



When he takes his motor home on the road to test and service hearing aids, Don Cloutier gets help from his wife, Marda, in covering their shop on Oakmont Way in Eugene.

## Hearing-aid expert tunes into service

**D**on Cloutier takes his rig on the road as often as he can, reaching out to Lane County residents who might need a little fine tuning in the literal sense.

Inside his motor home, Cloutier performs a one-of-a-kind service: He cleans, adjusts and repairs hearing aids - all makes. And he gives free hearing tests, too.

Just to make sure he doesn't miss anyone, Cloutier, owner of Hear & Now Hearing Center at 2449 Oakmont Way in Eugene, also visits retirement facilities and private homes on request. His wife, Marda, tends shop while he's away.

A licensed hearing instrument specialist for 27 years, Cloutier says it's common for people to stop using their hearing aids when the devices don't give them the desired results - a costly decision when one considers that the price of each aid usually runs between \$1,200 to \$3,500. Rather than taking the hearing aids in for adjustments or repairs, these customers tuck them in drawers and forget about them.

The best technology in the world

doesn't guarantee quality if the devices don't fit or aren't maintained properly, he says. Consequently, hearing aids get a bad rap when a customer invests the money but doesn't insist on satisfaction.

Cloutier's mantra for guaranteeing customer satisfaction is "Service, service, service." For him, that means requesting that clients return to see him for a follow-up visit just 24 hours after receiving their new hearing aids.

When they return, he asks, "Now how do things sound?"

He asks where they have been and what the sound was like walking outdoors, driving the car, sitting in front of the TV, and perhaps dining in a restaurant. Everyone is different: Some people hear the radio at home just fine, but the din in a restaurant interferes with conversation.

Which is why the follow-up visit is crucial for eliminating what customers often perceive as a shortcoming in the equipment, Cloutier says.

Whether the obstacle to improved hearing is the customer's improper use of the hearing aid, the technology, or a poor fitting, Cloutier says he wants to

make sure clients are comfortable with their hearing aids, and that the devices are effective.

"When you lose your hearing, your world begins to shrink," says Cloutier, who, having earned a master's degree in counseling from the University of Oregon, and having a hearing loss himself, is sensitive to his clients' sense of vulnerability.

In fact, while talking with a client, Cloutier sometimes pulls out his own aids and tells the customer "to take more control of their hearing loss" by compensating. This might involve eliminating background noise at home when having a conversation, and sitting close to people instead of asking them to speak up.

"You have to let people know you have a handicap," he says. And in doing so, you can be a role model so others can adjust more easily to their hearing loss as well.

Driven by a desire to improve professional standards for hearing instrument specialists nationwide, Cloutier serves on several boards and committees, such as the National Board for Certificate in Hearing

Instrument Sciences. He also is the vice-chairman of the Advisory Council on Hearing Aids for the Oregon Health Licensing Agency.

Practicing what he advocates, Cloutier just completed a two-year associate of applied science degree in the hearing instrument specialist program at Spokane Falls Community College in Spokane, Wash.

Cloutier says a person with a hearing loss begins "to feel isolated. ... (But) the good news is that most hearing loss can be restored with professional help and the proper hearing instrument."

Thus, a few times each month, Cloutier parks his mobile repair shop in a Safeway or Albertsons parking lot.

If he can reduce that isolation that someone with a hearing loss may experience, and give him or her a sense of hope, his actions speak louder than words.

Call Cloutier's Hear & Now Hearing Center at 343-1091 for upcoming dates of hearing-aid checks and hearing tests.