

Caption Quality and Enforcement Issues

By Jack O'Keefe

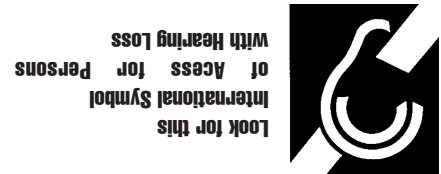
On January 1, 2006, after an eight year phase-in period, Federal Communication Commission (FCC) regulations will require that 100% of new English Language TV programming be captioned (with some exceptions). Although SHHH and other hearing loss advocates hail this captioning milestone, concern remains that FCC has regulated the quantity of captioning, yet remains silent on caption quality, while enforcement of caption rules appears to be weak or non-existent.

Last August, responding to chronic problems with caption quality on broadcast and cable TV, SHHH joined forces with Telecommunications for the Deaf, Inc. (TDI) and other advocacy groups to petition FCC to open a rulemaking proceeding addressing caption

quality and enforcement issues. This "Petition for Rulemaking" [RM-11065] asks FCC to establish additional enforcement mechanisms to better implement the captioning rules and to establish captioning quality standards to ensure high quality and reliable closed captioning.

Many caption viewers sent comments to FCC supporting this petition. A large number of these comments, about 15%, came from Pennsylvania. SHHH members commented on numerous captioning failures experienced during the extreme weather emergency following hurricane Ivan last September. FCC rules in effect since April, 2000, require emergency information provided in the audio portion of TV programming to be made accessible to persons with hearing disabilities by closed

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Message from Diana

As this issue of HearSay goes to press, the FCC has just announced the first enforcement action for violation of the emergency closed captioning rules which require emergency information to be provided in a visual format. Three CA stations were cited for failure to provide visual access to emergency programming during wildfires in the San Diego area in 2003. This is the first time ever that the FCC has issued fines against television stations for that reason. As part of the FCC ruling, Chairman Michael Powell said, "People with hearing disabilities have the right to the same timely emergency information as stations provide to their hearing audiences. The Commission remains committed to strong enforcement in this critical area." With the FCC committed to the meaningful enforcement requested in the captioning article in this issue of HearSay, it remains important for viewers to bring all violations of the accessibility rules to attention of authorities at FCC.

Diana Bender, PA-SHHH State Director

MY HEARING LOSS IS MY HOBBY

By Bill McConeghey, DELHOH SHHH Member

I am 87 years old. I have been hard of hearing for the past thirty-five years or so. My HOH life has been a rewarding one. I feel that I have helped many others to cope with the trials of hearing loss. I keep learning new things myself, and I don't plan to stop.

When I first became aware of my hearing loss, I went to Temple University Hospital. They teach audiology so I figured they would know something about it. A student examined my hearing (with an instructor sitting at her shoulder), gave me a copy of my audiogram and sent me to a local hearing aid dispenser. The dispenser and I tried four hearing aids before I found one I was willing

to live with. I think he came to regard me as a challenge. About that time I heard about an American Speech Language and Hearing Association Convention (ASHA) in Chicago. I went as a layperson, attended a number of lectures (most over my head), visited all of the exhibitors and took a side trip to the factory where my hearing aid was made. I have since attended about ten SHHH, ASHA or Cued Speech Conventions, going every three or four years to keep current with what's new.

Back home, I joined DELHOH, Delaware County Group for Hard of Hearing People, a local SHHH group started by Rev. Paul Harris, who, like Rocky Stone, found no local organized help for hard of hearing people, so he started his own group. We soon joined SHHH as a local chapter.

I have been active in DELHOH for 19 years, serving as Program Chairman, President, Newsletter Editor, and Chairman of the Access 2000 Committee to help hospitals better serve deaf and HOH patients, and, with other DELHOH members, spent 13 years as a volunteer at the Hearing Discovery Center (HDC), a free lending library of assistive devices for Deaf and HOH people. I helped in planning and running the local "Fall Get Away" weekend for deaf and HOH people.

As an HDC volunteer, I and other volunteers (I am not alone in this work) give lectures on hearing topics to local SHHH groups, schools, retirement communities, adult education classes, senior centers, church groups, libraries, service organizations, and anyone else who will listen. As well as conducting "Demonstrations of Assistive Devices", we talk on "HOH Communication Techniques", "Surviving a Hospital Stay With a Hearing Loss," and "Cued Speech, the High Road to Literacy for Deaf Children."

I have advocated for cued speech ever since meeting Dr. Orin Cornett, who was the Gallaudet University officer in charge of long range planning. He invented cued

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captioning or another method of visual presentation. Although this rule has been in effect for 5 years, and numerous complaints have been made about specific violations, FCC enforcement efforts appear limited to the issue of annual "reminder" letters. Absent meaningful enforcement, such "reminders" serve only to remind TV distributors that they can disregard the emergency information accessibility rule with impunity.

Some broadcast networks are dedicated to providing quality captions. CBS, already meeting the January, 2006, standard by captioning 100% of new programming, and striving to maintain 98.6% accuracy in their captions, is an outstanding example. Other TV distributors, including some local CBS affiliates, may provide captions reluctantly, only because they are required to do so. They may be more concerned about cost than accessibility or quality.

Additional supportive comments were provided by WGBH, Boston, and the Accessible Media Industry Coalition (AMIC), a group representing 22 leading companies in the captioning industry. The only opposition to the caption quality rulemaking petition came from the National Cable & Telecommunications Association (NCTA), a cable TV trade association.

In opposition, NCTA commented that:

- FCC should not adopt the compliance and enforcement measures proposed by the petitioners,
- Should not impose burdensome record keeping requirements,
- Need not modify complaint procedures,
- Has no reason to adopt punitive measures,
- Has no evidence that rules are needed to ensure technical quality,
- Should not make rules regarding reformatting,
- Temporary loss of captions should not disqualify programming from counting toward the benchmark,
- Electronic newsroom captioning should be permitted, and Non-technical standards are unworkable.

NCTA further wrote, "Improvements can always be made, and the cable industry is committed to working to improve these processes to better serve its deaf and hard of hearing customers." In view of comments expressed in opposition to the rulemaking petition, one might

question the sincerity of that commitment.

FCC has yet to take action on the rulemaking petition, but may be expected to issue a "Notice of Proposed Rulemaking" later this year. When that happens SHHH members and other caption viewers should be prepared to respond, effectively refuting opposition claims made by the cable trade association. A guide, "How to Write Effective Comments In Response to FCC Proceedings" by Brenda Battat is available online at <http://hearingloss.org/html/TC16.html>. For more information on the caption quality initiative, visit <http://hearingloss.org/html/captionqi.html>. *Jack O'Keeffe, is a SHHH member residing in Aliquippa, PA and a member of the VITAC Caption Viewers Advisory Panel.* □

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speech in response to his shock on learning that the average reading level of deaf students was grade 4.5. Cued speech can be learned in two days of instruction. It opens the whole world of spoken English and English literature to deaf students.

In a former SHHH brochure and application form, I am quoted as saying "Membership in SHHH National involves us in support for successful, legitimate, representation of the interests of people with hearing loss in federal government, health care, education, industry and the hearing related professions." This organization is worth supporting.

Yes, hearing loss and what to do about is my almost full time hobby. See you at the SHHH Convention in D.C. in June. □

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Getting to know the Deaf-Hearing Communication Centre

By Iris Boshes, DHCC Executive Director

Imagine becoming hospitalized in a foreign country where you may be forced to communicate in another language. Try making sense of your favorite TV show by only lip-reading. These examples should help you appreciate the communication barriers facing deaf and hard of hearing people every day.

The Deaf-Hearing Communication Centre (DHCC), founded in 1972, is a non-profit organization that promotes equal communication accessibility for deaf and hard of hearing people and cultural awareness to the hearing population. We accomplish our mission through various programs.

Most people do not appreciate how important hearing is until they lose it. Our ability to hear affects our participation in family dinners and/or business meetings. Without communication, we can become isolated and depressed. You may know someone who “hears what she wants to hear” or someone who constantly says that you “mumble”. These comments should alert you that the person is not hearing well and needs to have her hearing checked. Proper use of technology such as hearing aids can help. It is important that the hard of hearing person is properly diagnosed and receives support so that he or she

does not hide away because communication is too difficult.

Deaf people are part of a cultural group that shares common values and a unique language, American Sign Language (ASL). Deaf people experience difficulty when they do business in or require services from the hearing community, people who do not know sign language. Deaf people are asked to communicate by writing notes in English, which is like a foreign language to them and may cause serious misunderstandings. Our Interpreter Referral Department locates qualified sign language interpreters to provide communication access and help the business or service meet its obligation as legislated in the Americans with Disabilities Act.

DHCC has an after hour emergency service that helps police and hospitals secure interpreters for emergencies. Accurate communication is essential at all times but especially in life altering legal and medical situations such as signing a medical consent form for surgery.

DHCC has other services to assist hearing people such as Sign Language Classes, Sensitivity Training, Video Conferencing and a Resource Library for our members. To learn more about our services call us at 610-604-0450 or visit our web site at www.dhcc.org. □

Delaware County Intermediate Unit helps Children with Hearing Loss

By Linda Heffernan

Pennsylvania is fortunate to have one of the country's top educational programs providing oral educational opportunities for children who are deaf or hard of hearing. The Delaware County Intermediate Unit (DCIU), near Philadelphia, has a program that is nationally recognized.

The DCIU Hearing Department provides evaluations, programs and support services for students with hearing loss from the age of identification throughout their school years. Using auditory/oral methods, students are educated with their hearing peers within the public schools of Delaware County.

The program began in 1963 under Ms. Virginia Speaker. By the late 60's, its services had expanded to accommodate the large numbers of children who had hearing loss as a result of the rubella epidemic of the mid-60's. Under the leadership of Ms. Speaker and later, Lillian Wilson, the

program remained committed to the oral approach.

Services are offered to children as soon as a hearing loss is identified. The emphasis throughout the early years is on maximizing the child's communication skills and potential for learning. Some highlights of the Parent/Infant Preschool Program are auditory-verbal therapy, cochlear implant habilitation, parent education/support groups, a range of communication options, and interagency collaboration with audiological centers and service providers.

The parent/infant section of the program serves children from birth to three. It is a family centered program in the child's natural environment. Specially trained teachers of the deaf work with children and their parents in the home as well as in the child's nursery school program.

Children ages 3-5 receive specialized instruction in a preschool classroom using the auditory-oral method

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AUDIOLOGISTS PLAN HEARING AID CLINIC TO SERVE PEOPLE IN THE SLUMS OF BELO HORIZONTE, BRAZIL

Audiologists Kamal Elliot, Au.D. (Lititz, Pennsylvania) and Bjorn Eriksen, M.S. (New Hampshire) plan to fit hearing aids on 100 children from the slums of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, during a mission trip April 14-24, 2005. Speech-language pathologist Betty Trembly, M.S. (Massachusetts) will assist them in establishing a hearing aid clinic. Brazilian volunteers will be trained to troubleshoot hearing aids. Audiologists may return every 6-12 months to check hearing aids and to expand services to adults, as well as children.

This mission trip is organized by C'B Shalom International, a Baptist denomination. The focus of this outreach is to people in the "favelas" (slums) of Belo Horizonte, with a special emphasis on serving persons with special needs.

Equipment is needed to establish a permanent hearing aid clinic. Two audiometers, otoscopes, behind-the-ear hearing aids, and hearing aid batteries are needed. If you wish to make a tax-deductible, charitable contribution of equipment, please contact Kamal Elliot (717-464-2144 or kelliars@aol.com). Also, more audiologists are welcome to volunteer! □

The PA Public Utility Commission is seeking applicants to serve on the Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) Advisory Board. The TRS Advisory Board was established in 1990 to oversee operations of the relay service and identify improvements that should be implemented. The Board meets four times a year in Harrisburg to advise the TRS provider on service issues and to discuss policy issues related to the TRS. Seven consumer representatives from the deaf, hard of hearing and speech disabled communities are appointed by the Public Utility Commission and serve two year terms ending on December 31 of each even-numbered year. Members may serve for up to three consecutive terms. Members are not compensated for their service, but do receive travel expense reimbursement. If you would be interested in applying for membership please contact Ms. Barbara Lathrop, Office of Special Assistants, PA Public Utility Commission, PO Box 3265, Harrisburg, PA 17105-3265 or by email at balathrop@state.pa.us.

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with on-site opportunities for inclusion with typically developing peers. Itinerant services are also provided by teachers of the deaf in regular preschools.

For school age children, the DCIU program offers a range of services from itinerant hearing therapy in the student's own school to full-time classes, based on student needs. Emphasis is on the development of auditory skills to fully access the academic curriculum. Appropriate technology, including hearing aids, FM equipment, and computer-assisted real-time captioning (at the high school level) is provided.

For older students, the IU staff helps with career exploration and transition services, including collaboration with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. Courses in audiology are given to high school students, while social skills groups, led by our school psychologist, are offered to students in middle school and high school.

The Hearing Program's staff is experienced and highly qualified. The staff includes a supervisor, Marsha Dworkin, who is ASHA certified in Speech Pathology and CED certified in Deaf Education, certified teachers in Deaf Education, two educational audiologists, a social worker, a psychologist, speech therapists, certified auditory verbal therapists and oral interpreters. □

Linda Heffernan, is a 30 year teacher of deaf and hard of hearing students at DCIU, who together with Marcia Finisdore founded GenX Chapter of SHHH

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Contact Diana Bender (bender@pa-shhh.org)

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One way you can make a difference to hard-of-hearing people is to remember SHHH in your will. That way your money will continue to help hard-of-hearing people long after you are gone.

About SHHH

Self Help for Hard of Hearing People, Inc., founded in 1979, is a non-profit consumer self-help organization. SHHH opens the world of communication to people with hearing loss by providing information, education, support and advocacy.

The primary purpose of all SHHH members is to educate ourselves, our families, friends, co-workers, teachers, hearing health care providers, industry, government, and others about hearing loss.

SHHH has members and chapters in all 50 states. To find the chapter closest to you, contact a member of the PA-SHHH state committee if you are in PA, or contact the SHHH National Office.

Selp-Help for Hard of Hearing People
7910 Woodmont Avenue, Suite 1200
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Email: info@hearingloss.org
Website: www.hearingloss.org

PA-SHHH Needs You

SHHH volunteers from all over the Commonwealth assist the PA-SHHH State Director by serving on the PA-SHHH Advisory Council or one of its committees. The PA-SHHH Advisory Council meets periodically in Carlisle. Committees conduct most of their business by email but meet periodically in various parts of the state as needed. We would be delighted to have you join us. If you would like to serve on either the Advisory Council, or one of its committees, please contact one of the state leaders listed below.



| | | |
|---------------------|------------------|--|
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"Come and join us. You will be welcome!"