INTERVIEW
William F. Austin

GETTING the most out of life

During the Starkey Hearing Innovations Expo
William F. Austin, founder and owner of Starkey Hearing
Technologies and the Starkey Hearing Foundation,
spent some time talking to Audio Infos about his life,
his mission and his greatest challenges. An interview.

Audio Infos: Why does Starkey organise the Hearing
Innovations Expo?
Bill Austin: We do this as a forum to bring people together
who have a common issue. We have to motivate people to
go forwards to help themselves, to hear better and be part
of life. We're all people with the same challenge. We are
trying to understand hearing better and solve problems
so that we can serve better than we have ever served. So
we use this as a forum to bring people together that have
common interest to see if we can be part of progress by
using the energy and the minds of many to think about this
subject. We think it is a good forum to offer to the industry.

By Victoria Adshead
victoria.adshead@edpsante.org

We wanted to do it the way we thought it should be done.
If we go to someone else's party, they tell us how we have
to do it. When I was a young man I never wanted to go
to lectures and meetings that I couldn't go home with
something that I could use because I didn't want to waste
my time. I want to know how I can apply this knowledge,
so if we have a meeting we want the people to go home
and say it was really worth coming to it, it was a really
good meeting, our minds were challenged to expand, to grow.
We hope to do that here.

Audio Infos: What do you think will be the main take-
home message from the Expo?
Bill Austin: We’re in a very dynamic time in the history of
helping people with hearing and that change is going to
bring a lot of opportunity. We need to start getting ready and preparing for that opportunity. We will hopefully see in my lifetime (I'm still hoping to be around a little bit here) that the hearing aid becomes a personal communication device so people with normal hearing are wearing the device to overcome communication challenges, whether it be noise, distance, language. The amount of gain will just be dialled in all the way from normal to profound. It's incidental what the correction is, that's an easy part of the product. I think I will live to see that happen; it's going to be exciting when it does. What we will find is that a lot of the stigma and reticence to have these devices will go away and people will want the latest and best personal communication device that will be discreet, not encumber the way they want to live their life. We know ears better than anyone, we know how to package things small so that people can be comfortable with them and so we are prepared for that challenge.

Audio Infos: Why did you start the Starkey Hearing Foundation?
Bill Austin: The Hearing Foundation and Starkey was all one concept from the beginning. I wanted to be a physician and contribute my art, my work, to people in need. I thought I would be a missionary doctor in Africa. I thought I would not work for money; people would give me a place to live and some food and I would be thrilled with the challenge of contributing to life, respecting life and helping people. I decided, when I was going to school, to pursue it. I have been on the same path since 1961. The Hearing Foundation and Starkey was all one concept from the beginning. I wanted to be a physician and contribute my art, my work, to people in need.

I worked every day and I am blessed to work every day. What I contribute, gives me life. I need to do what I can mission is large in scale in a way, but I don't feel that it is impossible; I feel it is what I am supposed to do. I can't do it alone, I couldn't even scratch the surface. All we have to do is to get people to want to be part of it in their own way. There are many ways to respect a life, and to celebrate life. You can put a smile on someone's face through language and actions. You can do something. You don't have to be wealthy, you don't have to be a philanthropist to respect your neighbour and today our neighbours are all of the people in the world. We have a one-world market and one-world communications. We can no longer live in isolation and just be happy with what happens in our little part of the world, we have to be very concerned about what is happening everywhere else.

Audio Infos: How do you manage to get presidents hands-on, fitting hearing aids, during missions?
Bill Austin: I get everybody hands-on on our missions. Everybody from Presidents Clinton and Bush to Elton John – they want to. Everybody wants to get involved and once they have got their hands-on in a mission, whether it is a movie star or a president, they all say it is the best day of their lives. They really do! It doesn't matter if they are big American football players, NFL pros, they say this is the best work they have ever done. They love it! They love being able to help someone else, it gives them more meaning, they feel more useful than just indulging yourself because you are successful. It's so much better to lift someone else up and give them a chance at life that they might not have had. I work every day and I am blessed to work every day. What I contribute, gives me life. I need to do what I can do and I ask the same of the other team members, that they do whatever they can. Collectively we make the show go. The idea is to start a wave; infect the world with a good virus. Have people reflect love and start a wave like in a football stadium. In a football stadium of 100,000 people you can start a wave that will go around the whole stadium. If I can get the critical mass to make a little start, then it will keep going without me. I have to initiate that wave with a lot of other people who feel the same way as me. They have the same mission as me. I couldn't do this alone, but together this is our chance to succeed to find our humanity and help others for a better world.

"I couldn't do this alone, but together this is our chance to succeed to find our humanity and help others for a better world."
Audio Infos: Will you ever slow down?

Bill Austin: How can I slow down? If I say I am going to do something then I have to keep my word. I don’t want to say no when somebody asks for help. We always say, “yes we can!” More and more people ask for help, so I have to work and use my time more efficiently and grow the leverages of the team. It is all good! None of it is of any disappointment to me. The bottom line is that I just can’t imagine ever being retired. I have to be part of contributing to life, otherwise I feel like I am just taking up space. I can do something useful with my life, I have to do that.

When I work, and I have done the best I could, I feel good and that makes me happy. There’s enough differences in the challenges that it keeps me very busy trying to be better and better. You can’t ever get lazy, as you won’t be as efficient as you should be. I take holidays at Christmas as it is not the best time to travel and do missions, so I spend time with my family then. Ten months out of twelve I am gone doing missions in other countries. Those two months in the US, I do missions in this country at the Grammys, at the SuperBowl. I have a carriage trade of very successful business people who have heard about me and they come for help. Celebrities, movie stars, when I am in town, will queue to see me at the head office for help with their hearing. I also help very poor people. I put them altogether and use my time more efficiently and grow the leverages of the team. It is all good! None of it is of any disappointment to me. The bottom line is that I just can’t imagine ever being retired. I have to be part of contributing to life, otherwise I feel like I am just taking up space. I can do something useful with my life, I have to do that.

When I work, and I have done the best I could, I feel good and that makes me happy. There’s enough differences in the challenges that it keeps me very busy trying to be better and better. You can’t ever get lazy, as you won’t be as efficient as you should be. I take holidays at Christmas as it is not the best time to travel and do missions, so I spend time with my family then. Ten months out of twelve I am gone doing missions in other countries. Those two months in the US, I do missions in this country at the Grammys, at the SuperBowl. I have a carriage trade of very successful business people who have heard about me and they come for help. Celebrities, movie stars, when I am in town, will queue to see me at the head office for help with their hearing. I also help very poor people. I put them altogether and we help them. It really isn’t work at all.

My challenge is to find more time to do more work. You can always make more money; you cannot make more time. So you have to find ways to use the available time more and more efficiently. I have ways to stretch more time out of days! I used to travel commercially. I now use a private plane (which I pay for) for missions. I am loath to waste money, but the plane enables me to fly at night and fly between countries that don’t have air services between them. In West Africa you often have to fly back to Paris just to get to the next African city. I don’t have to do that, if I have my plane, I just go to the next country. So I save many days per year by doing that and I am willing to pay a lot of money to save those days. You only have one life and that life is expanded by what you contribute to life and I can contribute more this way.

I have modified my life because of time. I am getting up, going right to work, working all day and just eating at night. I eat plenty but I don’t like to waste time during the day. I am shifting my workload to the available time to get the most done and the body accommodates to that.

Audio Infos: Are you still involved in the day-to-day Starkey business?

Bill Austin: I haven’t worked very much on the day-to-day business for many years. It’s not that I don’t care about it, I am very much interested in it and I do very much care and want to be part of progress but I made a promise a long time ago that I have to fulfil. I said I would do the mission work and I have to do it. I made the promise; I have to do what I committed to. I said I would try to bring understanding between the peoples of the world, through using hearing as a vehicle to get this momentum started so that we might have a better place for humanity. We are all the same. We have to respect the cultural and religious differences, but we have more in common. Every child should have the chance to hear, learn, develop speech, and be all they can be for their family and community. We can go to help the people in Palestine and have the Israelis help us, even though they don’t agree on anything else. Through that bridge we can start to bring a little understanding between people. You would be amazed at how quickly that happens once people start working together on a common cause.

I believe peace is made in the hearts of people, not by politicians and treaties and governments. People need to know each other, to trust each other. Extending the hand of help and bring trust and respect. For me, I just need to do that and I am blessed to have such a good job. If I went to work I think I could make a lot more money, but what would I have – more pieces of paper. This way I have more life, it is a good trade. Every day I get to choose life and I choose life by contributing to life, I am getting older; every day I contribute. I am part of life ongoing, I wouldn’t want to do anything else.
Audiology Worldnews

A great “at-a-glance” way to stay current with the happenings of the profession!

Check out the new WORLDWIDE community website

Find out about the latest news and information

Find out about the latest hearing health care products and technologies, as well as associated services.

Be sure not to miss major upcoming events or announce your event.

Discover what was said during international or manufacturer events as if you were there.

Welcome to Audiology Worldnews, the global website for hearing care dispensers and ENTs to find information and resources: Latest news and topics related to the profession, new implants and hearing aids on the market, last conferences, interviews...

Follow Audiology Worldnews on:

@AudioWorldnews

www.audiology-worldnews.com