



Anne and Wayne Wicklund of Fountain Hills, shown with their dog Snowy, have started a home-based business selling stickers, patches and other materials to aid hearing-impaired people and those who interact with them.

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Fountain Hills couple tackle hearing problems

By Erin Reep, Tribune

As Wayne Wicklund gradually lost his hearing over the past three years, he discovered some of the social problems encountered by the hearing impaired. "People are talking to me from the side or behind me . . . and I don't hear any of it," the Fountain Hills man said. "They either think you're stupid, stuck-up or ignoring them."

Wicklund's wife, Anne, found a creative solution to the problem. To let people know that Wayne is deaf, Anne designed a royal blue lapel pin with the words "hearing impaired" in gold.

The process of producing the pin and giving it to others led the Wicklunds to launch a home-based business in February. Hearingimpaired.net offers door plaques, desk signs, emergency deaf response cards, car window decals, pins and patches for the hearing impaired.

Wayne, 56, is now deaf in his left ear and has 3 percent hearing in his right. Anne, 58, shared Wayne's frustration as they were in public and people didn't recognize her husband's hearing loss.

The products have improved his communication with others, he said. The Wicklunds volunteer at the River of Time Museum in Fountain Hills, where Wayne keeps a sign on the front desk as he works. The sign has also helped in his business as a real estate agent for First USA Reality.

"When you're working at your computer and people come up and talk to you, they don't realize you can't hear," he said. "With a desk sign, they'll start coming up and touching you on the shoulder." Another popular item is a "hearing impaired" door sign designed for hotel rooms and RV parks, Anne said. The door sign informs people that there is a hearing-impaired person in the room. The idea for this product came in August, after the Wicklunds evacuated their Minnesota hotel room during a fire.

The couple's hearing dog alerted them that there was a fire alarm sounding. "I didn't hear anything, and I didn't smell anything," Wayne said.

Prices range from \$3.50 to \$9.95 for most products and are available in English and Spanish.

To order products, call (480) 837-0190 or visit www.hearingimpaired.net.

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