

Julie Eschenbrenner, doctor of audiology, greets me with a plate of fresh-baked cookies. She bakes a selection daily in the office to offer to her patients. Dr. Eschenbrenner is a board certified audiologist who specializes in the treatment of tinnitus and in developing solutions to hearing problems based on a patient's lifestyle. (You have tinnitus if you perceive sound in your ear but there is no external sound causing the noise.) She has always been a person who wants to make others' lives better. She worked at summer camps for inner city kids for 10 years. She started her studies in audiology wanting to work with hearing-impaired infants and their families, but found the field satisfying enough that she is happy working with anyone with hearing difficulties.

I try on a hearing aid in Dr. Eschenbrenner's office. It is tiny. Part of it (which comes in many colors) is about an inch long and weighs next to nothing. It hooks over my ear and I cannot feel it, and I can't see it when I look in the mirror. Then a very small, transparent piece is put in my ear with a tiny transparent cord attaching up to the little hook part. That piece tickles or itches a little bit, but it is something I can imagine quickly getting used to. When I look in the mirror, I almost have to know the hearing aid is there to see it. When compared to glasses, it is invisible. Dr. Eschenbrenner is right: you can look good wearing a hearing aid.

Dr. Eschenbrenner has three degrees in audiology. She obtained her undergraduate degree in Michigan, her master's degree at the University of Colorado in Boulder, and her doctorate degree at the University of Florida. She started the Audiology Department at the Longmont Clinic P.C., and was there for five years.

In June 2007, she opened her private practice called Flatirons Audiology Inc. She never thought she would feel this way, but she loves being in private practice. Her office in the Community Physicians Pavilion near Exempla Good Samaritan Medical Center is relaxed and professional at the same time.

Her "office manager extraordinaire," Christina Delgado, as Dr. Eschenbrenner describes her, was willing to help set up the new practice. The two women seem to work well together. As I enter, the doctor is talking to Christina about a clinical evaluation to be sent to a patient's medical doctor and how to charge something to insurance. It sounds more like a consultation than a boss talking to an employee. The respect the two women feel for each other is clear. Her patients obviously like Dr. Eschenbrenner, too. A room divider in the office is blanketed with Christmas cards.

Dr. Eschenbrenner stays home on Wednesdays with her two sons, who are 1 1/2 and 3 1/2 years old. Every week she and her older son mix up from scratch the dough for a couple of kinds of cookies, which the doctor then bakes fresh each morning in the office.

Dr. Eschenbrenner says she is proud of being the second person in the state certified to treat tinnitus sufferers with Neuromonics Tinnitus Treatment (www.neuromonics.com). The treatment is highly successful and noninvasive. Dr. Eschenbrenner will perform a complete audiology examination, which includes finding the specific frequencies of the noise the patient hears. She

then orders a custom designed device for the individual patient; a machine about the size of an MP3 Player that is available only by prescription from a certified audiologist.

There are two stages of treatment over a period of six months. First is the need to provide relief from tinnitus. There are testimonials from tinnitus sufferers saying that they started experiencing relief after the very first day of using the machine, which plays music with patient-specific programming embedded in it. The second stage lasts about another four months, and in this stage the patient's brain is actually reorganized so that her responses to the sounds change. This significantly decreases the patient's awareness and disturbance from the tinnitus, according to Dr. Eschenbrenner.

Dr. Eschenbrenner's other main concern is helping patients with hearing problems based on their lifestyles and budgets. "My

FLATIRONS AUDIOLOGY

*You can look good
wearing a hearing aid!*

By Janaki Jane



Dr. Julie Eschenbrenner

goal is for patients to walk away hearing better, wearing the hearing aids, and saying good things about me," she says with an infectious grin. The hearing aid is no good if it sits in a drawer, she continues. She can adjust any hearing aid she prescribes and provides, and most likely can adjust any hearing aid you have right now at home that you aren't wearing. Her office can do visible live speech mapping, for example, to hear a loved one's voice and adjust a hearing aid so that the patient can hear that person or can hear specifically in the ranges they are having difficulties in.

Dr. Eschenbrenner wants people to know that hearing loss doesn't have to get in the way of living your life. "It's much less embarrassing for someone to notice you have a hearing aid than it is for you to respond (to them) inappropriately," she says. She does point out that hearing aids don't allow you to hear as well as you did when you were, for example, a teenager, however. They are an aid to a damaged system. But she is also clear that they can help immensely with your quality of life.

When you come to Dr. Eschenbrenner, she asks about your history and then performs a comprehensive hearing evaluation. This includes looking in your ear, which you get to see on a

TV screen. It also includes a speech discrimination test. In her office is a sound booth with a chair, a window so you can see the doctor, and various headphone sets. There are different headsets for testing hearing air conduction through the outer ear, middle ear, inner ear, and bone conduction directly to the inner ear. She can test to determine if hearing aids are the best solution for your hearing issues. The standard office hearing testing system period tests up to 8,000 Hertz, but Dr. Eschenbrenner's system tests to 20,000 Hertz. This helps her have a more extensive range to find where a patient's hearing loss lies, she says.

Dr. Eschenbrenner has a very helpful Web site including a library of articles about hearing with lots of helpful links at www.flatironsaudiology.com.

Flatirons Audiology is located in the Community Physicians Pavilion, 300 Exempla Circle, Suite 365 in Lafayette. There is a map on the Web site. The phone number is 303-664-9111, and you can email Dr. Eschenbrenner at drjulie@flatironsaudiology.com. Learn more about tinnitus at a free educational seminar offered on Thursday, February 21, 6:00 to 7:30 p.m. **WE**