



HLAA State and Chapter News

“Greater help comes from being part of a Chapter.” – Rocky Stone

By Larry Herbert

HLAA Central Virginia Chapter’s Advocacy Efforts Lead to New Hearing Loops in National Historic Landmark

The Rotunda, a signature building at Thomas Jefferson’s University of Virginia, is now accessible to people with hearing loss. As part of a four-year, \$58 million renovation, eight classrooms and meeting spaces in the Rotunda now feature hearing loops.

The Rotunda was originally designed to be a focal point of the University of Virginia (UVA), located in Charlottesville, when construction began in 1822. Once housing a library, classrooms, and laboratories, in recent years the Rotunda has become more of a museum piece and not an integral part of the University’s academic life as it once was. It mainly turned into a meeting spot where tours of UVA’s historic academic village, the Lawn, began. UVA’s Board of Visitors did meet there and from time to time special events were held, but it was not a study destination for the student body nor a particularly good listening venue when used as a lecture hall.

“The building’s usability was the thing most dear to the design team,” according to historic preservation architect Jody Lahendro. “I think it’s a sin that there are people who have graduated from the University in the last 70, 80 years who have never set foot in the building,” he says. (*Virginia Magazine*, Fall 2016)

The Rotunda now crawls with students in its quiet nooks and crannies, and the usability of the building extends to people with hearing loss, thanks in part to the HLAA Central Virginia Chapter.

Five or six years ago, then-Chapter President Ron Keeney and HLAA Member Larry Herbert met with building officials at the University and encouraged them to begin incorporating hearing loops into some of the facilities there. Interest was expressed by staff in attendance, and even though a lot of inertia followed, a seed was planted. All the hard work paid off, and now the signature building at the school is accessible to people with hearing loss.

On November 15, 2016 Dr. Juliëtte Sterkens, HLAA hearing loop advocate, visited Charlottesville and spoke to

faculty and students in the speech and language program at UVA’s Curry School of Education. Her presentation was fittingly held in the beautiful Dome Room of the Rotunda.

The hearing loops were installed by Hearing Technologies, Inc. of Virginia Beach, Virginia.

It’s a noteworthy achievement for a noteworthy building in the history of American architecture. **HLM**

Larry Herbert is a member of the HLAA Greater Richmond Chapter and a graduate of the University of Virginia. He is a previous member of the HLAA Central Virginia Chapter in Charlottesville and the HLAA Augusta Chapter in Augusta, Georgia.

History of the Rotunda

The Rotunda at the University of Virginia was designed by Thomas Jefferson as the architectural and academic heart of the University’s community of scholars. He named the University’s original buildings the “Academical Village.” As the phrase suggests, the Academical Village is based on the Jeffersonian principle that learning is a lifelong process, and that interaction between faculty and students is vital to the pursuit of knowledge.

Jefferson modeled the Rotunda after the Pantheon, a second century temple in Rome, Italy. Construction began in 1822 and was completed in 1826, shortly after Jefferson’s death on July 4 of that year. Built at a cost of \$60,000, it was the last structure to be finished on the Lawn. Together with Monticello, the Academical Village is designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

A photo essay of the renovation of the Rotunda can be found in UVA’s *Virginia Magazine* at uvamagazine.org/articles/rotunda-reborn.