

## Looking Back, Looking Ahead

As we were putting together this issue honoring local advocates around the country and cheering the prospects for the future, I look back on two things.

The first GA-SK issue I put together for TDI in the fall of 1998 honored 30 individuals that we considered were the prime movers and shakers in telecommunications and media access during the 30 years of TDI's existence. This group of local advocates we honor today do carry on the spirit of those pioneering advocates TDI has honored in the past.

This brings me to another episode in my advocacy experience. Back in the 80's, I worked as a research assistant and news file tape librarian for WJLA TV-7 in Washington, DC. Part of the time I worked for the sales department retrieving overnight Nielsen ratings that counted viewership demographics for the previous two days worth of programming. The rest of the day I worked in the news tape archives where I had developed a database covering eight years of news clippings and other video that we had accumulated. The reporters and editors come to me asking for "FILE VIDEO" of some event that had happened in the past to give background stories for the current day's newscast.

Shortly after a brutal winter with several back-to-back snowstorms, I received a letter from Northern Virginia Association of the Deaf asking that WJLA consider captioning its local newscast. I shared this letter with the news director, Tom Doerr, and the Vice President of Sales, John Long - who is the father of a deaf child. Both of them encouraged me to develop a white paper proposing that WJLA provide captioning of its newscasts. I did some research and gathered comments from leaders in the deaf and hard of hearing community. One particular comment, "We watch the captioned network news and know what is going on out there in the world, but we do not know what's happening in our own backyard!" drove the point home. Furthermore, this white paper also served as an article for the in-house newsletter introducing captioning to many of my coworkers.

At that time, only a few television markets were providing real-time local news captioning. A few others were using electronic newsroom systems that displayed the Teleprompter script as captioning - only useful for scripted portions of the newscast. I called a meeting at WJLA with several leaders of the community, including representatives from area associations for the deaf, hard of hearing viewers, parents of deaf children and minority groups. Everyone expressed a preference for real-time captioning.

We interviewed several captioning providers and developed a three-minute presentation video to solicit funding. National Captioning Institute came up to the plate with an attractive bid that also included funding from potential donors already in the bag. Deaf and hard of hearing viewers in Washington, DC were able to watch and understand local news with captions for the first time at 11pm on September 8, 1987. Today, these same viewers can now choose from several newscasts throughout the day, seven days a week - all with real-time captioning!

We are not stopping here. We at TDI know there are more advocates out there. We are starting with eight in this issue, and we plan to honor more local advocates in future issues one by one. Don't be shy, let TDI and other readers of the GA-SK know about your good work - contact us at [info@tdi-online.org](mailto:info@tdi-online.org). By sharing with us your accomplishments, you can inspire others to try new ideas in advocacy so that all of us in other communities can enjoy telecommunications and media access. **SK**



*John Long, an executive at WJLA TV-7, and Jim House pose during technical testing of the captioning system prior to the debut of Washington DC area's first captioned local news in 1987.*



### *From the Desk of the GA-SK Editor*

**James D. House**

*“By sharing with us  
your accomplishments,  
you can inspire others  
to try new ideas  
in advocacy  
so that all of us  
in other communities  
can enjoy  
telecommunications  
and media access.”*