

# THE CALLER

Virginia Relay: Telecommunications services for people who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind or have difficulty speaking

Fall 2018

## VRAC Update

We are pleased to welcome three new members to the Virginia Relay Advisory Council (VRAC)!



**L. Karen Darner**, joining as a representative for the Speech-Language-Hearing Association of Virginia (SHAV), was a speech/language pathologist and hearing clinician for Arlington Public Schools from 1971-2008. She also served in the Virginia House of Delegates for 13 years, focusing on education, social justice, the environment, and Dreamers. During her more than 30 years of civic activism, she was president of the Arlington Education Association, chaired the League of Women Voters and the Arlington Committee of 100, and was a board member and volunteer of numerous civic and nonprofit organizations. In 2009, Karen was the recipient of the Arlington Community Foundation's Spirit of Community Award and currently sits on their Board of Trustees.



**Christine Ross**, our new Video Relay Service representative, is a qualified rehabilitation counselor with the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS). As a Deaf person, Christine is passionate about the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities unique and various employment needs. With DARS, Christine provides a wide range of programs and services to assist clients who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing in preparing for, securing, retaining, or regaining employment.

**Teresa Ritzert**, our new representative for Captioned Telephone Service users, had to adapt to a life with hearing loss after she began to lose her hearing in her mid-twenties. Now fully Deaf, Teresa is an advocate for individuals who experience hearing loss later in life. She has an undergraduate degree in dramatic arts and a master's degree in legal studies. Teresa began her career as a high school drama teacher before becoming a paralegal in Washington, D.C. at top international law firms. When she moved to Virginia in 2006, she returned to her education roots as the director of education at Holy Comforter Church before she began working in the archives at the University of Virginia Law Library. She is currently training her dog as a service animal and is passionate about sharing the life-changing effects of Captioned Telephone Service with others.

**We are looking forward to gaining insight and experience from our new members and thank them for joining VRAC! The Council still has an opening for an Internet/Wireless Relay user. If you are interested in this opportunity, please contact Eric Raff at 804-404-9090 or eric.raff@vddhh.virginia.gov.**

### Virginia Relay Advisory Council (VRAC)

#### Consumer Members:

**Paige Berry**

Representing Hearing Relay users

**Kerry Byrne**

Representing Virginia Centers for Independent Living

**Alissa Conover**

Representing Virginia Association of the Deaf (VAD)

**L. Karen Darner**

Representing Speech-Language-Hearing Association of Virginia (SHAV)

**Lisa Harbour**

Representing Association of Late-Deafened Adults (ALDA)

**William Hess**

Representing Voice Carry-Over users

**Rebecca Ladew**

Representing Speech-to-Speech users

**Jenny McKenzie**

Representing Virginia Association of the DeafBlind (VADB)

**Teresa A. Ritzert**

Representing Captioned Telephone Service users

**Christine M. Ross**

Representing Video Relay Service users

**Barclay Shepard**

Representing Hearing Relay users

**Linda Wallace**

Representing Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) Virginia Chapters

#### Non-Voting Members:

**Eric Alvillar**

Hamilton Relay

**Christa Cervantes**

Hamilton Relay

**Diane Devaney**

Devaney & Associates, Inc.

**Mary Nunnally**

Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services

**Eric Raff**

VDDHH Director

**Gary Talley**

VDDHH Community Services Program Manager

# Join the Hearing Loss Support Group at Longwood University



Last year, Longwood University's Speech, Hearing, and Learning Services (SHLS) introduced the Southside Hearing Loss Support Group for individuals living with hearing loss and their families.

The meetings are led by graduate students from the Longwood University Communication Science and Disorders graduate program, with the support of Dr. Mani Aguilar, the SHLS audiologist, and Dr. Lissa Power-deFur, the SHLS Program Director. At each meeting, the students and doctors present a topic chosen by the meeting participants.

In previous meetings, the topics have included "Strategies to Improve Communication with a Person Who Has Hearing Loss," "What to Expect from Your Hearing Aids," and "New Hearing Aid Technologies and Solutions."

Participants are also offered hearing aid checks prior to the meeting.

**Meetings will be held on the fourth Friday of each month, from August to October and January to April.** Because of the holiday, the November meeting will be on the third Friday. Meetings are free to attend and are held at 315 West Third Street in Farmville from 12:30-2:00 p.m.

**For more information, visit [longwood.edu/shls](http://longwood.edu/shls) or call 434-395-2972.**

## VADB Holds Annual Meeting

The Virginia Association of the DeafBlind (VADB) held its annual meeting on Saturday, October 27. In addition to serving as a town hall meeting for the Statewide Interagency Team (SIT), the meeting was also a Halloween party for VADB members, featuring party games and a costume contest! The Nelson Malbone Award was also presented to the 2018 winner.

**If you'd like to attend next year's meeting, follow VADB on Facebook for updates.**

## VDDHH Equipment Programs Ensure Equal Telecommunication Access

Virginia Relay and the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) have a mission to promote equal telecommunication access for individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind, or have difficulty speaking. To help ensure everyone is able to make and receive telephone calls, the Commonwealth offers two programs that provide specialized telecommunication equipment to qualified applicants.



The Technology Assistance Program (TAP) is available to Virginia residents who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or have difficulty speaking, meet eligibility requirements, and/or are veterans of our military. The program provides specialized telecommunication equipment on a loan-to-own basis, including TTYs, Captioned Telephones, amplified telephones, signalers for the phone and door, and more.

**To learn more about how you can qualify for TAP, visit [varelay.org/tap.htm](http://varelay.org/tap.htm) or call 1-800-552-7917.**



**The National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program**

A service of the Federal Communication Commission and administered by the Perkins School for the Blind, the iCanConnect program offers a variety of equipment options for those who are living with both hearing and vision loss. Including tablets, large-button telephones, Braille keyboards, telephone signalers, and more, these equipment options are available to those who meet the eligibility requirements.

**To learn more about how you can qualify for the iCanConnect Program, visit [iCanConnect.org/Virginia](http://iCanConnect.org/Virginia) or call 804-371-3140.**

# Diners Experience Life Without Sight

The Virginia Association of the DeafBlind (VADB) gave people a taste of life without sight when it held its first Dining in the Dark event on August 28. Taking place at Applebee's in the Virginia Center Commons, the event was a great success. A total of nearly 100 diners wore blindfolds as they ate lunch or dinner and participated in interactive games at the table. Some attendees attempted tactile signing to get a true feel of how individuals who are DeafBlind communicate.

This event was held to raise awareness for those living with both vision and hearing loss, as well as raise money for VADB workshops and activities.



## Welcome Rhonda Jeter to VDDHH

Rhonda Jeter is joining the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) as business manager. She previously worked for the Department for Aging and Rehabilitation Services (DARs) as the director of independent living and has a master's degree in rehabilitation science from Virginia Commonwealth University.

**We are excited to have her on the team!**

## Update Your CapTel®

CapTel has released a software update for its CapTel 840 Plus. This software update has many benefits, including:

- Conversations, call history, and redial numbers are all saved even if the CapTel phone loses power.
- Changes to the built-in answering machine, including adding a Remote Message Retrieval feature and a new indicator that shows when the answering machine memory is full.
- Maximum amplification is now available during both calls with captions and without captions.
- The ability to erase individual conversations in memory instead of all at once.

**To find steps on how to update your CapTel 840 Plus, visit [captel.com/knowledgebase](http://captel.com/knowledgebase).**

Updates for the following CapTel models will also be released in the coming weeks:

- CapTel 2400i
- CapTel 2400iBT
- CapTel 840i
- CapTel 880i
- CapTel 800i

*CapTel is a registered trademark of Ultratec, Inc.*



## Here2Hear Annual Gala Supports Hearing Health in our Community

Virginia Relay and the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) were proud sponsors of Here2Hear's 2018 Gala and Art Show. The event featured a silent auction, community awards, music, and entertainment. Local artists also brought their original works to be seen and purchased.

This benefit event was held to support the efforts of Here2Hear in preventing poor hearing health in our community. The organization offers programs for people of all ages, including "Lower It or Lose It," which teaches preteens and teenagers about the importance of protecting their

hearing, and a hearing aid program, which provides free and low-cost hearing aids to low-income individuals with hearing loss.

In addition, Here2Hear provides educational resources, advocacy, and support for the community. Proceeds from the event help to continue the organization's efforts, and for every ticket purchased someone in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community received a free effective communication emergency kit!

**Didn't make it to the event? Look out for next year's gala by following Virginia Relay and Here2HearVA on Facebook or visiting [www.Here2Hear.org](http://www.Here2Hear.org).**

## ¡Se Habla Español!

Did you know that all of our great Virginia Relay services are also available in Spanish? Spanish-to-Spanish and Spanish-to-English options are available for in-state calls so that native Spanish speakers who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or have difficulty speaking can communicate with their friends, families, and local businesses.

To make a call using Spanish-to-Spanish or Spanish-to-English Relay, dial 7-1-1.

If you'd like to schedule a presentation on Spanish Relay during an event or for a group, contact Eric Alvillar at [eric.alvillar@hamiltonrelay.com](mailto:eric.alvillar@hamiltonrelay.com).



## Virginia Relay Sponsors VAD Mini Conference

The 2018 Virginia Association of the Deaf (VAD) held its mini conference at the Fairfax County Government Center on September 7 and 8. Virginia Relay was a proud sponsor of the event and provided two interpreters for the conference.

VAD members discussed relevant issues and heard from speakers from different organizations including Virginia Relay. Our outreach coordinator Eric Alvillar spoke to attendees about the exciting direction Virginia Relay will be taking in the future and our increasing involvement within the Deaf community.

**This was a great event and we look forward to the next biennial conference in 2019!**





## Caption Your Conference Call

If you have difficulty hearing what's said during conference calls, Remote Conference Captioning (RCC) is available to provide captions of conversations featuring multiple speakers on one call.

Using Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) service to convert speech to text as it is spoken, RCC delivers word-for-word captions over the Internet to the RCC user, while others listen on the telephone.

"I found, personally, that RCC is the best option available for conference calls and even webinars," says Gary Talley, community services manager for the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH). "I am able to see both the shared screen from the webinar leader and the captioning. RCC is fast and accurate, enabling me to keep up with the discussion and participate in these meetings more effectively."

To use RCC, you need access to a conference bridge and to an Internet-connected computer, tablet, or smartphone. Virginia Relay users are guaranteed access to RCC services if scheduled at least 24 hours in advance. RCC services may also be available for emergency situations with two-hour notice.

**To request RCC services, visit [varelay.org/features.htm](http://varelay.org/features.htm) and click on "RCC Scheduling Request Form" under "How to Request RCC Services," or contact Virginia RCC Customer Care at [varelayrcc@hamiltonrelay.com](mailto:varelayrcc@hamiltonrelay.com) or 877-339-2665 (Voice).**



## Hats Off to Karen Peltz Strauss

Karen Peltz Strauss, the deputy chief of the FCC's Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, is retiring at the end of the year. During her career with the FCC, she established the first Disability Rights Office and helped to develop an Accessibility and Innovation Forum.

Karen is also a co-founder of the Coalition of Organizations for Accessible Technology (COAT), a coalition of nearly 300 national and regional organizations dedicated to ensuring equal access to Internet-based and digital communication technologies.

The contributions that Karen has made to the advancement of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities are too many to name, and we thank her for her dedication, passion, and determination in breaking down communication barriers.

**Congratulations, Karen, on a well-deserved retirement and we wish you all the best!**

## Welcome, Paul Stuessy!



The Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) is happy to announce that Paul Stuessy is joining the Department as community services specialist. Hailing from Wisconsin, he is a proud graduate of the Wisconsin School for the Deaf in Delevan. He later earned his bachelor's degree in business management from Gallaudet University in 1994.

In 1996, through the New Mexico Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, he was instrumental in establishing the state's first telecommunication equipment distribution program. In 2002, he became an outreach coordinator for California's Telephone Access Program (CTAP), and later worked as a case manager with the Greater Los Angeles Agency on Deafness (GLAD). He focused on a Health Care Access grant and worked with patients as well as facilitated a team of stakeholders to address health care disparities within the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities. He also worked extensively with parents of children who are Deaf and the DeafBlind community. In 2010, he returned to telecommunications, promoting Telecommunication Relay Services for California and Virginia.

Paul resides in Midlothian, Virginia, with his wife Jennifer, who is also Deaf, and their two children. In his downtime, he enjoys golfing, being involved with his kids' activities, and cheering on his beloved Green Bay Packers.



Providing Accessible Telecommunications Since 1991

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Visit us at [www.varelay.org](http://www.varelay.org)



## Find Us on Facebook!

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

## Aashi Argawala Receives 2018 Hamilton Relay Scholarship

Hamilton Relay, Telecommunications Relay and Captioned Telephone Service provider for the commonwealth of Virginia, has awarded a \$500 scholarship to Aashi Agarwala, a graduate of Henrico High School in Glen Allen.

The Hamilton Relay Scholarship opportunity is available to high school seniors who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind, or have difficulty speaking. A recipient is selected within each of the states where Hamilton is the contracted service provider and is one of several ways the company gives back to the communities it serves.

Aashi was awarded the \$500 scholarship after completing

*"At Hamilton Relay, we support students by not only providing telecommunication services, but also by helping relieve the financial stress of a college education," said Eric Alvillar, TRS outreach coordinator for Virginia. "We are proud to be presenting this award to Aashi and are excited to see her succeed in the future."*



**Eric Alvillar presenting the 2018 Hamilton Relay Scholarship to Aashi Argawala**

the application process, which included writing an essay on the topic of communication technology. Aashi is attending Virginia Tech this fall to study mechanical engineering.

