

New branch of hard of hearing group established on west coast 🇨🇦

CORNER BROOK
GARY KEAN
The Western Star



Myrtle Barrett, president of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association's Newfoundland and Labrador chapter speaks during a meeting in Corner Brook Saturday. — Star photo by Gary Kean

Mike Fleming has had some loss of hearing for the last 15 years, but only had his condition diagnosed about three years ago.

Since then, he has become concerned about the level of services available to the many people who also live with being hard of hearing.

In his job as an agricultural representative for the Department of Natural Resources, Fleming often visits small communities throughout western Newfoundland and has noticed there are numerous people who simply live with the problem without help. He's seen it cause friction in households and make some people less sociable than they would be if their hearing was improved or if they were better able to cope with their hearing loss.

That's why the Corner Brook resident was more than willing to become president of a western regional branch of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association's Newfoundland and Labrador chapter.

Fleming accepted the role during a public meeting of the association in Corner Brook Saturday. The purpose of the meeting was to determine if there was enough local interest to establish a formal branch based in the city to serve the western region.

Four people came forth to form the required nucleus of a branch executive. Besides Fleming, Karen Davis was elected vice-president, while Doug Boger will serve as treasurer and Della Myers-Caines agreed to be

secretary.

The first step will be to identify what needs and gaps in services are most pressing in the region. Then the western regional branch will try to find resources and solutions to those problems.

"This is absolutely exciting," said Fleming. "Now we have access to resources like we've never had before and those resources are at the provincial board level. I feel now, once we poll the western region and find out the concerns here, we have a place to go for help. And it's not like we're starting from zero. There is some strong interest here in this and that will give us the ammunition we need to do something."

The Corner Brook branch is the fourth regional branch now in Newfoundland and Labrador, with others already up and running in Gander, Bishop's Falls and Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

The provincial chapter annually allocates \$3,000 to each regional branch, but the regional divisions can also do fundraising to generate more revenue for other activities. Most of those activities revolve around educating the general public about available services and increasing awareness of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association's desire to reach more people who have issues with their sense of hearing.

According to Myrtle Barrett, president of the provincial chapter based in St. John's, one out of every 10 people is hard of hearing, meaning there are an estimated 50,000 such people in this province alone. Given the regional branches and even the provincial chapter reach relatively small numbers of people, there are still many more who should be availing of the help that is out there.

"Where are these people? How are they faring? Are they getting the help they need?" asked Barrett. "We would like to see a branch in every region of the province and we're working on that, but it's up to people to come forward and let us know they want a branch or to help in some other way. It doesn't have to be a branch. It can just be a volunteer who is willing to help out in their region by going to events and promoting the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association."

Hearing loss may be more prominent amongst the senior population, which is growing rapidly in Newfoundland and Labrador, but Barrett said there have been increases in the number of younger people experiencing hearing loss.

"There is a growing trend of hearing loss at a far earlier age caused by recreational and industrial noise," she said. "Not just from things like iPods, but also from snowmobiles, motorcycles, high-powered tools and things like that. This type of hearing loss is preventable, so education is a big priority for us."

Who to contact:

Provincial Canadian Hard of Hearing Association office: toll-free at 1-888-753-3224

Western regional branch: Mike Fleming at 634-5421

Email: chhanl@nfld.net

Website: www.chha-nl.nl.ca

31/08/09