

# Around the Country and Beyond ...

## Editor's Note:

*TDI is interested to hear from readers about their experiences trying out the new developments reported in Around the Country. When reporting your experiences, please let us know which issue of the GA-SK you learned about the new feature.*



### Ameriphone Introduces the Dialogue VCO Telephone

*The Innovative Phone that Allows the Hard of Hearing to Read their Conversations*

The Dialogue VCO amplified telephone lets the user speak into the handset and read the text of the conversation on a screen built into the base of the telephone. This allows people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing carry on conversations through a toll-free relay service using Voice Carry Over (VCO). The phone uses an advanced protocol called Hi-Speed(tm) code, which sends text at twice the rate of other text telephones. A speed dial button provides one-touch access to the relay service. A preset message initiates VCO calls eliminating the need for the caller to type the VCO request. An audio output jack allows the phone to be connected to other listening devices such as a headset, neck loop or a cochlear implant.

For more information, go to [www.ameriphone.com](http://www.ameriphone.com).



### New TTY Software for MAC Users

Intelligent Products has released "SoftTTY", a new TTY software program for Macintosh users. Like a full-featured TTY, SoftTTY has an answering machine with toll-saver and remote message retrieval, intelligent dialing features like Auto Relay and calling cards, ungarbling feature for cleaning up garbled TTY signals, categorize, store and search messages and conversations.

For more information, go to [www.softtty.com](http://www.softtty.com).



### AT&T Wireless Offers 2-way Text

AT&T Wireless is introducing instant text messaging for mobile phones, the first U.S. cellular company to offer a service that's become a runaway craze in Europe, especially among teen-agers. The new two-way messaging service lets subscribers send and receive text messages up to 150 characters long using four Nokia digital phones available through AT&T Wireless. Messages can be sent to other digital phones, handheld devices, pagers or any e-mail address.

Mobile phone users can "write" short text messages on their handsets by pressing numbers on the keypad to choose the different letters of the alphabet that typically appear under numbers 2-through-9. In the simplest format, users choose one of the three letters on each key with multiple taps on that key. For example, to type the letter "C," a person would tap the 2-key once to select that key and another three times to choose the third letter on that key. Some phones feature "predictive" software that try to reduce the number of keystrokes by choosing the most likely combinations of letters to form words.

Short Message Service, as it is called in Europe, points to an SMS language of abbreviations catching on such as PC (please call) and BCNU (be seeing you) and a resurgence in use of the old telegram favorites such as TTFN (ta ta for now)." Worldwide, cell phone users send more than 9 billion short text messages per month, a number that's expected to reach 10 billion a month by year-end, according to the GSM Association, an industry group consisting of wireless companies using GSM technology, the dominant standard in Europe.

For more information, go to [www.att.com](http://www.att.com).

(Source: Associated Press)



### AOL Unveils Two-Way Paging Device To Access E-mail

Internet media giant America Online Inc. (AOL) unveiled a new two-way paging device designed for access to AOL e-mail and instant messaging services. The device, called AOL Mobile Communicator, is produced by Research in Motion Ltd. (RIMM), which makes the popular BlackBerry pagers.

AOL has taken the Research in Motion two-way pager and developed client software that operates on the device, which is a two-way data radio that operates on BellSouth Corp.'s (BLS) wireless data network nationwide. AOL chose to brand the device as its own because executives felt they had to have a more integrated approach to creating and rolling out since it involved AOL's e-mail and instant messaging services.

The AOL Mobile Communicator fits into the Internet services provider's AOL Anywhere strategy, which aims to extend its reach to devices beyond the personal computer. The device can be purchased online for \$329.95 and the service is available for a subscription fee of \$19.95 a month. For more information, check [www.aol.com](http://www.aol.com).

(Source: Reuters)

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## Pocketmail Offers Mobile E-Mail Option

The last few years have seen a huge increase in the mobile communications options available to people with hearing loss. 2-way pagers, hearing aid compatible mobile phones, portable TTYs, and the Pocket VCO come readily to mind. Now a company called Pocket Science is offering another alternative, called Pocketmail.

Pocketmail users access the service using a device that looks much like a 2-way pager or wireless telecommunication device. A user can compose and store outgoing e-mail on the device, and can download and store incoming email. So far, it sounds much like the email portion of a wireless messaging service. The difference is the manner in which the user sends and receives e-mail.

To send or receive e-mail, the Pocketmail user dials in using a telephone. A standard wired phone or an analog wireless phone may be used. When the user dials in, outgoing e-mails are sent and incoming e-mails are received. The Pocketmail device sells for about \$100, and unlimited monthly service is \$9.95, with a substantial discount for a one-year contract.

For additional information, point your browser to [www.pocketmail.com](http://www.pocketmail.com).

(Source: HOH-LD-News)



## Video Conferencing Chat Software

Eyeball.com Network of Vancouver, BC has recently released a new video chat software called "Eyeball Chat". Requiring a computer with microphone, speak-

ers and a video camera, Eyeball offers a one-on-one video chat free, multi-chats for businesses at a fee. The company says the software is simple to use and provides good images. For more information, visit [www.eyeball.com](http://www.eyeball.com).

(Source: Washington Post)



## Popular Chat Software "Add-On" Links to Relay

Another software, Netmeeting, is being combined with ScreenFIRE, an instant messaging software by the company WebbyNation. This software combination will have the capability to allow connection with the Relay service. For more information, visit [www.webbynation.com](http://www.webbynation.com) and [www.screenfire.com](http://www.screenfire.com).

(Source: NVRC News)

# Weitbrecht

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## New System Improves Communication Between the Hearing and the Deaf

SignTel Inc. today announced the availability of the beta version of the SignTel Interpreter(TM), a new communications system designed to improve interactions between the country's hearing individuals and the deaf/hard of hearing community. The SignTel Interpreter incorporates the language that is considered native to the deaf community, sign language, as an integral part of its program, and provides real time translation of spoken and written English into sign language.

According to Maureen Rosselli, a sign language interpreter and a member of the linguistic team at SignTel Inc., "While not meant to replace a live interpreter, this product was developed in the hopes of facilitating interactions between the hearing and the deaf when a live interpreter is not available."

The SignTel Interpreter is the first device to accurately translate the intended meanings of sentences, including common idiomatic expressions and turn such phrases into meaningful language for the signing community. It also is able to differentiate between the multiple meanings of words.

The beta version, available now, includes most of the features of Version 1, including text-to-sign language translation. It

does not include the voice recognition technology that enables voice-to-sign language translation.

Version 1, with a unique voice recognition technology that works in tandem with sophisticated lexical analysis, will be available by March of this year. The upgraded feature will be available free to beta owners.

Please feel free to visit SignTel's Web site at <http://www.signtelinc.com>.

(Source: US-L News)



## Home Safe NOAA Weather Alert Radio Features Kit with Strobes & Pillow Vibrators for Deaf Individuals

HomeSafe Inc. has been selling and pre-programming Weather Alert Radios that will alert automatically, 24 hours per day when there are severe weather alerts issued by the National Weather Service or messages from the Emergency Alert System. They can be programmed



to only receive signals for specific counties or areas that the user requests.

The new Hearing Impaired Accessory Kit includes a power pack with a test button, strobe light, and pillow vibrator. A



9-volt industrial battery in the power pack will operate the strobe and the pillow vibrator for approximately 4 hours on alert. This allows the strobe and vibrator to function automatically, even in the case of a power outage during a storm. There is an auxiliary output jack on the power pack to accommodate the use of X10 Technology, which is widely used in the homes of many handicapped people today. When the radio alerts, X10 would allow the hearing impaired person to receive additional warning signals such as flashing lamps in other rooms of their home. This can be achieved using X10 compatible plug-in modules. This kit can also be used as a signaling device for alarms other than a weather radio.

For more information, visit [www.homesafeinc.com](http://www.homesafeinc.com) and click on "special needs" to see the new Hearing Impaired Accessory Kit. With the severe weather, wildfires, man made disasters, hurricanes, tornados, floods, etc.; weather radios are becoming a necessity and should be as common in American homes as smoke detectors.

## The Kennedy Center

The Kennedy Center offers interpreted plays and provides assistive listening devices upon request. For information on our plays, please visit our website at:

<http://www.kennedy-center.org>



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## Program Aids Fire Safety for Deaf & Hard-of-Hearing Residents

Marion County agencies, firefighting organizations and businesses combined to purchase and install smoke detectors in 25 homes, designed to help warn deaf and hard of hearing residents should a fire start in their home. If smoke triggers the new alarm, extremely bright strobe lights begin flashing to warn the family that there's a problem. (Source: Star Banner, Ocala, FL)



## Church Services Online

St. Barnabas' Episcopal Mission of the Deaf's Website has a unique feature--those who cannot attend services on Sunday mornings because of distance, sickness, being home bound, etc. can now join in because the entire service--the weekly readings, the Gospel, the Creed, the Prayers and the Sermon--are online each Sunday. As technology continues to grow, it is hoped that one day the entire service will be offered in sign language also in streaming video. The website is at <http://justus.anglican.org/societies/stbarnabasdeaf/>

**aspiro**

## Aspiro Delivers Mobile Telephony Service for the Deaf to Telia MobileDenmark

Aspiro, the supplier of mobile Internet services, has signed an exclusive agreement with the Danish mobile operator Telia Mobile for the delivery of Mobile Textphone, a mobile telephony service for the deaf, hard of hearing and speech-impaired that is supported by the World Federation of the Deaf (WDF). With the



**W F D**  
WORLD FEDERATION OF THE DEAF

Mobile Textphone service and a mobile phone, callers and receivers can type messages to each other and instantly see the letters appear on a screen, making the service as near to normal telephony as it is possible to get. Mobile Textphone also allows callers to communicate with fixed-line phones in the home.

"We have long been searching for this type of service and are extremely happy that it can now be offered to our members in Denmark. Mobile Textphone will make life a lot easier for many of us. And because the service is being launched at the end of this year, I'm certain that one of this year's top Christmas gifts among our members will be a Telia Mobile subscription and the Mobile Textphone service," says Knud Sndergaard, Chairman of the Danish Deaf Association.

For further information about Aspiro, please visit [www.aspiro.com](http://www.aspiro.com).



## Cape Town's Deaf Commuters Get Assistance

In a breakthrough for deaf people in South Africa, the Cape Town Metropolitan Council introduced a new Teldem (TTY) service that will enable them to obtain timetables, routes and destinations of buses, trains and minibus taxis. Deaf people will first type a toll free number, which will be answered by a Telkom operator, at the local telephone company. They will then type their requests and will be answered in a language of their choice. Surveys have revealed that about 100,000 potential passengers have disabilities such as serious sight, hearing, physical or mental impairments.



## Orange Introduces Pocket PC-Based Videophone

Orange has launched Pocket PC based Videophones in the United Kingdom. Using this device you can, not only make a phone call, but you can also see the image of the person you are talking to. You can record a video clip or take still digital images with this Videophone. It also has the Pocket versions of Microsoft Reader, Money, Outlook, Explorer and Excel.

Read more at: <http://www.orange.co.uk/phones/videophone/home.html>



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## Kyocera Wireless Unveils the Smartphone, A Completely Integrated Wireless Communications Solution

Kyocera Wireless Corp. announced the Kyocera QCP(TM) 6035 Smartphone, a powerful yet lightweight wireless handset that unites voice communications, text messaging, e-mail and multiple methods of Web access with the power of a Palm OS(R)-based organizer...

Go to: [http://www.kyocera-wireless.com/showroom/showcase/coming\\_soon\\_6000.htm](http://www.kyocera-wireless.com/showroom/showcase/coming_soon_6000.htm)



## Vodafone: WISDOM

### *A Project for the Deaf Community*

A three-year, EUR6m project has been launched in Europe to give deaf people an opportunity to help shape the third generation of mobile telecommunications.

Funded and sponsored by the European Commission Directorate-General Information Society, the Wireless Information Services for Deaf People on the Move (WISDOM) initiative will bring together mobile communications companies and research and deaf organizations. They will investigate the problems deaf people encounter with mobile communications with the aim of developing practical visual communications services over 3G networks.

The WISDOM partners are Vodafone UK Ltd, Ericsson's Espana Research Department, Motion Media, research centers in the UK-based University of Bristol and Germany's Aachen University of Technology, Sweden's Omnitor and Envilogg, the rebro Interpreters Center in Sweden and deaf organizations in Sweden and Britain.

For more information, go to [www.vodafone.co.uk](http://www.vodafone.co.uk)



## Bell Canada Switching TRS Services for Deaf

Bell Canada has contracted out its TRS operations in London, Ontario to Nordia Inc., a partially owned subsidiary in Kitchener. Norm Berberich, Bell Canada spokesperson said the Bell relay and operator center that provided the service closed under an agreement with the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada.

"The services are not being terminated. They're being relocated and our customers will find the change seamless," said Berberich.

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## Innovative Software Aims to Aid Deaf

### *Program translates Japanese into sign language using animation*

Takao Kurokawa, 58, a professor at Kyoto Institute of Technology and a human interface specialist, initially dreamed of inventing a device to interpret intentions by analyzing facial expressions, gestures or glances. But he instead developed a device that translates Japanese into sign language via computer graphic animation.

While the device cannot effectively translate ordinary conversations in Japanese, it has reached a level where instructions or expressions can be communicated to deaf people, according to Kurokawa.

The device translates a keyboard-entered sentence into sign, which is shown through CG animation on a display.

Kurokawa and Katsuo Nishiyama, a professor at Shiga University of Medical Science, have almost completed the device, which they plan to debut on a trial basis in a hospital X-ray room in spring.

Kurokawa has had to analyze sign language in the development process, which he said

is very hard to categorize and enter into a database. He said the problem is not with vocabulary but with the idiosyncrasies of the sign

language. Besides sign language, Kurokawa also had to analyze facial expressions because understanding is reduced by 10 percent when only hand gestures are used.

Kurokawa's team is also trying to improve the animation to provide more natural-looking sign language. "Because the animation is only on a display, the quality of the CG needs to be high and its movement should be distinctive," he said.

Kurokawa predicts the device will be developed so that about 90 percent of Japanese expressions can be translated into sign language in the next year. Once this is reached, the device could be used at reception areas of hospitals, hotels, train stations or government offices to provide up-to-date information to deaf people, he said.

Kurokawa realizes, however, that communication would be one-sided. His ultimate goal is to develop a system that can translate both ways, which he said, is currently beyond his capabilities.

The study of reading sign language through computers has been going on in the United States and other places since the early 1980s and is reasonably advanced. But Kurokawa said the complication is the interaction in sign language between hand gestures and other expressions such as posture, facial expression and eye movements.

"Even if all these human expressions could be read into computers, segmentation of a sentence shown by sign language would be another obstacle to clear understanding. In other words, a computer has to distinguish where a word begins and ends," Kurokawa said.

If all the problems are resolved, it will be possible to create a system that can translate sign languages from different countries, or to make telephone devices linking deaf people with those who aren't, Kurokawa said.

Source: The Japan Times: (C)