

The National Institutes of Health runs a campaign against noise-induced hearing loss, called "Wise Ears," that emphasizes basic steps like wearing earplugs when operating power tools and moderating the volume on personal listening devices. The ubiquitous music players, which send sound directly down the ear canal, are a potential problem for millions of Americans, young and old. In a recent informal study at the House Ear Institute, researchers found that the new generation of digital audio players, with their exceptional clarity, allow listeners to turn up the volume without the signal distortion that occurs with traditional analog audio. Without distortion, which serves as kind of natural volume governor, listeners may be exposed to unsafe sound levels without realizing it. In preliminary observations, the music at the eardrum topped 115 decibels. Exposure to noise that loud for more than 28 seconds per day, over time, can cause permanent damage.

Kathy Peck, who learned the hard way about the dangers of loud music, has dedicated herself to helping other musicians avoid her fate. Along with Dr. Flash Gordon, the physician from the Haight Ashbury Free Clinic who helped with her hearing loss 20 years ago, Peck cofounded Hearing Education and Awareness for Rockers (HEAR). Since its inception in 1988 (with seed money from the Who's Pete Townshend, whose hearing was also trashed by loud music), the group has helped thousands of young rockers, distributing free earplugs at clubs, concerts and music festivals, and providing free screenings by audiologists.

For more than 6 million Americans, hearing aids are the best available solution for everything from mild to profound hearing loss. Today's digital devices, like the analog instruments that preceded them, amplify sound and transmit it down the ear canal to the eardrum. But the similarities end there. Thanks to digital technologies, modern aids offer better sound quality (above). Top-of-the-line models feature "directional" or "high definition" hearing. These devices use two microphones and an algorithm to enhance sound coming from the front (the person you are talking to), while tuning down sound coming from behind (the rest of the noisy party).

Despite such encouraging technical advances, there are about 21 million people in the United States who could benefit from hearing aids, but don't use them. Many simply can't afford them. Their costs range from a few hundred dollars for a basic analog device to \$3,500 for high-end instruments, and are rarely covered by insurance. Another reason some folks eschew aids is discomfort—they simply don't like the feeling of walking around with a plugged ear canal. And even with digital technology, people can still have difficulty separating speech they want to hear from the background noise, a common hearing-aid problem. Yet another obstacle to wider use is stigma—many people associate hearing aids with aging, Slattery says, and would just as soon cup a hand behind their ear. "They're afraid to look old, but they don't mind looking dumb."

A new generation of implantable and semi-implantable hearing aids, currently being developed and tested, could solve many of these problems. Unlike conventional aids, the new devices transmit sound vibrations directly to the bones in the middle ear, bypassing the eardrum and improving speech perception. "You can amplify the higher frequencies without feedback problems," says Slattery, "and that gives a richness to the sound. It's the high frequencies that help you localize sound and hear better in noisy situations." Other pluses: no clogged ear canal and no visible sign of infirmity. But

until insurance companies start paying for hearing aids (they are under increasing pressure to do so), the \$15,000-to-\$20,000 devices—intended for those with moderate to severe hearing loss—will remain out of reach for most.

A more permanent solution to hearing loss—regenerating damaged cochlear hair cells—is the shared goal of a scattered band of researchers around the country. Unlike birds and other lower vertebrates, which can regenerate hair cells, humans and other mammals get one set, and that's it. If scientists can discover a way to grow new hair cells in humans, exciting new treatments could be devised. Already, researchers at the University of Michigan have used gene therapy to grow new hair cells in guinea pigs. At the House Ear Institute, Andrew Groves and Neil Segil are studying the embryonic development of hair cells in genetically engineered mice. If they can unravel the process, figure out how it starts and why it stops in mammals, they may eventually be able to reactivate the cells and have them make new hair cells. In a related experiment, they have managed to coax some embryonic cochlear cells in mice to restart and become hair cells. "This is new stuff," says Segil, with the calm that often masks excitement in scientific circles.

"If you are going to have a hearing loss, this is the best time to do it," says Char Sivertson, who began to lose her hearing without discernible cause when she was a teenager. Sivertson is downright enthusiastic about things like closed captioning. "It's incredible; now I'm not left out of TV," she says, and ticks off other high-tech advances, such as digital hearing aids and phones that can be "tuned" to improve the clarity of the caller's voice.

But Sivertson, an activist member of the Association of Late-Deafened Adults (ALDA), a support group, wasn't always so gung-ho. "I was in denial for years and years," she says. "I tried to pass for hearing, which was ridiculous." Sivertson was using hearing aids by the age of 24, but it was another 20 years before she fully accepted her fate. And there were some dark days in between. Every few years, her hearing would suddenly get worse. After one such drop, "I was very depressed," says Sivertson, now 57. "I wasn't exactly suicidal, but I was thinking, 'I'm not sure life is going to be very meaningful for me from this point on.'"

Sivertson faced a myriad problems while raising her two sons, Dak and Matt. When there was a school matter or some other issue to discuss, her sons tended to bypass her and go to their dad, Larry, who has normal hearing. "Kids don't want to repeat themselves and stuff like that," says Larry Sivertson. "It's up to the hearing spouse to make sure that the person with hearing loss is involved." Char Sivertson found peace of mind through her association with ALDA. Joining such a group, she says, "is the No. 1 thing you can do for yourself" if you develop hearing loss later in life.

And here's something you can do before you reach that point—learn to appreciate what you already have. Says Yale's Rabinowitz: "If you are watching your diet, if you are exercising, then protecting your hearing should be part of your lifestyle." Sounds good to us.

GRANTS UNDER THE NATIONAL FLOOD INSURANCE PROGRAM

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, on Sunday afternoon, Hurricane Dennis made landfall on Florida's Gulf Coast, causing billions of dollars in

damage, taking four lives and bringing back terrible memories of last summer's four hurricanes. Some people in north Florida were still recovering from Hurricane Ivan when Dennis struck.

I was down in Pensacola on Monday and saw the damage wrought by Dennis. People are still without power in the summer heat. Food, clean water and ice are absolutely vital right now. Many coastal areas, like the small village of St. Mark's, were deluged by water from the ten foot storm surge. Mitigation helps us to better prepare for future storms, lessens their impact and saves lives.

Last summer, when the Internal Revenue Service ruled that FEMA mitigation grants must be reported as taxable income, I worked to advance a bill ensuring they were exempt from Federal taxes. This bill was signed into law by the President on April 15. Each year, hundreds of Floridians use mitigation grants to protect their lives and property from future natural disasters. Now they know for sure that accepting a mitigation grant to flood proof their home won't result in higher taxes.

Yet even with this relief, another IRS ruling is causing problems with the flood insurance program. That's because according to the IRS, a National Flood Insurance Program, NFIP, grant must be included as income. This could make some recipients ineligible for crucial Federal assistance programs like Food Stamps, aid to dependent children and Medicaid. No one should have to choose between making their home safe from flooding and food or medicine. No other kind of emergency assistance granted by FEMA counts toward income and neither should flood mitigation grants.

I'm pleased to sign onto legislation introduced by my colleague from Florida which would prevent Federal agencies administering means-tested benefits from counting NFIP grants as income. I hope the Senate will consider this legislation quickly and provide peace of mind to Floridians and other Americans living in disaster prone areas of the country.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

CONGRATULATING MS. SHANNON MURPHY

• Mr. BUNNING. Mr. President, today I rise to congratulate Ms. Shannon Murphy of Louisville, KY. Ms. Murphy recently completed the 2004-2005 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Teacher Fellowship Program.

The Museum Teacher Fellowship Program develops a national corps of skilled secondary school educators who will serve as leaders in Holocaust education in their schools, their communities, and their professional organizations. In August of 2004, Ms. Murphy participated in a summer institute at the Museum designed to immerse

teachers in advanced historical and pedagogical issues connected to the Holocaust.

It is truly an honor to have Ms. Murphy join the other 185 Museum Teacher Fellows who work throughout the country to provide teachers and communities with opportunities to learn about the Holocaust and the ongoing threats of genocide in the world today. I heartily applaud Ms. Murphy's hard work and achievements.●

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE STOLAR RESEARCH CORP.

● Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, I would like to recognize the achievements of the Stolar Research Corp. of Raton, NM. Stolar's drill string radar was recently selected by R&D magazine as one of the 100 most technologically significant products introduced into the marketplace this year.

The drill string radar attaches to systems that drill for natural resources. It can identify geological formations, locate the position of oil and gas deposits, and determine the thickness of coal seams. The use of the drill string radar will permit missed oil and gas reserves to be cost effectively and easily located. I have every expectation this capability will allow us to more efficiently utilize the resources we have. This ability will lessen our dependence upon foreign sources of energy, which is vital to our economic and strategic interest.

I would also like to commend Dr. Larry Stolarczyk, founder and president of Stolar Research Corp. His accomplishments and commitment to his hometown of Raton are an example to all New Mexicans.

This is the fourth industry award Stolar has received and I believe it will not be the last. I am very proud of Stolar's achievements. I congratulate them and encourage them to keep up the good work.●

60TH ANNIVERSARY OF WHITE SANDS MISSILE RANGE

● Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, I would like to recognize the central role White Sands Missile Range, WSMR, has played in the defense of our Nation and our exploration of space, as we commemorate its establishment 60 years ago.

I would also like to honor the men and women who have served and worked at White Sands. It is due to their hard work and dedication that White Sands has been, and remains a shining example of American scientific and technological innovation.

On July 9, 1945, White Sands Missile Range was officially established. One week later, its place in history was assured with the detonation of the world's first atomic device at the Trinity site. This would prove a pivotal moment in the final defeat of the Japanese Empire and the course of world history. The Trinity test was to be the

first of many historical achievements that will forever be linked to White Sands.

At White Sands the technology was developed and matured that would propel the United States into space and to the Moon. Beginning with the reverse engineering and testing of captured German V2 rockets at the end of the Second World War, a base of knowledge was created there that would lead directly to the development of the Redstone rocket program and every rocket produced in the United States since. It was a Redstone Rocket which launched the first U.S. astronaut, Alan Shephard, into space on May 5, 1961. For these achievements, White Sands is often referred to as the "Birthplace of the Race to Space."

White Sands continues its close connection to the space program today as a space harbor serving as the backup landing facility for the space shuttle. It also serves as the primary training area for NASA space shuttle pilots flying practice approaches and landings in the shuttle-training aircraft.

Over the last 60 years, White Sands Missile Range's contribution to the security of the United States has been significant. Most of the missile systems used by the U.S. military have been tested at WSMR. Like America's first guided anti-aircraft missile the Nike Ajax and the Patriot missile system made famous during the first gulf war, the missile systems tested at White Sands have played an important role in ensuring the technological superiority of the Armed Forces throughout the last six decades.

Today, White Sands Missile Range continues its long tradition of excellence as a testing and development center for new technologies and is the largest military facility in the United States. I would like to thank the men and women, past and present, who have made White Sands a source of national pride. I have no doubt the work done at White Sands will continue to contribute to the national security of the United States and further the scientific achievements of our Nation.●

GOLD STAR WIVES OF AMERICA

● Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to an organization that has answered the call of duty on behalf of our soldiers and their families for the last 60 years, the Gold Star Wives of America, Inc. On July 19th, representatives of all the Gold Star Wives chapters will gather in Orlando, FL, to commemorate their 60th Anniversary and I ask every American to join me in thanking these citizen soldiers for their tireless work on behalf of military families across this country.

While we as a Nation celebrate and honor the service of our soldiers, it is organizations such as the Gold-Star Wives that remind us that every soldier is a sibling, a parent, someone's child, a spouse. They also remind us

that our national obligation is not only to the soldier in the field but to the family a fallen soldier leaves behind.

Prior to World War II, many military widows and their families did not have a strong voice to advocate on their behalf. All of that changed in New York when 23-year-old Marie Jordan, whose husband Edward died in Germany, collected women's names as they appeared in military obituaries and invited a small group over for coffee. Once together, the assembled widows realized that their concerns were many, that their issues were common amongst many military widows, and that there was not an organization charged with advocating on their behalf. They set about addressing these three concerns and in the process created the Gold Star Wives of America with a simple but profound mission: to honor those who died in the service of their country and assist those left behind.

The meetings continued and grew throughout New York. In April of 1945, our country lost the President. From the sorrow of that loss came a member who would have a lasting and dramatic effect on the group's profile, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. Through Mrs. Roosevelt's weekly columns and public profile, the visibility of the Gold Star Wives increased, as did their impact and membership. That early coffee gathering evolved into their one and only annual fundraiser, a "Stay-at-Home Tea" to which members are encouraged to donate amounts as small as \$10 and \$15.

Initially the activities were local, such as arranging camping trips for the children of lost soldiers and volunteering at veterans hospitals. As membership grew so did the scope of the young organization's focus, which soon incorporated organizational support for memorial projects, helping coordinate Veterans and Memorial Days programs and speaking out in public forums on behalf of widowed military wives.

And the work continues today. Tiffany Petty, 25, of Inkom, ID, was widowed in December 2003 when her husband, Army PFC Jerrick M. Petty, was killed while guarding a gas station in Iraq. Along with other members of the Gold Star Wives, Tiffany appeared before the Senate and communicated in strong, heartfelt terms the need to increase death benefits for survivors and remove the bureaucratic obstacles grieving families face in accessing benefits.

On July 19, the mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters that comprise the membership of the Gold Star Wives will convene in Florida. A central part of this 60th anniversary celebration will be a tribute to the group's founder now known as Marie Jordan Speer. Along with the Massachusetts delegation, I am proud to stand with all of these inspiring women as they pay tribute to a patriot and citizen soldier who has had an immeasurable impact on how this nation treats military families.