

Back in December 2011 the publishers of THE HEARING REVIEW initiated a BEST OF 2011 Hearing Healthcare Professionals program to recognize the Audiologists who exemplify quality hearing care in the nation! Audiologists that “go above and beyond” the call of duty to serve the needs of people with hearing impairment. Dr. Lori Trentacoste, Au D and Island Better Hearing were selected for this prestigious award as one of the Best Audiologist and Audiology Practices in the nation! In December 2012 Dr. Lori Trentacoste, Au D and Island Better Hearing were featured in a one page article and again nominated for this award. In December 2013 THE HEARING REVIEW again nominated Lori and Island Better Hearing as one of the BEST Audiologist in the country and was featured in a 2 page article. Dr. Lori Trentacoste and Island Better Hearing was the only Audiologist nominated three times for three consecutive years!



Lori Trentacoste, AuD

## More HeART Than Science

Lori Trentacoste, AuD, FAAA, CCC-A, appreciates the art of audiology, but it's her dedication to *science* that provides remarkable accuracy when verifying and validating hearing instruments. Through it all, her heart leads the way, spurring her to work her hardest and make sure each patient's needs are met.

Using techniques that match today's advanced 21st century technology, Trentacoste is able to ensure that patients at Island Better Hearing (IBH), Melville, NY, obtain the best fit for the best result. It's not the easiest route, but Dr Trentacoste is convinced that patients' real-world success is directly related to evidence-based practice protocols that aid both selection and fitting of hearing aids.

The verification element used at the Long Island-based practice is essentially a device-centric process. “We ensure that the device meets a set of precise measurement of responses and amplification at specific frequencies,” explains Trentacoste, owner of IBH's two locations in Melville and Huntington. “This is why we use the Real Ear Verifit Analyzer.”

The validation part of the equation is a patient-centered process in which Trentacoste measures the extent to which treatment goals have been achieved—as perceived by patients in the real world. Coupled with the subjective patient reactions, verification testing ensures that patients are getting the best results from the hearing aid.

### A MATTER OF PHILOSOPHY

Patients at Island Better Hearing receive expert care from Trentacoste and Tara Mazzone, AuD, CCC-A, with both splitting time between Huntington and Melville as necessary. Mazzone, Trentacoste, and all the staff members at the practice (started by Trentacoste's father more than 40 years ago) take pride in their patient-centered focus, while disdaining the “dispense-and-go” business model.

Even well-meaning audiologists can be tempted to rely too heavily on expensive technology, while neglecting crucial aspects of fitting and circuit programming. In one recent case, a 70-year-old retired New York firefighter came to IBH after a less-than-successful 1-year stint with a pricey set of hearing aids.

“This retired fire captain came to us at a time when he was not consistently wearing his hearing aids, and he was becoming more and more socially reclusive,” explains Trentacoste. “We did testing in the sound room, otoacoustic emission testing, middle ear function testing, and otoscopy. He presented with moderate-to-severe sensory hearing loss, with reasonably good speech recognition scores under earphone in the sound booth.”

After all these tests without mechanical help, the hearing aids came on for an additional round of validation testing. As it turned out, speech recognition scores were actually 30% poorer with hearing aids on—a result that showed he was likely getting little benefit from the fitting and/or circuit programming.

“We ended up doing an objective test with Real Ear measurement and speech mapping so that we could determine what those hearing aids were actually giving him at the eardrum using a probe microphone in the ear canal,” explains Trentacoste. “I made adjustments on the hearing aid settings using the software and still he did not get much change. Eventually, we kept the hearing aids that he had, but we changed the earmolds so that we could change the input from the receiver mold for better resonance in his ear canal. That increased the frequency and improved speech recognition.”

New earmolds ultimately added up to 30% better performance, a percentage jump that made a difference in his life. “He probably would have left those hearing aids in the drawer,” says Trentacoste, “but we were able to turn it around and get him some benefit.”

Patients who have been unsuccessful with their current hearing aids or have returned hearing aids from other facilities in the past often find themselves at Island Better Hearing, and staff members at the venerable practice see these situations as opportunities to help. “New patients come into our office and are often times feeling negative about the benefits of technology,” says Trentacoste. “We explain how we are going to set goals and provide options that will maximize their hearing potential. That is something we always do as a matter of course so that we come up with a treatment plan specific to each individual.”

Rigorous testing in the test booth helps Trentacoste determine which hearing aid works best for patients, and which fit yields

the best sound quality. While acknowledging that some hearing aids are better than others, Drs Trentacoste and Mazzone do not play favorites, instead opting for a “whatever works for the patient” philosophy and carrying all major brands, such as Lyric, Phonak, Widex, Oticon, ReSound, and Starkey.

While “buying power” may be slightly compromised by the product diversity, it comes down to what is best for patients. “We sell most every major brand of hearing aid,” reveals Trentacoste. “We may pay more by offering a greater number of choices, but through testing and validation we can ensure the best results. Not one brand of hearing aid will provide the best fit for every patient's hearing loss.”

The search for that perfect solution has led to a greater number of custom-made products that are molded to fit inside the ear canal (IIC, CIC, and ITC style hearing aids). Manufacturers' representatives have stated that the percentage of custom products dispensed at IBH is significantly higher than in other practices.

Over the years, IBH has specialized in fitting a greater number of custom products largely due to the validation and verification model they have adopted. With the advent of smaller, wireless, behind-the-ear (BTE) products, they are having just as much success in light of the wireless features and accessories available.

“Receiver in the canal [RIC] have also become popular, because they can be quicker to fit than custom products,” says Trentacoste, “and can be fitted at the initial appointment. But again, we have specialized in fitting the more difficult, custom, in-the-ear products.”

After performing testing, Trentacoste may recommend testing using a series of standard and high frequency words and sentences to determine patients' ability to understand, as in a conversation in quiet or in noise. “We will also give patients several words/sentences to repeat,” she explains. “The results will help us determine their ability to understand speech, and the benefit hearing aids may provide in various listening situations. Because the patient is part of the process, they can experience first-hand the potential benefit of hearing aids.”

Tympanometry and otoacoustic emissions (OAEs) are other forms of testing provided. It all adds up to a level of excellence that medical professionals in the highly competitive Long Island area have come to respect. These same professionals regularly send patients to IBH for diagnostic testing, or for its complete line of digital hearing aids that come with comprehensive service and repair.

The range of services with the devices includes: 45-day trial on all new hearing aids; 2-3 year warranty; loss and damage insurance; quarterly cleanings and adjustments; yearly hearing instrument evaluation; and free batteries for the life of the hearing aid. Daily walk-in hours are available to accommodate patient needs.

In addition to dispensing hearing aids, IBH professionals assist with recommendations regarding other devices to help patients hear better in many conditions that otherwise would be difficult. With the advent of wireless technology, there are many accessories that can be joined with the hearing aids to improve patients' experience with cell and land line phones, and with television. “We

also custom fit water-protection swimplugs for patients prone to infection,” says Trentacoste, “as well as sound protection earplugs for musicians, hunters, and others who are regularly exposed to damaging sound levels.”

### A TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE

Started by Trentacoste's father, Bob, a licensed hearing aid dispenser and optician in the late 1960s, Island Better Hearing has maintained a community presence that continues to generate sizable word of mouth referrals.

Lori Trentacoste worked at the practice starting in 1986, ultimately taking over as sole owner a dozen years later in 1998. In those years spent learning the ropes, she cultivated a goal-oriented methodology and patient-first philosophy, both approaches that only broadened the appeal of IBH—which sees all ages from infants to 100 years old.

“Our goal is not just to sell hearing aids, but to rehabilitate hearing loss in any way that we need to,” enthuses Trentacoste. “We work with school districts training and in-servicing staff, and employ an educational audiologist who not only works directly with our contracted districts, but performs Central Auditory Processing Evaluations in the office. We do education as well as rehabilitation.”

The deep roots in the community mean that IBH has an unusually large number of established clients. New faces stream in naturally as a result of word of mouth, and Trentacoste can take a low-stress approach to the business side knowing that excellence will breed success.

“I don't spend a lot of time looking at other practices,” says Trentacoste. “I just try to do better than the day before, and I'm always looking to improve—whether it's through seminars, new equipment, or improving my office.”

IBH consistently makes capital improvements to acquire the best testing and fitting equipment. Recently, they made better use of existing space by adding another diagnostic test suite, complete with state-of-the-art equipment to include a second Verefit Real Ear analyzer, and touch-screen technology. Ultimately, providing patients with the best care is what IBH consistently strives to do. ■



Lori Trentacoste, AuD, FAAA, CCC-A  
Island Better Hearing  
1-03 Schwab Road  
Clock Tower Plaza  
Melville, NY 11747  
Phone: 631-271-1018  
www.islandbetterhearing.com