanding and inclusion.

The Future of Hearing Technology: AI, Robotics, and Gene Therapy

By Bruce Nelson

Exciting advances in hearing technology are transforming the way hearing loss is treated and managed. During a recent panel discussion featuring experts in audiology, cochlear implants, and neurotology, attendees learned how artificial intelligence, robotic surgery, and gene therapy are shaping the future of hearing care.



Dr. Jeffrey Shannon highlighted the growing role of artificial intelligence (AI) in hearing aids. Modern devices now use deep neural networks to better separate speech from background noise, making conversations in challenging environments, such as busy restaurants, easier than ever. AI is also enhancing remote care, personalized hearing aid settings, auditory training programs, and new technologies such as Auracast, which will allow users to receive audio directly from public venues like theaters, houses of worship, airports, and sports arenas.

Dr. Katrina Stidman discussed robotic-assisted cochlear implant surgery, a promising advancement designed to reduce trauma during electrode insertion. Robotic systems can place implant electrodes with greater precision and consistency than manual techniques, potentially preserving more hearing and improving long-term outcomes. Early research suggests patients receiving robotic-assisted implants may achieve better speech recognition and hearing performance over time.

Looking even further ahead, Dr. Ophir Handzel explored the emerging field of gene therapy for hearing loss. Researchers have already restored hearing in children with specific genetic forms of deafness by delivering healthy genes directly into the cochlea. Although currently limited to a small number of genetic conditions, early results are encouraging, with some patients achieving near-normal hearing.

Together, these innovations signal a new era in hearing healthcare, one focused not only on amplifying sound, but on providing clearer, more natural hearing and improving quality of life for people with hearing loss.

Speak Up: The Power of Self-Advocacy

By Bruce Nelson

The final session of the conference focused on a topic that resonated strongly with attendees: self-advocacy. Speakers Dr. Tina Childress and Toni Iacolucci shared personal experiences and practical strategies for obtaining communication access and ensuring that the needs of people with hearing loss are heard and respected.



Dr. Childress, an audiologist, accessibility advocate, and late-deafened cochlear implant user, emphasized a simple but powerful message: “If you don’t tell people what you need, others will make the decision for you.” She encouraged attendees to develop an “elevator speech” that clearly explains their hearing status and preferred accommodations. She highlighted the importance of understanding available technologies, including CART captioning, speech-to-text apps, assistive listening systems, and interpreters, and stressed that organizations often want to help but need guidance on how to provide effective access.

Drawing from her own advocacy experiences, Dr. Childress described successful efforts that led to improved accessibility in theaters, cruise travel, and other public venues. She encouraged participants to document requests, communicate in writing whenever possible, provide solutions when organizations are unfamiliar with accommodations, and persist when barriers arise.



Toni Iacolucci focused on communication access in healthcare, where many people with hearing loss continue to face significant challenges. She helped introduce the Communication Access Plan (CAP), a simple tool that allows patients to document their hearing needs and accommodation preferences before medical appointments. Through personal examples, she demonstrated how submitting a CAP can improve communication and create accountability within healthcare systems.

A recurring theme throughout the session was that advocacy creates change. Whether requesting captions at a theater, access during travel, or accommodations in a medical setting, every request helps increase awareness and improve access for others. The speakers challenged attendees to take action, reminding them that even small efforts can create a ripple effect that benefits the entire hearing loss community.

The message was clear: speak up, ask for what you need, and never underestimate the impact of your voice.

Tinnitus: Why Your Brain May Be Turning Up the Volume

If you've ever heard ringing, buzzing, hissing, or other sounds that seem to come from nowhere, you're not alone. Tinnitus affects millions of people, and for some, it can be one of the most frustrating challenges associated with hearing loss. At the October HLAA Rochester meeting, Dr. Adam Sheppard and Dr. Maria Gallina from Ontario Hearing Center shared fascinating insights into what Tinnitus really is and what can be done to manage it.



One of the biggest surprises? Tinnitus is not actually created in the ear. While hearing loss often triggers Tinnitus, research shows that the sound is generated in the brain. When the ear sends reduced sound information because of hearing loss, the brain tries to compensate by increasing neural activity. Think of it as turning up the volume on a radio when a station's signal becomes weak. Unfortunately, that extra "gain" can sometimes be experienced as Tinnitus.

This helps explain why so many people with hearing loss also experience Tinnitus and why the ringing may become more noticeable when hearing aids are removed at night. By improving access to sound, hearing aids can often help calm the brain's need to overcompensate.

Dr. Sheppard also discussed research showing that carefully controlled sound therapy may reduce the abnormal neural activity associated with Tinnitus. Studies in both animal and human subjects suggest that regular exposure to low-level sound can help the auditory system become less reactive over time.

The second half of the presentation focused on a practical approach called Progressive Tinnitus Management (PTM), introduced by Dr. Maria Gallina. Developed through the Veterans Affairs healthcare system, PTM recognizes that Tinnitus affects everyone differently. For some people, it is a minor annoyance. For others, it can interfere with sleep, concentration, mood, and overall quality of life.

Rather than searching for a cure, PTM focuses on helping people regain control. Strategies may include hearing aids, sound therapy, relaxation techniques, counseling, and cognitive behavioral approaches. The goal is not necessarily to make Tinnitus disappear, but to make it matter less.

The presenters left attendees with an encouraging message: Tinnitus does not have to control your life. With the right combination of hearing care, sound strategies, and support, many people find they sleep better, worry less, and spend far less time focusing on the sounds in their heads. If Tinnitus is affecting your daily life, start the conversation with your hearing care provider. Help is available.

Dr. Sheppard has kindly provided the chapter with copies of several papers he co-authored concerning Tinnitus. You may download them via the links below:

- **Overview Auditory Gain**
  https://tinyurl.com/AuditoryGain
- **Salicylate Induced Hearing Loss and Tinnitus**
  https://tinyurl.com/SalicylateIndu
- **Meditation for Tinnitus Treatment**
  https://tinyurl.com/At-Home-Med
- **Occupation Noise Exposure**
  https://tinyurl.com/Occ-Noise
- **Acoustic Analysis of Tinnitus Sound Therapy programs**
  https://tinyurl.com/Acous-Analysis

These are all technical but he indicated that “Overview Auditory Gain"“ is the most patient friendly

Portions of this article were developed with support from AI-based writing tools to ensure accuracy and readability.

Birthdays

Happy Birthday in November to:

5 Bob Slocum
14 Don Bataille
19 Bill Marshall
20 Benjamin Augustine
23 Cindy Kellner
25 Bruce Nelson
26 Dianne Brown
27 Ron Smith

Donations

Donations in addition to membership

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It's Your Hearing Loss and Only Yours; Moving Beyond Denial

By Michelle Gross

For those people who lose their hearing early in life, or lose a good portion of their hearing suddenly, acknowledging the fact they don't hear normally comes with many feelings, depending on their situation. The people who lose their hearing early have a bit of a head start in the process of dealing with all that comes with living with a hearing loss.

Most people with hearing loss do not lose their hearing in early childhood or due to a sudden event. Most individuals lose their hearing gradually, are mostly unaware of their progressing hearing loss or deny the situation for many years.

The sad reality is for a prolonged period of time most people with hearing loss depend on others to take action to communicate. Others are asked to repeat what they've said, put up with the increased volume on the televisions, act as interpreters, and intervene when the hard of hearing person errs. This situation creates impatience and frustration and often leads to "boisterous" conversations within the family and with well-meaning friends.

What also comes with the denial of hearing loss may be less obvious...the dropping out from social situations to avoid embarrassment, either talking too much to avoid listening in a group situation, or not speaking at all, or "faking" to hide the lack of understanding. The toll paid by the hard of hearing person is often frustration with others, social isolation, and depression.

At some point one is almost forced into reality. Let's look at reality...the television *is* too loud, not *everyone* mumbles, and the sound system wherever you are is not poorly maintained or by bad luck you have the one seat located where the sound system isn't working properly.

Let's face it, *you* probably have a hearing loss, *you* are missing out, and *you* are the one who can take action to make things better. While it's true that at this time there isn't a "fix" to make your hearing normal, you *can* make the situation better.

Take action! Have your hearing tested, learn what you can do in your particular situation and connect with National HLAA and the HLAA Rochester Chapter, for information, interaction, and becoming a part of a group that really understands.





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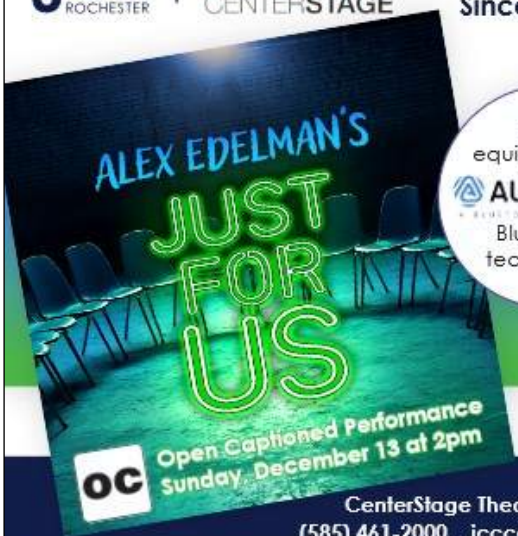
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HLAA Membership Information

Hearing Loss Association (HLAA) Rochester Chapter, Inc., a tax exempt and volunteer group, is a chapter of a national, nonprofit, nonsectarian, educational organization devoted to the welfare and interests of those who cannot hear well.

We are currently meeting in person and online via Zoom. See our website at **hearinglossrochester.org** to register for the online access.

While our primary focus is directed toward people with hearing loss, we welcome everyone to our chapter meetings whatever their hearing ability.

For more information, call

585 266 7890
or see
hearinglossrochester.org

Professional Advisors

Sue Miller, Chair

2025-2027:
Pamela Kincheloe, Ph.D.
Diana Palotas
Jason A. Richards
David Scott

2026-2028:
Aayush Kothari
William Marshall
Matthew MacDonald, AuD.
Adam Sheppard, AuD.

Consultants:
Medical - Ophir Handzel, MD
Technical - Charles Johnstone
Legal - James Vazzana, Esq.

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Newsletter
Newsletter deadline: first day of the month preceding the issue month.

Bruce & Candi Nelson, Editors
120 Cobblestone Dr.
Rochester, NY 14623
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editor@hearinglossrochester.org

HEARING LOSS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

Be Part of National HLAA

It's now easier than ever to **become a member** of HLAA's unique community of support! HLAA is the leading organization representing more than 50 million Americans with hearing loss, and empowering millions more who are at risk of developing this invisible disability.

Make a gift in any amount to help us make an impact on this growing public health crisis

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To sign up, please visit
https://www.hearingloss.org/make-an-impact/hlaa-membership

or send your donation, with your name, address, phone number, and email address (if any) to P.O. Box 736444, Chicago, IL 60673-6444

Office and general inquiries:1750 Tysons Blvd., Suite 1500, McLean, VA 22102

301.657.2248

inquiries@hearingloss.org

CHAPTER MEMBERSHIP FORM
HLAA-ROCHESTER
Membership year: July 1 - June 30

All members receive the Rochester Chapter Newsletter!

☐First-Time Member ☐Renewal

Membership Type: ☐Individual $10 ☐Family $20 ☐Corporate $50
☐Veteran $0 (Free lifetime chapter membership for veterans with hearing loss.)
Please state Branch of Service_____ *Thank you for Your Service!*

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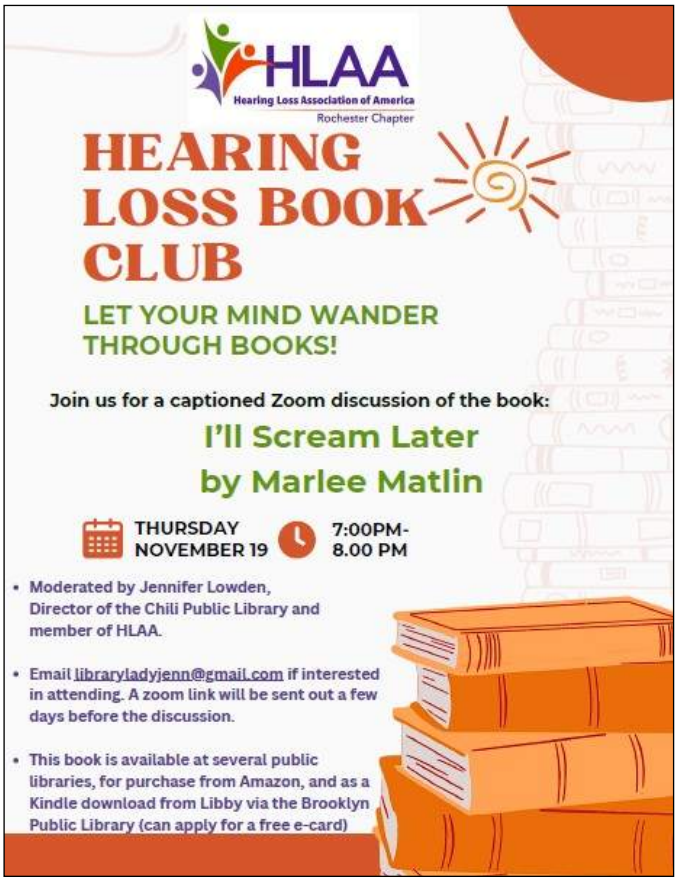
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Our Meetings are Hearing Accessible



We meet in St. Paul's Episcopal Church, East Ave. and Westminster Rd., across from the George Eastman Museum. Parking is available at the George Eastman Museum, if needed.

All meetings are audio looped, Auracast-enabled, and captioned. Our chapter meetings are also streamed on Zoom, with captioning. See our website at **hearinglossrochester.org** to sign up for access to all future meetings. Please register at least 24 hours before the first meeting you wish to attend, so that you will receive the link by email.

Everyone, with or without a hearing loss, is welcome to join our meetings online or in person.