



WORLD

Technology News and Commentary for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People

A New Beginning



RECOGNITION



NETWORKING

In the Nation's Capital



PROGRAM

Story begins on page 10

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2009 TDI Awards

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Dr. James Marsters

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TDI'S MISSION

"TDI provides leadership in achieving equal access to telecommunications, media, and information technologies for deaf and hard of hearing people."

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WORLD

**Volume 40, Number 3
Summer 2009**

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Board Views



BY DR. ROY MILLER
TDI President

HR 3101 is a bill that would amend the Communications Act to add new consumer protections that will ensure that people with disabilities do not get left behind as telephones and television programming increasingly rely on digital and Internet Protocol (IP) technologies.

Washington: Where Access Begins

The 18th TDI Biennial International Conference was held at the Renaissance Mayflower Hotel in Washington, DC last summer, and its theme was appropriately "Washington: Where Access Begins." Honoring that theme, TDI was able to do something at this past Conference that had never been done – at least not to the knowledge of present Board members. It took advantage of the Conference location to engage in its principal activity, namely to put "boots on the ground" and advocate for improved access for deaf and hard of hearing people.

The Conference opened on Wednesday night with a keynote speech by Mr. Kareem Dale, Special Assistant to the President for Disability Policy. The opening ceremony was held on Wednesday night to allow for a special event on Capitol Hill the following morning. The Thursday morning session was held in the Caucus Room of the Cannon House Office Building, and featured a panel of experts and a panel of consumers explaining what the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2009 (HR 3101) was all about, and why it was critically needed to ensure that people with hearing loss do not get left behind as society marches away from an

analog landline telecommunications network to a digital world built around the Internet. The session also included the presentation of the TDI 2009 Karen Peltz-Strauss Public Policy awards to Representative Edward Markey from Massachusetts (sponsor of HR 3101) and Senator John McCain for their many years of legislative service to improve access for Americans with hearing loss.

After the award presentations and panel presentations concluded, TDI and an army of supporters broke into eight advocacy teams to visit the offices of twenty-four of the Representatives who are members of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, the Committee to which HR 3101 has been assigned. Each team was lead by a member of the TDI Board of Directors, and at each of the offices that they visited they explained why HR 3101 was needed in order to provide continued telecommunications and media access for deaf and hard of hearing Americans. So what would HR 3101 do, and why is it important enough for TDI to dedicate half a day out of its Conference to advocate for its passage by Congress?

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BOARD VIEWS Continued from page 2

HR 3101 is a bill that would amend the Communications Act to add new consumer protections that will ensure that people with disabilities do not get left behind as telephones and television programming increasingly rely on digital and Internet Protocol (IP) technologies. Some of the things that HR 3101 would do, if passed, and the reasons why these new legal requirements are needed, are as follows:

1. HR 3101 would extend FCC requirements to ensure that people who have a disability and use relay services can use those services to communicate with other people who have disabilities, that is, connect one form of relay service to another form of relay service.

Today the FCC interprets current law to only allow relay conversations between people with disabilities and people without disabilities.

HR 3101 would allow a late-deafened person who uses CapTel Internet Relay to phone a deaf person who uses VRS, or a deaf grandparent who uses a TTY to communicate with their deaf grandchild who uses VRS.

2. HR 3101 would require closed captioning decoder circuitry in all video programming devices, including PDAs, computers, iPods, cell phones, DVD players, TIVO devices, and battery operated TVs.

The Decoder Circuitry Act of 1990 only requires that TVs with screens 13 inches or larger diagonally be capable of displaying closed captions.

Today there are many smaller size devices that display TV programming, such as PDAs, computers, iPods, MP3 players, cell phones, DVD players, TIVO devices, and battery operated TVs.

3. HR 3101 would require that distributors of video programming over the Internet pass through closed captioning that is already covered by the FCC's closed captioning rules.

When TV networks re-run their TV programs over the Internet, those programs would have to be captioned to the same extent that they are required to be captioned on TV.

When websites like Hulu run TV shows over the Internet, those shows would have to be captioned to the same extent that they are required to be captioned on TV.

4. HR 3101 would require easy access to user interfaces (controls) on video programming devices by people with disabilities.

Today television sets have become very complex, and it is often difficult to figure out how to turn on and control captions on the new, snazzy digital HDTV sets that everyone wants to buy.

HR 3101 would require manufacturers to put a CC button on all remotes to easily turn captions on and off, and to put captioning settings at the top level of on-screen menus to easily change them.

5. HR 3101 would require all Internet enabled relay service providers to contribute to the Interstate Relay Fund.

Currently only common carriers who use the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) and VoIP service providers are required to contribute to the Interstate Relay Fund, but Internet enabled relay services (such as VRS and IP relays) are rapidly growing.

To ensure a healthy Interstate Relay Fund, and the continuance of relay services for people with hearing loss, it is essential that all Internet enabled relay services contribute to the Fund.

These are just some of the provisions of HR 3101 and reasons why its passage is important for deaf and hard of hearing people. TDI is working with the Coalition of Organizations for Accessible Technologies (COAT) in its efforts to get HR 3101 enacted into law. But we need all the help we can get! What can you do? Contact your U.S. Representative and urge him or her to join in our struggle for access and co-sponsor HR 3101, as well as vote for it when the opportunity arises. Contact your U.S. Senators and urge them to co-sponsor S.3304, the companion bill in the Senate. You can find out more about HR 3101, sign a petition in support of the bill, and keep up-to-date regarding its progress by visiting the COAT website (www.coataccess.org). As the Conference theme said, "Washington" is "Where Access Begins," and passage of HR 3101 or S 3304 is critical to maintaining access for people with hearing loss in a digital world that revolves around the Internet. Help us, and help deaf and hard of hearing people, by advocating for Congress to enact the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2009 or the Equal Access to 21st Century Communications Act.

Capitol Commentary



BY CLAUDE STOUT
TDI Executive Director

As we maintain relations with other countries, we are building on each other's progress in accessible technology and accompanying legislation as well as regulation

Staying in Touch with the Rest of the World

It was good to see so many of our friends at the TDI Conference in Washington, DC last summer. As you will see from the rest of this issue, we felt the Conference was among the best that we have ever had in TDI's forty-one year history. Please let us know what you liked most about the Conference, and how we can improve for the next Conference (definitely one improvement would be better control over the air conditioning in the meeting rooms!).

For this issue, I will be focusing on TDI's ongoing efforts with other countries for accessibility of telecommunications, media and information technology. One of the key highlights of last summer's Conference was the plenary session on developing and maintaining global accessibility standards by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). The three presenters for this topic were Andrea Saks, Cynthia Waddell and Alessandra Gaspari. The daughter of Andrew Saks, one of the three men who started the TTY movement, Andrea Saks has represented TDI for many years at meetings of the ITU. Over the years, she has met with representatives and engineers from other countries in an effort to develop international standards in accessibility, first concerning the text telephone (TTY), and now to ensure that we benefit from text, voice and video technologies when communicating via the Internet to get information via peer-to-peer contacts or relay service. Recognized internationally in the field of electronic and information technology for people with disabilities, Ms. Waddell is Executive Director of the International Center for Disability Resources on the Internet. Ms. Gaspari is ITU's

Secretariat for the Joint Coordination Activity on Accessibility and Human Factors, as well as the Internet Governance Forum Dynamic Coalition on Accessibility and Disability.

In their presentation at the TDI Conference, the three presenters traced ITU's historical efforts concerning accessibility, and covered briefly its accomplishments that benefit citizens with disabilities from all over the world. They also spoke of their current efforts to develop standards that support citizens who are deaf and hard of hearing in their access to the Internet. Check the link to ITU's accessibility efforts, <http://www.itu.int/themes/accessibility/>. We were glad to have this presentation at the Conference for a number of reasons. First, as the saying goes, "Think globally. Act locally." Nowadays, with current technologies, we are able to get in touch much easier with our contacts abroad. In the past, we made landline calls to our contacts in other countries. Nevertheless, today we send email and instant messages, or make peer-to-peer and relay calls to others outside America. Second, we were anxious to learn from them concerning what new technologies their countries have for their citizens with disabilities, as well as new accessibility laws and regulations that enable deaf and hard of hearing people to participate more fully in the community. Last, but not least, we shared with them information on our current technologies and accessibility regulations.

TDI has three members on the Board of Directors that have a lot of experience in international relations and disability access. Judy Viera lived for a number

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CAPITOL COMMENTARY Continued from page 4

of years in the United Kingdom, where she worked for Ultratec from its London headquarters on the sale and distribution of its text-phone products. She has traveled extensively around the world to provide consultation on technology access issues. Joe Duarte was born in Portugal, but he now lives and works here in America. He goes to Portugal at least once a year, to work with the Portuguese government in an effort to make life accessible for deaf and hard of hearing people. Like Ms. Viera, Dr. Roy Miller has presented on technology access issues at a number of Conferences including the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), and the International Federation of Hard of Hearing People (IFHOH). I took part in the International Forum of the Deaf in Fez, Morocco two years ago with Dr. Yarker Andersson, a former WFD President.

As we maintain relations with other countries, we are building on each other's progress in accessible technology and accompanying legislation as well as regulations. This keeps us from "reinventing the wheel," and we learn about what works, and what does not for a particular country. At times, I am clearly impressed with the technology used by deaf and hard of hearing people in other countries. When I took part in a World Deaf Golf Federation tournament in Ireland in 2002, I was on the putting green with an official from the Australia Deaf Golf Association. I saw him take out a pager, and then send a message to someone. I asked him if he was sending something to his fellow teammate on the golf course. He said, "No," he was chatting with his wife a half world away in The Land Down Under. The conversation was made possible by the GMS technology in his pager. Back then, I did not have this technology in my pager, and could not use my pager in

Ireland. In 2004, I went to Sweden and met Gunnar Hellström's son. He had a cell phone with video capability and introduced me to his friend on his phone. This was over five years ago, and we still do not have this live two-way video capability on cell phones here in America.

While deaf and hard of hearing people in America and other countries have different cultures and languages, we share at least two things. We use similar accessible technologies to participate fully in the community through pagers, cell phones, relay services, computers and television. In addition, like our hearing peers, we must have the means to communicate and get information every day. To paraphrase a popular song, "We Are The World," TDI is committed to collaborate with consumer advocates and other stakeholders from other countries to build a better future for our constituents.

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Accessible Tech



BY JAMES HOUSE
TDI World Editor

Just a few short years later in the 21st Century, many parts of that law [Telecommunications Act of 1996] are now as obsolete as the analog technology that it addresses.

HR 3101 – What's in It For You?

Some of us read about HR #3101 in *TDI World* and many other publications. Some of us have never heard of HR 3101. If passed, this bill, which is known as the *21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act* should go far in updating communications law and creating more accessibility for people who are deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened and deaf-blind. What is it? Why is it important? What's in it for us? What can we do?

What is HR 3101?

HR 3101 is a “nickname” for a bill that has been introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives. The bill as introduced by Edward Markey, a Congressman from Massachusetts is called the *Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2009*.

Why is HR 3101 important?

TDI and nearly 300 other organizations serving people with disabilities support this bill because they see an urgent need, which makes it necessary for Congress to pass a law that meets the needs of people

with hearing and vision disabilities when they use telecommunications or other information technology. When Congress wrote the Telecommunications Act in 1996 (Telecom Act), the law was interpreted to mean it applied only to the existing technology at the time. Just a few short years later in the 21st Century, many parts of that law are now as obsolete as the analog technology that it addresses.

We did not foresee the immense popularity of the Internet and how the World Wide Web became intertwined with nearly every major activity that we participate in. See the list below.

This list can go on and on. Most of us can agree that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Telecom Act have produced many benefits for people with disabilities. It is equally obvious that the Internet has a major influence on our lives today, even to the point where it blurs political and geographical boundaries. While we enjoy the digital revolution, we are reminded of the limitations of analog

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Activity	1996	Today – Now we...
Banking	Local banks	Do most of our banking and investments online.
Pay bills	Checks and postage	Pay bills instantaneously at the click of a mouse.
Write letters	Paper and pen	Email and do instant messages from a computer or a phone
Photos	Camera and film	Create, edit and share photos digitally
Travel	Travel agents	Reserve our own plane tickets, hotel and car rental.
Driving	Paper maps	Get directions and know when we will arrive at our destination.
Gifts	Gift shops	Order ordinary and exotic gifts online from anywhere.
Taxes	IRS Form 1040	File electronically and hopefully get a refund in a few days.
Business	Brick and mortar	Buy and sell using web classified ads or create websites
Computer	Desktop	Have laptops and wireless devices that do multiple functions.
Software	Buy at store	Download software and keep up-to-date as needed.
Relay calls	Phone/TTY	Enjoy functional equivalency with voice, text and video
Telephones	Landline analog	Digital phones transmit voice, data and video over the air
News	Newspaper/TV	Keep informed up to the minute at media websites
Television	TV set	Watch TV shows on “smart phones” or through the Internet
Movies	Videotapes/DVDs	Download and watch movie videos IF they are captioned.

ACCESSIBLE TECH Continued from page 8

technology, especially in the last four areas (news, movies, relay calls, television and telephones).

Generally, the industry is in favor of fewer regulations on the Internet as compared with legacy services received through telephone lines or over the air. Telephone services were regulated state-by-state and phone subscribers used to pay an assortment of fees for different additional services such as Universal Service Fund subsidies, TRS, 911 service and other state and local fees. When the Internet came along, Voice-over Internet protocol (VoIP) providers split hairs by saying – since we are not using the regular telephone lines, we should not have to collect all the little taxes and fees as the record keeping would be too cumbersome. As a result, 911 services and relay services become underfunded as everyone ditches the older landlines in favor of wireless and VoIP technologies.

The same thing applies to television. The FCC has jurisdiction over television and radio because they need to allocate the spectrum for different purposes. The digital television transition of 2009 was one example of reassigning the airwaves to take advantage of better efficiencies offered by digital broadcasting as you could show more channels or higher quality channels in less space than the old analog broadcasts. Unlike the telephone network, licensing is done entirely by the FCC with several obligations and rules designed to help the broadcaster serve its local community. However, since the airwaves could not carry the television signals uniformly, cable television dominates the landscape. Cable providers compete for franchises to serve different jurisdictions. Very few jurisdictions award more than one company a franchise to serve that town or county – creating a local monopoly that aggravate viewers with price hikes and declining services. As

the Internet increased in capacity, people took advantage of the higher broadband speeds to watch television over the Internet, discontinue direct cable television service and just pay for Internet access. Again, the hair-splitting arises as cable providers argue that the public spectrum is not being used so they should not have to go through the expense of maintaining multiple licensing requirements.

At the time the Telecom Act was rewritten it was a good law, but not future-proof. Rapidly evolving technology made the law obsolete even before the ink was dry. TDI does understand the benefits of having a single nationwide rule-setting mechanism such as the FCC, and not the confusing patchwork quilt of state and local regulations. Rather than focusing on specific technologies that make things work, the regulations should have focused on the functions that we enjoy from the law. The reason we saw relay evolving the way it did was that the Telecom Act mandated functional equivalency and encouraged innovation in relay services. Nevertheless, it is unfortunate that functional equivalency mandate did not extend to other life activities. The industry also favors fewer regulations in the vain hopes that the marketplace will spur access for users with disabilities while history has repeatedly shown that access comes only after laws are enacted.

Benefits of HR 3101

HR 3101 attempts to extend the accessibility requirements we enjoy under the ADA and the Telecom Act into Internet technologies. According to the Coalition of Organizations for Accessible Technologies (COAT), there are two parts in HR 3101 as listed below... (list from www.coataccess.org)

Communications Access

- Requires access to phone-type equipment and services used over

the Internet (Current law: Section 255 requires telecommunications products and services to be accessible but does not extend to the Internet)

- Adds improved accountability and enforcement measures, including a clearinghouse and reporting obligations by providers and manufacturers
- Requires telephone products used with the Internet to be hearing aid compatible (HAC) (Current law: HAC required on all wireline and many wireless phones)
- Allows use of Lifeline and Link-up universal service funds (USF) for broadband connection and service (Current law: Discounts only available for products and services on public telephone network)
- Allocates up to \$10 million/year for equipment used by people who are deaf-blind (Currently: Inadequate state programs that distribute some free or discounted telephone equipment, but little available for people who are deaf-blind)
- Clarifies the scope of relay services to include calls between and among people with disabilities and requires Internet-based service providers to contribute to the Interstate Relay Fund
- Requires FCC to develop real-time text digital standards to replace TTY communications

Video Programming Access

- Requires caption decoder circuitry or display capability in all video programming devices, including PDAs, computers, iPods, cell phones, DVD players, TiVo devices and battery-operated TVs (Current law: Caption decoder circuitry is only required on TVs with screens at least 13 inches)

A New Beginning in the Nation's Capitol

BY JIM HOUSE

The 18th Biennial TDI International Conference took place at the historic Renaissance Mayflower Hotel (The Mayflower) in downtown Washington, DC at the end of July 2009. This article gives you a bird's eye view of what it is like to be in a TDI Conference.

First, we begin with an overview of the “nest”, the Mayflower hotel, which has ties to many historical events, including one that made a tremendous impact on our advocacy efforts that show no signs of abating. From an inspiring keynote speech by a high-ranking White House official that kicked off the conference, to an empowering rite of passage that every American citizen should participate in, there was some thing for everyone at the conference.

That was only just the first 24 hours of the premier gathering of people who wish to shape an accessible world where telecommunications, media and information technology and are all usable in the hands of every person seeking connections. Then as you fly through the rest of this article, you will want to peek through each doorway where you can see all the fun and informative activities at the conference. And along the way we recognize individuals and companies for their outstanding support of TDI toward shaping an accessible world.

The Mayflower Hotel is the largest luxury hotel in the U.S. capital according to Wikipedia. Nicknamed the “Grande Dame of Washington” at its opening in 1925, the hotel was said to contain more gold trim than any other building except

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the Library of Congress. One of our official Conference photographers, **Steve Brenner** reported that his parents spent their honeymoon at the Mayflower in March 1931 when room rates were \$7.00 per night, certainly a

fraction of today's rates.

The Mayflower has hosted a presidential inauguration ball for every President since **Calvin Coolidge**. **Franklin D. Roosevelt** worked on his famous

"We have nothing to fear but fear itself" inaugural address while as a guest. His successor **Harry S. Truman** resided there for the first 90 days of his presidential term while the White House was undergoing renovations. FBI Director, **J. Edgar Hoover** ate lunch with his number two lieutenant, **Clyde Tolson** at the Mayflower almost daily for more than twenty years, and legend has it that he once nabbed a "Top Ten Most Wanted" fugitive at a nearby table in the hotel.

Aside from being the scene of several political milestones and scandals, one particular milestone marked a turning point in the history of civil rights for people with disabilities. On March 6, 1988, more than one year before the first Deaf Way, deaf and hard of hearing students at Gallaudet University became upset when they learned that the Board of Trustees had picked a hearing woman with no background in deafness to lead the school over two seasoned deaf candidates. The mob took to the streets and marched down to the Mayflower Hotel to confront the Board during its meeting. The Chair of the Board, **Jane Bassett Spilman** came out the back entrance to speak to the angry throng of students and alumni, and to defend the Board's selection. In her speech, Ms. Spilman was widely quoted as saying, "Deaf people are not yet ready to function in a hearing world." Although she has denied making such a statement, that speech along with the refusal of the student body to accept a hearing president led to a week long shutdown of the University. As the students chanted "Deaf President Now", this protest captured the attention of presidential candidates as well as the U.S. Congress and the entire nation. On the following Sunday evening the student leaders got a TTY call, and they



Renaissance Mayflower Hotel, site of the 18th Biennial TDI International Conference

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learned that the Board of Trustees had agreed to all four of their demands.

I. King Jordan became the first deaf president, Ms. Spilman resigned from the Board, and they were doubly elated to find that **Phil Bravin**, the caller was the first deaf chair of the Board. This historic TTY call ended with a commitment to achieve a majority of deaf or hard of hearing trustees, and assurances of no reprisals for students or staff regarding the protest.

JULY 29, 2009 – OPENING EVENTS

Once again, the Mayflower Hotel became the site of new trends and another milestone in our march toward equal access. In the grand hallway, early arrivals completed their registration with ease, all because of the able assistance from **Gloria Carter**, TDI Executive Secretary, **Chad Metcalf**, Advertising Manager and Member Service Officer and **Scott**

Recht, Business Manager.

The theme, “Washington: Where Access Begins” inspired many firsts for TDI. The Conference had its opening night the evening of July 29. **Kareem M. Dale**, Special Assistant to the President for Disability Policy was the first high-level White House official to present a keynote speech at a TDI conference.

As **Cheryl Heppner** reported, during the keynote speech, Mr. Dale outlined the President’s agenda for people with disabilities. A decision was made at the White House that the best way to impact the lives of individuals with disabilities is to bring about needed changes. President Barack Obama’s first appointment was Mr. Dale as Special Assistant for Disability Policy, a senior position at the White House. The President has sought individuals capable and prepared to carry out his agenda. Mr. Dale said

that President Obama understands that if you don’t have people at the table who themselves live with disabilities, and who know what it means to be a person with a disability, then you aren’t getting the type of representation for the community that you need.

“I’m humbled and honored that he chose me for that appointment,” Dale said. “But what is great about this President is that he did not stop. He realized that one person is not enough.”

President Obama has made several other appointments to ensure that, across the board, people with disabilities -- including those who are deaf or hard-of-hearing -- have an equal shot to be a part of the change that he wants to bring about. To this end, he appointed Paul Miller to be a Special Assistant to the President in the White House Office of Personnel, to

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Entrance of the Mayflower Hotel



Lobby of the Mayflower Hotel



One team of advocates led by Joe Duarte visit Congressional offices to garner support for HR 3101. From L-R Joe Duarte (VA), Meredith Filiatreault (Interpreter), Dot Brenner (MD), Gary Viall (VA), Donna Graffe (VA) and Toni Dunne (CO).



Neil McDevitt escorts Kareem Dale to the ballroom for his keynote speech



Art Roehrig asks a question of Mr. Dale during the keynote speech

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ensure that persons with disabilities are included and integrated into the overall efforts in appointments. He also appointed Jeff Crowley to be national AIDS Director and a senior advisor on senior policy in the Domestic Policy Council. Mr. Dale and Mr. Crowley share responsibility on disability policies. Mr. Crowley leads the effort on health care and Mr. Dale leads on education, technology, employment and several other areas.

Two other examples he cited of things being done to include the deaf and hard of hearing community:

- The appointment of Julius Genachowski to the Federal Communications Commission, "a huge leap for this community" and a change in focus and consideration and a full implementation of the efforts of the FCC toward people with disabilities.

Mr. Dale said of Genachowski, "He is committed to strengthening the Disability Office of the FCC and working with this community at every level to improve technology and communications access for people with disabilities, including those who are deaf or hard of hearing."

A commitment by the White House for an open dialogue on the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act, listening to the community and figuring out where it can improve addressing these important issues.

Following the speech, TDI Executive Director, **Claude Stout** and the Conference Chairpersons, **Joe Duarte** and **Fred Weiner** gratefully acknowledged the generosity of the following sponsors during the remainder of the Opening Night Ceremony and gave those representatives that were present an opportunity to say a few words.

TDI gratefully acknowledges these sponsors that made this conference possible.

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 - ◇ Sorenson Communications
- The Lincoln Memorial
 - ◇ Gallaudet University
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 - ◇ Snap!VRS
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 - ◇ CaptionMAX
 - ◇ Consumer Electronics Association
 - ◇ Maryland Relay

- ◇ National Association of Broadcasters
- ◇ National Emergency Number Association
- ◇ Sprint Relay
- ◇ Williams Sound

JULY 30, 2009 - DAY 1 - LEGISLATION DAY

Another first for this TDI Conference was a field trip the next morning to the Capitol. First, Fred Weiner, TDI Board member and conference program co-chair, led a brief TDI awards ceremony honoring **Senator John McCain (R-AZ)** and **Representative Edward Markey (D-MA)** with the **Karen Peltz Strauss** Public Policy Award for their lifelong dedication to advancing civil rights for people with disabilities. Afterwards, Ms. Peltz Strauss moderated a panel discussion of experts including **David Bahar** from the office of **Representative Jay Inslee (D-WA)** and **Mark Richert** of the American Foundation of the Blind. Then **Rosaline Crawford** of the National Association of the Deaf led a separate panel of consumers including **Lise Hamlin, Randy Pope, Alfred Sonnenstrahl** and **John Stanton**, that focused on the potential impact of the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act or HR 3101.

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Cheryl Heppner and Pam Holmes on the Digital Television Transition Forum



COAT Steering Committee (L-R) Jenifer Simpson, Karen Peltz Strauss, Rosaline Crawford and Eric Bridges



Sean Hayes, Microsoft Corporation



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Later, eight teams of conference participants fanned throughout the Capitol complex and visited the offices of 24 House Representatives to seek additional cosponsors for HR 3101.

The last time TDI had its conference in the Nation's Capitol was in 1989 in conjunction with the first Deaf Way hosted by Gallaudet University. Twenty years ago, Deaf Way was the first gathering of its kind with thousands of deaf and hard of hearing attendees from all over the world. The week-long event celebrated international Deaf Culture and its unique history, language and cultural achievements with workshops focusing on advocacy, education, family life, the arts and dozens of other topics. TDI coordinated a series of workshops focusing on accessible technology such as 9-1-1 access, relay services and local news captioning.

The TDI Conference's regular routine of plenary sessions and workshops began in the afternoon. Cheryl Heppner had the honor of moderating the first plenary session that covered an all-important topic. The nation's television infrastructure had just completed its transition from analog to digital broadcasting, bringing a completely new world of television. On its way out were the old "boob tubes" of yesteryear as households began to replace them with sleek panels that you could hang on the wall. Some viewers

would say its better to watch a football game on digital TV than to go to the game itself because you as the viewer would get up real close, you can even see the players sweat. On this panel were industry leaders and consumer advocates including **Ann Bobeck** (National Association of Broadcasters), **Pam Holmes** (Consumer from Madison, Wisconsin), **Brian Markwalter** (Consumer Electronics Association), **Andy Scott** (National Cable Television Association) and **Chris Soukup** (Communication Services for the Deaf). Just how to access those new features at first was a mystery to many early adopters in the audience that took the plunge to take advantage of all these "wow" features and yet encountered captioning problems. In place of Line 21 or standard white lettering on black boxes, its digital counterpart now comes with a palette of different options for adjustment. For the first time, you can adjust the style, color and size of characters, color and transparency of the background, or just take in the captions as they are transmitted. But as we learned, there are so many different configurations for captioning that each person has to find one that works best for them.

Cheryl Heppner introduces the panelists in the following excerpts from her report on the Digital Television Transition Forum.

Pamela Holmes, Consumer (Madison, Wisconsin)

Pam Holmes was a panelist at the digital television and captioning workshop held at the TDI Conference in California in 2007. There she showed a video clip and talked about some problems she was experiencing with digital captioning. Curious about how her television captioning experiences back then compare with those she has today, I asked her to present an update for the forum. Pam came with a series of home movie clips she filmed recently to document her current captioning problems. She focused on problems that she had heard were being experienced not just in her state of Wisconsin but also in California, Texas, Alabama, Florida, New Jersey, New York and elsewhere.

Two years ago, Pam was seeing mostly captions where two lines were overlaid. Since then, without making any changes to her TV setup, the problem went away. Now she is seeing problems she has never seen before. These problems included delayed captions, garbled captions, captions that are missing letters or words, and lines of captions that run right off the screen.

As the saying goes, "a picture is worth a thousand words" and by that measure Pam's videos were worth about 8,000 words. There were clips of weird

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Sean Gerlis catches up with Nancy Bloch at the President's Reception



Cynthia Waddell, Elaine Aiello and Andrea Saks together at a table during the President's Reception



Hamilton Relay exhibit

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captions from Good Morning America, the Michael Jackson memorial service and several more programs. After showing each clip, Pam asked the audience if they had experienced the same problem. The show of hands clearly showed she was not alone.

Pam concluded her presentation by saying that her questions as a consumer were what initiatives are happening to solve these issues, and whether the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) technical working group to study digital closed captioning would address them. She noted that many consumers had stopped complaining about their problems with closed captioning because they had become discouraged that their complaints did not bring results. She also wanted to learn whether there is a requirement that captioning be accurate and properly portray what is being shown.

Christopher Soukup, CSD Digital TV Transition Help Desk

Chris Soukup shared some of the results from CSD's work over the past nine months, working in collaboration with the FCC to provide a help center for consumers who are deaf or hard of hearing. The CSD Digital Transition Help Desk had a marketing and outreach campaign to create awareness of the digital TV transition and possible issues stemming from it. CSD created a comprehensive website on the digital TV transition with information in

English, American Sign Language, Spanish and Spanish ASL. Their other creation was a national help center to provide consumers with live support.

Over the nine months the help desk was in operation, it interacted with consumers in three different categories. The first group of consumers were people who were frightened, confused by the information they were seeing about the DTV transition, and unsure of what they were going to need.

The second group was consumers who had issues with equipment such as their converter box or television set, or had a problem with their service provider. Many of these consumers were able to resolve their problems successfully after viewing the instructional videos on the CSD website or by interacting with a live person at the help desk.

The third group of consumers had issues with captioning. This led CSD to create a national captioning survey with input from the FCC, National Center for Accessible Media, National Association of the Deaf and Hearing Loss Association of America. The survey was on the help desk's website and has had over 2,000 responses.

All of those responding to the survey had some type of captioning issue. Half of them had captioning problems all of the time. Sixty-five percent had experienced out of sync audio, where the captions didn't match what they were seeing onscreen.

Cathy Seidel, Chief, Consumer and Governmental Affairs, Bureau Federal Communications Commission

Cathy Seidel from the FCC noted that the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau houses the Disability Rights Office. This office recognized early in its planning for the digital TV transition that there would be several key groups that should be targeted for education about what the transition was, why it was being done, when it would occur, and what to do to prepare for it. One of the groups targeted was people with disabilities.

The FCC partnered with the industry, government agencies, service organizations, and nonprofit organizations to reach consumers about the transition. They awarded contracts for additional education to organizations like CSD, and had call center representatives at the FCC who also answered questions from individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. In addition to questions about captioning, these individuals had issues that were the same as others nationwide, such as how to install their converter box.

The FCC has had an open docket for a while to look at various captioning issues. In November, 2008 they released a declaratory ruling clarifying that providers, broadcasters,

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Ultratec's CapTel® exhibit



Pre-Paid Legal Services exhibit



Research In Motion BlackBerry exhibit

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and other program distributors were required to provide captioning with digital television just the same as they would with analog television unless they were covered by other exemptions. The FCC also asked in this proceeding for further comments on some technical or quality issues with captioning. Comments that were received are still being analyzed, and Cathy said this is a priority issue for the FCC.

Acting Chairman Copps established the technical working group comprised of many talented people who are very versed in captioning issues on the consumer side as well as the industry side, whether it's software, programming, cable, equipment, or another issue. It can be very hard to identify where a captioning problem lies. The working group will be identifying technical issues and determining or making recommendations to resolve those problems. It may require education or development of best practices or a streamlined way to report problems.

Ann Bobeck, Senior Vice President and Deputy General Counsel National Association of Broadcasters

Ann Bobeck serves on the FCC's Consumer Advisory Committee. She's the daughter of a local resident who is hard of hearing, and as a result she knows firsthand about the problems of accessing captioning.

From finding how to turn on captioning with the remote control to trying to figure out how to access the captioning through playback, or reading about navigating HDMI, Ann has learned it can be very daunting and frustrating.

She found that it took lot of time and patience to work with broadcast engineers and learn why there are so many technical challenges with captioning. Broadcasters, however, recognize that it's their responsibility as well as good business sense to make sure that captioning works for the estimated 30 to 37 million people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) is doing several things to meet the technical challenges head on. They have provided member education. They are supportive of a streamlined consumer complaint process with a central database or email or phone number where consumers can easily learn where to report a complaint with captioning and stations can more quickly respond. Although the FCC's proposed new rules were still being reviewed by the Office of Management and Budget at this time, the NAB went ahead and sent a reminder to its members to update their complaint process. Suggestions for best practices for education at the stations are welcome.

Andy Scott, Vice President of Engineering National Cable and Telecommunications Association

Andy, along with his colleagues, spends a great deal of time working on closed captioning with members of the National Cable and Telecommunications Association (NCTA). He pointed out that two aspects of captioning are producing the captions and sending them. Then there are cable operators whose responsibility is to pass the captions on to the consumer. He feels a huge amount of effort is being made to ensure the captions are right. The NCTA welcomes the opportunity to improve captioning.

Along with the broadcast and electronics industries, the cable industry has spent hundreds of hours for months and months to prepare for the digital transition. Cable companies not only carry the broadcast digital services but also in some cases convert some digital signals back to analog for certain customers.

Andy said that he understands how frustrating it can be to call a cable operator and get a customer service representative who simply has to forward the question. Right now, a lot of education is going on for members of the NCTA to make sure that they have the right processes in place and

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Verizon exhibit



AT&T exhibit



Snap! VRS exhibit



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that any captioning complaints are steered to the right person for quick response and resolution.

The cable industry is also taking a fresh look at how “this evil device at the end of the chain” – the set-top box -- is designed. They are giving more focus to making access to the captioning capabilities as intuitive as it can be.

Brian Markwalter, Vice President of Technology, Consumer and Electronics Association

Brian is one of the many individuals in the consumer electronics industry who worked on the digital TV transition for a long time. He found it to be an amazing public/private partnership. Some good work done early in the planning stage was the collaboration with broadcasters to define some of the minimum capabilities of the converter boxes and the submission of a proposal to make it reality. That proposal included captions. In 2008-2009, approximately 43 million converter boxes are expected to be sold and in the same time frame, about 66 million digital televisions. Every one of these products is ready to receive, decode and display broadcast captions.

Going digital has freed up spectrum for public safety and given broadcasters multiple channels, Brian pointed out. It has also given viewers fantastic pictures and new capabilities with captions. The flip side is that with

all of these options there are choices in implementing them that have led to problems with interoperability. CEA has the 708 standard that defines what digital captions are to be like, a change from the original 608 captions. Captions now have a richer environment and provide a better experience but that can lead to problems. We no longer have a television and antenna with just questions of whether the broadcaster sent the broadcast right and the TV decoded it right. Now there are set-top boxes in between and sometimes we are viewing broadcasts that these boxes recorded.

In another plenary session, the executive committee (**Eric Bridges, Rosaline Crawford, Karen Peltz Strauss and Jenifer Simpson**) of the Coalition of Organizations for Accessible Technology (COAT) reviewed many accomplishments in its first two years that vindicated the need for accessible technology. The rapid growth of COAT continues as the coalition has welcomed more than two hundred international, national, state and local affiliates. It is free for any business or organization to join COAT, just go to www.coataccess.org.

As Cheryl Heppner noted in her report, besides their work on the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act, COAT has been involved in several other activities.

Claude Stout, TDI's Executive Director, testified on behalf of COAT before a House subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet regarding the problems that people with disabilities were experiencing during the digital television transition.

COAT has petitioned the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in support of captioned telephone relay service.

COAT has had some other successes with the FCC, including a report in May 2007 that clarified how voice over IP (VoIP) services must be made accessible to people with disabilities that will have an impact on how relay services operate.

More recently, nine COAT affiliates were asked to serve on the FCC's technical working group on captioning and video description of digital television.

Six COAT affiliates are now represented on the FCC's Consumer Advisory Committee.

In the final plenary session of the day, **Sean Hayes** gave us an update about Microsoft's ongoing efforts to maintain accessibility for users of their products using what they call, “inclusive innovation” that goes beyond universal design. As Cheryl Heppner reported, Microsoft's vision is to enable everyone to meet their full potential regardless of

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Dr. Z gives advice at ZVRS exhibit



Disability Rights Office staff at FCC exhibit



Chad Metcalf watches over the TDI exhibit

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their challenges. As we move into new worlds with computer applications, they seek to keep the entire spectrum of disability needs in the forefront so no one gets left behind. A study Microsoft commissioned in 2003 by Forrester Research found that 57% of the population surveyed could benefit from some accessibility features that were put into Windows.

Traditionally, the President's Reception is usually a time to mingle and reconnect with friends. **Dr. Roy Miller**, President of TDI, saw to it that the food was well prepared and tasty. People kept going back for more food. However, this time, there was a short program giving overdue recognition to several people who have supported TDI and its Community Emergency Preparedness Information Network (CEPIN) program.

But first, **Andrea Saks** came on the stage with a solemn announcement. The last of the original founders of the TTY network, **Dr. James Marsters** had passed away just a few days before. He was an orthodontist and a pilot. More importantly, he provided inspiration to **Robert Weitbrecht** to develop a way for deaf people to communicate on the telephone. Andrea's father, **Andrew Saks** also contributed to the development of the fledging network, lending his business acumen to develop APCOM. APCOM manufactured and sold the TTY acoustic couplers, the forerunner

of computer modems that worked between the TeleType machines and the Ma Bell telephone network. Marsters traveled everywhere in his plane to spread the word about the TTY to deaf and hard of hearing people, telecommunication leaders and government officials. Andrea asked that we all take a moment of silence in Marster's memory.

The program continued as Claude Stout took up the floor and explained that TDI depends a lot on its friends and colleagues outside the organization to help fulfill its mission. For the last few years, we had counted on a number of professionals to help with the CEPIN project who brought their expertise in emergency preparedness. Stout, **Neil McDevitt**, CEPIN program director and **Michele Roseman**, CEPIN outreach coordinator presented five honorees with a **Chuck Baird** artwork, a painting called "Wolf" which depicts a lone wolf on top of a canyon below a cloud formation of an Indian signing "wolf." The honorees are:

- **Claudia Gordon**, a civil rights attorney at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security who supported the goals of the CEPIN program from the outset.
- Cheryl Heppner, an author of a report on communication gaps encountered by deaf people across the country because of the 9/11

terrorist attacks.

- **Mike Monge**, a small town fire chief who developed emergency plans that included students as well as others at a nearby deaf school in Faribault, Minnesota.
- **Hilary Styron**, who led a team of investigators that extensively documented the barriers encountered by people with disabilities in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina in 2005
- **Colonel Tom Tucker**, a father of a deaf woman and director of the National Center on Biomedical Research and Training at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge that partnered with CEPIN on its original course development.

JULY 31, 2009 - DAY 2 - INDUSTRY DAY

Since the first part of the day was open, some conference participants took the time to catch up on their sleep, eat a hearty breakfast and have a business meeting or two. Many other participants browsed the exhibit area and viewed the latest offerings by relay providers and several other exhibitors. Other exhibitors not pictured include:

- Hearing Loss Association of America

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Safe Awake products on display



Purple Communications exhibit



Kelby Brick of Purple Communications was the speaker for the Professional Motivational Luncheon

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■ sComm

■ Sorenson Communications

In the first workshop of the day, Andrea Saks began with a plenary session on Globalization of Standardization and Making the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Accessible. Drawing on her childhood experiences witnessing the birth of the TTY network, she continued the work that her father Andrew had dedicated his life to, making the international telephone network accessible to deaf and hard of hearing people, by representing TDI as an "ambassador" to ITU since 1991. Two other ladies joined her in the workshop, **Alessandra Gaspari**, also from ITU, and **Cynthia Waddell**, an internationally recognized expert on electronics and information technology.

This year's speaker at the Professional Motivational Luncheon was **Kelby Brick**, Vice President of Purple Communications in charge of strategic policy and regulatory affairs. Attendees at the luncheon listened to Mr. Brick's many thought-provoking pointers on what it means to pursue "functional equivalency".

Following the luncheon, **Dr. Gregg Vanderheiden** and **Lisa Åström** gave a presentation on implementing a new technology that would go far beyond than just replacing the antiquated analog TTY (text telephone)

technology. Real-Time Text (RTT) is yesterday's TTY functionality in today's digital environment. Vanderheiden points to the success of this recent feature on AOL's Instant Messaging system that allows the user to read the other party's character as they are typed. Seeing as they type was one of the most endearing features of Baudot TTYs that transmitted characters to be displayed at the time they are typed. Just like a TTY, or a voice conversation, we are free to interrupt each other rather than waiting for the "GA." Vanderheiden and Åström described several applications that further exploit the usefulness and potential of text communications and the universal design applications in telecommunications and information technology.

The main afternoon event was what some relay professionals consider to be the core of TDI's work to make telecommunications accessible to all. In each conference, the TRS Forum draws professional leaders, government officials and consumer advocates to hear a panel of their peers in a lively overview of telecommunication relay services. Moderated by **Judy Viera** and **Brenda Kelly-Frey**, the three panels of the TRS Forum reviewed the successes and failures of the 10-digit numbering system implementation, outreach activities, E9-1-1 access through the Internet, videophone numbers for hearing

people, videophone device porting, needs of nonsigning deaf and hard of hearing consumers, possible captioned telephone relay service mandate and access to video relay for deaf-blind consumers.

The TRS Forum consumer panel was comprised of a cross-representation of relay users and communication preferences, including **Amy Bopp**, **Rachel Dubin**, **Rebecca Ladew** and **Pam Sterwart** from Maryland, **David Nelson** from the District of Columbia and **Wayne Roorda** from New Jersey. On the government panel, officials from the Federal Communications Commission, National Exchange Carriers Association and two state relay administrators include **Clayton Bowen** (VA), **Greg Hlibok** (FCC), **John Ricker** (NECA), **Suzanne Tetreault** (FCC) and **Jan Withers** (NC). Finally, the industry panel included voices from executives of five relay service providers **Sean Belanger** of ZVRS, **Tom Kielty** of Snap!VRS, **Dan Luis** of Purple Communications, **Paul Kershnik** of Sorenson and **Dixie Zeigler** of Hamilton Relay.

Wrapping up the second day was a plenary session panel that highlighted the work of TDI's E9-1-1 Stakeholder Council on behalf of deaf and hard

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Lisa Åström and Dr. Gregg Vanderheiden discuss Realtime Text applications



Brenda Kelly-Frey and Judy Viera moderate the TRS Forum



Sheri Farinha (moderator), Dr. Judy Harkins, Lisa Åström, Greg Hlibok, Toni Dunne, Edward Price and Patrick Halley discuss accessibility on the E9-1-1 Stakeholder Council Panel

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of hearing people, including the Next Generation 9-1-1 Project under development by the U.S. Department of Transportation. Moderated by the council chair, **Sheri Farinha** from northern California, the panelists were **Toni Dunne** of Positron and former TDI Board member, **Patrick Halley** of the National Emergency Numbering Association (NENA), Greg Hlibok of the FCC and **Edward Price** of the RERC on Wireless Telecommunications at Georgia Tech.

AUGUST 1, 2009 – DAY 3 – CONSUMER DAY

Bright and early, the final day of the conference began with the first pair of several workshops geared toward consumers with a variety of interests. To accommodate the early-birds and sleepy-heads alike roaming the halls, a table in the exhibit hall was piled high with fruits, bagels and pastries. The familiar aroma of percolating coffee wafts out of the room into the vast ornate hallway. Exhibitors smile and shake hands as they greet new faces of consumers. Many people came in from Washington, DC, and surrounding communities in Maryland and Virginia to take advantage of the free workshops being offered by TDI on Consumer Day.

For any deaf or hard of hearing worker in a job requiring varying degrees of human contact, the Ubi-Duo is

one serious accessibility tool that is appearing in workplaces and businesses across the country. Whether you are a vendor seeking to sell products to the public or an employee networking with colleagues after a career advancement seminar, this pair of portable linked keyboards allows typed conversations to take place anywhere in plain English without arranging for an interpreter. The presenter, **Emma Curry**, brought the audience through the establishment of sComm and the development of the Ubi-Duo. Potential user applications include assisting customers at service counters, short and long impromptu meetings, and getting to know hearing coworkers. The staff at TDI once used the Ubi-Duo to communicate with an Italian deaf graduate student and his father, both of whom knew no sign language, spoke only Italian but could read and write in the English language. Without the Ubi-Duo, we would not have had a rich discussion about life in Italy and compared telecommunications access between the two countries.

Concurrently, **Bob Brewer** and **Rocco Luigi Saccente** from National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) presented a workshop that dealt with information security and how to protect your privacy from different perils on the Internet.

In a third room, FCC attorney Greg Hlibok gave his audience a rundown

on issues facing the Disability Rights Office (DRO) at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). In less than ten years, DRO played a key role in implementing many advances in accessible policy for relay services and captioning. Hlibok also mentioned about the role DRO is playing during the roll out of President Obama's National Broadband Plan. Incidentally, this was not Hlibok's first visit to the Mayflower hotel because as a student, he was one of the four leaders of the aforementioned Deaf President Now protest that began in that hotel in 1988.

Following the early morning workshop, Neil McDevitt moderated a panel discussion on videophones with representatives from Purple (**Cary Barbin**), ZVRS (Sean Belanger), Snap!VRS (**Sean Gerlis**), Sorenson (Paul Kershishnik) and Viable (**Jason Yeh**). Each representative discussed the advantages of using their respective products and relay services and then took a multitude of general questions about video telephones from the audience.

In one of the next pair of consumer workshops, **Mike Shebanek** gave an update on Apple, Inc.'s accessibility efforts with its iPhone, iTunes, iPod and other "iProducts".

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Judy Viera asks a question to Greg Hlibok during the discussion on the Disability Rights Office at the FCC



Kelby Brick, Jason Yeh, Sean Belanger, Cary Barbin, Sean Gerlis and Paul Kershishnik on the videophone panel



Lise Hamlin, Gerald Penna and Bruce McFarlane discuss emergency preparedness for people who are deaf and hard of hearing.



Membership Application Form

First & Last Names (not published in Business listing): _____
 Company Name: (leave blank for Residential listing): _____
 Street or Mailing Address: _____
 City, State/Province & Postal Code: _____
 E-Mail Address (for free e-Notes & e-Promos): _____
 Main/Home Phone: (____) _____ ☐ Video ☐ TTY ☐ Voice ☐ CapTel*
 Alternate Phone: (____) _____ ☐ Video ☐ TTY ☐ Voice ☐ CapTel*
 Fax Number: (____) _____ Mobile (cell phone or pager): (____) _____
 Video Mail/CapTel#: (____) _____ IM Service: _____ IM User ID: _____
 Web Site: _____
 Description of Business: _____

Check one for your listing ☐ List All ☐ Address Only ☐ E-mail/www/IM Only ☐ Phones Only*
 in TDI's Blue Book: ☐ Address & Phones* ☐ E-mail/www/IM & Phones* ☐ Unlisted
☐ Address & E-mail/www/IM * = Includes Video/TTY/Voice/FAX/Mobile/CapTel*

May TDI send email from third parties for commercial and informational purposes? ☐ YES ☐ NO
 May TDI send you eNotes, a free e-mail newsletter with news and action alerts? ☐ YES ☐ NO

- Changes mailed to TDI will be processed in the eBlue Book by staff within 30 days.
- **Alternate Formats Available (Contact TDI)**



Select One TDI Membership Rate:

	1 Year	2 Years
Individual/Household:	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25.00	<input type="checkbox"/> \$45.00
Senior Citizen (age 60+):	<input type="checkbox"/> \$22.50	<input type="checkbox"/> \$40.50
Student (with copy of school ID):	<input type="checkbox"/> \$15.00	<input type="checkbox"/> \$27.00
Nonprofit/Government/School/Small Business:	<input type="checkbox"/> \$50.00	<input type="checkbox"/> \$90.00
Large Business (with 15+ Employees):	<input type="checkbox"/> \$75.00	<input type="checkbox"/> \$135.00

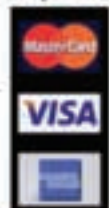
Tax Deductible Contribution to TDI: (Fed ID #35-1146784) Thank you! \$ _____
 (If shipping outside the U.S. please contact TDI) **GRAND TOTAL:** \$ _____

MEMBERSHIP INCLUDES: 1 Blue Book Directory, 4 issues TDI World & eBlue Book until expiration date

- If paying by check or money order, enclose a US Check/Money Order payable to TDI and mail with this application to address below. There is a \$25 fee for checks returned due to insufficient funds.
- Businesses: If paying by Purchase Order – please attach copy of purchase order
- If paying by credit or debit card: Type of card: ☐ Credit ☐ Debit
 Card issuer: ☐ MasterCard ☐ VISA ☐ American Express

Account Number: _____ Expiration Date: _____
 Cardholder's Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____



Mail or fax completed application with payment information to:

TDI - 8630 Fenton Street, Suite 604, Silver Spring, MD 20910-3822 listings@tdi-online.org
 Phone: 301-589-3786 • Video: 301-563-9112 • TTY: 888-202-1120 • FAX: 301-589-3797 www.tdi-online.org

New Beginning

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The other workshop had Neil McDevitt moderating a panel once again to discuss how consumers can be better advocates and be more involved in emergency preparedness and response. The panelists were **Lise Hamlin**, a former CEPIN outreach specialist, now director of public policy at Hearing Loss Association of America, **Gerald Penna**, a volunteer firefighter from the West Ridge Fire Department near Erie, Pennsylvania, and **Bruce McFarlane**, former director of USDA's emergency preparedness office and current deputy director of the Emergency Preparedness Initiative under National Organization on Disability.

Lori Breslow emceed the 2009 TDI Awards Luncheon where we recognize the extraordinary efforts of an elite group of consumers and organizations in their support of TDI's mission in shaping an accessible world. First on the agenda, Dr. Roy Miller passed out plaques of appreciation to two departing board members, Ms. Breslow and **Greg Gantt**, thanking them for their service. You can see the individual award recipients on page 32.

After the awards luncheon, TDI Director of Public Relations, **Jim House** moderated a plenary session panel discussion about pagers, PDAs and hearing aid compatible wireless phones. On the panel were representatives from T-Mobile (**Shellie Blakeney**), Research in

Motion, makers of the BlackBerry devices (**Dave Dougall**), Sprint Relay (**Karl Ewan**), Verizon (**Jeff Kramer**) and AT&T (**Susan Mazrui**). Each representative gave an overview of their companies services and offered a glimpse of upcoming enhancements to their digital wireless networks.

Here are some details about the panelists and the products and services they offer (Excerpted from Cheryl Heppner's NVRC reports)

Susan Mazrui, AT&T

AT&T considers accessibility a commitment. Several departments work on accessibility across the board. AT&T does extensive work behind the scenes in product development, working with vendors to understand the needs of persons with disabilities.

The company now has a range of accessible devices a result of work with organizations like TDI and HLAA, individual advocates, and feedback from groups like Gallaudet University's TAP program. Finding technical solutions to hearing aid compatibility was difficult, but better solutions resulted from working together. As a result, AT&T now has a range of products and services that are hearing aid compatible, all at different prices and with different features. They have done extensive work with the industry association and outreach to consumers. Their efforts include a captioned video for

people who are learning how to find hearing aid compatible phones and for audiologists. Materials have been made available free and are available in different formats for download. That information is also used for the company's own training, a critical component of what A&T does to improve its services for people who are deaf or have hearing loss.

AT&T doesn't just go for innovation and interaction from focus groups. It also asks what features people want. This has led to a feature that allows you to magnify the text. It's helpful not just for people with vision loss but those in dark environments where it's hard to read. Because many people like a QWERTY keyboard to do texting, this is also included in many devices. What started as communication among deaf people has caught on with the general public.

Check out AT&T's outstanding web page on hearing aid compatibility and wireless devices: <http://www.wireless.att.com/learn/articles-resources/disability-resources/hearing-aid-compatibility.jsp>. Also check out the Disability Resources web page for lots of other useful information such as 711 TRS access, TTY-compatible phones, Text Accessibility Plan at <http://www.wireless.att.com/learn/articles-resources/disability-resources/disability-resources.jsp>

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Josh Mendelsohn giving updates on the Americans with Disabilities Act.



Phil Bravin aka Dr. Z from ZVRS dispensing advice for video relay service users



Mike Starling from National Public Radio giving updates on the captioned radio development.

New Beginning

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Dave Dougall, Research in Motion (RIM)

Research in Motion is a leading designer, manufacturer and marketer of innovative wireless solutions. Its portfolio of BlackBerry products and services is now being used by more than 28 million subscribers worldwide. These subscribers use 475 carrier partners in 165 countries, including all the wireless carriers in the United States. The company has technology available for multiple wireless networks so that it can be transparent to users. RIM's range of smart phones has a platform that allows third-party developers to add applications so you can get a broad range of use from your device.

In 2002, the company began an accessibility program in its corporate research and development arm, which helps to ensure there is a focus on BlackBerry products that meet the needs of customers with disabilities. RIM collaborates with assistive technology partners and participates in many research projects as well as participating in accessibility-related legislation and standards reviews and attending many conferences and events.

RIM uses universal design principles to ensure that accessibility of a product is built in at the design stage. It also tries to leverage and enable common

software functionality across multiple devices. An example is a new feature in the recently launched BlackBerry Tour that came from feedback by some deaf police officers at Gallaudet University. It allows the device to vibrate as many as ten times and to choose from short, medium or long vibration lengths. Moving forward, this feature will become available on other devices.

BlackBerry has multiple messaging options, such as push-based messaging for email and instant messaging. A wide range of support is provided for third party instant messaging applications such as AIM, Yahoo Messenger and Google Talk. You can do SMS, and there is support for third party TTY devices and third party relay services. Many individuals actively use IP relay to create and conduct relay calls directly from their BlackBerrys. Relay services software is a free application that can be downloaded from the relay providers over the air. You don't even have to connect via Internet. The software is available from IP-Relay.com, Sorenson through SIP relay, Sprint Relay and i711.com.

Today's BlackBerry is more than just email, text messaging and voice. You can access the Internet for news, weather, sports and flight status. You can take a picture, do social networking, play games, record a

video, get a map or directions, get a list of restaurants, and use it for a memo pad or task list or password keeper. Some of those features are free. For information on different devices and applications, you can go to <http://na.blackberry.com/eng/services/appworld/>. Examples include Viigo, which provides one-click access to news, weather, entertainment, sports score, stock info, RSS feeds, and blogs.

Karl Ewan, Sprint Relay

Karl, who has been with Sprint for five years, calls himself a power relay user because every minute of every day you will see him on his pager. He believes the Sprint online store is unique because it caters to deaf and hard of hearing people. One of the most popular products is the variety of BlackBerrys, which he believes is due to the devices' ease of use. The staff of the Sprint online store are deaf and know their products. A video customer service is offered by Sprint to converse in your native language with a deaf customer care representative at www.sprintrelaystore.com/vcs. You can also access customer service through instant messaging. Customer Service information and links are at www.sprintrelaystore.com/ecare/.

Click on the link to Hearing Aid

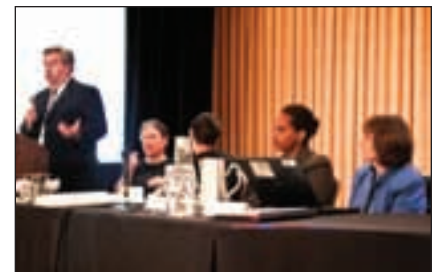
Continued on page 29



Dave Dougall, Jim House, Jeff Kramer, Susan Mazrui, Karl Ewan and Shellie Blakeney discusses accessibility to pagers, PDAs and hearing aid compatible wireless devices.



TDI President Dr. Roy Miller gives a report on TDI's activities during the previous two years



David Martin at the podium, Yvonne Mattiello (Interpreter), Elizabeth Spiers, Blaine Workie and Lise Hamlin (moderator) discuss the recent changes to the Air Carrier Access Act

New Beginning

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TDI staff and volunteers help clean up the ballroom after the entertainment. Front L-R: Chad Metcalf, Neil McDevitt, Laurie Dowling, Donna Graffe, Gary Viall, Dot Brenner, Steve Brenner and Pat Graves. Middle L-R: Teddy Clemmons, Peter Reeb, Lynette Reeb, Paul Daniels and Anne Leahy. Rear L-R: Joe Duarte, Claude Stout, Michele Roseman, Scott Recht, Jim House, Jayne Magneson Tubergen, Yvonne Mattiello and Dr. Roy Miller

Compatible Phones and you'll find information that explains the M and T ratings for hearing aid compatibility as well as additional information. There is a link to a list of hearing aid compatible devices from Sprint, which takes you to a table listing 37 different phones and their M and T ratings, which you can download and print from http://www.sprint.com/landings/accessibility/docs/HAC_PDF_List.pdf.

Shellie Blakeney, T-Mobile

T-Mobile is the nation's fourth largest wireless carrier. It provides both voice and data service to customers in the U.S. T-Mobile has a tool called Personal Coverage Check (PCC) that can be accessed at T-Mobile's website, <http://www.t-mobile.com>,

or at a retail store. As you shop for your device, it allows you to identify the areas where you are likely to use it and determine the quality of coverage to see if the devices are best suited to your needs.

Hearing aid compatible phones that are purchased in T-Mobile stores can be tested in those stores, and customers are encouraged to try before they buy. The company's hearing aid compatible phone options are listed at http://www.t-mobile.com/Company/Community.aspx?tp=Abt_Tab_Safety&tsp=Abt_Sub_TTYPolicy. You can also find information there about options for TTY use.

Jeff Kramer, Verizon

Jeff said that Verizon cares very much about people who are hard of hearing,

deaf or have other kinds of disabilities. They have spent a good deal of time in the product area, service area, and public policy area to practice universal design principles and will continue to do so.

For wireline services, Verizon has had a Center for Customers with Disabilities on both the east and west coast for years. By the end of the year, they expect to have a customer service center that specifically serves wireless customers as well. Customer service representatives can take TTY calls. Right now customers can use the Verizon website to find answers to frequently asked questions and contact Verizon directly by email. The support page is at <http://support.vzw.com/?lid=//global/support>.

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New Beginning

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TDI held an association business meeting where President Roy Miller gave a presentation on TDI's accomplishments since the previous conference in 2007. Since our last conference in San Mateo, California, TDI has seen the roll-out of the ten-digit number for users of video and IP relay, the nationwide transition to digital television, and the expansion of online videos. TDI has watched as federal investigators began probing the video relay industry after allegations of fraud had surfaced. Dozens of eNotes went out from the TDI office informing members of action alerts, conference news, recent accomplishments and other timely information. Thanks to the generous pro-bono services of Bingham McCutcheon law firm, TDI was also able to submit numerous filings with the FCC on various telecommunication relay and television captioning issues over the years. He also announced the result of the recent election with the names of two new Board Members, **Rebecca Rosenthal** (Central Region) and **Stephanie Buell** (Midwest Region).

After a short break following the business meeting, two additional workshops kept the consumers busy. **Josh Mendelsohn** from the Civil Rights Office at the U.S. Department of Justice gave us an update on the recent amendments to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Phil Bravin donned his lab coat to give a presentation as Dr. Z and showcased the growing ZVRS product line.

During the final round of workshops, **Mike Starling** from National Public Radio (NPR) gave us an update on a project in the works with Towson University for the last several years, the rollout of captioned radio. From iPods, to boomboxes, to Internet websites, to kitchen consoles and to automobile radios, viewers with hearing disabilities will soon be able to read captions on

radio broadcasts of the newest hit songs, late-breaking news and emergency reports.

Nearby, **Lise Hamlin** moderated a panel on air travel access. On the panel were **David Martin** from Delta Airlines, **David Nelson** from Amtrak, **Elizabeth Spiers** from the American Association of the Deaf Blind and **Blaine Workie** from the U.S. Department of Transportation. This panel discussed the impact of the recent additions and changes to the Air Carrier Access Act.

In yet another workshop, **Anne Girard** from Hamilton Relay discussed their lineup of IP-Relay services, as well as captioned telephone relay services, that are offered in 16 states and several U.S. Territories as well as online and mobile relay services.

The politics of Washington, D.C. does have some comedy moments depending on who you ask. But on this night, I think many of the 325 conference-goers who attended the Entertainment Finale of the TDI Conference had quite a few chuckles and guffaws from two nationally known stand-up comics, **Kathy Buckley** and **Bob Daniels**.

After the entertainment show, volunteers came and helped TDI tear down the banners and other signs of the TDI Conference, which is now history. TDI gratefully acknowledges the assistance of **Heidi Burghardt**, **Teddy Clemmons**,

Paul Daniels, **Tom and Laurie Dowling**, **Jeanne Lavelle**, **John Olumoya**, **Al Sonnenstrahl**, **Gary Viall**, **Donna Graff**, **Dot Brenner** and others too numerous to mention. TDI is also grateful for the many interpreters and CART writers who came to make sure that each conference attendee was able to fully participate in the activities. As **Anne Leahy** coordinated the stage interpreters, **Yvonne Mattiello** made sure that people with visual disabilities were able to take part in the proceedings and **Pat Graves** transcribed each word spoken so that all of us could read it on the screen. **Peter and Lynette Reeb** continued their generous support on behalf of NTID in setting up and dismantling the audio visual equipment. Thanks to **Cheryl Heppner** whose reports put you right inside each room, and to Steve Brenner, our official conference photographer, you can sense that you are almost a participant and now you want to come to our next TDI Conference in two years.

Now that you have had your bird's eye view of the recent TDI Conference, you are most cordially invited to come and join us for the 19th Biennial TDI International Conference in June 2011 in Austin, Texas. Please stay tuned for details as they develop and we look forward to hearing from our members and friends. Thank you for your ongoing support.



Anne Girard from Hamilton Relay demonstrates the CapTel 80i captioned telephone device



TDI Executive Director Claude Stout sits with nationally renowned comedians, Kathy Buckley and Bob Daniels

ACCESSIBLE TECH Continued from page 9

- Extends closed captioning obligations to video programming provided by, or generally considered comparable to programming provided by, a television broadcast station, even when distributed over the Internet: covers video programming that was previously captioned for television viewing, live video programming, and new video programming provided by or generally considered to be comparable to programming provided by multichannel programming distributors; does not cover user-generated content (e.g., YouTube videos posted by individuals) (Current law: Captioning required on most broadcast, cable and satellite TV shows)
- Requires easy access to closed captions via remote control and on-screen menus
- Requires easy access by blind people to television controls and on-screen menus
- Restores video description rules and requires access to televised emergency programming for people who are blind or have low vision

Now, let's go back to that list of activities and look at the last four items to see where we can actually benefit from HR 3101.

What can you do?

Now is the time for you to do what some of us did at the TDI Conference last July. During the first day, a group of participants went to the US Capitol for a short program on HR 3101. After that program, they went to visit their own Congressional Representatives and talked to them about HR 3101.

There are several things you can do...

- Visit your Congressional Representative. Ask him or her

Activity Barrier

Relay calls	Signer to non-signer Scarcity of TTYs
Telephone	Broadband expense Deaf-blind users Hearing Aid users
News	Not near a TV
Television	Stripped out CC Blind viewers
Movies	Online videos not CC Hidden CC menu

Tomorrow with HR 3101...

Permits calls between video relay and IP relay users
RealTime Text developed for on VoIP phones and computers
Universal Service Fund applied to high speed Internet service
Universal Service Fund applied to Braille telecom equipment
All Internet and VoIP phones compatible with hearing aids
CC on ALL video display devices including iPods and pagers
CC of TV programming "passed through" onto Internet
Require video description and access to menu controls
CC on more online video clips and more captioning tools.
Captioning options available via button on remote

to co-sponsor HR 3101. Many Democrats support this bill and we need more Republican support too. It is a bill for everyone, not just Democrats or Republicans. Find out when your Representative will be in your area when Congress takes a recess and go visit at the local office or a community event. Take your friends along.

- Visit your Senator. Ask him or her to co-sponsor S. 3304 a companion bill similar to HR 3101. We need both Democrat and Republican support. Find out when your Senator will be in your area when Congress takes a recess and go visit at the local office or a community event.
- Write letters to your Senator and Congressional Representatives. Emails and faxes are easily overlooked.
- Write letters to the editor of your local newspaper – you can follow up on a recent technology article that they published and point out how it can be accessible if HR 3101 passes.
- Contact your local radio or television station – tell them your story and how HR 3101 and S 3304 can improve your life.
- Blog about it, write or do a vlog on social networks – tell them about HR 3101. For an example, look up TDI's first vlog

at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwrFHPyC0dM> The video is in sign language with voice-over and captions.

- Tell all your friends and relatives about HR 3101 and S 3304. Ask them to contact their Congress Representative or Senator. If they already support the bill, thank them and remember them when you go vote. (I am hoping you are already registered to vote, but if not – please register today!)
- Review the COAT website at www.coataccess.org as it has many tools to help you advocate, and you can see up-to-date news about HR 3101. Ask your group to join COAT, it costs nothing!
- Seek opportunities to let the manufacturers know of your needs. If an online video is not captioned, send a comment or feedback.

Let TDI know about your efforts, send us copies of emails or letters that you write. We want to know about your work because your efforts help TDI help you.

Support TDI by becoming a member or making a donation.

Thank YOU for your ongoing efforts to make communications and video accessibility happen! Join TDI and spread the word about HR 3101 and S 3304 as we work together to shape an accessible world!

2009 TDI AWARDS



2009 TDI Award winners (l-r) Bob Daniels (AT&T - Marsters), Cathy Brown (Verizon - Marsters), Dr. Judy Harkins (Brody), Kevin Colwell (Saks), Pat Graves (Weitbrecht) Dr. H. Alan Hurwitz (NTID - Breunig). Pictured below: Edward Markey (D-MA - Peltz Strauss) and Senator John McCain (R-AZ - Peltz Strauss).

Karen Peltz Strauss Public Policy Award

2009 – Representative Edward Markey (D-MA)

A key player in the following legislation:

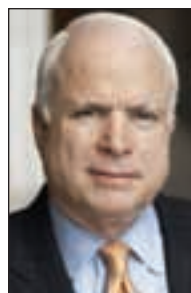
- Television Decoder Circuitry Act of 1990
- Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
- Telecommunications Act of 1996
- Chief Sponsor – 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act



2009 – Senator John McCain (R-AZ)

A key player in the following legislation:

- Telecommunications Accessibility Enhancement Act of 1988
- Television Decoder Circuitry Act of 1990
- Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
- Telecommunications Act of 1996



H. Latham Breunig Humanitarian Award

2009 – National Technical Institute for the Deaf at Rochester Institute for Technology

- Conference Support
- Large-screen video projection equipment
- Operating personnel

James C. Marsters Promotion Award

2009 – AT&T

- Telephone Pioneers of America Program



Nationwide Telecommunication Relay Services

- Commitment to Consumers with Disabilities
- Corporate Policies to Promote Disability Access
- Consumer Involvement in Product Development



2009 – Verizon

- Quarterly Conference Calls With Disability Groups
- Web Page and Center for Customers With Disabilities
- Strategic Alliances Policy Briefings
- Diversity Strength in Corporate Publicity Materials

- Proponent of National Broadband Policy

Robert H. Weitbrecht Telecommunications Access Award

2009 – Pat Graves

In recognition of her pioneering efforts in developing Communications Access Real-Time Translation (CART) Services for deaf and hard of hearing people.”

Andrew Saks Engineering Award

2009 – Kevin Colwell

In recognition of his work for over 25 years developing new telecommunications technology for deaf and hard of hearing people, including the

- PayPhone TTY
- Turbo Code
- More than 150 TTY models in 13

languages

- Voice Carry Over (VCO) for TRS
- Captioned Telephone (CapTel) service
- IP based CapTel

I. Lee Brody Lifetime Achievement Award

2009 – Dr. Judy Harkins

In recognition of her outstanding contributions over many years to the welfare of deaf and hard of hearing people, including her

- Research on relay services that helped develop Title IV of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)
- Research on hearing aid compatible phones
- Research on emergency telecommunications
- Leadership of the Technology Access Program at Gallaudet University

NEWS FLASH!

Senate Introduces Companion Bill to H.R. 3101

Just as this issue went to press, U.S. Senators John Kerry and Mark Pryor introduced the “Equal Access to 21st Century Communications Act (S. 3304), a companion bill to the U.S. House’s 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act (HR 3101) that was introduced in 2009. While there are some differences between the two bills, their overall goals are very much similar. Please ask your Senator to support this bill TODAY. TDI will continue to report new developments as they occur.



Senator Mark Pryor
(Democrat – Arkansas)



Senator John Kerry
(Democrat – Massachusetts)

TDI MOURNS THE PASSING OF TTY PIONEER, DR. JAMES MARSTERS



Founders of the TTY Network: (L-R:) Robert Weitbrecht, James Marsters and Andrew Saks

James Carlyle Marsters, DDS

April 5, 1924 - July 28, 2009

"It's the end of an era," said Andrea Saks when she announced the recent passing of James C. Marsters during the 18th Biennial TDI International Conference. Andrea is the daughter of Andrew Saks, a close friend and business partner of Dr. Marsters and Robert Haig Weitbrecht, the three men who established the first TTY network.

"What I have in mind Bob, is the possibility of a network of regular

telephone line RTTY for deaf people who can afford one ... but not to lease one [from] the telephone company nor a special telephone line. ... why won't it be possible to translate over the regular line by proper modification of equipment. ... granted that eventually there will be enough units? ... What do you think?" (from A Phone of Our Own by Dr. Harry G. Lang). With these words, Dr. Marsters planted a

seed in Bob Weitbrecht's head that would soon open countless doors of opportunity for thousands of deaf and hard of hearing individuals, long denied the use of the telephone for about 90 years.

While Weitbrecht and Saks tinkered with the technical aspects of the burgeoning TTY network in the late 60's and early 70's, Dr. Marsters

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Marsters

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was their spokesperson. Using his business acumen from his years as one of the first deaf orthodontists and deaf airplane pilots in the United States, he approached thousands of people telling them about a new way for deaf and hard of hearing people to communicate by phone. His positive attitude and personable approach earned the respect of not only deaf people, but also hearing people from reporters to business executives to government officials everywhere. For many years, Marsters sought out support for the TTY network, which is closely intertwined with the history of TDI.

During the President's Reception at the TDI Conference, Ms. Saks fondly shared her memories with the audience of the early advocates that embraced the TTY network as a combined effort began by three deaf men. The attendees present also observed a moment of silence in tribute to a pioneer, whose voice is now stilled.

Under the guidance of Marsters, Saks and Weitbrecht in California, this movement spread nationwide employing dozens of deaf people assigned with the mammoth task of cleaning, installing and repairing thousands of mechanical TTYs in their communities. Many of them eventually became known as TDI Agents. Their basements and garages became centers of commerce as deaf and hard of hearing people were connected, one-by-one, to the telephone network for the first time. The



agents volunteered many hours distributing these 200-pound mailbox-sized behemoths often called "the mean green machines", "two-ton monsters", "cement mixers" and other "pet" names in homes of deaf and hard of hearing people throughout the country.

Without these agents, TDI would not have existed. Originally incorporated as Teletypewriters for the Deaf, Inc., TDI was formed to coordinate the acquisition and distribution of obsolete office machines from giant corporations to individual homes and businesses. In 1968, its first year of existence, TDI published 174 names in a small directory and resource guide that became known today as "*The Blue Book*". Since then TDI, now called Telecommunications for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Inc.,

has grown to be the premier advocacy organization that promotes access to telecommunications, media and information technology.

Dr. Marsters' outgoing, yet charming demeanor is best captured in TDI's "Promotion Award" in his namesake that is given out during its biennial conferences "... to an individual, an organization, or a company that has made an outstanding contribution to improving the accessibility of telecommunications, media and information technology for people in the United States who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, late-deafened, or deaf-blind through their efforts in promotion, marketing, or public relations." Since 1995, six individuals and five companies have been bestowed with this prestigious award for their work in publicizing the need

for access.

"It was a special honor to meet Dr. Marsters who was such a colorful personality. It is no wonder he helped put a cheerful face on the TTY movement, and spearheaded its growth and success," said Claude Stout, executive director of TDI, while reminiscing about their meeting ten years ago during the TDI Conference in Seattle, Washington. Stout added, "We deeply honor and appreciate his pioneering contributions to the TTY movement. And thanks to that movement and its historical breakthrough, we are more equipped and empowered today with the array of various technologies we use every day at home, in the workplace, and in the community."



TDI In Action July – August 2009

Telecommunications



On July 6, TDI submitted comments to the US Department of Transportation

urging the inclusion of Real Time Text in the NG9-1-1 plans. The comments also highlighted one deficiency in SMS services where there are no systems that identify the location where a text message originated, thus hampering efforts to determine the most appropriate PSAP for a 9-1-1 text call placed through SMS.

TDI and other consumer organizations jointly filed



Reply Comments with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) on July 20 reiterating their position described in their earlier Comments. That filing urged that the FCC permanently adopt the rates as proposed by the National Exchange Carriers Association (NECA) and immediately explore alternative VRS reimbursement plans that will restore and maintain stability to the VRS industry's long-term plans.

Information Technology



On August 31, TDI and other consumer groups filed comments with the FCC regarding the development of the National Broadband Plan. Broadband should be defined to enable communication and Telecommunication Relay Services,

TDI Board of Directors Issues Position Statement Regarding Allegations of Manufactured VRS Minutes

On July 29, 2009, during its regular meeting on the eve of the 18th Biennial TDI International Conference, the TDI Board of Directors issued a position statement regarding allegations of "manufactured VRS minutes." The allegations are in reference to the illegal and unethical practice of creating calls using VRS for the sole purpose of accruing minutes billable for reimbursement from the Interstate TRS Fund, which is managed by the National Exchange Carriers Association (NECA) and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

Dr. Roy E. Miller, President said "Over the years, TDI has worked closely with the FCC, other sister consumer advocacy groups, and TRS industry members to nurture the evolution of many fine telecommunications relay service features such as Video Relay Service. We take very seriously any allegation of illegal and fraudulent practices that affect this vital communication link between deaf and hard of hearing consumers and society. We must all work together to maintain the long-term integrity of the Interstate TRS Fund."

TDI Position Statement Regarding Allegations of "Manufactured VRS Minutes"

TDI is deeply concerned about the allegations concerning abuse of Video Relay Services (VRS) and the Interstate TRS Fund, by engaging in the illegal and unethical practice of billing for "manufactured minutes." With respect to that issue, TDI takes the following position:

TDI takes no position regarding the truth or accuracy of those allegations.

It is the position of TDI that VRS is an absolutely critical public service that was established by the U.S. Congress under Title IV of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, to provide functionally equivalent telephone service for people who are deaf and hard of hearing. It is of the utmost importance that people be able to communicate in their preferred language with any and all sectors of society, especially during the course of employment, and during emergency situations where efficient communication may save a life. TDI stands ready to educate any and all parties regarding the importance of VRS.

TDI fully supports the strict enforcement of all laws and regulations regarding the operation of VRS.

Because VRS services are reimbursed to providers from the Interstate TRS Fund, and because those services are essential to the well-being of the community of deaf and hard of hearing VRS users and the hearing people with whom they communicate, it is of utmost importance that the integrity of the service and of the Fund be maintained at all times. The Interstate TRS Fund must only be used to reimburse for legitimate VRS minutes.

The alleged practice, if found to be true, of "manufacturing minutes" is illegal, unethical, and intolerable, and has a direct adverse impact on the availability of precious resources, including unnecessary longer wait times for VRS to answer calls, and the lack of available interpreters in the community.



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essential for deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened and deaf-blind people to be able to call each other and allow for functional equivalency in calling others through relay services. Broadband should also be defined to enable full and equal access to all services, including access to Internet-based media and other information services.

Emergency Preparedness



The Community Emergency Preparedness Information Network (CEPIN) offered the "Emergency Responder and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Community: Taking the First Steps to Disaster Preparedness" training on August 26, 2009, at The University of Texas-Pan American to a group of local emergency responders, managers and planners and deaf and hard of hearing consumers. The goal of the course is to encourage networking, preparation and communication between the two communities prior to disaster situations.

This training was hosted by the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, and was provided through an agreement with the Rural Domestic Preparedness Training Center at Eastern Kentucky University. This agreement allows CEPIN to present its unique and vital workshop to small and mid-sized communities across the country.

"The training will educate emergency responders and planners concerning the various communication preferences and how to determine the most appropriate accommodation,"



Claude Stout and Kareem Dale in television interview about disability policy on July 27, 2009.

said Neil McDevitt, Program Director for CEPIN. "Deaf and hard of hearing consumers will identify tools in working with emergency responders in order to develop comprehensive disaster preparedness efforts at the local and state level."

TDI in the News

On July 13, NexGenWeb, a policy blog praised Claude Stout and TDI's comments on the National Broadband Plan which indicated the benefits of broadband and how it has improved the quality of life for people with disabilities – specifically the growth of video telecommunications and IP based relay services and captioned telephone services.

On Monday, July 27, Claude Stout appeared in a live ten-minute television studio interview on WUSA, Washington, DC's local CBS affiliate, along with Kareem Dale, President Obama's Special Assistant for Disability Policy. The interview covered disability policy, the TDI Conference and emergency preparedness for people with disabilities.

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As of 1/1/2009, 911 and 911 Relay users are required to register their devices and to share a text-based telephone number. Users can change providers at any time and retain the same number. Users should keep their address information updated for emergency 911 calls. For more details, please visit att.com/911.



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