

Lions host hearing seminar

By Scott Dalton/ sdalton@cnc.com
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Local members of the Chatham/Nauset Lions Club hear the need.

Although perhaps best known for their eyeglass donation boxes, the Lions have also been instrumental in providing hearing aids to needy folks for many years.

On Friday, the group hosted a seminar in support of the deaf/hard of hearing community at the Community Center. Joined by representatives from Partners for a Greater Voice and Self Help for the Hard of Hearing (SHHH), organizers said they hoped to bring more awareness to an issue that affects 45 million Americans.

Bob McCarthy, president of the Chatham/Nauset Lions, said people must be careful that they do not treat people with hearing impairments differently from anyone else.

"It takes work," he said, listing a sense of uneasiness as a common reaction when a hearing person encounters a hearing-impaired individual. "It's almost like listening to a distinct accent. The average deaf person can speak well ... and most have residual hearing."

Joanne Travers, president of Partners for a Greater Voice, has a vested interest in the discussion and debate surrounding the hearing-impaired community. The mother of two children with hearing loss, Travers called deafness "the invisible disability" and noted that each individual is unique.

"I don't think enough of us understand the variables," she said. "I know a little boy who can only hear high frequency sounds. Everyone is so different."

Her daughter Tori, 9, and son Matthew, 7, were each born with a degree of hearing loss. For Tori, a partial solution came in the form of cochlear implants. For Matthew, it was a behind-the-ear hearing aid. Both children speak well, as evidenced by a short computer video that Travers shared with seminar participants.

Travers also listed some of the main causes of hearing loss, including head trauma, noise pollution and congenital issues. She noted that more than 45 million Americans are affected by partial or total hearing loss, including between 7 million and 8 million children under 18. And those numbers only recognize the reported cases of hearing loss.

During a recent trip to the Dominican Republic, Travers said she identified 2,000 children in one week that had some degree of hearing loss.

Fran Richardson, a representative from the Lions Hearing Foundation, said the foundation is celebrating its 30th anniversary as a nonprofit, and works to provide refurbished and new hearing aids to those who need them. The group also offers free hearing evaluations for those unable to afford them. She noted that those familiar eyeglass drop-off boxes that are found in post offices can also be used for hearing aids. "We refurbish behind-the-ear hearing aids for adults, and purchase new aids for children," she said, adding that the foundation also purchases diagnostic equipment. For more information about the Chatham/Nauset Lions Club hearing aid program, contact Bob McCarthy at 508-432-0419 or Jim Beardsley at 508-430-1973.



