

On stage with Ozzy is a sign of the times for local woman

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Chili's Susan Manley's summer rocked as she interpreted for the deaf at concerts.

By Eric Walter

ewalter@mpnewspapers.com

In her eight years interpreting for the deaf, Susan Manley has been asked to perform in many different situations. Up until this July, however, sharing a stage with the likes of Ozzy Osbourne, Coldplay or Hilary Duff weren't among them.

"Usually I'm in the classroom or the court room or a doctor's office," the Chili resident said. "So I don't normally have this much fun."

A full-time interpreter with the National Technical Institute for the Deaf at Rochester Institute of Technology, Manley also works freelance for Rochester's large deaf community.

And starting this summer, she has also been popping up in places like Darien Lake and the New York State Fair.

Not too shabby for a woman who, up until recently, had a major case of stage fright.

"The first time was a little terrifying," Manley said. "(But) you learn to turn your nerves into productive energy."

According to Linda Siple, of the National Technical Institute for the Deaf at Rochester Institute of Technology, the idea that deaf or hard-of-hearing people can't enjoy live music is a commonly held myth.

"Deaf and hard-of-hearing people experience a wide range of hearing loss," Siple wrote in an e-mailed interview. "For those who have profound hearing loss, they may feel the music through vibrations; others may hear varying levels of the music."

Even putting the auditory aspects aside, the visual nature of some performances and social atmosphere of a live show can also be draws, she said.

When the previously scheduled interpreter had to drop out of the metal-heavy Ozzfest's Rochester show in July, Manley said she jumped at the opportunity.

"They called, I think, 36 hours before they needed us," she said. "So we had to learn a lot of music fast."

It was an opportunity that led to others—among them Hilary Duff's performance at the New York State Fair and Coldplay's show at Darien Lake.

With the summer concert season over, things have since quieted down a bit on the musical front, said Manley. Still, she said, there's always next year.

"One of my goals is to interpret for Metallica," she said with a laugh. "I think it's from growing up in the '80's."