

AMERICA'S HEALTHIEST HOMETOWN

A weekly report on The Villages' efforts to become "America's Healthiest Hometown" compiled by Daily Sun Ombudsman **Larry D. Croom**
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For more information on audiology, contact The Villages Health at 352-674-1700. For general information, visit the website at thevillageshealth.com.

Did you know?

Dr. Tressie Waldo, an audiologist with The Villages Health and 20-year Air Force veteran, once saw Haley's Comet from the cockpit of a C-130 transport plane.

The Villages

Q&A with Dr. Tressie Waldo

Position: Audiologist
Age: 47
Undergraduate: University of South Alabama
Master's degree: University of South Alabama
Doctorate: Arizona School of Health Sciences
Certified: American Board of Audiology
Military service: Air Force (20 years)

Why did you become an audiologist?

I started off in speech pathology and our program at the undergraduate level required that we had to do three semesters of speech language therapy. I realized I hated speech language therapy. Fortunately, at the undergraduate level, audiology was the same. So I just had to change my major for the master's degree. I tried the audiology class and I enjoyed that. So I said, 'OK, I can do audiology forever.' I'm glad I did.

Why did you go into the Air Force to practice as an audiologist?

I took a pay raise and got benefits by going into the Air Force. And the breadth of experience. They sent me to their largest medical center. I was doing everything that was possible in the field of audiology at that time.

What would you say to somebody who's thinking about a military career in audiology?

If you want to have the opportunity to explore all aspects of audiology, then the military is a really good way to do that. You can go to the large medical centers and work with your ear, nose and throat physicians. But then you have the opportunity to also have the industrial exposure to working with the noise-exposed.

What is your favorite thing about being an audiologist?

Helping people hear better and preventing hearing loss for people who are around loud noise exposure, whether it's a job or a hobby that exposes them to loud noise. I want them to be aware that there is something that they can do to prevent that loud noise from causing hearing loss. We can't prevent all hearing losses. But from loud noise, definitely, it's 100 percent preventable if we do the right things.

Why is it important to see a certified audiologist?

We get more of a clinical perspective on the evaluations. It's not just do you or don't you need hearing aids. It's do you need medical intervention. Do you have a hole in your ear drum and you need to go see your ear, nose and throat doctor about it. Do you have an ear infection that needs to be treated? Do we need to counsel you that your noisy hobby might be increasing your hearing loss? What other preventative strategies you might need besides hearing aids to help you out.

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George Horsford / Daily Sun

Dr. Al Turri, right, director of audiology for The Villages Health, administers a hearing test to Villager Jim Scarlett at Colony Care Center recently. Scarlett, of the Village of Chatham, said he never had been able to hear out of his left ear before seeing Turri.

LABOR OF LOVE

Audiologists strive to change Villagers' lives by improving their hearing

BY LARRY D. CROOM / DAILY SUN OMBUDSMAN

THE VILLAGES
Dr. Al Turri will never forget the day he discovered his true calling.
The director of audiology for The Villages Health had already been accepted into two graduate programs for speech pathology when he was sent to observe audiology clinics as part of his requirements.

"I saw somebody get turned on with hearing aids for the first time in two different clinics and I got goose bumps," he recalled. "I said, 'wow, this is for me.' It's been 12 years and I've never felt like I went to work a day in my life."

Turri and Dr. Tressie Waldo, a 20-year Air Force veteran who boasts an extensive background in hearing-loss prevention, treat patients who are dealing with issues such as hearing loss or dizziness. They work alongside the primary care physicians at The Villages Health facilities in Florida's Friendliest Hometown and Belleview.

"There's really a built-in trust by having your primary care doctor right down the hall," said Waldo, who also was studying speech pathology in college before switching to audiology. "They trust us, so therefore the patient is more willing to trust us. We're here to help you in the same way that your doctor is here to help you."

Waldo said there are

many reasons that patients with hearing issues should see an audiologist. And, she added, it's very important to establish hearing baselines.

"We'll monitor you every year," she said. "And not just is your hearing decreasing, but is your speech understanding decreasing as well – that brain-ear connection. Or is the brain still understanding the speech input that's provided by the inner ear. That's one of the big things that we do look for every single year."

If there is a decrease in that baseline, Waldo said it's important for the patients to consider a variety of different solutions, including hearing aids if they are warranted.

"I had a patient recently that her hearing loss was really, really mild, but she was really motivated to give them a try," Waldo said. "And then you have those who have more hearing losses and the spouse may force them to wear the hearing aid. But they're just not

ready, so they become an in-the-drawer hearing aid, which is really not beneficial to anyone."

Turri, who also served four years in the National Guard, said there's really nothing more rewarding than getting hearing aids programmed just right and watching what happens next between the patient and their friends or family members.

"They start having a conversation and nobody's yelling," he said. "Nobody's leaning in. Nobody's saying, 'what?' The patient isn't yelling anymore because they can hear themselves. It's the coolest thing."

Turri pointed out that only about one in four patients will actually need hearing aids. For those who don't or aren't quite ready, he said, there are several strategies worth trying, such as sitting at a table in a restaurant with your back to the wall or at the head of the table so everyone has to turn toward you when addressing you. He said it's also helpful to turn down the television or radio volume when talking to someone with hearing loss, as well as getting their attention before speaking to them.

"If you and I were just sitting here and watching the game or something, instead of blurring something out I'd say, 'Hey did you see that? Did you see what number 92 did?'" Turri said. "You know, get your attention first and then ask the question. That solves those mild hearing losses."

Coming April 6

■ Villages Health doctors share thoughts on the importance of having audiologists onboard

■ Audiologists say it's extremely important to be a part of The Villages Health's primary care philosophy

Waldo said another huge advantage to seeking treatment from audiologists is that they're trained to help patients who are suffering from conditions such as dizziness or vertigo.

"If you put your head in a certain position and the room starts spinning on you, there's certain tests that we can use to evaluate that," she said. "If those are positive, then we'll do the treatment on you and hopefully that works."

Turri said there's no doubt that every patient he and Waldo see are quite different. But, he added, listening to each one and then providing the right kind of treatment really is the key to success.

"If you treat your patients like your mom or your dad, it's easy to do the right thing," he said. "The technology available is definitely there, but if you don't use the right technology for the right patient, you don't get it right. And that's just really sad."

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Q&A with Dr. Al Turri

Position: Director of Audiology
Age: 47
Undergraduate: University of South Florida
Master's degree: University of South Florida
Doctorate: Salus University (Pennsylvania)
Certified: American Board of Audiology
Military service: Army National Guard (4 years)

Why did you become an audiologist?

When I was deciding what I was going to do for a living, one of the professors I had in a speech pathology program I was doing made me take an audiology class. He made us pick three different practice settings. In two of those three, they were fitting patients with hearing aids. I'll never forget that rush, that goose-bump feeling. The hair was rising up on my arm. The patients were hearing stuff they haven't heard and they just got ignited. It doesn't happen with every patient, but there are those cases where you see them tearing up and I start to tear up and the wife tears up. Or they come back at their first follow-up and say, "Oh my goodness, I heard my granddaughter on the phone."

What is your favorite thing about being an audiologist?

On the patient side, I get to help people hear better. I get to pull out their ear wax. I get to get rid of their dizziness with a simple eight-minute procedure when they've got a certain form of vertigo. I'm making people's quality of life better and getting them connected to the world. I also get to hire audiologists. I get to buy equipment and determine what type of technology we use as a company. I get to make the decisions that guide this company down the road of helping patients with their hearing health care. It's not only going to change the lives of the Villagers, it's going to be the model for the rest of the world.

You were in the National Guard for four years. Would you recommend the military to young adults today?

I think if everybody had to do a year or two, it would be a wonderful thing for this country and for young people growing up. Granted, maybe I was different than a lot of kids. Maybe not everybody needs that to grow up. But I know it changed my life and it really focused me. It made me detail-oriented and responsible in a lot of ways.

What is the biggest thing you took away from your military experience?

The attention to detail, discipline, schedule and the camaraderie. I remember being at boot camp and infantry training. You really mold and blend with those guys. You kind of unite, and that was some of the closest ties that I've had in a short period of time.