

SUNDAY RECORD

YOUR GUIDE TO PUBLIC RECORDS AND VITAL STATISTICS IN CALHOUN COUNTY

DEATHS

Charles H. Barton, Weaver
Ronald D. Bennett, Oxford
Essie Mae Sistrunk Boyd, Munford
Ruby Lee Bradshaw, Anniston
Arch Brewster, Ohatchee
Edward Lee Bryant, Anniston
JoAnn Ginn Burgess, Weaver
Johnny Angus Coleman, Anniston
Chandler Joseph Conner, Anniston
Adilene Cottle, Roanoke
John Wilburn Daniel Jr., Wedowee
Patricia Ann Dollar, Collinsville
Joseph N. Findley, Anniston
Faye Ann Fisher, Anniston
Doris Juanita Fortenberry, Piedmont
Margaret Lee George, Anniston
Georgia Ann Green, Anniston
Gabrielle Nicole Hale, Powder Springs, Ga.
Flora Janice Hammonds, Jacksonville
Betty Handling, Roanoke
Cisro E. Hill, Talladega
Edith Johnson, Wedowee
Maudesta Adams Woody Jones, Gadsden
Walter Lee Jones Jr., Sylacauga
Angela Dawn Lee, Heflin
Laura Beatrice Mackey,

Gadsden
Frances "Thomas" McCullars, Ohatchee
James Douglas McKenzie, Anniston
James Burlin Meadows, Woodland
Jewell Mote, Woodland
Kenneth Nichols, Piedmont
Jennifer W. Pope, Anniston
Cheryl Lynn Porteous, Heflin
Jo Ann Reed, Centre
Frances Lee "Dottie" Robinson, Centre
Alvin Roden, Centre
Mary C. Shelnut, Anniston
Karon Louise Griffith Simmons, Heflin
Thomas Steiger, Wedowee
Esther Sprayberry Floyd Stephens, Centre
June Kathleen Thompson Stinson, Cedar Bluff
Angel Dawn Summers, Anniston
Shirley Terrell, Talladega
Xina Hope Tuerke, Norcross, Ga.
Rev. Vernon E. Vowell, Wedowee
Robert Larry Waddell, Oxford
Lorine Wallace, Detroit
Sheena Nicole Warren, Lineville
Brenda Watts, Roanoke
Eldora Pearson Williams, Gadsden
Amanda Smith Young, Anniston

BANKRUPTCIES

A Chapter 7 bankruptcy allows the debtor to retain certain exempt property, but the debtor's remaining property is gathered and sold by a trustee from which creditors will receive payment. It may also be used by businesses which wish to terminate their business.

A Chapter 13 bankruptcy enables debtors, through court supervision and protection, to propose and carry out a repayment plan under which creditors are paid, in full or in part, in installments over a three-year period. During that time, debtors are prohibited from starting or continuing collection efforts.

The following bankruptcies declared by Calhoun County residents were recorded by U.S. Bankruptcy Court Northern District of Alabama last week:

Chapter 7

- **Tonya Marie Barnes**, Wexford Avenue, Weaver
- **William Corey Roberts**, Boozer Lake Road, Jacksonville
- **Wayne Gentry and Tranita S. Gentry**, Paul Street, Anniston
- **Norman C. Thomas**, Lera Drive, Anniston
- **Bryce Parker**, South Allen Avenue, Anniston

Chapter 13

- **John A. Holtbrooks Jr.**, Louise Drive, Jacksonville
- **Stephanie Phillips**, George Douthit Drive Southwest, Jacksonville
- **Amanda Jelks**, Church Street, Anniston

FORECLOSURES

- **Christopher B. Buckelew**, Quail Run subdivision, 1st addition, block F, lot 7.
- **Joanie W. Turley and Christopher G. Turley**, Whispering Oaks, 1st addition, lot 8.
- **Douglas Allen Shipp and Tammy D. Shipp**, Delwood Estates, block B, lot 5.
- **Theletha J. Williams**, Henry Highlands, lot 17.
- **Latoya P. Battle**, Golden Springs subdivision, 5th addition, lot 12.

WILLS PROBATED

- **Joey Mark Farrington**
- **Betty White Hendricks**
- **Marvin J. Bible**
- **Mazelle Jackson Davidson**
- **Rebecca Greer**
- **Barbara M. Phillips**
- **Ernest Leroy Dover Jr.**
- **Dinah H. Hudson**
- **Allen R. Hudson**
- **Earline Caver**
- **Donald Robert Hicks**
- **Willie Stanley Bell**
- **Louise Fant**

MARRIAGE LICENSES

- **Jason Ray Rowland** of Jacksonville to **Pamela Smith Bonds** of Jacksonville
- **Dylan Ray Jones** of Jacksonville to **Lauran Ashley Ghee** of Heflin
- **Stephen Wayne Rowell Jr.** of Hampton, Ga., to **Anna Lisa Holliday** of Jacksonville
- **Patrick Herbert Walker** of Jacksonville to **Genevieve Lorraine Baker** of Jacksonville
- **Michael Lee Blanton** of Douglasville, Ga., to **Sina Kaye Pitts** of Ohatchee
- **Kenneth Lee Whitley** of Wellington to **Darlene Gilliam Chandler** of Wellington
- **Cody Ryan Grammer** of Alexandria to **Mary Beth Kirkland** of Alexandria
- **Tony Nguyen** of Oxford to **Thao Manh Thanh Truong** of Oxford
- **Charles Ryan Branham** of Anniston to **Holli Deann Frames** of Delta
- **Aldo Raymond Chiramonti** of Oxford to **Lisa Lynn Watts** of Oxford
- **Patrick Williams** of Anniston to **Tracy Michelle Hester** of Anniston
- **Nicholas Arnold Harbison** of Jacksonville to **Cerena Ashley Cortez** of Weaver
- **James Harvey**

- **Young** of Anniston to **Essie Lee Hughley** of Anniston
- **Christopher Wayne Hubbard** of Alexandria to **Julie Ann McMath** of Alexandria
- **Danny Joseph Maye Jr.** of Ohatchee to **Rachel Suzanne Jones** of Montevallo
- **Michael Wade Tillison** of Jacksonville to **Jennifer Marie Potts** of Jacksonville
- **Lauro Esparza** of Sapulpa, Okla., to **Maria De Los Angeles Cisneros-Ortiz** of Anniston
- **Samuel Jared Jones** of Jacksonville to **Katharine Suzanne Bolding** of Albertville
- **Matthew Ray Hooper** of Piedmont to **Amanda Dean McBrayer** of Piedmont
- **Terry Robert Murphy** of Munford to **Florina Jennifer Wolf** of Marktdredwitz, Germany
- **Patrick Michael Perkins** of Jacksonville to **Theresa Anne Craycraft** of Jacksonville
- **Christopher Lee Tomberlin** of Jacksonville to **Falon Mae-Marie Sweeney** of Jacksonville
- **Steven Leslie Shafer** of Anniston to **Lynn Michele Hedgepath** of Weaver
- **Scott Warren Mills** of Oxford to **Tina Louise Waters** of Oxford

DIVORCES

- **Michael James H. Buse** and **Darla Butler Buse**
- **Casey Freeman** and **Preston Wilke**
- **Timothy Elbert Pate** and **Teresa Jane Pate**
- **Mary Ann Ragland** and **Willie Lester Ragland**
- **Andrea Pinkston Eudes** and **Benoit Eudes**
- **Christopher L. Austin** and **Andrea Lurene Faus**
- **Shasta Michelle Jones** and **Anthony Wayne Creek**
- **Kristen Melson** and **Ricky Melson**
- **Joshua Wayne Austin** and **Courtney Leigh Austin**

CATTLE SALE

Here is the livestock market report for the Tuesday sale. Receipts for this week 751 compared to 842 last week. Receipts a year ago 487.

FEEDER CLASSES:

Bulls and steers (Medium and Large No. 1 and No. 2): 200-300 lbs. 280.00-335.00; 300-400 lbs. 270.00 to 305.00; 400-500 lbs. 240.00 to 275.00; 500-600 lbs. 210.00 to 250.00; 600-700 lbs. 180.00-210.00. Heifers (Medium and Large No. 1 and No. 2): 200-300 lbs. too few; 300-400 lbs. 250.00 to 280.00; 400-500 lbs. 210.00 to 245.00; 500-600 lbs. 180.00 to 215.00; 600-700 lbs. 170.00 to 200.00.

SLAUGHTER CLASSES:

Cows: Breakers 96.00 to 106.00; Boners 100.00 to 113.00; Lean 96.00 to 104.00. Bulls: Normal Dressing 54-58% 125.00 to 129.00; High Dressing > 58% 132.00-138.00; Low Dressing <54% 117.00-120.00.

INCORPORATIONS

- B2C OMG Group Inc.
- T & S Gonzalez Inc.
- T & S Gonzo Inc.
- Samson Alarm Co. LLC
- Blue Selene LLC
- ARSS LLC
- Gianna's Trucking LLC
- Alore LLC
- Macombe's Helping Hand Healthcare
- Veteran's Lawn-N-Yard Service LLC

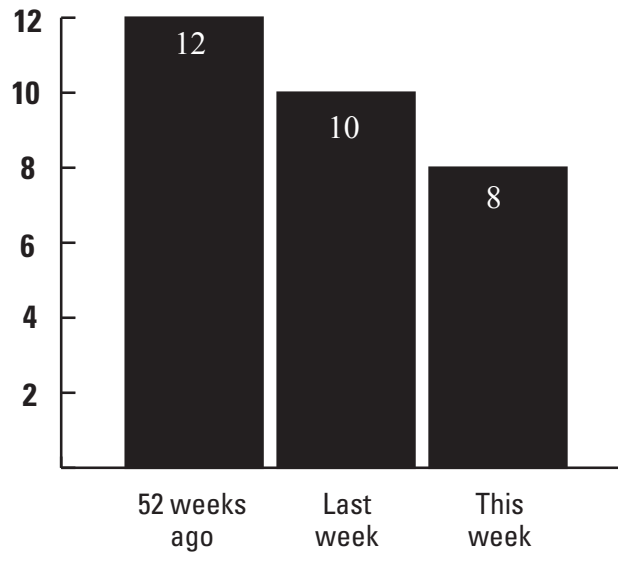
EDITOR'S NOTE

The material inside the Sunday Record is recorded by The Anniston Star from various institutions and government offices.

The public records are published as they appeared on the documents obtained by the newspaper. Direct questions and comments about Sunday Record to Isaac Godwin at igodwin@annistonstar.com.

AnnistonStar.com

RATE OF BANKRUPTCIES



BLOTTER

Crimes are listed by location. Anonymous tips may be called in to Crime Stoppers at 256-238-1414. A reward of up to \$1,000 may be given.

Anniston

The following property crimes were reported to the Anniston Police Department during the seven-day period ending at 7 a.m. Thursday.

Burglaries

- Residence, 500 block of South Colvin Street: cash.

Auto-related thefts

- Unknown location: tablet computer, speaker.

Calhoun County

The following property crimes were reported to the Calhoun County Sheriff's Office during the seven-day period ending at 7 a.m. Thursday.

Burglaries

- Residence, Peeks Hill Road, Ohatchee: tattoo kit, briefcase, Coca Cola and John Deer signs.

Thefts

- Residence, Sulphur Springs Road North, Piedmont: utility trailer. (Recovered 06-05-2014)
- Residence, Church Street, Anniston: cell phone.
- Residence, Valley Drive, Alexandria: ATV.
- Fur and Feather Hunting Club, Rocky Hollow Lane: tractor, tree stand with platform, scraper blade.
- Auto-related thefts
- Residence, Jamback Road, Anniston: 1995 Toyota 4-Runner. (Recovered 06-13-2014)
- Parking lot, White Plains Road, Anniston: tablet computer, backpack.

ARRESTS

The people listed in this arrest report, whose names and charges are obtained from public records, are presumed innocent unless proven guilty in a court of law.

Anniston

- The following felony arrests were reported by the Anniston Police Department (addresses not provided) during the seven-day period ending at 7 a.m. Thursday.
- **Valerie Jean Dixon**, 34: second-degree theft.
- **Harold Joe Hilliard Jr.**, 42: First-degree possession of marijuana.
- **Jerry Guy Williams Jr.**, 36:

- third-degree robbery, hold for other agency.
- **Johnny Kevin Whited**, 39: possession of a controlled substance.

Calhoun County

- The following felony arrests were reported by the Calhoun County Sheriff's Office during the seven-day period ending at 7 a.m. Thursday.
- **Jeffery Thomas Christian**, 27, of Anniston: failure to appear in court.
- **Dexter Gene Howard**, 41, of Lincoln: failure to appear in court.
- **James Stephen Tibbs**, 39, of Anniston: second-degree

- domestic violence.
- **Rebecca Ann Pitts**, 38, of Gadsden: third-degree robbery.
- **Christopher Freeman Bailey**, 37, of Oxford: first-degree theft by deception.
- **Ernie Lamont Ellis**, 36, of Anniston: violation of the Sex Offender Registration and Notification act.
- **James Barney Cash Jr.**, 32, of Ohatchee: unlawful possession of a controlled substance.
- **Gregory Allen Nicholson**, 30, of Jacksonville: warrant of arrests.
- **Jeremy Davon Oliver**, 24, of Anniston: failure to appear in court.

CALENDAR: AnnistonStar.com/calendar

PROPERTY TRANSFERRED

- **Doris M. Dishner** to **Billy Young** and **Gwen Young**, Anniston Land Co., block 535A, lots 2 and 3, \$10.
- **David A. Neisler** and **Merry J. Neisler** to **Jason Callan** and **Donna Callan**, Brittany Downs, 1st addition, lot 22, \$10.
- **Wayne Claude Chandler** and **Marsha Monrow Bondie** to **Linda Young**, a parcel of land addressed 303 North Center Street, Piedmont, \$10.
- **John C. Hurley** and **Carolyn H. Hurley** to **John Charles Hurley** and **Carolyn Hayes Hurley Restated Living Trust**, Monte Vista subdivision, lots 23A and 24A, \$10.

- **Rachel Reid** to **Michael Mitchell**, a parcel of land in section 18, township 15, range 6, \$10.
- **Hubert Scott** to **Vester M. Martin III** and **Sharon H. Martin**, a parcel of land addressed 308 Main Street, Oxford, \$10.
- **Cathy D. Morrow** and **Daniel J. Morrow Sr.** to **Brendan C. Wade**, Rosser subdivision, lot 7, \$10.
- **TBARK LLC** to **Michael Van Kuiken** and **Janice Van Kuiken**, Lake Park subdivision, block 3, lot 2, \$10.
- **Maurice E. Riley** to **George N. Riley** and **Angela R. Riley**, Taylor's Crossing, lot 3, \$10.
- **Phillip Brinson Sr.** and **Kathy L.**

- Teets** to **Fernando E. Hernandez** and **Maria D. Hernandez**, Coleman subdivision, block 520, lot 22, \$10.
- **Veterans Affairs** to **Rickie C. Cranford** and **Martha J. Cranford**, a parcel of land in section 6, township 14, range 8, \$110,500.
- **P.K. Brooks** to **Stephen Simmons**, Carriage Hills subdivision, block 3, lot 1, \$100.
- **Audrey Beck** to **Marie Cupp**, a parcel of land in section 9, township 16, range 7, \$100.
- **Sylvia Jones** to **Jenny Rebecca Cain**, a parcel of land in sections 10/14/15, township 13, range 8, \$10.
- **Thomas P. Madden** and **Julie A.**

- Madden** to **James Gareth White** and **Yesylle Marie White**, Eagles Landing, 1st addition, lot 67, \$16,000.
- **Ruth S. Curvin** to **Matthew J. Todd Sr.** and **Mary E. Todd**, a parcel of land in section 11, township 14, range 7, \$115,000.
- **Waldrop Enterprises LLC** to **Judy W. Mays**, Wesley-Tyler Estates, lot 8, \$10.
- **Judy W. Mays** to **Tammy R. Moss**, Wesley-Tyler Estates, lot 8, \$10.
- **Mary B. Simpson** to **Linda S. Crow**, **Lydia Simpson Sikes** and **Phillip Simpson**, a parcel of land in sections 21/22, township 15, range 5, \$10.

- **Amanda Mosley** to **Daniel Lee Mosley**, a parcel of land in section 35, township 14, range 7, \$10.
- **Michael E. Taylor** and **Carolyn S. Taylor** to **Carolyn S. Taylor**, a parcel of land in section 1, township 16, range 9, \$1.
- **Coley Pritchett** to **Phillip Pritchett**, a parcel of land in section 24, township 14, range 8, \$10.
- **Mitchell E. Kessler** to **Elvin Lanay Freeman**, a parcel of land in section 35, township 14, range 6, \$10.
- **Mark Connell** and **Alicua Connell** to **Scott Shiflett** and **Aimee W.**

Please see PROPERTY I Page 7E

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PROPERTY TRANSFERRED

PROPERTY

Continued from Page 7E

Shifflett, Hunters' Ridge subdivision, 2nd addition, lot 39, \$225,000.

• **Tifiny Thompson to Clinton Qawndale Campbell and Markee Taylor Campbell**, a parcel of land addressed 126 East 27th Street, \$100.

• **Lorel R. Wright to Geoffrey B. Horn and Tina M. Horn**, a parcel of land in section 4, township 15, range 7, \$10.

• **Ronald D. Harris and Theresa A. Harris to Giselya Leyva**, a parcel of land in section 14, township 16, range 7, \$10.

• **Fort McClellan Credit Union to**

Bridges Properties LLC, Hillcrest Heights, Saks 3rd addition, block 9, lot 6, \$8,500.

• **Joshua L. Forrest and Julie L. Forrest to Joshua C. Carter and Helen M. Carter**, a parcel of land in section 32, township 13, range 7, \$10.

• **Rickey D. Doyal and Janice M. Doyal to Frances Leann McKnight and Brandon Keith Lockridge**, Standard-Coosa-Thatcher Co., block 11, lot 1, \$10.

• **Sweetwater Properties LLC to Corey Barbee**, a parcel of land in sections 22/23, township 14, range 6, \$113,100.

• **Terry Spendlove, Brenda Roberts and Debbie Csaky to Brenda Roberts**, a parcel of land in section

31, township 14, range 7, \$1.

• **Lauren Papaspiros to Charles Klug and Katelyn Waits**, Camelot subdivision, lot 31, \$83,972.

• **Wells Fargo Bank to Housing & Urban Development**, Map of Glencoe, lot 5, \$500.

• **Darla Lee Cotton to Edward Cotton**, Wallace Lumber Co., block 48, lot 1, \$10.

• **Alabama Housing Finance Authority to Housing & Urban Development**, Berkshire Woods, 1st section, block 1, lot 9.

• **Fannie Mae to William C. Arnwine**, a parcel of land in section 30, township 15, range 8, \$6,750.

• **John C. Hurley Sr. and Carolyn Hurley to Armando Nunez Casillas and Silvia Salas**, a parcel of

land addressed 1226 McPherson Street, Oxford, \$10.

• **Billy Wayne Holt Jr. and Kathy Morgan Holt to Daniel C. Flynn and Jinnia L. Flynn**, Trinity Heights, lot 27, \$10.

• **Loys Edward Bonds Jr. to Stephanie N. Withorne**, Indian Oaks Estates, section 2, lot 50, \$125,000.

• **447 LLC to Judson Brock**, Asberry Estates, block F, lots 2 and 3, \$10.

• **Heirs of N.C. Bedwell to Paris J. Lindsey, Kennon K. Lindsey and Virginia Bedwell**, a parcel of land in section 11, township 15, range 9, \$10.

• **Harold Wayne Wunningham to Sue Smith**, Griffis Hurst property,

block A, lot 2, \$4,000.

• **Aaron J. Lane to Shedrack Anderson III**, Anniston Land Co., block 605, lot 14, \$7,000.

• **Joe Cain to Tim Cain Enterprises LLC**, Corning Land & Loan Co., block 24, lots 13-15, \$100.

• **L. James Holloway to L. James Holloway and Elizabeth Holloway Johnson**, a parcel of land in section 10, township 16, range 8, \$10.

• **L. James Holloway to L. James Holloway, Elizabeth Holloway Weaver, Valley Brook subdivision, block 3, lot 5, \$10.**

• **Winkles Properties LLC to Ride-nour Rentz Family LLC**, J. J. Burns subdivision, block A, lots 14 and 15, \$10.

The cost of hearing aids can be daunting

BY TOM AVRIL

The Philadelphia Inquirer

David Decker had all the signs. He often missed things that actors said on TV. Hearing in crowds was a challenge. And when he came home each day from work in a noisy data center, where cooling fans whirred nonstop, his wife would tell him he talked too loudly.

Why not get hearing aids? A big reason: the cost.

Decker, 70, of Philadelphia, learned what millions of aging baby boomers are starting to discover. High-end devices can cost \$6,000 a pair, and most insurance plans cover a fraction of the cost at best. Medicare, to the astonishment of many, covers none of it.

"It's costly," Decker said. "Insurance companies basically pay diddly-squat."

Lower-cost options have started to emerge in recent years, but some entail less in-person service. And for the uninitiated, the menu of choices may seem daunting.

Large retailers such as Costco sell lower-cost hearing aids. One insurer, UnitedHealthcare, sells the devices through a sister company, both to insured members and others, who pay slightly more. And like most other things, hearing aids can now be bought online.

Yet consumer frustration remains rampant, said Carolyn Meyer, outreach coordinator for the Pennsylvania Office of the Hearing Loss Association of America, a consumer group.

Meyer, 71, who has worn a hearing aid for decades, estimates that she gets three calls a week from people dismayed by the price tag. She provides information about financial assistance for low-income people with hearing loss, but options are limited.

"It breaks my heart," the Jenkintown, Pa., resident said.

The technology has undergone great changes in the past two decades. Virtually all hearing aids now are digital, meaning they can be programmed to amplify sounds of various frequencies by differing amounts, depending on the person's hearing loss.

Able to hear the rumble of a garbage truck but have trouble understanding the high-pitched voices of children? A digital aid can help.

Other newer developments include custom settings for listening to music and talking on cellphones via wireless Bluetooth technology.

It all costs money, but customers wonder why a hearing aid should cost more than other sophisticated devices, such as a laptop computer.

Industry officials cite multiple reasons, among them that the products are medical devices sold in lower numbers than computers. But the biggest is that the price includes much more than just the device.

Audiologists, who have traditionally sold most hearing aids, usually include an array of follow-up care in a unit's price. The tab includes fitting, programming, adjustments, and training, among other services.

Providers also teach strategies so that new hearing-aid wearers can make sense of the sudden influx of sound. After years of living without amplification, their brains are likely to need help, said Lynda Wayne, treasurer of the Pennsylvania Academy of Audiology, a professional group. And everyone's brain is different, so the sound-processing algorithms that work for one person may not work as well for another.

"It's not like you slap them on your ears and you're good to go," said Wayne, of Cadence Hearing Services in Langhorne, Pa. "You're not buying a washer and dryer."

The cost of the device alone is hard to find out. When The Inquirer asked six major manufacturers for the wholesale prices they charge to audiologists, all declined to answer.

Ross Porter, the chief executive officer of Embrace Hearing, estimates that it costs a manufacturer \$400 or \$500 to make a good-quality pair of hearing aids, which are then sold to an audiologist for \$1,000 and to the end-user for \$5,000 or more.

Carole Rogin, president of the Hearing Industries Association, a manufacturers' group, said that at a typical audiology practice, one-third of the consumer's total price is for the device, and two-thirds for the professional services.

Some audiologists say they need to do

better in explaining the cost, and have begun to "unbundle" their services, letting patients pay for a hearing aid and follow-up care separately.

That is what eventually happened with Decker, the Northeast Philadelphia man. He recently bought a pair of hearing aids from audiologist Elizabeth Gray-Karagrigoriou, who engages in what she calls "partial unbundling" at Ascent Audiology

"It's costly. Insurance companies basically pay diddly-squat."

— David Decker of Philadelphia

& Hearing in Holland, Pa.

She charges one fee for a hearing aid, fitting, programming, and the initial 30 days of training. That's \$2,000 for a high-end model, or \$4,000 a pair, which she said would cost \$6,000 at a traditional audiology practice. She then charges a separate fee for optional service plans of one, two or three years — a fee that most audiologists fold into their higher up-front cost.

Decker bought a pair of high-end hearing aids made by the Starkey company. Although he opted to add on a three-year service plan, his total was less than \$5,500 for what would have typically cost \$6,000.

The audiologist said her goal in charging less upfront was to get patients to start wearing devices sooner, while their brains are more "plastic" — adaptable.

"I'm hoping that people will say 'Yes, I'm going to go in and do this a decade earlier than I would have before,'" Gray-Karagrigoriou said.

In a 2012 survey by the American Academy of Audiology, one-third of audiologists reported that they charged separate fees for follow-up care, said Debbie Abel, senior specialist in practice management at the professional group.

Many audiologists say they are loath to unbundle their prices, fearing that if customers have to pay a fee every time they need a follow-up, they will choose not to come at all, and stop wearing their aids.

"We want people to come in to see us at no extra charge so we can fix any problems they have," said Kathy Landau Goodman, president of Narberth, Pa.-based Main Line Audiology. It allows customers to make unlimited visits for three years, she said.

Then there is Costco. The membership-based warehouse chain has been selling hearing aids at lower cost than independent audiology practices for years.

The chain offers its high-end aids for about half the going rate at typical audiology practices — about \$1,400 for a behind-the-ear model. Sold under Costco's Kirkland brand, the store's devices always have been made by major manufacturers, now Denmark's GN ReSound,

Audiologists have traditionally sold most hearing aids. Some lower-cost options have emerged, though not always with the same level of service. Here are prices for a pair of high-end devices by category.

- **TRADITIONAL AUDIOLOGIST:** (\$6,000) Price includes extensive service, such as programming, training, and upkeep for up to 3 years
- **PARTIALLY "UNBUNDLED" AUDIOLOGY PRACTICE:** (\$4,000) Provider charges separate fees for service plan, so patients are not daunted by a large up-front price.
- **COSTCO:** (\$2,800) The store's aids are made



by major manufacturers, and price includes unlimited follow-up care. But most of its dispensers are not audiologists, and are not required to have nearly as much training.

• **EMBRACE HEARING:** (\$1,898) The online retailer mails hearing aids to the patient. Adjustments are free,



Photos by Michael Bryant/Philadelphia Inquirer

David Decker, right, talks about his new hearing aid with audiologist Elizabeth Gray-Karagrigoriou in Southampton, Pa. Like many, Decker resisted getting a hearing aid partially due to high costs.

said Costco senior vice president Richard Chavez.

The chain can sell the devices for less because it does so much volume, and spends nothing on marketing.

Most of the company's sites are staffed by hearing aid dispensers, who must pass state licensing exams. But unlike audiologists, they do not need an advanced degree. Audiologists caution that their additional years of training allow them to spot problems that need medical attention.

Still, Costco worked for Tasha Turner, 46, of Highland Park, N.J., who in December bought a pair of aids for the first time and has been back to the chain's Edison, N.J., store for five or six tune-up visits. "They are just absolutely fantastic on follow-up," Turner said.

One point on which all providers agree is that most hearing-impaired people wait too long to buy the devices, if they ever do at all. Studies have found that just 20 to 25 percent of hearing-impaired people wear them.

Studies also suggest that people with hearing loss are more prone to cognitive decline, though it is not clear if one problem causes the other.

If nothing else, a hearing aid helps you communicate rather than drift off into your own world.

What is the proper price for that? The marketplace is still deciding.

A PERSONAL ACCOUNT

Buying hearing aids online has advantages — but it's not for everyone

I have worn a hearing aid for nearly four decades, and I cannot imagine life without one.

But the pricey devices keep getting more expensive. My current model, bought from a trained professional called an audiologist, cost about \$3,000.

Would it make sense to save money by ordering my next one online?

A cardboard box arrived in late November from Wilmington, Del.-based Embrace Hearing, holding what I hoped

would be the answer.

Inside was the X-Mini, an aptly named model about the size of a kidney bean. It was packed with electronics and features similar to what I have in my old hearing aid, yet it sells for just \$599.

Right away I hit a small roadblock. I was not entirely sure how to put it on.

But 30 minutes after I sent a question via e-mail, the company responded with helpful guidance, and I was on my way.

The X-Mini worked well.

The sound was a bit metallic the first few times I wore it, but a new hearing aid often sounds a bit unnatural, regardless of where it is bought. The brain may need a few days to adjust to a given device.

What's more, it was the first time I had tried a hearing aid that fits into the ear canal by means of a "dome" — a small, plastic cone that fits any adult-sized ear, rather than the traditional, custom-fit earmold.

Within an hour of turning on the X-Mini for the first time, I put it to the ultimate test: lunch in Philadelphia's Chinatown.

Anyone with a hearing loss will tell you that restaurants can be a challenge, and this one, a crowded hole-in-the-wall with no carpet or wall hangings to absorb noise, was a killer. Between the clatter of kitchenware and the chatter of fellow diners, I was prepared to miss some of my lunch partner's conversation.

Not to worry. I simply pressed a button on a remote control, thereby putting the X-Mini into "speech beam" mode.

That did two things. The rear-facing microphone was turned off, so I could focus on the sound coming through the forward-facing microphone. And for that front-facing mike, the frequencies associated with speech were pumped up while other kinds of sounds were tamped down a bit.

Many digital hearing aids, including my old one, have similar features. My version of the X-Mini had five other settings, including one for music.

So should everyone buy online?

In my opinion, no. If the person is fairly tech-savvy and likes to figure things out, then sure.

But if the wearer is older and requires lots of hand-holding, buying a hearing aid online could lead to frustration and ultimately a refusal to wear it. Hearing aids are tricky if you have never worn one, and an audiologist can teach strategies for getting the most out of them.

And some patients, because of the nature of their hearing loss, will need multiple follow-up adjustments to their devices. Embrace Hearing offers to adjust a hearing aid if you mail it back, but that could be a hassle.

Fortunately, my X-Mini did not need any modification. I had sent the company the results of my most recent hearing test in advance, and they programmed the hearing aid to amplify sound at various frequencies by whatever amount I needed.

The company allowed me to wear the X-Mini on a trial basis for a few weeks, and now I'm back to my old one, made by a firm called Oticon, which I got from Main Line Audiology and like very much.

I'm not sure what I'll do when it's time to buy a new hearing aid in a few years. Rest assured you will never find me without one.

Personal sound-amplification devices are worn in the ear and make sounds louder, but are less sophisticated than hearing aids, and the FDA does not allow them to be marketed as such.