

# CALLER

## THE COMMONWEALTH

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

Spring 2018

## Ron Lanier Retires from VDDHH

Join us in congratulating Ron Lanier on his retirement as director after nearly 21 years of service at the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH).

Under Ron's two decades of leadership, VDDHH made many strides. Notably, the Virginia Relay Advisory Council was established, ensuring users had a voice in the improvement and development of Virginia Relay services.

*"As I reflect on my tenure,  
I am proud of the work we have  
done and the differences we have  
made in people's lives."*

*-Ron Lanier*

A fierce advocate, Ron has always been ready and willing to speak out to improve the quality of life for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. He is a strong believer in making all public spaces equally accessible to everyone and has devoted his long career to creating and expanding technology, programs, and resources to ensure we can all communicate with one another.

Most recently, Ron published an article in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* highlighting communication barriers faced by individuals with hearing loss and how he wants to see them tackled.

"What we need is more willingness from our hearing neighbors, colleagues, and legislators to step out of their comfort zones and seek the education and assistance needed to eliminate all communication barriers," says Ron. "It is well worth the cost and effort required to implement these solutions and ensure that all Virginians have equal opportunity to achieve their fullest potential and thrive in our communities."

In his time with VDDHH, Ron was committed to ensuring effective communication solutions for Virginians living with hearing loss. We are so grateful for his decades of service, the doors he has opened, and the accomplishments he has made. He will be greatly missed!

"As I reflect on my tenure, I am proud of the work we have done and the differences we have made in people's lives," says Ron.



Ron Lanier with VDDHH's Elaine Ziehl at his retirement party.



VDDHH presented Ron with a retirement cake—complete with an edible photo—at his party.



Ron and his grandchildren at a photoshoot for Virginia Relay in 2013.

## Text to 9-1-1 Update

The introduction of new technology has revolutionized the way we communicate in emergencies. The availability of Text to 9-1-1 technology is expanding in Virginia as more and more counties implement the system at their Public Service Answering Points (PSAPs).

If you are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, have difficulty speaking, or are in a situation in which you cannot safely make a phone call, there are now a number of counties in which you can report an emergency through text message. The list includes Virginia Beach, Prince William County, Fairfax County, and Loudoun County.

For a visual explanation of how to use Text to 9-1-1 technology, a video called "Text to 9-1-1 in Fairfax County PSA" has been posted to Fairfax County Government's YouTube page with a closed caption option.

With the current technology, 9-1-1 responders may not be able to determine your exact location from a text message, so should you need emergency support, be sure to include your location in the message.

To see the most recent Text to 9-1-1 coverage map, visit [www.vita.virginia.gov](http://www.vita.virginia.gov) and click on "Integrated Services" and then "Text to 9-1-1 Resources."



If Text to 9-1-1 is not yet available in your area, most smartphones now offer a setting that can turn your phone into a text telephone (TTY), which gives you the capability to request help via TTY in an emergency.

If you have an iPhone®, go to General Settings and then Accessibility. There will be an option that says RTT/TTY. By turning Software RTT/TTY on, your phone becomes a TTY. If you choose Hardware TTY, you can connect your phone to an external TTY device.

On most Android™ smartphones, the same setting is available under either General Settings or Call Settings.

**As a reminder, please dial 9-1-1 or the nearest PSAP directly in an emergency situation. Do not attempt to make an emergency call through Virginia Relay.**

## Eric Raff Appointed New VDDHH Director

Eric Raff has been appointed to the position of director of the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH)!

Since he joined VDDHH in 2016, Eric has been overseeing Virginia Relay, the Technology Assistance Program (TAP), and the Interpreter Services Program (ISP), making sure that each program is running smoothly and effectively.

Eric came to VDDHH with a goal of improving the current services and expanding the Department through new programs and services. Most importantly, he wanted to unite Virginians under the common goal of promoting positive change.

"I am excited for the many opportunities and possibilities that are in store for VDDHH," says Eric. "As director, I will continue to work to improve the lives of individuals throughout Virginia."

With more than 20 years of experience working with the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind communities all around the country, Eric is a true asset to VDDHH and we are very proud to welcome him into this new position.



*"I am excited for the many opportunities and possibilities that are in store for VDDHH. As director, I will continue to work to improve the lives of individuals throughout Virginia."*

*-Eric Raff*

# Summer Safety Tips

for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing



**Summer is right around the corner! Here are some tips for having fun and staying safe this season:**

- Talk to your community leaders about installing street signs that warn incoming drivers that children who are Deaf will be playing in the area.
- Most hearing aids and cochlear implants are not waterproof. Talk to your children about properly caring for these devices this season.
- If your child spends a day with a friend, talk to their parents about how to contact an interpreter if one is needed.
- Bicycle helmets, while very important for safety, can interfere with hearing aids. Make sure your child knows to be extra alert to oncoming cars and to stay on sidewalks when possible.
- Talk to your community about providing interpreters at swimming lessons, and make lifeguards aware if your child is Deaf or Hard of Hearing.



## Star Grieser Wins Deaf Community Leader Award

Congratulations to Star Grieser for winning the Hamilton Relay 2017 Deaf Community Leader Award! Star has been a great asset to the Deaf community for many years. She not only served as a board chair for the VDDHH Advisory Board, she also spearheaded the development of a community organization for individuals who are Deaf in the Hampton Roads area when the local VAD chapter disbanded.

Star works with Tidewater Community College as part of the Interpreter Training Program and hosts ASLville at the college to bring a communication-accessible experience to the community. Star's personality, accomplishments, and ability to make people want to learn more about Deaf culture and ASL make her a very deserving winner of this award.





## VDDHH Unveils NEW 2018 Directory of Services

You may not be aware of all the helpful services in Virginia for those who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or DeafBlind.

Luckily, the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) has compiled the extensive 2018 Directory of Services for People who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind that is available for download on the VDDHH website!

With resources that range from assistive technology and DeafBlind services to hearing loss support and interpreter referral agencies, this directory can help you find the support and answers you or your loved one may need.

Visit [www.vddhh.org/outreach.htm](http://www.vddhh.org/outreach.htm) for the full 2018 Directory of Services for People who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind.

## Welcome Our Newest Virginia Relay Partner!

The Virginia Victim Assistance Network (VVAN) staff recently finished their training to become a Virginia Relay Partner!

Located in Henrico, VVAN strives to be a voice for crime victims and works to diagnose, assess, and advocate for the needs of victims and their families; promote policies and legislation to protect victims' rights; and foster accountability through the criminal justice system.

The VVAN Helpline is now fully trained and ready to answer calls from Virginia Relay users. To learn more about this resource, visit [www.vanetwork.org](http://www.vanetwork.org).

### Virginia Victim Assistance Network

Helpline: 1-888-887-3418

P.O. Box 71704

Henrico, VA 23255

*Virginia Relay*  
You Are Always Connected



**PARTNER**

To see a complete list of Virginia Relay Partners and learn how your company can receive FREE Virginia Relay Partner training, visit [www.varelay.org](http://www.varelay.org).

## Upcoming Events

**June 3**

Deaf Awareness Day at Kings Dominion  
Doswell, VA

**June 13**

12th Annual Art of Aging Expo  
Fredericksburg, VA

**June 18-20**

Opening Doors and Unlocking Potential  
Doubletree by Hilton Hotel  
Richmond-Midlothian, VA

**June 22**

Camp Loud and Clear  
Front Royal, VA

**June 23-24**

2018 Virginia Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (VRID) Biennial Conference  
Wyndham Virginia Beach Oceanfront  
Virginia Beach, VA

### SAVE THE DATE

**Thursday, October 4, 2018**

**9:30 a.m. – 3 p.m.**

Virginia Relay Advisory Council Meeting  
Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS)  
8004 Franklin Farms Drive  
Henrico, VA

## Lisa Harbour Graduates from Partners in Policymaking

Congratulations to Virginia Relay Advisory Council (VRAC) chair Lisa Harbour on graduating from the Partners in Policymaking (PIP) program! Offered by the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (VBPD), this program consists of seven two-day sessions and is available for individuals with developmental disabilities and parents of young children with developmental disabilities.

"I think anyone who is eligible, especially VRAC members, should go through this program," says Lisa. "It was nothing like I expected."

PIP participants hone their leadership abilities by attending advocacy training, resource development, and skill building workshops led by state and national experts. Topics covered include the history of the disability rights movement, self-advocacy, independent living, employment, building inclusive communities, natural supports, legislative advocacy, assistive technology, communication, team building, and much more.

This program is competitive and only select applicants will be able to participate in PIP. For those who are accepted, all costs, including travel, lodging, and meals, are covered by VBPD!

Visit [www.vaboard.org/policymaking.htm](http://www.vaboard.org/policymaking.htm) for more information.



## Welcome, Eric Alvillar!

A new face has joined the Virginia Relay family! Eric Alvillar has been hired as Telecommunication Relay Service (TRS) outreach coordinator. In this role, Eric will pursue outreach and educational opportunities throughout the Commonwealth to raise awareness of the TRS features available through Virginia Relay that enable people who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind, or who have difficulty speaking to place and receive telephone calls.

Eric has more than 13 years of professional experience in sales and marketing. He recently moved to Virginia from San Diego, California, where he was the operations and business development manager for a corporate travel agent and meeting/event planner. He also served in the military with the United States Navy.

"Being new to Virginia, I am looking forward to traveling and meeting people from all areas of the Commonwealth as I explore new and exciting opportunities to share information about Virginia Relay," says Eric. "I'm eager to meet both current and potential TRS users, and open more doors to accessible telecommunication."

Eric is available to provide information and training on how to use Virginia Relay TRS features to individuals and groups including agencies, businesses, or schools. **For more information, please visit [www.varelay.org](http://www.varelay.org) or contact Eric at 804-295-2863 (Voice/TTY) or [eric.alvillar@hamiltonrelay.com](mailto:eric.alvillar@hamiltonrelay.com).**



*"I am looking forward to traveling and meeting people from all areas of the Commonwealth as I explore new and exciting opportunities to share information about Virginia Relay."*

*-Eric Alvillar*



Providing Accessible Telecommunications Since 1991

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

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

## VRAC Update

The Virginia Relay Advisory Council (VRAC) recently held a meeting and we have a lot of exciting news to share! We are happy to welcome **Lisa Harbour** as the new VRAC chair! Lisa is joining us from the Association of Late Deafened Adults (ALDA).

We are also welcoming **Alissa Conover**, who is joining the Council as a representative of the Virginia Association of the Deaf (VAD).

Additionally, we said goodbye to three of our members. **Mani Aguilar**, our representative from the Speech and Hearing Association of Virginia (SHAV), **Valerie Luther**, our Captioned Telephone Service (CTS) user, and **John Slone**, our Video Relay Service (VRS) user, have retired from the Council. We thank them for their service and commitment to improving and expanding Virginia Relay.

### Become a VRAC Member

With the retirement of these VRAC members, we currently have openings for three new members to join the Council:

- Internet/Wireless Relay user
- Captioned Telephone Service (CTS) user
- Video Relay Service (VRS) user

For members of VRAC, the duties and responsibilities include:

- Ensuring through research and practical experience that Virginia Relay is meeting the needs of its users
- Collecting feedback from consumers to be shared with VDDHH, and the contractor(s)
- Providing advice on meeting the requirements for functional equivalency required by federal law
- Assisting in the disseminating of information from VDDHH and the Relay contractor(s) to consumers
- Providing access to consumers and other interested parties through meetings held in various regions of the Commonwealth as determined by the Advisory Council

If you use these Relay features and are interested in serving on VRAC, please contact **Eric Raff** at 804-404-9090 or [eric.raff@vddhh.virginia.gov](mailto: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)

**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)

**Barclay Shepard**  
Representing Hearing Relay users

**Linda Wallace**  
Representing Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) Virginia Chapters

### Non-Voting Members:

**Eric Alvililar**  
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



## 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.