Deaf Owned Businesses

ALSO INSIDE:
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“Two Steps Forward, One Step Backward”

There is an old quote, “The more things change, the more they stay the same.” I was thinking about this as I reflected on the past 50 years of TDI’s history, what has changed or evolved over the years and what has remained the same and not changing. We celebrated the 50th year of TDI at a well attended gala in October of 2018. TDI was actually founded in June of 1968 in Indiana but we decided to celebrate this notable anniversary in the fall around the time of Gallaudet’s Homecoming weekend.

I keep up with social media and see progress in some areas and then no progress in others. Some examples are requests for captioning in different places and locations. Some cities and states have enacted laws requiring captions in some of their locales. Some locations will provide captions on their own initiative. As a deaf person, I appreciate viewing captions on the TVs in airports, restaurants, medical waiting rooms, my local grocery store, etc. Of course, I always want captions in the hotels we stay at on our trips. It appears that lately, instead of finding the “cc” symbol on the remote handset in the room we have to do a little more work like finding the menu on the remote and hunting for the menu option to turn on the captions. It used to be much easier when the “cc” symbol was on the remote all the time, now I feel like this is a step backward in not being able to find the captions with ease.

I still see commercial ads on TV, cable, and in my postal mail, advising deaf and hard of hearing people to call 711 or call a TTY number.”
are people who still use the TTY relay but the mainstream public also needs to know about other relay options such as VRS and of course, not hang up on the deaf/hard of hearing caller. I often wish we could reach businesses via email as phone tag can be very time consuming, exasperating, and frustrating. Some examples for me personally are, I have a number of doctors and medical specialists within a medical group that have the same phone number. When they call me they sometimes forget to identify the doctor or specialist they are leaving a message for and all I receive is a phone number and a message to return the call. So I end up using the health group email system to see if I can find out who was attempting to call me. It is as annoying as phone tag and time consuming as well. Good thing I am retired so I have time to play tag but it is not much fun and it’s time consuming as well.

We have an elderly couple in the neighborhood we socialize with on occasion. They are hearing but very friendly. I have tried different ways to communicate with them remotely such as email and through the relay. They admit they are not regular email users. Then when I called through the VRS, the wife answered the phone and was under the impression that I was trying to sell her something. I thought she was going to hang up on me until I reminded her it was Sheila, her deaf neighbor down the street and I was not trying to sell her anything. We had a good chuckle out of that.

So we have come a long way but we still have a long way to go to ensure our rights as US citizens are not infringed upon or taken away from us. This is why I am very grateful for and appreciate organizations such as TDI, NAD, HLAA, ALDA, Black Deaf Advocates, Cerebral Palsy and Deaf Organization, and other similar organizations.

All for access,

Julie Conlon Mertzowski

President, TDI
West Region Board Member
Support Small Businesses Owned by the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

In this issue, TDI is pleased to give a spotlight on a number of small businesses that are owned by the deaf and hard of hearing across America. Thanks to the advancing technology we enjoy today, and the impact from the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as well as a few other related disability access laws, the number of businesses run by the deaf and hard of hearing continues to increase and are more visible in the general mainstream ongoing.

Some of you may be considering starting a small business in the near future. There is a detailed step by step article by Matthew McCreary, www.entrepreneur.com/article/297899, which offers a 12-step guide to starting a business. The twelve steps he listed are: 1.) Evaluate yourself. 2.) Think of a business idea. 3.) Do market research. 4.) Get feedback. 5.) Make it official. 6.) Write your business plan. 7.) Finance your business. 8.) Develop your product or service. 9.) Start building your team. 10.) Find a location. 11.) Start getting some sales. and 12.) Grow your business.

As you can see, there is more to managing a small business than just to get it off to a good start, the challenge is to keep it going, and to offer a product or a service that meets your customers’ needs over time. Often, it will be important to offer new versions of your product or service that will keep them coming back to your business. Other key attributes of a successful small business are: 1) invest as much time (giving up some time per week past 40 hours a week) to keep the business going; 2) ensure you deliver your product or service on time for your customers. This will be the key difference between your company and other companies that offer a similar product or service; 3) respond quickly to phone calls, letters, and emails from customers, or even when they appear in-person at your business. This is where you can maintain your appeal as a dependable business as compared with your competitors.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the survival rate for today’s small businesses appears to be about 80% of businesses with employees will survive their first year in business. About 70% of businesses with employees will survive their second year in business. About 50% of businesses with employees will survive their fifth year in business. About 30% of businesses will survive their 10th year in business. While these statistics may take us back a bit, we hear nowadays that we change jobs on an average of seven years. Either way, we deal with some risks in our lives.

We thank the small businesses, featured in this issue for their contributions to their local communities, both deaf and hard of hearing, and hearing.

“We thank the businesses, featured in this issue for their contributions to their local communities, both deaf and hard of hearing, and hearing.”
not covered in this issue. They, too have our commendation and appreciation.

There is an inspiring story I want to share with you. A deaf guy in Florida was operating an aquarium store, and one day he received an order via a relay service from a hearing woman who needed a new pump for an aquarium at her house. He called her back, and told her that the pump was ready to be picked up. Upon arriving at the store, she was shocked to find that the owner was deaf and using sign language. She told him that she must have stopped at the wrong store, and he assured her that she came to the right place. He told her that it was made possible via Video Relay Service that they had a routine business transaction. The only difference was that the interpreter had voiced for him. Pleasantly impressed by the new experience, she went ahead to pay for the pump, and she has continued to do business with the deaf owner.

Whether we realize or not, small business opportunities are around for our taking. They are more important for us to consider doing today than ever before in our 243+ year American history. In the past, we accepted full-time jobs in printing, post office, schools for the deaf, and a few major corporations, etc. Today, automation and robotics are taking up a great portion of the jobs with many factories and warehouses that could have been ours. Small businesses are the last bastion of income-producing opportunities, if we choose not to venture in information technology, human services, education, medicine, finance, telecommunications, media and other fields.

When I grew up, my mother and father—Arvie and Ethelene Stout, both hearing, operated an independent women’s clothing store in Pittsboro, N.C. They had a good run with the store for about twenty years, and sold it at the right time before shopping centers and malls became the norm. Prior to joining TDI, our Director of Public Relations, Eric Kaika, was an owner of a landscaping business, called LocalGuy. When I was living in Maryland, Dr. Steven Rattner, himself deaf, was my dentist. Judy, my wife and I remember going a few times to Frederick, MD to have some great Mexican food at a restaurant owned by the Abenchuchan family, across the street from Maryland School for the Deaf. For a while, there was a tea sandwich shop in Frederick, MD, managed by Sharon Cooley. We had Georgi Ilochka, a deaf Russian immigrant who did a phenomenal job building a deck in back of our house in Germantown, MD. We were also happy to have good, durable TTYs, which we bought from Potomac Technology, then operated by Steve and Dot Brenner.

Thank you all for patronizing small businesses that are owned/operated by the deaf and hard of hearing. Also, we will be supportive, too of such businesses and large corporations in the general community.
Putting together this issue made me realize I miss running my own business. To rely on one's own efforts, resources and creativity to create a self-sustaining company is a challenging and worthwhile experience. Sure, it’s great being your own boss, deciding your hours and working from wherever, but there’s a lot more to starting, running and leading a business - three very different skill sets.

Starting a business is probably the easiest. Determine a need, provide a solution, draft your business plan, get incorporated, open a bank account, etc. Those could be done in a day. The challenge begins in marketing oneself, growing client/customer base, ensuring revenue outpaces expenses, maintaining financial records and taxes. It becomes more demanding when you’ve successfully grown the company to the point where it needs employees, and all sorts of plans e.g. strategic, benefits, marketing, insurance. Once you hit that first million dollar mark - you’ll transform yourself from manager to leader.

Many of us can be effective managers, but being the company leadership is a different mindset. By having a clear vision and communicating it clearly with your employees, you’ll gain their respect which ensures they’re putting their best foot forward for your company, thus creating loyal consumers and imitation by competition. You’ll also need fine-tune your visionary skills to be able to see where the market is going and making sure your company’s product/service is well positioned to generate positive cash flow years down the road. Being able to foresee the ever-changing market will better position your company to adapt and resolve any unexpected issues that arise.

Once you’ve shed your small-medium business size and morph into big business, no longer are your worries only about your consumers, but your employees and continuing the annual earnings and growth cycle for your board of directors and investors. Your involvement in on-floor operations likely becomes limited as you’ll need to continually assess the company’s challenges and threats. Keeping your eye on the strategic plan and ensuring milestones are met, along with data-generating tactics and adapting to the market’s demands. You’ll be juggling your employees’ job satisfaction and the Board’s growth expectations while still putting out a reputable product/service for your consumers.

Customers are important. However, the key to their satisfaction and loyalty really comes from their experience with your employees. Do your employees have the necessary tools, software, knowledge, etc to insure a seamless and pleasant transactional experience? Is the company accessible and relatable? A lot this really comes from the culture of the company and how you, as its owner, are able to effectively instill your employees with the ability to solve your customers needs.

Employees are an essential building block for a company. Employee satisfaction is critical; providing them with career development and competitive benefit plan are a few of the necessary compensation offerings to consider. Employees don’t work with numerical goals in mind, they work to bring meaning into their lives. If the company and its culture facilitates happiness in their private lives, they’re likely to want to continue working for the company in the long term, and do their best for the company.

By typing these thoughts, I once again become excited and reminisce about my first foray into business ownership. Although I’m not currently actively managing it anymore, it was a successful and rewarding experience. The one issue I found to be an obstacle was
finding deaf employees with knowledge in landscaping. I don't mean yard care, mind you - but creating accessible landscapes that embraced the native plant diversity and stormwater management. This required training on my part and the load was too much for me given that I just started a family. An opportunity was offered to me to do the same work, but for my county’s park system.

It’s been nearly five years since I tabled my company. Do I miss it? Absolutely. Will I revive it again? Probably not the landscaping service, but a different service area.

### Individual Membership Application Form

As a TDI Member, you will automatically receive a copy of the Blue Book, our quarterly TDI World, and e-Notes. You can opt-out of any of these subscriptions at anytime, just let us know by emailing: PubRel@TDIforAccess.org

Save time and postage! Renew online: TDIforAccess.org/eMembership

**Bold** indicates *required* information.

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**Check items you permit to be listed in the TDI Blue Book**

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*Thank you for supporting TDI!*
Take a two-and-a-half-hour country drive west of Gallaudet University, and you'll have many towns to visit, but there's one in particular you must set eyes on - Lost River, West Virginia. At 1,850 feet above sea level, you'll find a 22-acre resort nestled in the Appalachians Valley called Lost River Vacations, a completely relaxing escape in an estate of tiny homes.

At Lost River Vacations, you'll experience panoramic views of mountain sunsets, and eventually a disc golf course, natural wood hot tub, communal lounge with a self-serve espresso car, gazebo, fire pit and much more. Despite no cellular service, it is still accessible to the deaf and hard of hearing.

Need to make a VRS call or use your CapTel phone? No problem.
Stream a movie and watch it anywhere onsite with captions? No problem.
Want to communicate with the owners in ASL? No problem.
Thanks to its onsite high speed fiber-optic internet access, visitors can share their selfies on Instagram while making relay calls. So don't worry about missing the latest captioned Netflix series or sharing an illuminating sunset on social media. You'll be unplugged from city living but not from cyberspace.

Lost River Vacations is a deaf-owned business operated by Jane Jonas, Shawn Harrington, and Andrew St. Cyr. These three partners share an immense passion for the outdoors, an unwavering belief in the deaf ecosystem, but more importantly, a desire to bring greater awareness to the deaf community and its contributions to the world.

Anyone can stay at Lost River Vacations. Hearing, Deaf, international tourists, mobile-restricted, everyone. By serving anyone in the world, those who ascent LRV will gradually learn bits and pieces of deaf history,
The Definition of Cozy

lostrivervacations

lostrivervacations.com
accessible devices, and embracing the silence of this remote property tucked in a forest with crisp clean mountain air.

Currently on the property is one tiny home for your vacation rental, and a trailer-tractor serving as the main office. LRV just wrapped up its successful kickstarter campaign a couple of weeks ago and now constructing three more houses, with plans to later expand and possibly offer tree-houses, glamping tents or cabins. Regardless of the types of building, each will be named after prominent and successful deaf people in history. The first and current tiny home is called the Clerc.

“We know naming the first building Clerc sounds cheesy, but the fact is he still largely unknown and unrecognized by the greater (hearing) community. No one realizes the significant contributions Laurent Clerc gave to the American Deaf community,” explained Jane Jonas, CEO of Lost River Vacations.

The buildings will not be the only thing associated with deaf people, everything about Lost River Vacations has contributions from other deaf entrepreneurs.

Nick Perepelkin crafted exquisite wood furniture for the tiny house. Ashley Hanna created a mural and wall painting inside the house. Megan Malzkuhn of KissFist Deaf designed the logo. Sheri Youens-Un of Deafroot made a property sign marker out of layered wood. Corps That and Catalyst+ designed walking trails, tree identification and woodland preservation. The list will continue to grow as LRV expands its facilities and more deaf and hard of hearing entrepreneurs enter the market.

Jane, an established and successful business owner of Eyeth Studios, has a lengthy and impressive portfolio of clients. She originally hails from California, and grew up in a hearing family that learned to sign. She experienced both hearing (mainstream) and deaf school environments.

Shawn, co-owns NSH Properties with his brother. NSH specializes in home renovation. His roots are entrenched in Maryland, being from a deaf family and attended one of the dominant deaf schools.

This brings Andrew to provide the perfect balance, coming from the bayou of Louisiana, also from a deaf family, but with strong oral background having attended Central Institute for the Deaf. He is a talent videographer and owns a film production company.

Their paths first converged at Gallaudet University and over the next decade they started their own respective businesses, fine-tuning their respective networks, building bonds with local communities and the greater deaf ecosystem. Then one day they found themselves sitting together at a local tavern, chatting about the usual things, their day, their jobs, and their aspirations. They realized their dreams were identical, like all great business
LOST RIVER VACATION Continued from page 10

ideas, they jotted down the basics of their vision on a napkin and Lost River Vacations was born.

These decade long friends were talking about the lack of opportunities for deaf people to enjoy the wilderness without sacrificing their accessibility needs. This gap was also compounded by the fact deaf children are limited in options to experience on-demand camping trips with their peers.

Sensing a need to create a bridge between the concrete cities and towering skyscrapers where we lead hectic and stressful lives to the tranquil outdoors with majestic trees and never-ending horizons of nature at its finest. They mapped short and long term goals.

The short being Lost River Vacations, the long is a future campground at an adjacent property to serve as a nonprofit organization for large group camping, events, et cetera.

Almost as quickly as they wrote their idea, Lost River Vacations became the trending deaf business of 2019. This wasn't by sheer coincidence, it was because they each recognized their specialized talents and meticulously crafted a business plan enabling them to bootstrap their company while strategically designing plans for marketing, fundraising, property investment and infrastructure, and communications.

Jane leveraged her family's background in real estate as well as her Eyeth clients to get the word out. Shawn drafted the unique tiny home blueprint, balancing a deaf space concept while accounting for all plumbing, electrical, internet and related-utility needs. Andrew put together a dynamic production schedule and documented every step on video to keep investors informed and give the general public a sense of involvement.

With the land purchased, permits secured, and all required paperwork filed, trailer foundation pinpointed, Lost River Vacations was announced in November 2018 and within a few short months, they were featured in the Washingtonian, The Daily Moth, the Washington Post, TDI World, and probably on everyone's social media feed. We doubt you missed it, but if so it's #LostRiverVacations.

These three partners didn't get there through their good fortune, press and experience alone. They utilized the deaf ecosystem by brilliantly pulling other deaf businesses to either provide products or services for LRV. Over two dozen deaf-owned businesses were patronized by Lost River Vacations, which also elevated exposure and awareness of these businesses to the mass market.

On April 28, 2019, Lost River Vacations announced their kickstarter campaign by hosting a launch party at Red Bear Brewery in Washington, DC. The initial location was scheduled at Streetcar 82, a deaf-owned business in Hyattsville, MD. Unfortunately on the day of the event a water main burst happened on main street, shutting down several blocks. S82 assisted LRV in making arrangements to use Red Bear as both breweries are locally owned and share mutual respect for other.

Despite the last minute change of venue, the turnout was still overwhelming. No official headcount was taken, but this author was in attendance and could easily see half a thousand people participating. And that doesn't account for those who tuned in to watch the live-stream on their social media platform, which registered at xxxx.

At the launch party, more deaf-owned businesses assisted with exposure and fundraising. Convo Relay sponsored the event, Route 66 printed LRV promotional materials, Kissfist Deaf designed shirts. Cupcakes by Rosemary were for sale at the event, which was coordinated by Wendy Wiatrowski of Savvy Assistants. Also onsite was Gabe Arellano of STEMS to provide activities for kids and DJ Nico DiMarco providing a rhythmic and dynamic mood. Calvin Young of Seek The World also made a guest appearance.

Lost River is not just another deaf-owned business. It's a destination. Add to your bucket list and enjoy a stay with friends and family. It will literally feel like your home away from home.

Americans with hearing loss have the right to pick up the phone and connect.

Join the movement to protect captioned phone service:

Learn more at https://clear2connect.us/
Sheena Cobb owns her own booth at the Georgia Hair Salon where she is a Braider Assistant and Natural Stylist. With a staff of five people, she is the only deaf worker there. She became deaf at 8-month year old while growing up in Richmond, VA.

From a hearing family, she attended mainstream programs before attending Model Secondary School for the Deaf. She received degrees from Sargeant Reynold Community College and Regency Beauty Institute in Clerical Assistant and Cosmetology and Cosmetology Arts and Science, respectively.

Starting her business required a lot of patience and persistence. Being deaf does not post a challenge, it’s being a sole proprietor and juggling marketing/advertising, growing her clientele, and scheduling.

“I’M STILL ROCKING MY BRAIDS. LOVE THEM GOING ON 2 MONTHS.”
-KHYANDRAH MUHAMMAD

alisesglourmz.com  facebook AliseGlamourz  Instagram aliseglamourz
In 2018, Lori Kober and her husband, Tom, acquired two funeral homes in Vermillion and Elk Point, South Dakota. Both born deaf to hearing families in Wisconsin, they met while attending Wisconsin School for the Deaf. They married in 1989 shortly after Tom graduated from Gallaudet, Lori graduated the following year. That summer, Lori took a course in Mortuary Science at the University of the District of Columbia, which led her to graduating in the top third of her class.

Lori started working at a funeral home in Silver Spring, MD. After living in Maryland for a decade, both received an opportunity to work in South Dakota. Tom for Communication Service for the Deaf, and Lori for Iverson-Siecke Funeral Home. Her employer, Alton Siecke, became a great mentor for Lori, eventually selling both his funeral homes to her. Seeing her success, Tom left CSD to join Lori in supporting her running Kober Funeral Homes.

The journey wasn’t an easy one, as funeral directors and embalmers is a male-dominated field. Coupled with the fact that Lori is also deaf, banks were often reluctant to give loans.

Finally, the Wells Fargo Small Business Administration division supported Lori’s ambition and her dream came true.

Despite an array of assistive accessible communication technologies, being in a small town can hamper some communication access, mainly when they need live interpreters to communicate with unannounced family members. However, they are very well known and liked in the community, so there are no negative experiences between the Kobers and their clients, because Lori and Tom treat everyone like family - with compassion and dignity. Hosting holiday remembrance programs, angel ornaments, and online video tributes for those unable to attend services.
One of the very few deaf-owned restaurants in the US, operating in Austin, TX is Crepe Crazy. Started in 2007 by immigrants, Inna and Vladimir Giterman. Both were born into deaf families attending deaf schools. Inna is originally from Kiev, Ukraine and Vladimir from Rostov On Don, Russia. Both moved to America in their early 20’s for freedom, accessibility, and endless opportunities, where they met at a deaf club and it was love at first sight.

Vladimir had always had dreams to be his own boss and run a business. They brainstormed ideas and realized that people buy and eat food everyday. Vladimir then fondly recalled memories of his mother making homemade crepes from scratch. With the idea in mind, they travelled France and other parts of Europe, tasting and researching a variety of crepes.

When they returned home, and with no restaurant experience, they bootstrapped their business by starting off at local festivals making and selling crepes. The craze for their crepes continues to grow exponentially. From festival booths to two food trucks, they decided to take the plunge in May 2014 and found a building with 1.5 years left on its lease. This wildly successful decision led to extending the lease and opening a second location with plans for a third! Crepe Crazy currently has a staff of 30 employees, a majority of them deaf.

Like all of us, Crepe Crazy uses an assortment of technology to communicate with customers and staff. For customers, most of the time customers will point and gesture, but when in doubt they use Boogie Board, a writable/erasable board. With staff members, it’s mostly Glide so everyone can continue to communicate comfortably in ASL.
DRIPPING SPRINGS
660B W HWY 290 • Dripping Springs, TX 78620
Mon. - Sat.: 9AM - 8PM | Sun.: 9AM - 3PM
512.524.3198

crepecrazy.com

SOUTH AUSTIN
3103 S. Lamar Blvd • Austin, TX 78704
Mon. - Sat.: 9AM - 9PM | Sun.: 9AM - 4PM
512.387.2442
Lee Kramer is a deaf man born into a deaf family using the oral method. He, along with his deaf sister, attended Clarke School for the Deaf and later graduated from Wesleyan University. During an internship as a cancer researcher at Massachusetts General Hospital, he realized this was not the career he wanted. He enrolled at Northeastern University, where he learned sign language and graduated with an MBA.

Growing up, Monopoly was his favorite game, so he started working for a financial services and insurance company. Surprisingly, there was a lot of resistance at first from the deaf community because they were concerned about confidentiality due to it being a close-knit community.

Lee decided to prove his worth and pursued hearing clients to build his base. He started making cold calls using the relay system, but not allowing the relay agent to identify themselves. When meeting the clients in person, they were often shocked because they assumed he was a woman (many relay agents are female). This surprise encounter didn’t deter either party, and his client base quickly grew - largely from referrals.

Many of his hearing clients, as well as CPAs and Estate Attorneys also referred their clients to him. Not because he was deaf, because he was excellent at financial planning. The financial world doesn’t care about hearing loss, only about dollar signs. And Lee was masterful with growing the amounts.

When word got around the deaf community that Lee was a man of integrity and respectable, it didn’t take long until they became his clients. Lee was getting client requests all over the country - before the Videophone was invented. This is when he noticed there was an information gap between the community and the financial world. Remember, this is pre-internet, TV captioning and other accessible technological advances. He decided to start-up Kramer Wealth Managers and provide financial advice in ASL.

Today, with a staff of nine people (one being the first Deaf female with a Series 7 Investment license), Kramer Financial Services operates two offices, one in Frederick, MD and the other in Austin, TX. They are also registered in all fifty states with clients all over the country.
In the Mission District of San Francisco is an established and respected brick-oven pizzeria owned by Melody and Russ Stein. Melody, originally from Hong Kong, moved to the States when her family found out she (and her younger brother) were both Deaf. Russ is from a deaf family, originally from New York City, but grew up in Florida. Both met at Gallaudet and started their journey together.

Melody's family is rooted in restaurant ownership, naturally it's been a lifelong dream of hers to own a restaurant. Russ, a lifelong pizza enthusiast, also toyed with the idea of owning a pizzeria. Together, after successful careers in marketing, operations, management, etc - they decided to pursue their dream and launch Mozzeria.

It was a long two years to get started, mainly because banks often turned them away due to a lack of restaurant experience. After securing private loans as well as personal funding, Mozzeria opened.

In the beginning, they took on a number of responsibilities that comes with business ownership, and one of the essential tasks was teaching their patrons how to feel welcomed and comfortable interacting in a restaurant operated by an all-deaf staff. Over time, thanks to award winning pizzas, rave reviews from critics and 4.5 star average on Yelp, Mozzeria was quickly embraced by communities near and far.

They currently employ an all-deaf staff of 15 people at the San Francisco location, who use VRS, Mobile phone ordering, and other digital means to get hot, made to order pizza in their hands quickly and deliciously.
Founded by Ken Brown III and Chris Landry in 2014, Scan Mailboxes will scan, digitally archive and physically store your US Postal mail & packages. This deaf owned business provides a niche service to many businesses and individuals in Texas and beyond.

Both men, born deaf in hearing families, were mainstreamed in hearing schools growing up (for Ken, the last two years of high school was at California School for the Deaf). They met while working together for another company. Ken had long been frustrated with making trips to the Post Office only to find his PO Box empty and often wondered why mail wasn’t scanned and emailed. It wasn’t until Chris had to go out of town when Ken offered to scan his mail, upon Chris’s return - they decided to launch Scan Mailboxes.

Together, they self-funded their venture and within the first few years they had become debt-free. Ken and Chris have a staff of five to manage their growing clientele. They also work with Texas School for the Deaf to provide internship opportunities for the students to develop business acumen.

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In the heart of the Arts District in Hyattsville lies a fast-growing, locally popular brewery called Streetcar 82, the first deaf-owned and operated brewery on the East Coast. Named after the 82 streetcar that ran along route 1, from DC to College park. Had the streetcar been active today, it would pass by each of the three owner’s homes - Sam Coster (Woodbridge, DC), Jon Cetrano (Eckington, DC), and Mark Burke (Hyattsville, MD).

Mark and Jon both attended mainstreamed schools, whereas Sam went to North Carolina School for the Deaf. All three met at Gallaudet, but it wasn’t until years later when Gallaudet hosted a business pitch competition for students and alumni that they realized they were onto something. Upon winning the competition, and being the audience’s favorite, they decided to venture into establishing a brewery. After much research and investment using personal funds, Streetcar 82 Brewing Co. opened its bay doors nearly a year ago.

It quickly bloomed into a popular hangout spot for both the Hyattsville residents, and the local deaf community. In fact, TDI will partner with NASADHH and host a community mixed event there the day before TDI’s 2019 Conference begins.

Being such a cozy neighborhood spot, with a total of eleven deaf employees, they seldom use much technology to communicate with their customers. The menu and taps are plainly visible for the customers to point and choose. A small cue card of bar-related signs is available for non-signers to practice. But mainly, good beer removes any and all communication barriers.
STREETCAR82BREWING.COM

Facebook: Streetcar82  Instagram: streetcar82brewingco

4824 Rhode Island Ave, Hyattsville, MD
Telecommunications Relay Services

Ex Parte to Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities – Misuse of Internet Protocol (IP) Captioned Telephone Service • CG Dockets No. 03-123 & 13-24

(September 17) HLAA, TDI, NAD, ALDA, CPADO, AADB, DSA, CCASDH, DHHCAN, and DHH–RERC submitted these comments in response to the Commission’s Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on IP-CTS. IP CTS has increasingly become an important part of the fabric of communication for people who are deaf, or hard of hearing, or DeafBlind. Though the Commission suspects that this increased usage is a result of waste, fraud, and abuse, given no evidence to the contrary, we believe the increased use is the result of an aging population that is becoming more generally aware of accessibility technologies like IP CTS. Nearly 25 percent of Americans aged 65 to 74 and a full 50 percent of Americans aged 75 and older experience disabling hearing loss. Against that backdrop, eligibility criteria for IP CTS should remain non-burdensome for consumers; imposing a burdensome eligibility regime risks precluding legitimate users from IP CTS’s profound benefits. However, should the Commission move away from a self-certification regime, it should steer the program toward assessments by third-party professionals as opposed to states. The Commission should also maintain federally standardized control over all eligibility criteria for consumers, rather than opening the door to a patchwork system of state requirements where a consumer may lose access to a vital service simply because he or she moves from one state to another. The Commission, rather than states, should also continue to certify providers. Consumers should not suffer the consequence of varying service quality as a result of the state in which they live. In updating the program, the Commission should include a portion of intrastate revenue in the TRS Fund. Marketing communications should be accurate and complete, and consumers must be able to learn about the service and how it may serve their needs. Lastly, easily accessible on and off buttons for captions should be present on IP CTS devices, so long as they do not discourage legitimate IP CTS users from turning or leaving captions on when needed. Finally, we urge the Commission to ensure that ASR-based offerings provide quality sufficient for reliable use in emergency situations.


(September 18) HLAA, TDI, NAD, ALDA, CPADO, AADB, DSA, CCASDH, DHHCAN, and DHH–RERC submitted reply comments to comments and oppositions filed regarding Sprint Corporation’s July 9, 2018 petition for clarification or reconsideration. We reiterate the general support for Sprint’s request for the Commission to clarify or reconsider its approach to allowing and evaluating IP CTS applications using automatic speech recognition (ASR) technology outlined in the July 26, 2018 ex parte of several of the Consumer Groups and DHH–RERC and IT–RERC and oppositions filed regarding Sprint Corporation’s July 9, 2018 petition for clarification or reconsideration. We reiterate the general support for Sprint’s request for the Commission to clarify or reconsider its approach to allowing and evaluating IP CTS applications using automatic speech recognition (ASR) technology outlined in the July 26, 2018 ex parte of several of the Consumer Groups and DHH–RERC and IT–RERC and oppositions filed regarding Sprint Corporation’s July 9, 2018 petition for clarification or reconsideration. We reiterate the general support for Sprint’s request for the Commission to clarify or reconsider its approach to allowing and evaluating IP CTS applications using automatic speech recognition (ASR) technology outlined in the July 26, 2018 ex parte of several of the Consumer Groups and DHH–RERC. Our perspective is consistent with the record of support for Sprint’s petition from Hamilton Relay and CaptionCall, LLC. More specifically: The Declaratory Ruling was procedurally deficient and denied
stakeholders an opportunity to comment;

The Commission should articulate and adopt a technology-neutral framework for certifying IP CTS providers that seeks notice and comment and ensures the quality, privacy, and reliability of new offerings.

The Commission should afford the opportunity for consumers to comment on all IP CTS certification applications.

Conversely, the Commission should reject the narrow opposing arguments raised against Sprint's petition. MachineGenius argues against Sprint’s petition primarily on the basis that there the Commission's minimum standards do not require robust demonstrations of privacy, emergency capabilities, reliability, or accuracy for non-ASR offerings, and so ASR offerings should likewise pass with little scrutiny from the Commission.

T-Meeting likewise argues that “[e]xisting IP CTS providers may or may not establish accuracy,” and that consumers who do not “find the ASR speed and accuracy acceptable” can simply “abandon the service.” To whatever extent non-ASR offerings are deficient, the Commission should adopt technology neutral requirements that all IP CTS services can satisfy robust standards of functional equivalency. The Commission should decline the invitation to certify new providers solely on the grounds that they are no less problematic for consumers than existing offerings that fail to serve their needs or that consumers can simply stop communicating with their friends, family, and coworkers if the no market for high-quality services exists.


(October 17) HLAA, TDI, NAD, ALDA, CPADO, AADB, DSA, CCASDHH, DHHCAN, and DHH-RERC and IT-RERC submitted these reply comments in response to the Commission’s Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on IP-CTS. We join others in urging the Commission to comply with the D.C. Circuit’s conclusion that the Commission must identify specific instances of or practices leading to waste, fraud, and abuse before enacting sweeping reforms that put the civil rights of millions of Americans at risk. Moreover, there is significant support … that the current system of assessing user eligibility through self-certification remains the most flexible and least burdensome option for consumers to exercise their rights to equal access. The record also makes clear that should the Commission … impose new eligibility requirements, third-party professional certifications are preferable to delegation to the states. Additionally, many share our view that the Commission's proposed list of authorized third-party professionals is too narrow and must be broadened to minimize the potential burden on the consumer. Although the Commission has proposed delegating control over IP CTS to the states, others make clear that states do not have the requisite data to effectively analyze whether they can assume administration. States lack the financial resources, administrative capacity, and legal authority to administer IP CTS. The federal government is better suited than states to oversee the program and ensure that IP CTS users have access to a functionally equivalent service in every state. We also agree that the Commission includes intrastate revenues when calculating carrier contributions because both intra- and interstate minutes are compensated from the TRS Fund. Finally, we agree that the Commission needs to collect and make available national data on IP CTS when issuing notices for rulemaking. The Commission should stop the unjustifiable shielding of detailed provider cost data

use IP CTS, while engaging in further research to define the specifics of the metrics. Finally, the Commission should adopt its suggestion to publish performance metrics achieved by all providers, and to develop a system where IP CTS users can rate the quality of calls. The Commission should also maintain one standard of accuracy and quality for all calls made or received on IP CTS instead of establishing a higher standard of accuracy for calls made to legal, medical, or other professional services. The Commission also should ensure that methods for measuring accuracy are performed by third parties, rather than allowing IP CTS providers to self-measure or self-report.


(October 17) HLAA, TDI, NAD, ALDA, CPADO, AADB, DSA, CCASDHH, DHHCAN, and DHH-RERC and IT-RERC submitted these comments in response to the Commission’s Notice of Inquiry on IP-CTS. We strongly support the Commission’s decision to institute a proceeding aimed at establishing performance goals and standards for (IP-CTS). Functional equivalence, the keystone of the civil right to communications access codified in Section 225, must be the first goal for IP CTS. The Commission's goal of efficiency—which it defines as decreasing instances of waste—must not outweigh the goal of functional equivalence. We support the Commission’s goal of spurring technological advances, but those technological advances must be in service of providing functionally equivalent service based on the metrics established by the Commission.

We urge the Commission to establish broad principles for specific metrics for accuracy so that they best serve the consumers who...
RERC are thrilled that the FCC established the IVC Working video calling, call encryption, and more. Consumer Groups and location passing, call routing, interoperability with mainstream standards from the above-referenced bodies for NG9-1-1, others. The VRS ecosystem must be compatible with applicable compatibility, and indoor wireless location accuracy, among others. We support development of encryption, automatic geolocation for 911 calls, skills-based routing and the use of certified deaf interpreters, and seek a written commitment from the Joint VRS Providers to work on each of these efforts so that they are not set back or harmed by pausing development of the VATRP App and the RUE Profile.

In the Matter of Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities re: Structure and Practice of the Video Relay Service Program * CG Docket Nos. 03-123 and 10-51

(October 31) TDI, NAD, CPADO, and DSA, and the RERC on Technology for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing at Gallaudet University (RERC) submitted an ex parte filing in response to the October 17, 2018 letter from Global VRS, ZVRS/Purple, Convo Relay, and Sorenson VRS to Eliot Greenwald, Deputy Chief, Disability Rights Office, FCC. Joint VRS Providers asked the CGB to “immediately pause any further development of the VRS Access Technology Reference Platform ("VATRP App") and (revisions being made to the associated technical specifications ("RUE Profile").” Consumer Groups and RERC are not opposed to pausing development of the VATRP App and the RUE Profile. We urge the Bureau to focus on (a) how the ultimate goal of mainstream interoperability can be accomplished and (b) the ability of the community to develop services integrated with VRS, just like the mainstream can develop VoIP services. Consumer Groups and RERC agree that the VATRP App should be developed, deployed and used as a tool for VRS providers to ensure interoperability with each other and their VRS customers, pursuant to the Commission's rules, as well as for direct-to-direct video communications. Consumer Groups and RERC fully support the Joint VRS Providers' recommendation to transition the RUE Profile from the Commission's vendor to an appropriate standards organization. The Commission has routinely used standards developing organizations such as TTY Forum, SIP Forum, IEEE, ITU-T, IETF, ATIS, CTTIA, NENA, TIA, ANSI and other bodies to address matters in VRS, captioning, emergency communication, hearing aid compatibility, and indoor wireless location accuracy, among others. The VRS ecosystem must be compatible with applicable standards from the above-referenced bodies for NG9-1-1, location passing, call routing, interoperability with mainstream video calling, call encryption, and more. Consumer Groups and RERC are thrilled that the FCC established the IVC Working Group to build for a better future in interoperable video calling, not just between deaf and hard of hearing people, or for when either the deaf/hard of hearing or hearing people make VRS calls, but for anyone, disabled or not disabled to make video calls with each other, to see each other in video when they speak with their voices, or in sign language, or a combination of both.

The record developed in response to the Commission's NOI reflects broad support for establishing functional equivalence as the Commission's first goal for IP CTS. The record further reflects that neither the goal of technological advances nor the goal of efficiency should outweigh the priority of functional equivalence, and demonstrates support among commenters for the Commission's proposition to establish a system by which IP CTS users can rate the quality of their calls. Additionally, commenters agree that consumer choice, efficiency, transparency, and a technology neutral framework all have a role to play in furthering the ultimate goal of providing IP CTS, but that all of these goals should be considered in light of functional equivalence. Moreover, the record significantly reinforces our assertion that the metrics promulgated for comment in this NOI are insufficient and that as such the Commission must engage in further research before adopting new, better-defined metrics for comments. Regardless of how the Commission defines IP CTS metrics, it must ensure that metrics apply across providers and that an independent third-party conducts testing. The Commission also should keep consumers actively involved in the dialogue surrounding IP CTS quality by developing a system that allows users to rate the service and see ratings from other people who use the service.

Continued from page 23
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