

NATION & WORLD / B1  
**SEIZED WEAPONS**

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**UCSB CENTER ALAN WILLIAMS EARNS BIG WEST CONFERENCE PLAYER OF THE YEAR AWARD**



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**EAR ADVANCE**

New technology offers improved relief to those suffering from hearing loss

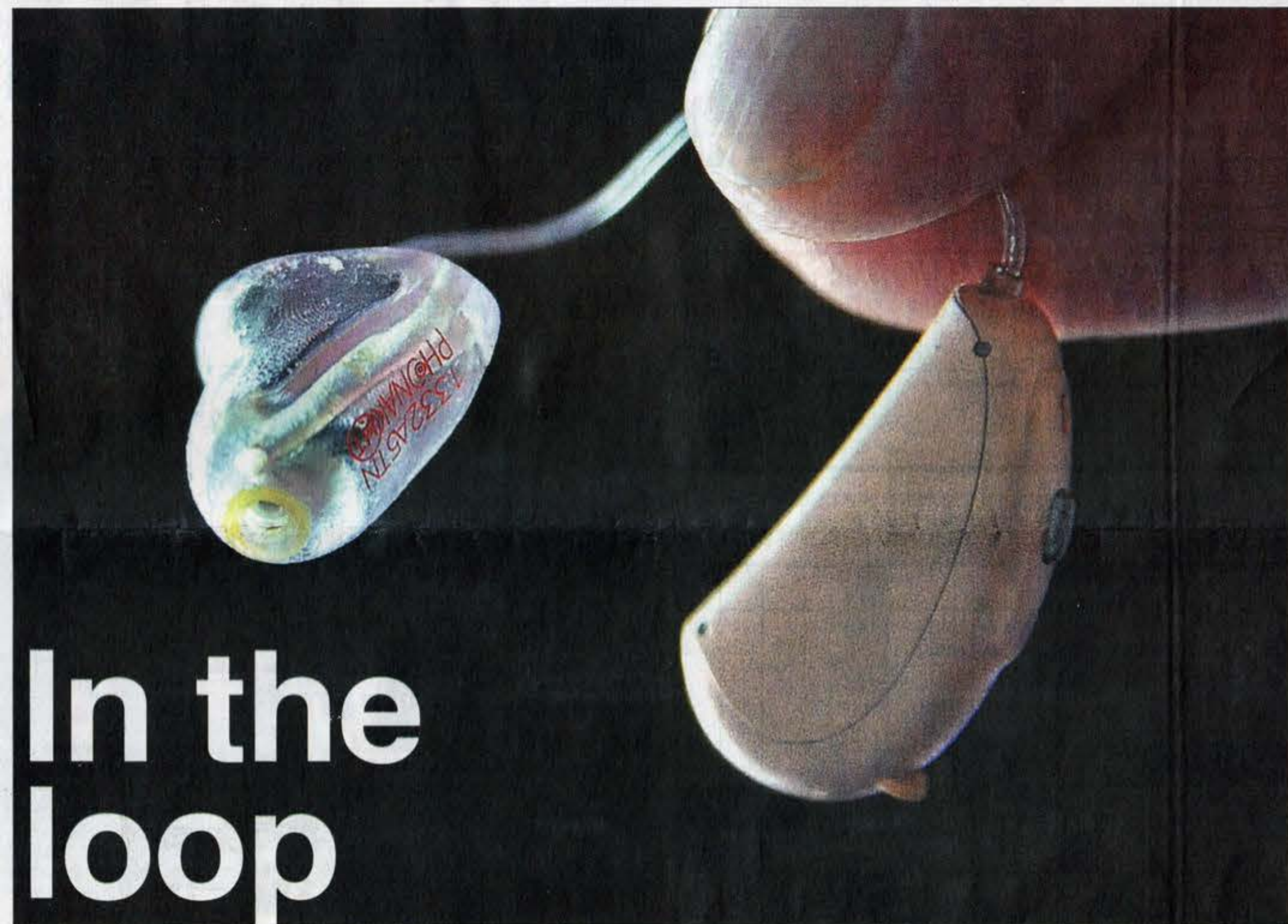
# SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS



OUR 158TH YEAR

TUESDAY, MARCH 11, 2014

75¢



## In the loop

New technology helps those with hearing loss

Those who have to rely on hearing aids, above, have exciting new technology to help them cope with their disability. It's called the Hearing Loop, a system that takes sound straight from the source and delivers it right into the listener's hearing without extraneous noise or blurring.

By MARILYN MCMAHON  
NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER

For Dennis Peterson, 72, it was the sound of machine-gun fire from two feet away for an hour and a half while he was serving in Vietnam as a platoon commander in the Marines.

For Cherie Alvarez, 48, the cause was hereditary on her mother's side of the family. Both suffer from severe hearing loss. "Big time," emphasizes Mr. Peterson, who wears two hearing aids. "I had 1 percent hearing in my left ear and 14 percent in my right ear until I had Cochlear implants for both ears in 2012," added Ms. Alvarez.

A Cochlear implant is a small, complex electronic device that can help to provide a sense of sound to a person who is profoundly deaf or severely hard-of-hearing. The implant consists of an external portion that sits behind the ear and a second portion that is surgically placed under the skin.

Now, Ms. Alvarez and Mr. Peterson are excited about a new technology that will help them cope even better with their disability.

It's called the Hearing Loop, a system that takes sound straight from the source and delivers it right into the listeners' hearing without extraneous noise or blurring. To them, it sounds like the speaker is right in their head.

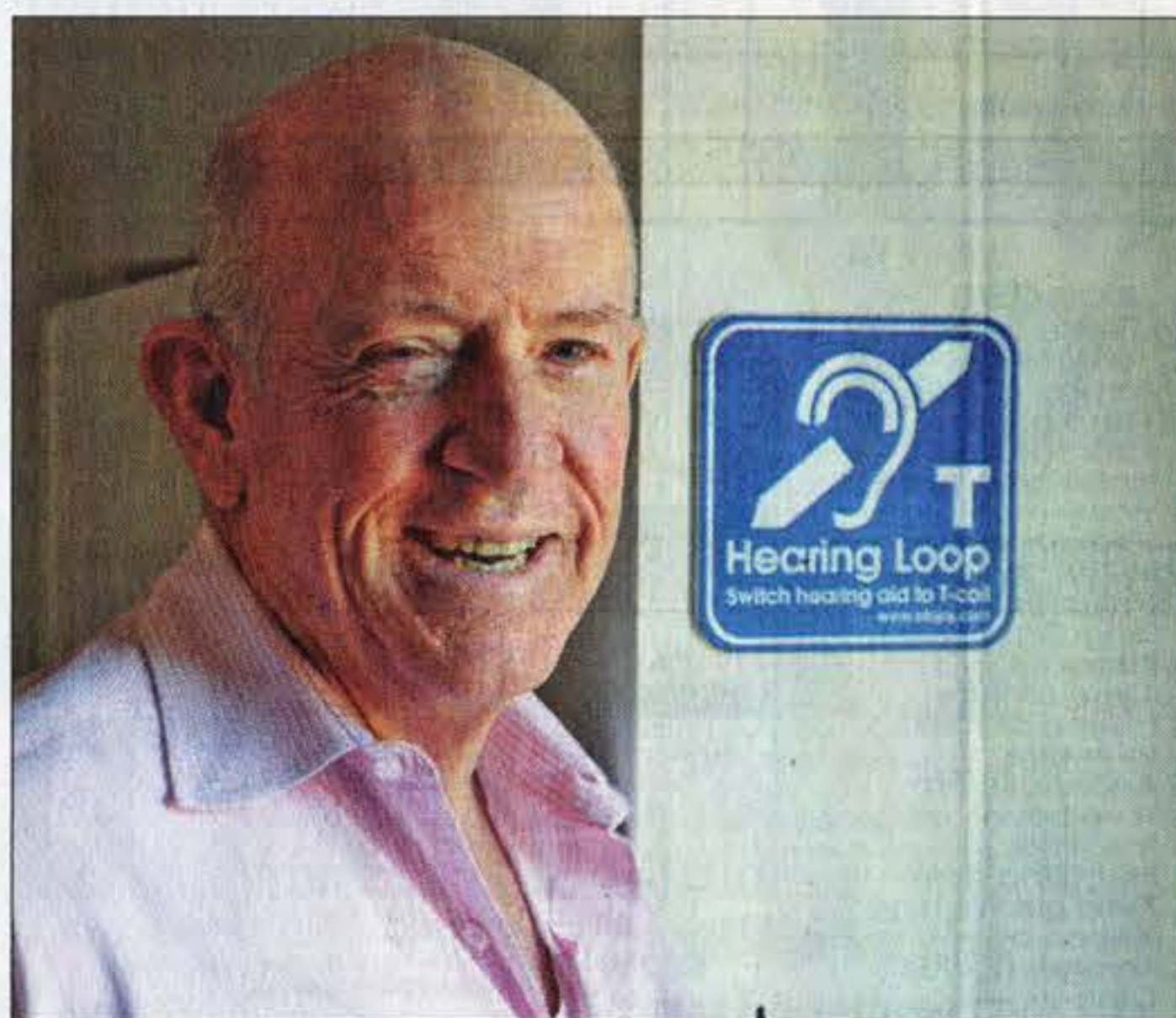
"The loop is a copper wire that circles a room, usually on the floor, but it can be on the ceiling. The wire is connected to an amplifier that interfaces with the sound system in a venue, and it goes directly to a person's hearing aid. It feels as if the person is standing right next to them," explained Thomas Kaufmann. "The Hearing Loop eliminates echoes and reverberations."

Mr. Kaufmann is founder of Otojoy, a Santa Barbara company he officially founded in June 2012 to install the systems.

"Oto is the Greek word for ear and joy refers to my motto, 'If ears could smile,'" he said.

The company is part of the "Let's Loop Santa Barbara" project sponsored by the Independent Living Resource Center in Santa Barbara with support from the Hearing Loss Association of Santa Barbara, Hearing Loss Association of America and the American Academy of Audiology.

With a \$33,000 grant from the California Communications Access Foundation, the project is in the midst of a campaign to turn the community into one of the most hearing-accessible cities in the



Dennis Peterson, who suffered hearing loss because of combat in Vietnam, was instrumental in having a hearing loop installed at First Congregational Church, where he and his wife, Cynthia, are members.

world.

So far, more than 20 venues in Santa Barbara have the loops installed. They include UCSB Campbell Hall, Lobero Theatre, New Victoria Theatre, community rooms at the Carpinteria Branch Library and the Jewish Federation of Greater Santa Barbara, El Montecito Presbyterian Church and First Congregational Church.

Bright blue-and-white Hearing Loop logos, about 6 inches square, can be found near the entrance to all facilities that have the system installed.

"Approximately 20 percent (48 million) American adults have

Please see **LOOP** on D8

## Bringing the technology here

### LOOP

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some form of hearing loss in at least one ear, making it the most prevalent form of disability in this country, and that number is expected to double by 2030 with aging baby boomers and current teenagers who listen to loud music," said Mr. Kaufmann.

The native of Bonn, Germany, who came to Santa Barbara in 2010, studied physics at the University of Bonn and planned to earn his Ph.D. in chemistry at UCSB.

His career path detoured when he founded Otojoy.

"Hearing loss interested me because of a business I had in Germany booking DJs and musicians. I was aware of the effect of loud music and frequently wore custom earplugs, which allowed me to communicate and still protect my hearing," he said. "Ironically, the earplugs were invented in Chicago and are common in Germany and The Netherlands but not in the United States."

To find them locally, he contacted several audiologists and the Hearing Loss Association of Santa Barbara.

"As I began researching the field, I discovered hearing loops are widely available in the United Kingdom and Scandinavia but not in the United States," Mr. Kaufmann told the News-Press.

His research led him to Contacta, a hearing loop distributor in Austin, Texas, where he went for four days of training in December 2012 to learn how to install the equipment.

"My background in physics and my first business helped me with my first installation soon after I returned: the installation of a hearing loop in the library at Wood Glen Hall retirement community on Foothill Road," Mr. Kaufmann said.

A month later, the Santa Barbara International Film Festival staff asked him to do the same for a festival screening to be held in January 2013 in the Mary Craig Auditorium at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art.

"I made it happen," he said with a grin. Costs for the installations can range from \$3,000 to \$5,000 for venues seating 100 to 200 people to \$25,000 for places seating 800 to 1,000, depending upon the complexity of the project.

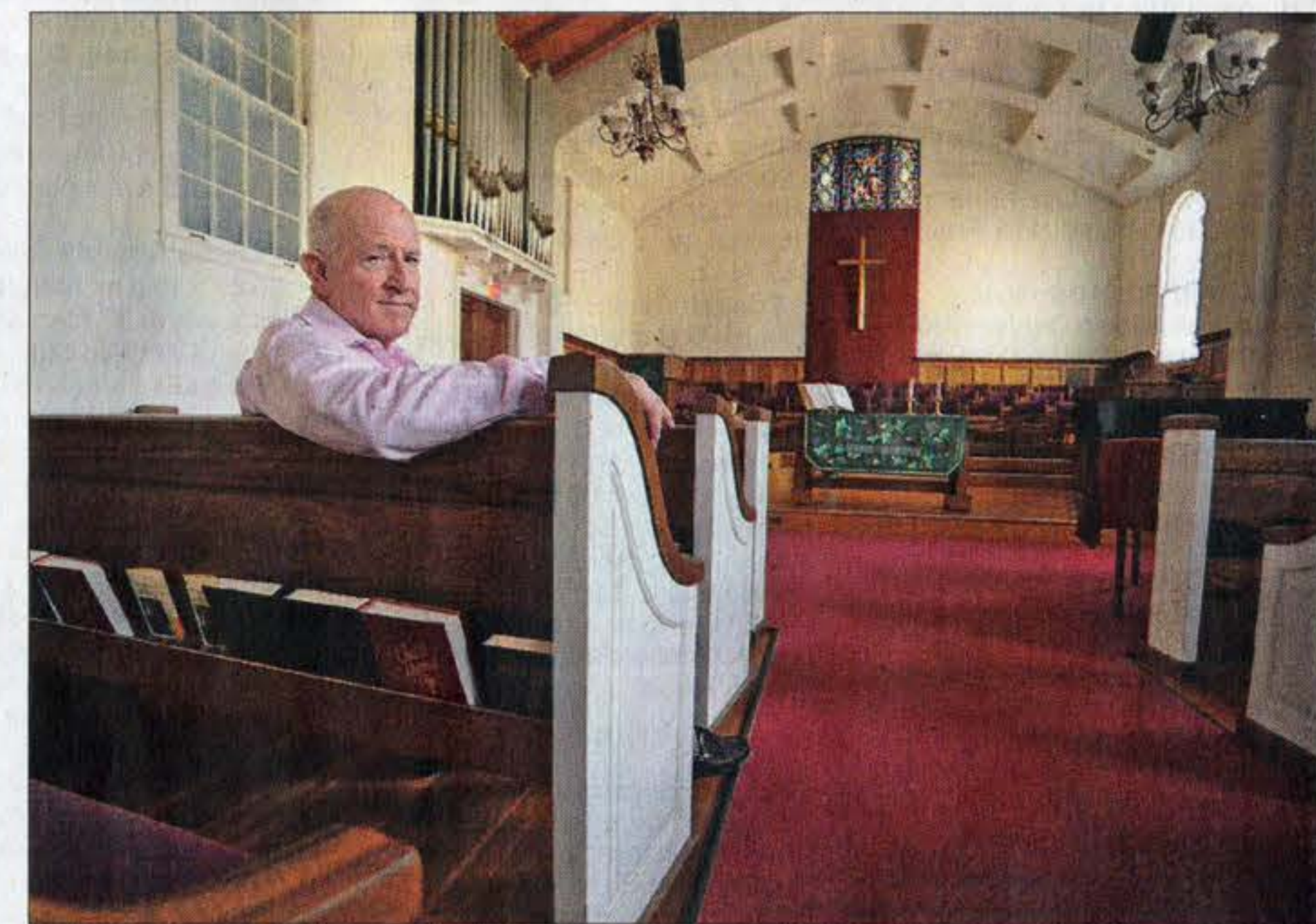
"Theaters like the Arlington or Granada would need multiple loops for every other row of seats," said Mr. Kaufmann. "A living room, office or conference room might cost \$500."

"The cost of a new system for an average-size venue is equal to the cost of a pair of high-end hearing aids," he pointed out.

Working with him to educate the community about hearing loops is Kase Martes, 36, a native of Morgantown, W.Va., and a graduate of Marshall University in Huntington, W.Va., with a bachelor's degree in journalism.

Soon after moving to Santa Barbara last May, she met Mr. Kaufmann and now works as a hearing loop advocate for the Independent Living Resource Center.

"My job is two-pronged — making public venues aware that they can create access to those with hearing loss just as they do in



MIKE ELIASON / NEWS-PRESS

"With the new system, I can really hear the word of God. I think it should be in every church," said Dennis Peterson.

### FYI

For more information about "Let's Loop Santa Barbara," call 617-3778, email [info@loopsantabarbara.org](mailto:info@loopsantabarbara.org) or visit [www.loopsantabarbara.org](http://www.loopsantabarbara.org). For more information about the Hearing Loss Association of Santa Barbara, call 684-2788 or email [info@hlaa-sbc.org](mailto:info@hlaa-sbc.org).

providing ramps for people in wheelchairs and getting the message to people with hearing aids that they have to activate the T-coil inside for the hearing loops to work. This can be done free by any hearing professional," said Ms. Martes.

"All the user needs to do is switch his or her hearing aid to the T, telephone or hearing loop program. All but the very smallest modern hearing aids tend to be supplied with an internal T-coil. However, it may not have been enabled when the device was initially programmed. If the user is not sure whether his or her hearing aid has a T-coil and/or does not know how to access the T program, his or her hearing professional will be able to advise," she explained.

Ms. Martes was a recent guest speaker at a meeting of the Hearing Loss Association of Santa Barbara, which meets at 10 a.m. the second Saturday of every month except in July and August.

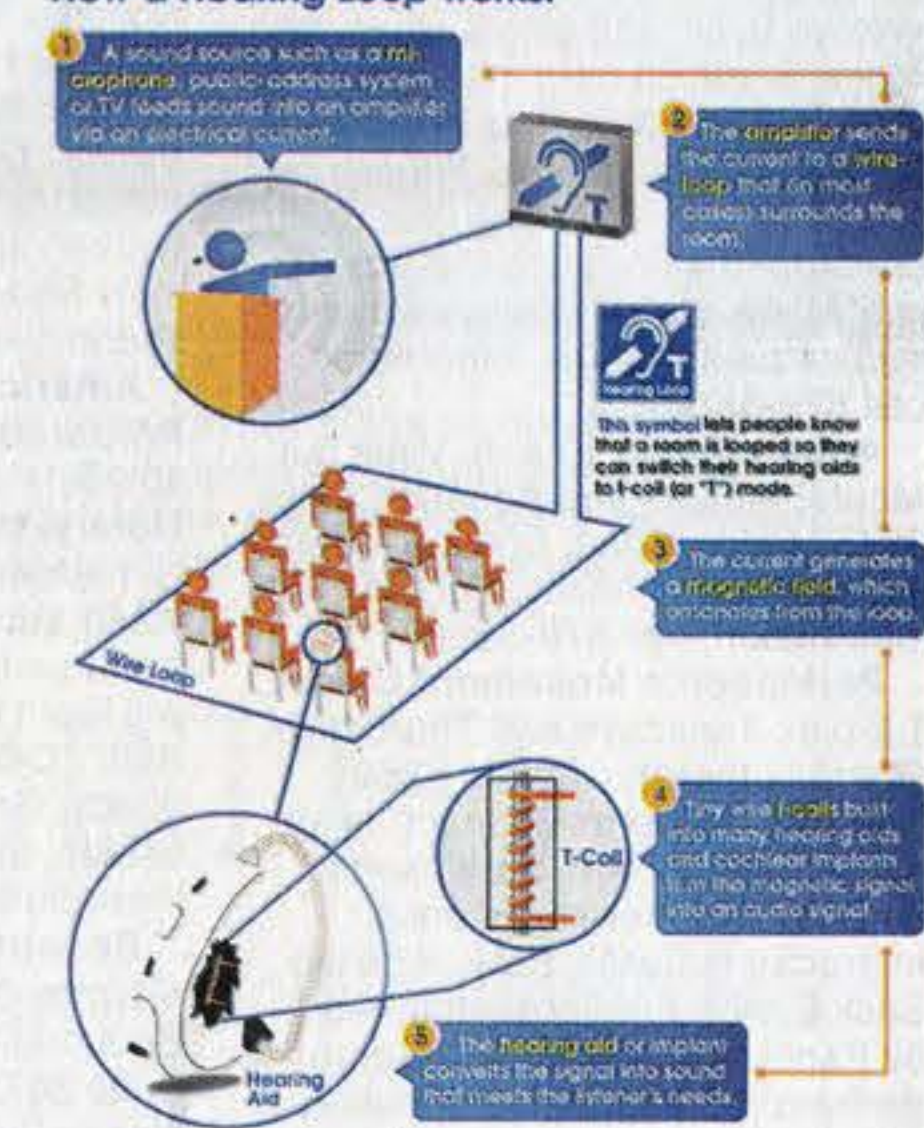
"We always have talks on hearing-related topics," said Ms. Alvarez, who is president of the group; her mother, Mary Kohler, who also has hearing loss, is treasurer.

An accountant for DuPont Displays in Goleta, Ms. Alvarez helps "spread the word" about hearing loops.

"I know how effective they are. I give a hearing-loss perspective," she said.

Mr. Peterson, owner of an asset

### How a Hearing Loop works:



COURTESY PHOTO

management and self-storage business, was instrumental in persuading those in charge at the picturesque First Congregational Church at the corner of State and Padre streets to allocate funds from the operating budget to install a hearing loop.

He and his wife, Cynthia, are longtime members.

"Looping is important because over the years it gets harder and harder to hear," said Mr. Peterson. "With the new system, I can really hear the word of God. I think it should be in every church."

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