

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 6, 2018

CONTACT: Steve Thunder
Assistive Hearing Systems
SThunder@LoopIt8.com
855-566-7488

ASSISTIVE HEARING SYSTEMS, LLC MAKES PERFORMING ARTS MORE AVAILABLE TO THE HEARING-IMPAIRED AT PURDUE'S ELLIOTT HALL OF MUSIC

6,000-Seat Auditorium Is Largest Venue in North America To Install Hearing Induction Loop System to Aid Audio Experience

ELGIN, IL – Assistive Hearing Systems (AHS), an industry leader in hearing induction loop systems, has announced the completion of its largest single-room project ever, a state-of-the-art wireless system at Purdue University's Elliott Hall of Music. With more than 200 installations of this kind in theaters, classrooms, houses of worship, city halls, libraries and other public spaces throughout Illinois, Wisconsin and Indiana, AHS, along with Purdue, is leading the charge to improved hearing accessibility in venues where the audio experience is critical to the enjoyment or effectiveness of the event.

The project, which included a full re-carpeting of the theater, cost about \$250,000, most of which came from funds from Purdue's Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) designated funds. It works by installing a series of wires in the floor – more than two miles of wire in the case of Elliott Hall – that relay a wireless signal that is received by anyone with a tele-coil enabled hearing aid or receiver. The system then enables the user to listen to an incredibly clear direct feed from the venue's audio system.

The project makes Elliott Hall of Music the largest proscenium theater (a traditional theater design) to include a hearing loop system. The upgrade to the venerable campus auditorium benefits those with a wide variety of hearing loss types, which has been an issue with past systems which were designed to simply amplify the sound but not enhance it. According to Steve Thunder, president and hearing loop engineer at AHS, this system will revolutionize the audio experience for those with hearing impairment – and those who don't.

"Our hearing loop system addresses several of the issues that have plagued hearing assistance technology in the past," he said. "First, it gives state-of-the-art audio quality. Second, it is available to a broad spectrum of users including those with t-coil hearing aids, which are found in 70-80% of existing hearing aids and all cochlear implants, and even those who want to enhance their audio experience by connecting through an Apple device connected to Otojoy's LoopBuds t-coil enabled earbuds."

Elliott Hall is the third performing arts venue at Purdue to receive the hearing loop technology, and by far the largest. Both Loeb and Fowler Halls, with seating capacities of 1,011 and 388 respectively, previously had the hearing loop technology installed. According to Stephen D. Hall,

Director, Elliott Hall of Music Productions, the lessons from those two installations were tremendously beneficial during the Elliott project.

“The Fowler and Loeb Hall projects provided us with great lessons,” Hall said. “One of the unique lessons we learned was that if we had a person on stage playing a guitar that had a pickup, that pickup signal could get mixed with the loop signal and echo back on itself. So, AHS had to figure out how to install a cancellation loop that eliminated that issue. And they did.”

“The size of the other two theaters is so different we didn’t learn as much from them in terms of the physical wiring of the hall, since they didn’t require several different “zones” to coordinate since they are smaller,” he continued. “What we did learn were the basics of how the system would work, so we weren’t starting over at Elliott – there were practical applications that were in place in all three venues and that saved us a great deal of time and effort on this larger project.”

The Elliott Hall project took about two months to physically install but was in the works for more than a year. “Once the project was a ‘go’ we still had to phase it in around the events we already had scheduled at the venue,” Hall said. “We had to coordinate with the university’s ability to free up the Americans with Disabilities Act funds that were allocated to our project, then it was just a question of working around the existing event schedule at Elliott Hall.”

One of the primary reasons the university was able to complete such an ambitious project was the advocacy of Betty M. Nelson, Dean of Students Emerita at Purdue. Her role with this piece of the campus accessibility began in the mid- ‘70s when the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 made specific requirements that institutions that accept federal financial assistance be accessible for “otherwise qualified individuals” with a disability. Nelson was tabbed by the university president to lead the institutional initiative to determine campus accessibility and recommend changes needed to meet student needs.

“As a university founded in 1869, the Purdue campus had many older buildings constructed long before there was a Universal Design concept,” Nelson said. “Of course, the student advisory committee gave high priority to changes to the Hall of Music so students with various disabilities and their guests could enjoy events just as other students did. Changes allowed for handicapped parking, a ramped entrance, parking pads in the hall for wheelchairs, companion seats for friends, etc.”

She continued, “At that time the technology for sound enhancement for those with hearing loss was emerging, knowledgeable technicians were scarce, and funding was not available for major changes. But for the past approximately 40 years, many of us have been nudging and inquiring and promoting changes in sound technology throughout the campus and especially in the larger venues. Looping was included in the classroom construction of the new Wilmett Active Learning Center which was dedicated in 2017 (and installed by AHS). And in recent years, Fowler and Loeb Halls were looped. Looping for the HOM is the BIG deal – it puts Purdue at the forefront of universities in bringing the performing arts to those with hearing impairments.

Stephen Hall deserves endless kudos for accomplishing this long-desired goal; it is a mega-bonus for the university, the community, and the region to have this large auditorium looped.”

And while the Elliott Hall project is by far its’ highest-profile project, Thunder said he is proud of all the work AHS has done at Purdue and around the Midwest.

“We have done a total of 52 classrooms and the three major theater projects at Purdue to date, and while the performing arts venues are very visible, these other projects make students’ lives better every day,” he said. “We wired one building alone that has about 30 classrooms – that is making an impact on an even larger number of people daily than all the theaters combined. It’s that ability to enhance the educational, artistic and every-day lives of the people in the community that makes me proud to be working with this kind of technology. It’s a great feeling to know that our products are making people’s lives better every day.”

AHS is the Midwest’s leader in hearing loop design and installation with completed projects for clients including Northwestern University; Indiana University; the School of the Art Institute of Chicago; Chicago’s Steppenwolf Theater and the Rush University Medical Center. Assistive Hearing Systems is headquartered at 847 South Randall Rd. Suite #218, Elgin, IL 60123. You can reach them on the web at www.LoopIt8.com or by phone at 855-LoopIt8 (566-7488).

#