

Help for hearing group provides advocacy, awareness

By CLIFF WELLS

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CORNER BROOK Myrtle Barrett and Brian Marshall know hearing loss is an individual experience, but it doesn't have to be an isolating one.

Barrett is the president of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association — Newfoundland and Labrador (CHHA-NL), while Marshall is a director of the organization.

While she had progressive hearing loss in her teenage years, Barrett lost her hearing completely as a result of a viral infection later in life. She said that can be a very traumatic experience and the professional social worker — a job built on communication — felt she hit “rock bottom” so there was nowhere to go.

“I didn't really have anywhere else to go but up. I decided that I have a choice, I can allow this to own me or I can fight back. I learned about every communications strategy, every bit of technology that was out there — anything that could help me reach my maximum potential.”

Marshall has Meniere's disease in his left ear, which usually causes loss of hearing in one ear and it affects all of the ear so balance is affected as well. Each attack leaves him with less hearing in the affected ear and off balance for the duration of the

attack.

He was self-employed until he was forced to go on a disability pension.

He said it can take awhile to be diagnosed and the investigation usually includes looking for tumours which is stressful.

“The great thing about the support group and the diagnosis is it's not life-threatening,” said Marshall. “It's

something you can live with. If you don't let it get the best of you, you go in with the attitude that this is not going to get the best of you and you adapt and go on with your life. You just roll with it.

The group is a vehicle for promoting awareness, advocacy, providing education on hearing loss for people in the province.

Living With Hearing Loss is a workshop the group is presenting at Sir Wilfred Grenfell College in AS 378 starting at 10 a.m.

“What we hope to do in that workshop is alert people to communications strategies, coping strategies,



Myrtle Barrett, left, and Brian Marshall are helping present the Living With Hearing Loss workshop today

— Star Photo by Cliff Wells

technical devices that are available to make life more accessible in home, work and in the community,” said Barrett. “Right now our main concern is hearing loss is the third most common chronic disability in Canada.”

“Research is showing hearing loss is on the rise. Right now, one of the leading causes of hearing loss is noise — industrial and recreational. So we have to send a strong message to the young people that they have to turn down the volume to protect their hearing.”

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