

# HELPING PEOPLE COMMUNICATE AGAIN



Independent/Crystal LoGiudice

Roxann T. Ellison is the owner of Grand Island Hearing Aid Center in Grand Island. The 40-year-old business was founded by Roxann's aunt, the late Laverne Almquist.

## By Robert Pore

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When it comes to telling the story of the Grand Island Hearing Aid Center, 721 W. Seventh St., it's important to go back to its founder and the influence she has had on the success of the business the last 40 years.

Roxann Ellison, licensed by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services and the National Board of Certification in Hearing Instrument Sciences, is owner and CEO of the business. Her license allows her to dispense and fit hearing instrument equipment.

But it is her aunt, Laverne Almquist, who started the business and who Ellison said provided her the inspiration that has made the family business the success it has become over the last 40 years.

Ellison said the business was started by Almquist in 1971. She said her aunt held license number one in Nebraska for hearing instrument dispensers and fitters. Almquist was also instrumental in organizing and founding the then Nebraska Hearing and Dispensers and Fitters Organization, which is now the Nebraska Hearing Society.

"Laverne was one of the few area women, at that time, who were sole owners and founders of their own business," Ellison said. She said Almquist was employed by Drs. Bilon and Grange, optometrists, where she was introduced to the hearing instrument dispensing industry. When Almquist's employers decided to get out of the hearing aid business, she purchased the inventory and started her own practice.

What makes that story special is that Almquist was 57 when she started Grand Island Hearing Aid Center, which was then located on Second Street.

"Laverne was an independent and savvy businesswoman, respected by her peers, and her community," Ellison said. "She worked at it daily until her death at age 71."

Ellison said along with being a good businesswoman, Almquist was also "compassionate" with her patients.



Laverne Almquist

"She really did it from her heart," Ellison said. "She was an inspiration for me."

When she purchased the business in 1988, Ellison said she knew that this was the career path she wanted to pursue.

"It has given me an incredible sense of satisfaction knowing that you have helped people to communicate once again," she said. "In some cases, because of a loss of hearing, people had not been able to communicate well for years. There have been incredible stories that go along with the people I have helped over the years, and my aunt as well."

Ellison, who grew up in a large farming and ranching family near Comstock, joined the practice in 1986 and purchased the business when her aunt died in 1988.

While Ellison has successfully operated and been involved in the business now for 25 years, she gives much of the credit for her success to her aunt.

And the key to that success, Ellison said, is carrying out the original philosophy that her aunt instilled in her to "offer excellent products at a fair price, to give outstanding service and to be thankful and grateful for the staff and patients who helped grow a successful, long-term business."

It was a philosophy well-learned by Ellison, as during her 23 years as owner she has expanded the busi-



Cameron Ellison, COHC  
(Roxann's son)

ness, along with managing all aspects of the operation.

Ellison said what makes 40 years in business special is that people "have had enough faith in us and what we do and our expertise to have stuck with us for 40 years and give us referrals."

"Forty years is not an easy accomplishment, especially in today's economy," she said.

Along with the Grand Island location, Ellison has owned and operated up to six satellite locations over the years, including her Aurora office, which has been in operation for more than 25 years.

Among Ellison's many duties are technical operations of equipment that are software specific to various brands of hearing instruments, conducting hearing tests and the selection and fitting of hearing instruments.

Ellison also founded Hearing Testing Services, which is an industrial hearing testing business that tests employees at manufacturing facilities throughout the central United States from the Canadian border to the Gulf of Mexico. That expansion of the business has allowed her son, Cameron Ellison, to become involved in the business as he serves many local businesses where employees are exposed to noise levels that require annual hearing tests, which as mandated by OSHA.

During the 25 years she has been with the business, Ellison has received many honors and has served both the community and her industry.

Among those honors, are:

- Past president, vice president, treasurer, secretary and director at large of the Nebraska Hearing Society.
- Nebraska Hearing Society ethics committee chairwoman.
- Youngest person ever bestowed a lifetime membership to the Nebraska Hearing Society based on her service and leadership to the organization.
- Co-founder of the political action committee for the Nebraska Hearing Society and worked closely with lawmakers on a state and national level.
- Nebraska liaison to Washington, D.C., for the Joint Conference of the American Optometric Association and the International Hearing Society, both of which works with members of Congress concerning legislation affecting both groups.
- Only outstate Nebraska honorable mention Integrity in Business Award for the Better Business Bureau.

Among the services provided by Grand Island Hearing Aid Center, are:

- Hearing tests.
- Consultations to patients and employers on hearing issues.
- Hearing conservation protection, which works with individuals in getting the right hearing aid equipment or protection for the job they work or the hobby they enjoy.
- Industrial Hearing Testings, which works with employers in protecting the hearing of their employees.
- A provider for the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. "Fitting hearing aids is the primary focus of our business," she said.

Helping Ellison to make her business a success is Misti Chmiel, BSHIC, and Brenda Thomas, hearing technician and office assistant.

Grand Island Hearing Aid Center is open Monday through Friday, 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. or by special appointment after hours. Appointments are encouraged. Appointments or other information can be obtained by calling 308-382-9169 or toll-free, 800-382-9169. The business website is: [www.gihearingaidcenter.com](http://www.gihearingaidcenter.com).

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