



Dr. Charles Andrew Laszlo, P.Eng.

## Gold Medal Award

When he was an undergraduate student at Montréal's McGill University, Dr. Charles Laszlo, C.M., O.B.C., P.Eng. faced a dilemma. Without immediate ear surgery, he would almost certainly lose his sense of hearing, but he had no money to pay for the operation or hospital stay, and medicare was still a distant dream in Canada.

Charles ultimately received the needed surgery with help from the surgeons at McGill, who waived their fee for the operation, and the university, which paid his hospital costs. That kindness led to a job, graduate work in biomedical engineering, an academic career, engineering excellence, a dream, and a man who has repaid his benefactors a hundred times over through his many contributions to Canadian society.

Born in Budapest, Hungary, Charles immigrated to Canada in January 1957. Within two weeks, he had a job repairing radios, and nine months later was studying engineering at McGill University in Montréal.

Charles received a bachelors degree in electrical engineering in 1961. That was followed by a masters degree and Ph.D. in biomedical engineering, and a career dedicated to helping hard of hearing people communicate.

In 1993, Charles established the Institute for Hearing Accessibility Research at the University of British Columbia. He created a unique interdisciplinary research environment, where engineers, other professionals and hard of hearing consumers worked together as a team to develop new communications technologies. Another piece of the puzzle – a mechanism to speed the transfer of the Institute's research to industry and into usable products – had been developed in 1991, when Charles and his colleagues formed Assistive Learning Device Systems Inc. (ALDS).

Since then, Charles has developed and produced several inventions, including a portable infrared communication system for use in classrooms and meetings, and a personal infrared communication system for private one-to-one conversations. His latest invention is FlightSound, the world's first "airworthiness certified" infrared communication system for hard of hearing people.

Charles' inventions are only one aspect of his work to help the hard-of-hearing communicate. He is also an active volunteer with several advocacy groups, both in Canada and internationally. From being the founding president of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association and the Canadian Deaf and Hard of Hearing Forum, to serving a term as president of the International Federation of Hard of Hearing People, and his current role on the executive committee of Hearing International, Charles has given generously of his time to achieve social equality for hard-of-hearing people.

After devoting well over 30 years to the development of technologies to help hard of hearing people communicate, there is still much to do. Charles intends to pursue research in the university environment toward the commercial development of new assistive listening devices, to create a relevant, accessible technical knowledge source, and to encourage more people with disabilities to become entrepreneurial.

Charles is a member of the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of British Columbia.

