

"You can accomplish as much as you determine is important to you – we all have gifts and talents that will benefit us and society at large."

– Bradley S. Vite

Turning Adversity Into Action

BY BRADLEY S. VITE, ATA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

"Make a positive difference; let your tinnitus and hyperacusis lead you to the land of plenty – plenty of opportunity for positive change."

Like many of you, I involuntarily entered a world in which I no longer knew silence and in which everyday sounds became extremely loud. Believe me, at first I was not excited about it either. But



Bradley S. Vite (left) with friend Gale Sayers, the youngest National Football League player ever inducted into the hall of fame, filming an ATA public service announcement.

with each and every person who has to deal with one or both conditions on a daily basis.

During my college years, I frequently quoted a poet – Virgil – who wrote simply, "They can because they think they can." When I first discovered this quote, it held meaning for me and a group of my peers that were trying to start a national fraternity chapter at our college. We faced many obstacles along the way, however we accomplished what we set out to do. Today, this quote still holds great meaning to me in my desire to help tinnitus and hyperacusis patients worldwide.

Aside from living with these two conditions for the better part of 15 years, I reside in Elkhart, Indiana, a town that has over 100 trains a day passing through. Anyone

I have come to learn that living with tinnitus and hyperacusis fuels my dedication to making the world a quieter place. For me, first came the hyperacusis and then, years later, the tinnitus decided to move in. I empathize

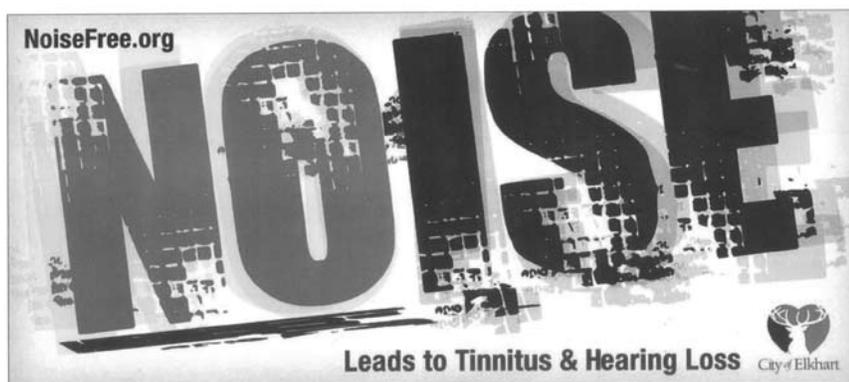
who has ever lived nearby a major train line is all too familiar with the excruciatingly loud sound emitted from a train horn, which seemed even louder to my hyperacusis ears.

These experiences led to my first big noise-related initiative to bring attention to these types of problems at the state level. My first effort was met with support from two elected members of our state government who authored the "Quiet Community Act" as a direct response. The goal of the legislation was to have a "quiet zone" where no train horns would be blown. The bipartisan support of the Act was tremendous and it passed with an 87% approval.

This initial success helped raise the visibility of noise problems and, in turn, potential health hazards like tinnitus and hyperacusis. But train horns are only one kind of noise, and in our cities there are many noise sources that contribute to health problems. We know that exposure to loud noises can cause hearing loss, hyperacusis, and tinnitus; however, a lesser known fact is that noise can also indirectly contribute to heart disease, gastrointestinal problems, and high blood pressure.

With awareness raised about noise and its health implications, I continued working to take the initial success a step further. Without going into too much detail, I can tell you that after many meetings and phone calls, being told that there was little chance of success – I worked with three different administrations to create a

noise ordinance that was effective and enforceable. This included an awareness campaign with billboards, television and radio public service announcements and finally, a full-time noise enforcement officer. From 2009-2011, Elkhart issued thousands of tickets with fines totaling around \$700,000.



"Elkhart's noise ordinance is a model for the nation."

– Ted Rueter, President of Noise Free America

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The Main Event

As people of all ages began to trickle into the sports dome, it was easy to see the excitement on everyone's faces and feel the enthusiasm for the scheduled event. When you are the only health-related booth in attendance – promoting hearing protection at an event that is expected to be fun and loud – and are stationed alongside booths that are selling team shirts and banners, band paraphernalia and competing with tasty food vendors, our job was not an easy one. Some of the glances we received were often amusing – as if to say, “Who invited the ‘Debbie Downers’?”

The event appeared to be a huge success, but didn't surpass the feeling of accomplishment my colleagues and I had when some competition participants and attendees were eager and receptive to taking our materials and learning about how to preserve their hearing while still enjoying events like this. I knew our presence was starting to strike the right chord when some students approached us to ask how they could better promote hearing conservation to their band leaders and fellow musicians.



“Many of them had no idea that these instruments could cause irreparable damage to their hearing.”

— Dr. Mraz

As the day progressed, and the bands got bigger and louder, more people began purchasing the ear-plugs we had available to help prevent hearing loss, tinnitus and hyperacusis. Many even thanked us for volunteering our services.

I think the thing that left the biggest impression on me was the surprise and shock on people's faces as they approached our booth and realized just how loud these instruments could be. Many of them had no idea that these instruments could cause irreparable damage to their hearing. And for those select few that did understand, it suggested they were not considering the consequences.

Education is the most powerful tool we have to inform individuals about the dangers of noise-induced hearing loss and tinnitus and it's never too late to start. Let's set the example by beginning with ourselves and all those people we say we care about. It's bound to have a sound wave effect!

If you are interested in helping to educate members and leaders of drumlines, visit Etymotic.com/adoptaband. ☺☺

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This noise ordinance did not cost the taxpayers a dime. Instead, it was paid for directly by the offenders themselves in fines. As a result of these efforts, the city of Elkhart was able to purchase 40 new cop cars and Elkhart citizens now live in a quieter, safer community. This also helped to give a platform to the fact that noise inadvertently punishes and attacks those of us with tinnitus and hyperacusis on a daily basis.

Although I cannot go out to eat at most restaurants, go to the movies or attend sporting events because of my afflictions, I concentrated on what I could do to still make a difference in the lives of many. You can raise awareness in your communities. You can be an agent for positive change. You can help cure tinnitus and hyperacusis.

Noise is a bigger issue to life in the 21st century than ever before. All of us together, along with ATA, can make life better for the millions around the world who suffer from tinnitus and hyperacusis. As Virgil might say, because “we think we can.” By being proactive in our own communities to raise awareness of the dangers of excessive noise, we empower ourselves and encourage others to participate in efforts to find a cure.

Visit Noisefree.org to get a pulse on efforts in your area and help quiet down our communities. ☺☺

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Dr. Hoover is a Fellow of the American Academy of Otolaryngology, Board of Allergy & Environmental Medicine and Royal Society of Medicine, London, and a Diplomat of the Royal College of Surgeons of England. Dr. Hoover has served the Houston area for 25 years, spoken in over 26 countries and published in numerous medical journals, such as:

- International Rhinology. Supplement 2.all.1987
- Tinnitus & Allergy. Proc II International Tinnitus Seminar, Munster, Germany. 1987. Publisher, Harch V. Karlstruhe
- The Journal of Japan Rhinologic Society. Vol 30,1(1991)

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