

CALLER

THE COMMONWEALTH

Virginia Relay: Telecommunications services for the deaf, hard of hearing, DeafBlind and speech disabled

Spring 2009

COAT Fights For Equal Communications Access


Since 2007, the Coalition of Organizations for Accessible Technology (COAT) has been working with Congress to close the gap between federal legislation and new technology. COAT's goal is to ensure that laws and rules exist so people with disabilities have equal access to high speed broadband, wireless and other Internet-based technologies.

"We want to make sure that legislation concerning equal access to telecommunications continues to be amended as technology continues to advance," said Karen Peltz Strauss, COAT co-founder and a leading advocate for telecommunications rights for people with disabilities. "COAT's mission is to ensure that as the U.S. migrates towards more IP-based and other innovative communication technologies, individuals with disabilities do not get left behind."

In 2008, a bill known as the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act was introduced to Congress. The

proposed law would extend close captioning to some Internet video, require hearing-aid compatibility of all broadband telephone products and mandate a certain level of ease in accessing captions on televisions with remote controls, among other provisions. COAT members are currently gathering community and grassroots support for the bill among senators and representatives.

"We want to make sure that legislation concerning equal access to telecommunications continues to be amended as technology continues to advance."

More than 225 national, regional, state and community-based organizations currently belong to COAT. If your group would like to join this coalition to provide access to emerging digital and Internet-based technologies, please visit www.COATaccess.org or email info@COATaccess.org. 

Virginia Relay Partner Update

Virginia Relay is proud to announce its two newest Relay Partners: Ukrop's Super Markets and SunTrust Bank!

In just its fourth year of existence, the Virginia Relay Partner Program has already welcomed more than 600 local businesses.

The Virginia Relay Partner is a free program that teaches employees of Virginia-based businesses how to make and receive Relay calls. The goal of the program is to reduce the number of organizations that unknowingly hang-up on Relay users

attempting to conduct business by phone. In just its fourth year of existence, the Virginia Relay Partner Program has already welcomed more than 600 local businesses.

"Now that we have developed an extensive list of Virginia Relay Partners, our goal now is to make Virginia's deaf and hard of hearing community more aware of the program," said Matthew Myrick, AT&T Channel Manager. "We want to make sure that people who are deaf and hard of hearing know which organizations have chosen to learn about Relay so they can make educated decisions about who to conduct their business with."

A complete list of Virginia Relay Partners is available at www.VARelay.org. 

Celebrate Communication 2009 Coming May 2



Celebrate Communication is Northern Virginia's premier event for promoting excellence in communications for deaf, hard of hearing and hearing people of all ages. This year's event will take place Saturday, May 2, 2009 at the George Mason University Center for the Arts.

"Celebrate Communication is a wonderful opportunity for deaf, hard-of-hearing, speech-impaired and hearing individuals to come together and learn from each other," said Cheryl Heppner, executive director, Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons (NVRC). "In addition to meeting others from our community, people will have the chance to learn about the newest technologies and services designed to enhance communication for everyone."

Presented by NVRC and the Helen A. Kellar Institute for Human Disabilities (KIHd), Celebrate Communication 2009

continued on page 2

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- Stories of Appalachian Life
- Introducing AT&T IM Relay
- Virginia Relay Advisory Council Welcomes New Members
- What You Need to Know About 10-Digit Numbers for VRS and Internet Relay
- And Much More...

 *Virginia Relay* 
DIAL 7-1-1



Offering Keys to Communication

VDDHH

Stories of Appalachian Life, As Told by Virginia Relay Communication Assistants



The Virginia Relay Center is located in Norton, the smallest official city in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Established in 1991 to serve Virginia's deaf, hard of hearing and speech-impaired population, the Relay Center is now the largest employer in Norton. Situated in the Appalachian Mountains, Norton is a city rich with history in pioneer

exploration, farming, railroad expansion and coal mining.

Virginia Relay Call Center Communication Assistants (CAs) have recreated pieces of this rich history in a collection of poems, short stories, plays and photographs titled *Coalfield Suite*.

First published in 2006, the book is the result of a creative writing class offered to Virginia Relay CAs by the Alliance for Employee Growth and Development, Inc. Based on a similar project previously completed by the United Steelworkers of America, the class was taught by Dr. Vivian Bowlings Blevins, a native of Kentucky coal country with experience teaching creative writing to a wide range of demographic groups.

Through their work in the class, the CAs created poems as well as pieces of fiction and non-fiction that told their life

stories and the history of their families' stories living and working in southwestern Virginia. During the first year of the program, the participants gave several public performances of their work that were well received by audiences. The first 20-hour course was so successful it was soon expanded into an ongoing advanced writing seminar so the CAs could further develop their creative writing skills. Many CAs have even been invited to read their work at

"Not only was it an educational opportunity, but the employees also came away with a stronger sense of self and their heritage."

events throughout the eastern United States.

"As the employees of the Virginia Relay Center set out to improve their personal communication skills through this writing project, it quickly grew into an instrument of personal growth for most of the participants," said AT&T manager Brenda Neely. "Not only was it an educational opportunity, but the employees also came away with a stronger sense of self and their heritage."

Coalfield Suite is a unique illustration of the family values, humor, mystery and spirituality that make up Appalachian life from the people that have experienced it first-hand. For more information about the Virginia Relay Center writing project or to purchase a copy of Coalfield Suite, please visit www.employeegrowth.com/participants.asp. 📖

Introducing AT&T IM Relay

AT&T Relay is now on AOL® Instant Messenger™ (AIM)! As of March 31, 2009, AT&T will be transitioning from IP Relay to IM Relay. AT&T is making the change in order to be in compliance with new FCC regulations that require VRS and IP Relay users to obtain 10-digit phone numbers. By using AT&T IM Relay, individuals will have access to the latest in Relay technology and a 10-digit phone registered to their physical address. Among the most important benefits, this will allow 9-1-1 call center operators to obtain location information from IM Relay users automatically, saving precious time in the event of an emergency.

To use AT&T IM Relay, you must:

1. Go to www.relaycall.com/IM/
2. Click on "Need an account? Sign up Now!"
3. Create an AIM account with a screen name and password

4. Once you are logged in to your new AIM account, add the screen name "ATTRelay" to your Buddy List
5. To place a call using AT&T IM Relay, log in to your AIM account, click on "ATTRelay" in your Buddy List, then enter the number you would like to call

In order to use AT&T IM Relay, you must have a 10-digit phone number registered with your current address. To request a 10-digit phone number, log in to your AIM account, click on "ATTRelay" in your Buddy List, type in your address and follow the prompts. There is no cost to use the service and you do not have to be a current AOL member. (Note: If you are a VRS user, you will need different 10-digit numbers for VRS and IM Relay.)

For more information, please visit <http://relayservices.att.com/>. 📖

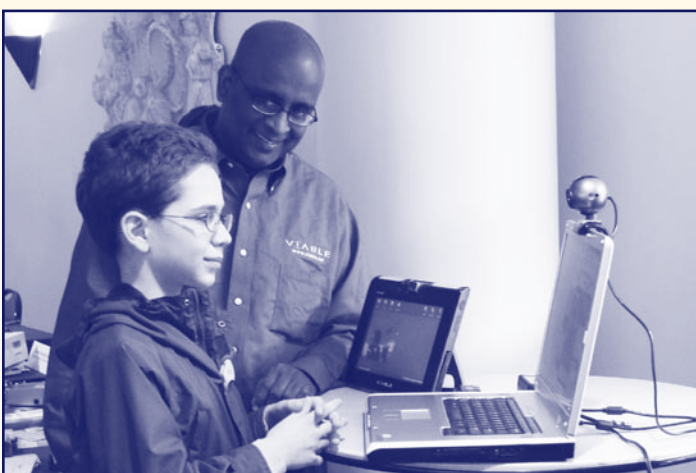
Celebrate Communication 2009

continued from page 1

is expected to draw the biggest crowd in the event's history. More than 60 exhibitors will participate and provide visitors with information about the latest technologies, services and organizations targeting the deaf and hard of hearing community.

The agenda includes fun activities for the entire family, including valuable exhibits and demonstrations for adults and crafts, games and a costume parade for children. Admission to the event is free and food will be available for purchase from Panera Catering.

For more information about Celebrate Communication 2009, please visit www.nvrc.org. For sponsorship and exhibitor information, please contact Cheryl Heppner at cheppner@nvrc.org. 📖



Virginia Relay Advisory Council Welcomes Six New Members

The Virginia Relay Advisory Council (VRAC) works closely with the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) to establish and maintain outreach programs for Virginia Relay. Made up of volunteers from a variety of personal and professional backgrounds throughout Virginia's deaf and hard of hearing community, VRAC also represents the needs and concerns of

Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services Center (DHHSC). He works mainly with the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to provide information and services to people with hearing loss through the Technology Assistance Program (TAP). Feta is also head treasurer for the 2009 Virginia Associated for the Deaf Conference planning committee and a former employee of the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind.

A relay user for more than 20 years, Feta understands all of the benefits and challenges deaf and hard of hearing people experience when using communication technologies. As a member of VRAC, Feta is planning to further his role as an advocate for equal communication access.

Abra Jacobs, representing the Virginia Association of Centers for Independent Living, has worked for the Eastern Shore Center for Independent Living since 1999. As an independent living services coordinator, Abra provides peer counseling, skills training and other services to program participants. She also serves as coordinator of the Technology Assistance Program (TAP), which provides assistive equipment to deaf and hard of hearing individuals. As part of VRAC, Abra is looking forward to gathering knowledge of advancing technology for deaf, hard of hearing and deaf-blind consumers and their families.

Helen Justice, representing the Virginia Association of the Deaf (VAD), retired from the Internal Revenue Service as a lien technician in 2005. Helen currently teaches Sunday school to the deaf and serves on the advisory council of the Virginia Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services. As part of VRAC, she is looking forward to learning about the latest in relay telecommunications relay services and technologies to share with the local deaf community.

Eileen McCartin, representing the Association of Late Deafened Adults (ALDA), is a deaf and hard of hearing specialist for Loudoun County Public Schools. Eileen holds a Ph.D. from George Mason University and a master's degree in Deaf Education from Gallaudet University and has spent many years teaching deaf and hard of hearing students. A late-deafened adult and bilateral cochlear implant user, Eileen is a former president, vice president and newsletter editor of the Potomac chapter of the Association of Late-Deafened Adults (ALDA). ■

Virginia Relay users and serves as a focus group for new Relay features and services.

In 2009, the Council is happy to welcome six new members:

Dr. Carl Amos, representing Hearing Relay users, is an associate professor of American Sign Language and community coordinator for people who are deaf and hard of hearing at Danville Community College. Carl is also program director for Virginia's only Weekend Educational Interpreter Training Program (WEIT). Carl has worked with people who are deaf and hard of hearing for more than 30 years, including roles as an outreach specialist for VDDHH, an ASL teacher and interpreter at New York University and an English teacher at Gallaudet University. An active member of the deaf and hard of hearing community, Carl is a current member of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, National Association of the Deaf, American Sign Language Teachers' Association, Conference of Interpreter Trainers and the Danville Host Lions Club's Hearing Committee. Carl brings a unique perspective to VRAC as a hearing relay user and is hoping to learn more about Virginia Relay to better assist in resolving and improving concerns for people who are deaf, hard of hearing and hearing.

Traci Branch, representing Voice Carry-Over users, currently serves 11 counties and four cities across Virginia as a regional vocational counselor for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing for the Department of Rehabilitative Services. Tracy is already enjoying her role with VRAC and learning more about the laws and regulations that pertain to individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing.

Feta Fernsler, representing Internet Relay users, is an outreach specialist for the

Ten-Digit Numbers for VRS and Internet Relay: What You Need to Know

What is the new policy?

As of January 1, 2009, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) requires that all Video Relay and Internet Relay users obtain a 10-digit number. This number is just like the standard 10-digit number used by most voice telephone callers.

Why was the change made?

There are many benefits to using a 10-digit number for VRS and IP Relay. First of all, it is now much easier to place a call to a VRS or IP Relay user. There is no more need for multi-step calling instructions, special extensions, "proxy" numbers or IP addresses. Now, anyone can simply pick up a voice telephone, dial a 10-digit number and be connected to any VRS or IP Relay user through that person's preferred provider (Sorenson, SnapVRS, CSDVRS, etc.)

Secondly, every 10-digit number is assigned to its user's physical geographic location. This means that in the event that a VRS or IP Relay user places an emergency call to 911, the user's address is automatically routed to the 911 call center operator, who is able to dispatch emergency services to the appropriate location more quickly.

What do I need to do?

If you are a VRS or IP Relay user, you must contact your preferred service provider and request to be assigned a 10-digit number. Once you receive your number, you must register this number with your current address through your provider. You will be able to change your service provider or update your location information at any time. After June 30, 2009 VRS and IP Relay services will not be available for anyone without a registered 10-digit number.

How can I learn more?

Any Virginia Relay user who needs to obtain a 10-digit telephone number for VRS or IP Relay, needs to register a number with a current address, or would like to learn more may do so by contacting Virginia Relay at either V/TTY 1-800-552-7917 or www.varelay.org. ■

Upcoming Events

Mid-Atlantic ADA Conference

Friday, April 24, 2009

Best Western Hotel
109 Apple Tree Lane, Waynesboro, VA
For more information, visit www.adainfo.org

Celebrate Communication 2009

Saturday, May 2, 2009

George Mason University, Center for the Arts
Fairfax, VA
For more information, visit www.nvrc.org

Summer 2009 VRAC Meeting

Thursday, June 11, 2009

Danville Community College, Oliver Hall
For more information, contact matthew.myrick@vddhh.virginia.gov

The Art of Aging Conference and Expo

Wednesday, June 17, 2009

Fredericksburg Expo and Conference Center
Fredericksburg, VA
For more information, visit www.artofagingexpo.com

Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) 2009 Convention

Thursday – Sunday, June 18 – 21, 2009

Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center
Nashville, TN
For more information, visit <http://www.hearingloss.org/convention>

Deaf Seniors of America (DSA) Conference

Monday – Friday, June 22 – 26, 2009

Paris Hotel
Las Vegas, NV
For more information, visit www.dsa2009.us

Virginia Association of the Deaf (VAD) Biannual Conference

Thursday – Sunday, July 23 – 26, 2009

Stonewall Jackson Hotel
Staunton, VA
For more information, visit www.VAD.org

Virginia Relay Advisory Council (VRAC)

Consumer Members:

Dave Crocker, Chair
Representing Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA)
Email: crocker3@verizon.net

Cheryl Deavers, Vice Chair
Representing CapTel Users
Email: deaverca@jmu.edu

Helen Justice
Representing Virginia Association of the Deaf (VAD)
Email: Justice1118@comcast.net

Carl Amos
Representing Hearing Relay User
Email: camos@dcc.vccs.edu

Eileen McCartin
Representing the Association of Late Deafened Adults (ALDA)
Email: Eileen.McCartin@loudoun.k12.va.us

Jenny McKenzie
Representing the Virginia Association of the DeafBlind (VADB)
Email: jmckohs@juno.com

Deanne Lindsey
Representing the Speech and Hearing Association of Virginia (SHAV)
Email: dee.lindsey@cavtel.net

Abra Jacobs
Representing Central Virginia Center for Independent Living
Email: Jacaw2003@yahoo.com

Mary Nunnally
Representing Hearing Relay User
Email: Mary.Nunnally@drs.virginia.gov

Betti Thompson
Representing Video Relay Users Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services Center
Email: Betti@deafhh.org

Feta Fernsler
Representing Internet Relay Users
Email: Feta@deafhh.org

Traci Branch
Representing Voice Carry-Over Users
Email: Traci.Branch@drs.virginia.gov

Non-Voting Members:

Gary Talley
VDDHH Outreach and Community Service Program Manager
Representing VDDHH Outreach Programs
Email: Gary.Talley@vddhh.virginia.gov

Rosemarie Riggs
Representing the AT&T Relay Center in Norton
Email: rs4@att.com

Rex Moers
Virginia CapTel Manager
Sprint Consumer Relations Manager
Email: Rex.Moers@sprint.com



1602 Rolling Hills Drive, Suite 203
Richmond, Virginia 23229-5012