



Two years of checking ears in sole practice

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Last month, NexGen Hearing celebrated its second year in business in Port Alberni. The company's success and growth recently earned practitioner John Charley and his staff recognition with two awards, including Most Improved Performance and Clinical Achievement. The awards not only confirm the company's commitment to customer service, but demonstrate the staff's efficiency and professionalism.

When NexGen Hearing opened for business in Port Alberni on December 3, 2012, Charley, owner and Registered Hearing Instrument practitioner, launched the clinic with a strong background in the industry.

His career had already spanned 15 years, seven of which were located in Port Alberni. At the time, there were only two NexGen clinics on Vancouver Island. That number has since increased to 15, including satellite operations, and eight in the Okanagan.

The clinic's roots started about 40 years ago by Marke Hambley, president and director of operations of Island Hearing Group. After he grew the branches from a single clinic to 125 across the country, he took a temporary retirement. Coming back, he encouraged practitioners to gain a more vested interest in how the company is run and attracted people who wanted to work the same way, namely by providing a focus on customer service.

Such growth is a result of the increasing need for diagnosis and treatment of hearing loss.

"Hearing loss is growing with the wave of baby boomers," Charley said. "It is a hidden thing and can take time to manifest. Most people don't know they have. It is usually those around them who notice it first when they are always having to repeat things."

The result is that treatment can be delayed, Charley said. "One-fifth of people [experiencing hearing loss] ever get help," he said. "There is denial or not knowing the process of getting help. Cost can be an issue, but we have a wide range of products to address that."

Charley also said these days more people are addressing self-inflicted hearing loss. This can come from prolonged connectivity to ear buds and loud personal electronic devices, recreational noises and even loud lawn mowers and dirt bikes.

Port Alberni's local industry is also a major contributor to gradual hearing loss. Without precautions such as ear plugs, the damage can be irreversible.

A major acquisition for NexGen Hearing recently was the ability to provide another level of service to clients covered by Work-Safe B.C. People with referrals from WCB from other provinces, Veterans Affairs Canada, RCMP, Non-Insured Health Benefits for First Nations and B.C. Social Services are also treated at the clinic. Charley continues to provide pre-

employment hearing testing.

Hearing loss is not only restricted to the aging population and with the advances in technology, the industry caters to everyone in today's digital world. The tiny hearing aids are equipped with high-tech computer chips that can connect to cell phones and tablets via bluetooth for streaming audio directing to the hearing aid.

"This works well for television too because the hearing aid is getting more direct input as opposed to from the speaker," Charley said.

For clients experiencing multiple symptoms, Charley works on-site with two ear, nose and throat specialists. Dr. Jaymi Dumper and Dr. Clark Bartlett are available once a month when such issues as tinnitus, sudden vertigo and infections can be addressed.

Hearing loss of family members and friends can be a frustrating process to all involved, Charley said, and recommends early intervention.

"If someone is concerned, they should encourage family members to get their hearing tested, then we can dispense the information that they can use." To reduce anxiety or apprehension about treatments, Nex-Gen Hearing offers a free 90-day trial period for hearing aids. Charley hopes this motivates people to take control of their own health and to be able to live a more productive life.

"It is better to try to get rehabilitation sooner than later," he said. "As it gets worse, the audio part of the brain starts to get weaker."

Free hearing tests are available by appointment at NexGen Hearing, located at 3831 Ninth Avenue.

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