

# Reaching out, helping people launches new avenues for Ann Pickart

by Maggie Sales

Imagine a world where Mozart's symphonies were a mere thrumming and basic conversation, an awkward struggle to decipher words from gestures, context, or the motion of the speaker's mouth. From the soft chirp of a songbird to the slight scratch of the pen as it glides across the paper, the simplest sounds that most take for granted are the very ones that are welcomed so gratefully by those who have experienced hearing loss and then rediscovered it through the technology of hearing aids.

With a personal commitment and determination to help those who have experienced hearing loss, Ann Pickart set out on a mission to establish a business that would reach out to people in a caring and very personalized way. More than a decade later, her entrepreneurial adventure has expanded in ways that she had never imagined.

"We choose what's best for our life," noted Ann, who literally packed up her things at the hearing aid company where she had worked for more than two years and drove to the nearest town outside of her current contract area. "I picked up a newspaper at a gas station and began looking for rental space. I ended up getting lost and drove into a lot to turn around."

It was there that she encountered a gentleman who had a small office available. Over the weekend, she bought furniture and supplies and set up office in Plymouth, opening her doors for clients



**Ann Pickart works on a hearing aid in her offices in Fond du Lac, at 481 E. Division St. She has a personal commitment to help those who have experienced hearing loss.**

that following Monday. Through newspaper advertisements, direct mail, and a good reputation built through personalized service and outreach programs, her new business blossomed and grew so quickly that within three years, she was able to open a second office in Fond du Lac.

"I was a single mom, determined, and full of energy," said Ann. "I wanted a place for clients to feel comfortable, and I didn't want any high pressured sales. My goal is to look at the problem, come up with the best solution for the clients, and then let them choose what's best

for their own life."

With a bachelor's degree in communicative disorders, audiology and speech pathology from UW-Oshkosh, Ann used her experience and personal philosophy to guide her in making choices for her life and business. While marketing is an integral part of a successful business, Ann's natural compassion and understanding of the individual needs of the clients drives her to find a balance.

"It's amazing to see the transformation in people's lives. Hearing loss can cause anxiety, depression, and so many other things. It's frustrating for people.

They stop doing the things that they usually enjoyed. They don't go out with friends. Little by little, so many simply stop living the active and happy lives that they used to."

She adds, "Hearing aids will allow them to get back to living – back to life and enjoying it. The greatest reward is seeing them thrive again, getting involved in life again. It's an incredible feeling to know that I can help someone to do that."

Serving clients from age three to elderly, Pickart Hearing recently ranked very high in a survey and market analysis that examined the demographic and geographic components of similar businesses. Ann's business has not only thrived, it has touched the lives of people of all ages and walks of life.

"I'm very passionate about what I do," admitted Ann, who sometimes finds herself struggling to balance

business responsibilities with client consultations. "Some of our clients are young, active, and constantly on the move, so they require a more sophisticated device to allow them to do all of the things they want to do. Others are elderly, who are less active. We look at all aspects and then suggest solutions.

We need to offer a high quality, low cost product so that

clients are getting top-notch technology, but not paying so much for it."

That's no easy task with rising costs, cutbacks, and economic uncertainty, but with in-house construction and customization, Ann's hearing aids cost 50-75 percent less than most others offered through larger companies and manufacturers.

"God works in mysterious ways," explained Ann, whose husband, Chris Lisko, builds and repairs the hearing aids in their Fond du Lac laboratory located next to the office at 481 E. Division St.

"Three years ago, we met a gentleman who had been in the hearing aid business for a long time. He asked me why I didn't make my own hearing aids, and then offered to train my husband." He then was trained by a leading manufacturer of hearing aids.

Having worked as a cabinet builder in the construction industry for many years, Chris's natural

talents blended well with the process of molding and building the acrylic shell, which is then fitted with the electronic components, the only portion of the hearing aids that is purchased from a manufacturer. It was a perfect fit for the company.

"By the time he returned home, I already had orders waiting for him."

With state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment, impressions are taken of each ear, from which reverse castings provide a model for molding a customized fit. After each one is designed to fit the individual ear, the internal circuits are added, followed by personal consultations for fitting and use.

With six full-time staff, including a doctor of audiology in Fond du Lac and a licensed hearing specialist in Plymouth, as well as just opening an office in Appleton with plans for a fourth office in the near future, Ann's business has been successful not only due to hard work and a commitment to clients, but also because of her personal mission to "help the community to hear better, one person at a time." For Ann, it is not a matter of business, but rather, a chance to make a difference.

"I saw a way to do something better, and I decided to do it."

According to Ann, one in four people over the age of 65 experience hearing loss, and young people or adults who are either born with it or experience it later in life can have the chance to enjoy their lives again or even hear for the first time with hearing aids. In a world filled with beautiful music, children's voices, and nature's melodies, hearing the words of a loved one or the nightly song of the cricket can be wonderfully magical.



**Ann takes a look at the ear of Dr. Katherine Tobin, who serves in the Fond du lac office of Pickart Hearing Service, LLC. Ann is the owner of the company while Tobin is a doctor of audiology and has a Certificate of Clinical Competence in audiology.**

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