THE COMMONWEALTH CALLER

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

Fall 2012

Veterans Now Eligible for No-Cost Telecommunications Equipment through TAP

Just in time for Veterans' Day, Virginia Relay and the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) have announced that military veterans living with a hearing or speech loss are now automatically eligible for telecommunications equipment through Virginia's Technology Assistance Program (TAP).

Adaptive telecommunications equipment, including text telephones (TTY), captioned telephones (CapTel) and other devices are available to individuals who meet the following qualifications:

- A veteran with a hearing or speech loss and proof of an Honorable Discharge
- A veteran with a hearing or speech loss and documentation of a service-related disability rating from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
- A surviving spouse or child of a veteran who was killed in the line of duty and has a hearing or speech loss
- An active member of the Virginia National Guard who has completed the required initial active-duty service

"Our veterans have dedicated their lives to protecting our way of life, and now through our Technology Assistance Program, we are honoring their service by offering veterans adaptive telecommunications equipment."

"I am pleased to announce that veterans living in Virginia with a hearing or speech loss are now automatically eligible for telecommunications equipment through Virginia's Technology Assistance Program. I urge all eligible Virginia veterans to learn more about this new program to help reduce communications barriers," said Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell.

"Our veterans have dedicated their lives to protecting our way of life, and now through our Technology Assistance Program, we are honoring their service by offering veterans with a hearing or speech loss adaptive telecommunications equipment," said Ron Lanier, director of VDDHH. "Our goal is to make daily life easier for Virginia's veterans living with a hearing or speech loss by helping them to stay connected with their family, friends, and employers as well as their grateful community."

Paul Galanti, Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Veterans Services, noted, "the US Department of Defense Hearing Center of Excellence estimates 60 percent of veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq have hearing loss as a result of their military service. This new benefit will help provide these men and women with the tools necessary to adapt to this loss."

TAP provides telecommunications equipment to all qualified applicants whose disabilities prevent them from using a standard telephone. To qualify for the program, individuals must be deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind or speech disabled. Applicants must also be Virginia residents and meet income eligibility requirements that are based on household income and family size. There are no age restrictions; however applications from minors must be co-signed by a parent or legal guardian.

Learning to Live with Hearing Loss: A Veteran's Story

Any noise louder than 85 decibels is considered dangerous to a person's hearing. Now imagine a soldier serving in combat, firing a weapon in close proximity to his/her own ear, with each blast measuring at around 105 decibels, repeatedly over the course of a deployment that may last months or years. Factor in other loud sounds of frequent blasts and explosions, and it's not hard to understand why many of our service men and women experience a hearing loss as a result of their time in the military.

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Find Us on Facebook!

Virginia Relay now has a Facebook page! Just enter "Virginia Relay" in Facebook's search field and click the "Like" button at the top of our page to get regular status updates of Virginia Relay news, events and more.

Virginia Relay DIAL 7-1-1

A Commitment to Communication – 40 Years Strong VDDHH

Virginia Relay CapTel®

Learning to Live with Hearing Loss: A Veteran's Story

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Don Doherty, an Education Specialist at the Department of Veterans Affairs National Chaplain Training Center in Hampton, Va., first noticed his hearing loss while serving in Vietnam as a member of a Marine Corps infantry company. While on night patrol, he discovered that he couldn't understand what was said when people whispered into his ear. After leaving Vietnam, he hid his hearing loss as best he could while working first at Officer Candidates School in Quantico and then the Marine barracks in San Juan, Puerto Rico. However in 1970, while on night patrol training, his secret was uncovered when Don's commanding officer noticed that he was unable to hear and ordered his medical evacuation.

Don was transported to the Philadelphia Naval Hospital, where he was placed with a group of people who were all experiencing hearing loss and fitted with an early-model hearing aid—a large body pack that he wore on his belt with a big, thick chord that attached to a headpiece. He spent two months at the hospital, learning oral rehabilitation and speech reading skills. The hospital recommended that he be medically discharged from the military, but Don was proud of his career as a Marine and appealed the decision. He was allowed to stay on active duty, but he had to retrain in a new occupational field and agree not to be exposed to loud noises.

"It was difficult for me not being able to do what Marines do; fire a gun or the other activities I was used to," he said. "So I retrained in the administration field and became an overachiever. Despite my hearing loss, I wanted to make sure that I was so valuable they wouldn't dare let me out of the Marine Corps."

He earned his bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in education while still on active duty and went on to have a successful military career as a drug and alcohol counselor in California, Hawaii and then Virginia. Don retired as a Master Sergeant of Marines (E8) in 1987. After his retirement, Don transitioned into the corporate world but still struggled at times to adjust to his 60 percent hearing loss.

"At the time, I knew nothing about hearing assistive technology. I remember sitting up in my hotel room at night, wearing my hearing aids, trying to sleep and just hoping that I would hear the phone, the door, or the alarm clock, because if I laid down without my hearing aids I couldn't hear any of it. It was a big shock to me the first time I went to a Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) meeting, and someone told me about the Shake Awake alarm clock. It was just so enlightening and remarkable to me that I lived through all of those years—from 1970 when I got my first hearing aid to five years after my retirement— without anyone ever telling me that these things were out there."

In addition to his hearing aids, Don also currently uses a hearing loop at home when he watches television and in his classrooms when he teaches. At home and at work, he uses CapTel phones, a technology that he loves.

Because he knows first-hand how hard it can be for people newly diagnosed with hearing loss to find the information and resources they need, Don is now dedicated to educating both audiologists and consumers about the various forms of hearing assistive technology that are available. He is president of the Virginia Beach chapter of HLAA which provides education, advocacy and support for the 45,000 local residents who live with hearing loss. Don is also the HLAA state chapter coordinator for Virginia.

This year, Don also participated as a panelist in a series of discussions presented by Hamilton CapTel. Entitled "A Holistic Approach to Hearing Healthcare for Veterans," the panels provide an open forum for veterans with hearing loss and hearing healthcare professionals to engage in meaningful dialogue and learn about the resources available in their communities.

"Because of my service connection, I get a free hearing aid evaluation every three years, and that can be extremely valuable to people who need it. Veterans have two years after they come back from deployment to get free medical care through the Department of Veterans Affairs, and I encourage all veterans to schedule a free audiological evaluation at their local VA office. For veterans experiencing hearing loss, I urge them to seek out their local HLAA chapter, and use the Internet to learn everything they can about hearing loss and hearing assistive technology. Be aware of the huge array of services available through Virginia Relay and the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Don't wait as long as I did to find answers as to what's out there."

Don Doherty

"Despite my hearing loss, I wanted to make sure that I was so valuable they wouldn't dare let me out of the Marine Corps."

To learn more about VDDHH, Virginia Relay and TAP for veterans, call 1-800-552-7917 v/tty or visit www.vddhh.org.

A Sample of Smartphone Apps for Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Thanks to FREE apps like these, a smartphone can be an incredibly powerful communications tool for deaf and hard-of-hearing users. Download them now from your device's apps store.

IP-Relay
IP-Relay from Purple Communications enables deaf or hard-of-hearing users to make and receive text relay calls. Calls are free and do not count against your monthly phone minutes.
For Apple, Android and BlackBerry devices.

ntouch
Get video relay service on the go with ntouch, the app from Sorenson Communications that turns your smartphone into an instant videophone.
For Apple and Android devices.

Hamilton Mobile CapTel
See exactly what is being said to you on every call with Hamilton Mobile CapTel, the app that translates your caller's words into easy-to-read text captions. Ideal for hard-of-hearing or deaf people who want to make voice calls.
For Apple, Android and Blackberry devices.

ConvoMobile
Enjoy video chat wherever you're comfortable! ConvoMobile lets you call any videophone and features one-click Video Relay calling. It's also the first mobile VRS app to have a 911 hot button.
For Apple and Android devices.

Virtual Voice
Virtual Voice uses text to speech (TTS) and speech recognition features to enable deaf and speech-disabled users to communicate with others without the need for sign language or lip reading.
For Android devices.

iSpeech
iSpeech converts text to speech and will even translate your text into 18 foreign languages, making it great for travel. Choose from a selection of voices.
For Apple and Blackberry devices.

Dragon Dictate
Perfect for ASL users and late-deafened adults, Dragon Dictate changes voice to text captions, making it easy for deaf and hard-of-hearing users to communicate face-to-face with others.
For Apple devices.

Skype
Video call and instant message anyone on Skype for free.
For Apple, Android and BlackBerry devices.

Vibe
Feel who's calling and texting you with Vibe, the app that uses vibration patterns to help you ID callers. Pick a contact and set or create a unique vibration pattern for them—it's that easy!
For Android devices.

Deaf Note
Deaf Note replaces the need for pen and paper to write notes back and forth. Save or export your notes, change font sizes, and more.
For Android devices.

Buzz Cards
Buzz Cards by Sorenson Communications works like a deck of flash cards to help deaf users communicate more easily with those who don't know sign language. Make and edit cards as needed, or create cards ahead of time for messages you use more often (e.g., "Where is the restroom?" or "Where is the nearest bus stop?"). Your cards are organized by category (e.g., "Dining" or "Travel") to make them easy to find later.
For Apple devices.

A complete list of Apps can be found at http://code-idea.org/index.php/accessiiblity-tolls/applications.

Virginia CapTel Outreach Coordinator Marta Cagle presents Alice Frick with the 2012 Deaf Community Leader Award

Alice Frick Receives Virginia's 2012 Deaf Community Leader Award

Each year in honor of Deaf Awareness Week (the last full week of September), Hamilton Relay recognizes individuals who are deaf or deaf-blind who have been a strong influence within their community. The 2012 recipient of the Deaf Community Leader Award for the Commonwealth of Virginia is Alice Frick of Staunton. Alice is well-known and respected for her advocacy efforts and volunteerism within the local deaf community.

For over 30 years, Alice taught at the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind (VSDB). Now retired, she stays involved in a variety of local organizations, including the Blue Ridge Association of Deaf Senior Citizens, the Deaf History Museum, the Virginia Association of the Deaf, the National Association of the Deaf, and Deaf Seniors of America. The Governor recently appointed Alice to the Board of Visitors of VSDB.

Please join us in commending Alice for her many contributions and her dedication to enhancing the lives of individuals who are deaf.

VDDHH Celebrates 40th Anniversary

This summer, VDDHH and 17 partner organizations invited the public to an open-house at its Richmond headquarters to celebrate 40 years of service excellence to Virginia's deaf, hard-of-hearing, late-deafened and deaf-blind communities. More than 200 guests visited the celebration to meet VDDHH staff, share their memories, and see exhibits on the latest relay services and assistive technologies. Dr. Bill Hazel, Virginia's Secretary of Health and Human Resources served as the celebration's keynote speaker, and Lily Bess, a past director of VDDHH who moved to Florida more than 20 years ago, was a welcomed surprise guest. The event was even featured on WRIC-TV's evening news. VDDHH would like to extend a big "thank you" to everyone who visited, called, or emailed to send their congratulations on 40 years. It was truly a memorable celebration for the staff and community!

Pictured below from top: *Director Ron Lanier welcomes guests to the 40th Anniversary Open House; Secretary of Health and Human Resources Dr. William Hazel presents a Proclamation to VDDHH from Governor Bob McDonnell; Former Director Lily Bess learns about new technology from Gary Talley*

New Program Provides Communications Equipment to the Deaf-Blind Community

For the thousands of Americans who have combined hearing and vision loss, communicating on the phone and on the Web just got easier thanks to the new iCanConnect program. Established by the Federal Communications Commission and administered in-state by the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, iCanConnect provides a wide range of communications tools—including screen enlargement software, screen readers and Braille displays—at no cost to qualified applicants. Free installation, training and support are also provided to help recipients make the most of the technology.

To qualify, applicants must be verified as deaf-blind by a practicing vision- or hearing-related professional and be enrolled in a federal low-income program or have an income that does not exceed 400 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

To learn more or to apply, visit iCanConnect.org, call 1-800-552-7917 (v/tty) or email frontdsk@vddhh.virginia.gov.

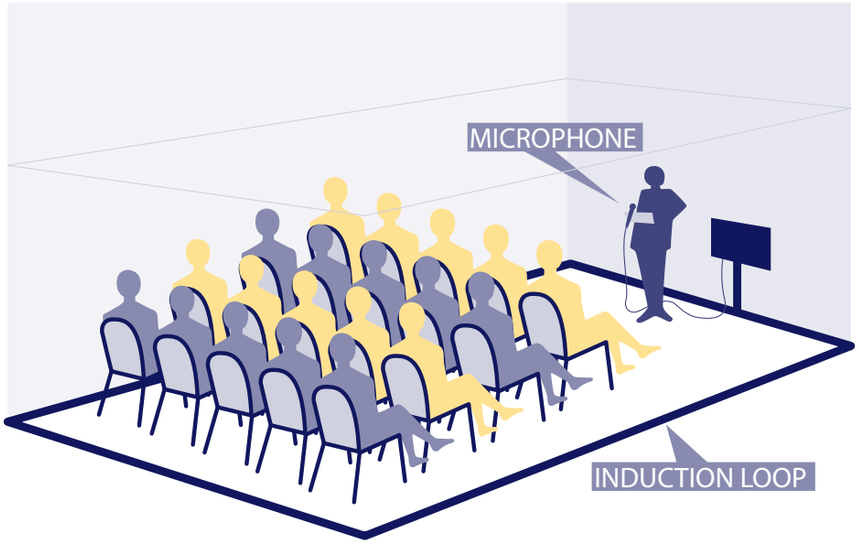
Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind Dedicates Yates-Shinpaugh Education Building

This fall, the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind (VSDB) in Staunton held a special ceremony to dedicate the Yates-Shinpaugh Education Building, a brand-new facility that will enable middle and high school students who are deaf or blind to be taught together under one roof. Politicians, educators, students and other VSDB supporters came together to see the dedication of the new building, the centerpiece of a six-year, $71.3 million upgrade project that consolidated the school's Hampton and Staunton campuses into one location.

The Yates-Shinpaugh Education Building is named in honor of Fred Yates, a former student and teacher at VSDB, and Joseph Shinpaugh, a former VSDB principal and superintendent. The 58,000 square-foot facility features larger hallways, new technology including smart boards and teaching walls, and hypo-allergenic floors; however, during the ceremony, VSDB Superintendent Nancy Armstrong emphasized that the most important aspect of the new building is that it will bring together students who are deaf with students who are blind.

About 130 students currently attend VSDB, and with the upgrades the school now has room to accommodate 100 more. For more information about VSDB, please visit http://vsdb.k12.va.us/.

In the Loop: A Look at Hearing Loops and Telecoils



If you are one of the estimated 8.4 million Americans who wears a hearing aid on a daily basis, you may know that it can often still be difficult to hear in public places where background noise is common (such as restaurants, airports or pharmacies), or in meeting places where the speaker is using a microphone (such as places of worship, presentation rooms or theaters). However, new technology may soon make much of America a friendlier place for people who live with hearing loss.

Just as WiFi allows people to connect to the Internet in connected public places, assistive listening devices such as induction hearing loops allow people wearing properly equipped hearing aids or cochlear implants to connect directly to public sound systems. A hearing loop consists of a microphone to collect sound, a transmitter to send the signal across a distance, a receiver to intercept the signal, and any one of several different listening attachments to send the sound from the receiver to the user's ear, hearing aid or cochlear implant.

"Induction hearing loops allow people wearing properly equipped hearing aids or cochlear implants to connect directly to public sound systems."

Today, most models of hearing aids and cochlear implants feature a small copper wire known as a telecoil or t-coil. Originally invented to boost magnetic signals from telephone handsets, t-coils are activated by a t-switch on hearing aids and all cochlear implants and enable the listener to receive the sound signal transmitted by the hearing loop directly in his/her ear while eliminating most background noise.

For those who do not use t-coils, hearing loops can also be accessed through portable receivers or headsets that are usually available to be checked out at public venues.

Hearing loops are already widely used overseas in places including Great Britain and Scandinavia, and thanks to advocacy efforts they are slowly becoming more popular in the United States. Last year, New York City Transit installed hearing loops in 488 subway information booths. Earlier this year, Nissan Motors announced that 13,500 new city taxis will be equipped with hearing loops.

Access to public places for individuals with disabilities—including hearing loss—is required by the Americans with Disabilities Act. However, in order for hearing loops to become commonplace in the United States, more people need to be educated about the technology and advocate for its use. If you think an assistive listening device would benefit you on the job, in your classroom, at your place of worship or any place you attend regularly, find out the process from the institution for requesting accommodation (in private settings) or for auxiliary aids and services (in public settings).

For more information about hearing loops, contact the Hearing Loss Association of America or visit www.hearingloss.org.

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Upcoming Events

HLAA Walk4Hearing
November 4
Tidal Basin
Washington DC

Virginia Association of Free Clinics 2012 Annual Conference
November 4 -5
The Homestead
Hot Springs, VA

Veteran's Day Observance at The National D-Day Memorial
November 12
Bedford, VA

For more information on these events, contact VDDHH or visit the Virginia Relay Facebook page.
facebook.com/VirginiaRelay

Collaboration between VATS and TAP Programs Brings New Life to the Former TAP-Loan Program

The Virginia Assistive Technology Program (VATS), a part of the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, has been working with the VDDHH TAP program to target those deaf and hard-of-hearing citizens who do not have access to assistive technology and devices that fall outside the prevue of TAP. As a result of this collaboration, $25,000 in new assistive technology for persons with a hearing loss is now available.

Similar to the former TAP-Loan program, these devices are ready for demonstration and loan to individuals so they can test new technology for themselves prior to purchase. Selected devices are also available for limited loan to community agencies and organizations serving persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. New devices include weather alert radios, visual smoke alarms, portable hearing loops, iPads with apps specifically for communication, and other personal communication devices. Demonstration and loan of the new equipment are available through VDDHH's Outreach team in five areas of the state.

Barclay Shepard, lead VATS Specialist, sees the collaboration as "a win-win for both agencies, since the VDDHH TAP/L2O program is able to provide additional equipment for demonstration and evaluation to its consumers, while VATS is able to expand their statewide coverage and consumer base for demonstration and loan of new technology." For more information on the new VATS/TAP program, contact VDDHH at frontsdsk@vddhh.virginia.gov or (800) 552-7917 for the Outreach office nearest you.

Check Out the Newest Relay Partners!

The overwhelming success of the Virginia Relay Partner Program has made it impossible to allocate the necessary space in our newsletter to list every Relay Partner. Our newest partners, however, are listed below. You can view a complete list anytime at www.varelay.org.

Attention Virginia Relay users: Make your next Relay call to a Relay Partner!

Apartment Complexes/ Rental Properties

Edinburgh Square
Roanoke
http://edinburghsquare.org
540-366-1888

Elm & Mountain Manors
Roanoke
540-344-7192

Seniors

Friendship Retirement Community
Roanoke
http://friendship.us
540-265-2100

Retail

Goodwill Industries
Harrisonburg, Waynesboro, Ruckersville, Staunton & Verona

Nonprofit

The James House Intervention/ Prevention Services, Inc.
Hopewell
thejameshouse.org
804-458-2704

Deaf & Hard-of-Hearing Services

Vicki Polo Inc.
Alexandria
966-451-6133

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Visit us at VaRelay.org