

# Dr. Donald Hood, “Frontier Audiologist”

By Michael Currie

HALIFAX – Canada’s most famous Audiologist, relaxing in the new coastal bungalow that is his home just outside Halifax, still remembers his early days when nearly all audiologists worked in hospitals. “In 1978, private practise in Audiology was unheard of.”

After eight years working for the government health care system in Ontario, disappointment with the way care was being provided in the public hospitals, coupled with the allure of having the freedom to do what he wanted, compelled Dr. Donald Hood go on his own. Thus, *Thunder Bay Audiology* was born.

The transition to private practise was difficult. “There was a real lack of trust on the part of the bank, because what I was doing was unprecedented in Canada.” Indeed, for many years, Dr. Hood’s business barely broke even.

In 1985, he had a revelation. By prescribing hearing aids but not actually dispensing them, he was missing the most profitable aspect of the audiology business. “I was sending my business literally down the hallway.” He also saw his customers disgruntled with the lack of knowledgeable service at the hearing aid vendors. So, he started selling them directly.

There was great opposition to his unprecedented move, as many in the industry saw it as a conflict of interest. In the end, his unwavering medical integrity quelled the sceptics. “If you don’t need a hearing aid, I won’t sell one to you.” He continues with a laugh: “The way I see it, if you don’t need one now, you’ll need one someday, and I can afford to wait.” Selling hearing aids was the missing piece of the business model – the business has been profitable ever since.

Dr. Hood has always maintained that Audiologists must listen to their clients. “It’s sad to see people with ‘hearing impaired drawers’ – that’s where the hearing aids end up if they aren’t

correctly adjusted to fit a client’s needs.” He maintains he is not afraid of being told something is wrong. “I enjoy problem solving. I don’t sell hearing aids, I sell *help*.” That international reputation for continuing care has resulted in a strong referral base, contributing to growth and minimizing conventional advertising costs.

Throughout his career, Dr. Hood has donated his time and expertise to training efforts in developing nations. He has made hundreds of trips to many countries, including India, Chile, Eastern Europe, Russia, and the Philippines. In recent years, this philanthropy has turned into a growth area in his business. “There are two hats I wear on my trips these days: one for charity, and one for business.” Helped by the low Canadian dollar, he now dispenses Canadian-made hearing aids internationally.

Dr. Hood also credits his personal and business success in part to his volunteer efforts as the former President of both the Canadian Speech and Hearing Association and its provincial counterpart in Ontario. “I was very active there in the 1970’s and 80’s,” he says.

Asked if he would have done anything differently now, he says simply: “I would have done what I did sooner. My two best decisions, to move into selling hearing aids, and get consultation with the marketing, could have been made much sooner.”

Dr. Hood also credits his staff for keeping his business healthy. “The best advice I can give you is to have a good office manager. My ‘Second in Command’ has been with me since the beginning. She was initially my secretary, and her role expanded and changed with the business.” Indeed, his office manager knows, at all times, exactly how much money is owed to them, down to the penny. “Let’s just say relations with the bank are a lot healthier than they were in the early days.”

With gross revenues in excess of one million dollars last year, Dr. Hood has reason to be pleased with his enterprise. He’s made a career and a life out of helping others. As he gazes through his elegant sunroom’s widow onto the Atlantic sunset, he knows he’s earned every penny of his success with charity and integrity.

