



The NCI Foundation

Spring / Summer 2006 Issue

All TV Sets Are Not Created Equal

BY MARY PRESSWOOD

There was a time when purchasing a new television set was relatively easy and the major considerations were choosing the screen size and cabinet design. Purchasing a television set today is a different story. There are terms such as analog, digital, high-definition, enhanced definition TV, monitors and LCDs. What does this mean?

Digital television (DTV) is a new type of broadcasting technology that will replace the analog transmission system that has been used for the past 60 years. DTV enables broadcasters to offer television programming with sharp, clear movie-quality picture and enhanced sound.

Congress has set February 17, 2009 as the date when broadcasters will cease traditional analog transmissions and switch to all-digital television broadcasts. How will this change affect consumers? Most U.S. households currently receive TV signals by cable or satellite and the set-top boxes supplied by the cable/satellite provider can send the digital signals to either an analog or a digital television set. Those consumers would not be affected by the switch to digital television broadcasts (but would not view the movie-quality video on the analog TV). Consumers with analog television sets receiving over-the-air programming will only be able to watch TV if they purchase a digital-to-analog converter box or subscribe to a cable or satellite service. "Over-the-air" programming refers to programming broadcast over the public airwaves that is received through an antenna (as opposed to a cable provider or

satellite dish). Networks such as ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, PBS and their affiliates broadcast programming via over-the-air sources. Network and local channels provided by your cable or satellite provider will not be affected by the transition, as noted above.

Congress has proposed a subsidy program to help consumers purchase converter boxes so that their analog television sets can continue receiving programming following the transition to digital broadcasts. The converter box is estimated to cost around \$40 to \$60. Analog sets equipped with a converter box will display the digital broadcasts, but the television's picture quality will not be enhanced to high-definition-quality display.

It is important to note the difference between DTV and High-Definition TV (HDTV). Not all digital televisions are high-definition televisions. There are many quality levels for receiving and displaying digital television programming. Here are some terms and information that will help you navigate through the digital technology maze.

- Standard Definition TV (SDTV) is the basic level of quality display and resolution for both analog and digital broadcasts. SDTVs are digital televisions that can receive over-the-air signals. The picture quality is an improvement over analog TV, but does not have the high-quality picture performance of a true high-definition display.

- Enhanced Definition TV (EDTV) provides better picture quality than SDTV, with a sharper image and richer colors, but not as superior as a high-definition display.

- High-Definition TV (HDTV) provides the highest quality picture display with true-to-life images and vivid colors that will add a new dimension to your television-viewing experience.

The primary factor in determining whether a digital TV is Standard, Enhanced or High Definition is the number of horizontal lines displayed on the screen at any given time. More horizontal lines mean a higher picture resolution and better image on the screen.

There are a wide variety of TV types to fit your décor or turn your family-room into a movie-theater environment. Flat-panel televisions are lightweight with a slim profile and, because they do not have traditional picture tubes, these sets can be mounted on a wall or fit easily in small spaces. There are two types of flat-panel TVs: plasma and LCD (Liquid Crystal Display). Plasma flat-panel televisions tend to be larger and more expensive than LCD models.

Continued on page 6

Words Worth Watching	2
Back In The Day	3
NCI Tackles Torino Games	4
Postcards From Dallas	5
New Releases	7

inside

Words Worth Watching

BY MARY PRESSWOOD



Many commonly used words also have meanings that are unique to the captioning process and the broadcast industry. This feature provides a detailed explanation of the process behind the terminology.

Dictionary: A computerized dictionary that is comprised of the phonetic steno outlines and their corresponding English that the real-time captioner uses to build words and create punctuation.

Captions for live programming, such as news or sports events, are created simultaneously during the program's broadcast. Because real-time captioners must keep up with speakers talking at speeds over 225 words per minute, captioners "write" phonetically (transcription of speech sounds) what they hear and input this information on a stenotype machine like those used in courtrooms. Unlike a standard QWERTY computer keyboard, a stenotype machine has only 23 keys. Using writing theories developed for court reporters, a real-time captioner presses multiple keys, similar to playing chords on a piano, to create different word combinations.

The stenotype machine is connected to a computer containing software that

translates stenographic shorthand into words in caption formats and standard spellings. The caption data is transmitted instantaneously via modem to an encoder at the broadcast origination point. There, the caption data is inserted into Line 21 of the television signal and carried to the viewer's television. Since the real-time captioner cannot transcribe a word until it is spoken, real-time captions always lag slightly behind the audio by about two to three seconds.

No two captioners write exactly the same way, so each has a custom dictionary. These entries include geographical, scientific, political, business, financial, world leaders, weather, and sports terms. Captioners covering local newscasts must be familiar with the local city, including streets, highways, schools, politicians, businesses, sports teams, coaches, team players and prominent city officials, etc. Captioners build their dictionaries by keeping abreast of current news, both local and national, reading magazines, newspapers and researching on the Internet.

Because real-time captions are created phonetically, if a word is not in the computer dictionary, then the computer will select the closest phonetic equivalent.

This situation often results in displaying a misspelled word or one that is not within the context of the conversation. For example, to real-time caption the word "occupants" a captioner presses three keystrokes on a stenotype machine. However, if the word "occupants" is not in the captioner's dictionary, the computer will search for the closest phonetic match, and it will read the words separately resulting in captions that could read "ok" "you" "pants."

Real-time captioners are juggling many mental tasks while writing live television programs, including keeping up with rapid speakers or several speakers talking over one another and deciphering difficult to understand audio. A real-time captioner writes approximately 3,200 words in an average half-hour newscast (actually, there are only about 22 minutes of programming once you take out the commercials). Since each word has an average of two syllables, the real-time captioner has stroked the keyboard approximately 6,400 times by the end of the broadcast! □

staff

EDITOR

Mary Presswood

CONTRIBUTORS

**Susan Hahaj, Ryan Kinser,
Darlene Parker, and
Mary Presswood**

Published by:

News from The NCI Foundation

1900 Gallows Road, Vienna, VA 22182

Email: mail@ncihelpdesk.org

Phone: (703) 917-7600 V/TTY

Relay (TTY): (800) 828-1120

FAX: (703) 917-9878

Selected images are copyrighted by
Microsoft Corporation.

Back in the Day

BY DARLENE PARKER

The year was 1984. Ronald Reagan was making a run for the White House again. Communism and the Evil Empire were still alive and well. Madonna hit the pop music scene, and Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the USA" took the country by storm. Everyone was still glued to the nighttime soaps – "Dallas" and "Dynasty," while some new shows were going to give them a run for their money – "The Cosby Show," "Who's the Boss?" and "Miami Vice." Remember Don Johnson with his jacket sleeves pushed up? What a fashion statement.

However, for me it was a year that began with feelings of despair. The cause of my despair was my career. It had become too physically challenging for me to continue. I prayed for an answer. Little did I know that my salvation was to become part of an industry that would help millions of people. It seemed too good to be true, that I could help myself and others at the same time.

I had just completed 10 years of "hard labor" as an official at the Superior Court of the District of Columbia. The reason it had become so challenging for me is because in 1977, at the age of 23, I was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent a modified radical mastectomy. Normally, recovery is not a problem – really – unless you're pounding on a steno machine all day long in a high-volume court. Once I was reconstructed 15 months later, my chest ached, in addition to my arm, which was minus its axillary lymph nodes.

I was so sure that my career as a court reporter would soon be over that I went back to school at the University of Maryland and was about to complete a paralegal program. I didn't really want to be a paralegal. The prospect of working even more closely with attorneys than I had been was not very appealing! At least it would be a decent living, but I would always miss writing on my steno machine, which was the fun part.



Then my prayers were answered. Tammie Shedd and I worked together at D.C. Superior Court. Just the year before, in 1983, she had left to become a real-time captioner with the National Captioning Institute. Whenever she came by the courthouse, I would bombard her with questions about real-time captioning. I was in awe that she was confident enough to make this quantum leap. I thought to myself, I don't think I could ever do that! Then in March the call came. Tammie told me that NCI was going to start captioning a new program in the fall and that they were hiring real-time captioners. She asked me if I was interested in applying. I had mixed emotions. The thought of captioning live television was exhilarating, but also terrifying. I wasn't "on the computer" yet. I wasn't the most accurate or the least accurate reporter. I wasn't the fastest, and I wasn't the slowest, but I was intrigued and wanted to pursue it in spite of my fear. I couldn't believe that a kid who grew up watching way too much television and was a walking TV guide (easy to be when we only had four channels) would now get paid for watching television!

With the assurance of my supervisor that if I fell flat on my face at NCI, he would take me back, I took a leap of faith across the Potomac River and began working at NCI in close by Northern Virginia in June of 1984.

There were only three real-time captioners at NCI when I started working there. We didn't have any training manuals. We often felt overwhelmed and thought that we would never get on the air. Nonetheless, we were excited to come to work every day and even more excited at the prospect of using our skills to help people, instead of writing the same old lame defense arguments day in and day out.

And how appreciative the deaf and hard-of-hearing community was! We received letters from viewers who were ecstatic that they were finally included in the political process. One letter said "I'm so happy that I don't have to wait until the next day to read about the debate in the newspaper. I can receive the information at the same time as everyone else and participate in the debates as they are being broadcast."

It's hard to believe that until the fall of 1984, the only regularly scheduled program that was real-time captioned was "ABC's World News Tonight" – only a half-hour newscast. It was just two years earlier in 1982 that the first real-time captions appeared.

Preparation was problematic, at best. It was more like a shot in the dark. A cabbie would drive to ABC in downtown Washington, D.C. and pick up the run-

Continued on page 6

NCI Tackles Torino Games for 187 Million Viewers

By RYAN KINSER


If you think competing in the Olympics is a world-class challenge, consider the people who provide closed-captions for them. The National Captioning Institute won the contract to caption NBC's network coverage of the 2006 Winter Games in Torino, Italy, and the results were worthy of a gold medal. Our own world-class duo, David Fisher and Jack Turner, immersed themselves in the stories and cultures of athletes from over 175 countries to bring viewers the call of every double axel and gigandoidtron. During the 17-day competition in February, their coverage of all 15 sports and "The Olympic Zone," a locally produced show in NBC affiliate markets, captured the sounds of each historic moment so that 187 million viewers nationwide could enjoy the world's athletic gala of goodwill.

The captioners began as any athlete would, spending countless hours preparing. NBC provided eight large manuals of proprietary Olympic research which ran the gamut of necessary terms – names of athletes, foreign cities and towns, even references to previous event winners. Bringing decades of combined captioning experience, including Olympics past, Fisher and Turner became human encyclopedias. Each sport from alpine skiing to ice hockey to luge had its own terminology to absorb and announcing team who brought a different flavor to the commentary. NBC's website, www.nbcolympics.com also offered the latest information to our captioners. "The website was updated very promptly," Turner says, "which made it easier to focus on specific names of winners."

With all of this ready research, what makes captioning the Olympics so difficult? Our captioners have plenty of ideas. "The foreign unfamiliarity of the

names...and the large amount of captioning dictionary preparation," Fisher says. "You are hearing the names for the very first time in most cases, and you have to be able to write it accurately." With challenging spellings such as Gerda Weissensteiner and Azerbaijan requiring immediate accuracy and repetition, NCI needed every possible hour out of Fisher and Turner. A typical day began in the early morning and lasted until prime time. The two floated from sport to sport, transitioning from non-stop-commentary events like ice hockey to jargon-filled snowboarding runs. In the evenings, they recapped the highlights and brought human interest stories to viewers in Baltimore, Orlando, and Sacramento via

"The Olympic Zone." From reporters in Italy to homes in California, the coverage tested the mettle of Fisher and Turner's body clocks, spanning nine time zones.

The pair's ability to handle the two-week grind unassisted not only provided superlative Olympic coverage; it eased the scheduling demands of NCI's nearly 100 real-time captioners. Our Olympic team "freed up other captioners...so they didn't have to spend many hours in prep," Fisher says. Why do it? The guys are not only tireless experts who enjoy the toughest jobs, but they are Olympic fans. During the showcase of the world's finest athletes, NCI is proud to have offered viewers our own masters. Look out for them in Vancouver, 2010. 



Postcards from Dallas

BY SUSAN HAHAJ

Have you ever shared a thought or opinion with someone interested in your career field and generated a whole new thought process for that person, and for yourself? This is like planting a seed and watching it grow.

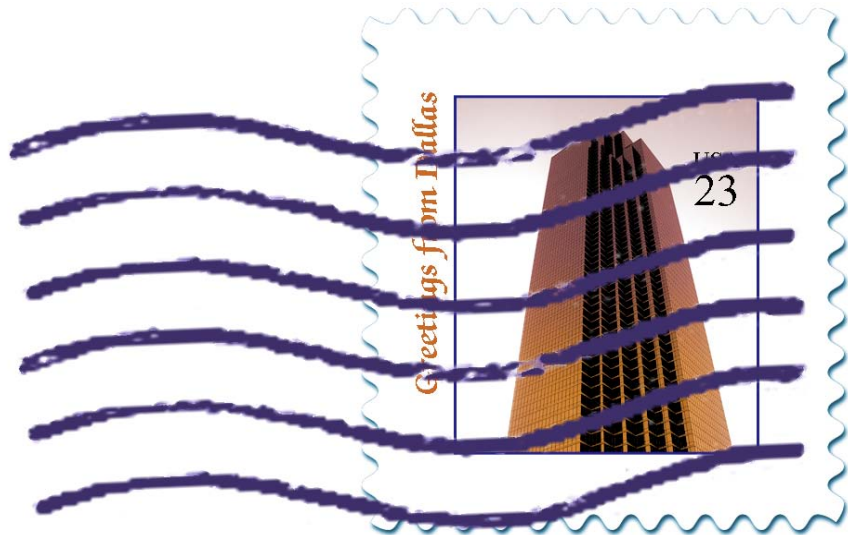
As a captioner, I've been able to expand my horizons beyond comfort levels at times, but I've never been bored in my career choice. Captioning is demanding in many aspects, but also very rewarding to see daily improvements that can be achieved through diligent work.


It was with this approach to the field of captioning that led me to establish an internship program with the Court Reporting Institute of Dallas (CRID) in partnership with NCI. Many advanced students in court reporting nearing the end of their training are beginning to consider the various career opportunities available to them. As part of their internship, I wanted to let these students have the opportunity to explore the challenging and rewarding career of captioning. Captioning definitely has a different skill set than traditional training for becoming a court reporter, and often students feel intimidated and confused about the steps that are necessary to become a captioner. Through the internship program at NCI's Dallas, TX office, I've been able to pair the students up with experienced captioners to see the overall work that goes into captioning, a lot of times before we even are "on air." This would include the basics of improving our skill set by improving our software dictionaries, and also by changing our thinking process to see potential stumbling blocks to writing cleanly, consistently at 98% accuracy. Most students have no idea of the amount of pre-work that goes into establishing specific dictionaries for various programming such as sports like basketball and baseball, or news programs like "NBC Nightly News" or FOX news. Also through this internship program they can see how we prep before each broadcast and the technical engi-

neering support involved with captioning.

Each student interested in participating in the internship program is chosen by the staff at the Court Reporting Institute of Dallas by their internship program coordinator. After making initial contact with the internee, I arrange two 8-hour days for the student to sit with a captioner. The student brings their laptop with court reporting specific software and their stenography machine with them during their visits. They set up their equipment alongside the captioner and "write" the various programs to their laptop in real-time while the captioner is captioning the program live on television. At the conclusion of the program(s) NCI's captioner can offer tips to the internee that help to improve accuracy, and share tips that have helped them on the path to captioning.

As a bonus, I've also been able to establish a Spanish real-time internship portion for those internees interested specifically in Spanish captioning. Maria Blatnik, a Spanish captioner here in NCI's Dallas office, is coordinating those students' visits to NCI.



NCI is constantly seeking talented individuals to become part of the real-time team in both their Virginia and Dallas offices. This program is a win-win situation for both CRID and NCI, pairing up those future potential captioners with the opportunity to seize a wonderful career while helping NCI fulfill the tremendous demand for accurate captioners for the fulfillment of the many hours of captioning for today and into the future. I am pleased to be a part of the process to see this become a reality. 

For information about captioning and media access, please visit the NCI National Help Desk website at www.ncihelpdesk.org.

There you will find answers to frequently asked questions, a link to Amazon.com, and a list of captioned home video and DVD releases.

All TV Sets Are Not Created Equal

Continued from page 1

The aspect ratio is another consideration when purchasing a television set. This term refers to the television screen's width as compared to its height. A traditional TV has an aspect ratio of 4 x 3, sometimes noted as 4:3. A widescreen TV, that looks more like a movie screen than a traditional TV, has an aspect ratio of 16 x 9 or 16:9. Some digital television sets have enhanced captioning features that allow the viewer to choose the font styles, and adjust the text size to display small, normal or large captions.

When buying a television set, be sure to note the difference between an integrated television set and an HDTV monitor. An integrated TV set has a built-in tuner for selecting channels and must comply with the Television Decoder Circuitry Act, requiring a built-in caption-decoding chip. TV monitors do not have built-in tuners and they are not required to have a caption-decoding chip. Monitors are display screens that receive program-

ming from an external video source, such as satellite or cable services. You might not be able to view captioned programming on a monitor-style television, unless the external tuner/receiver has a built-in decoding chip.

A true HDTV has an NTSC (analog) and ATSC (digital) tuner built into the set. In contrast, an HD-ready TV has an NTSC tuner built-in, but requires an external ATSC tuner connection in order to receive the high-definition quality picture display. The FCC requires all digital and HDTV sets to have built-in tuners by March 1, 2007.

The current analog captioning standard is EIA-608. The standard for broadcasting captions in a digital signal is EIA-708. While cable company tuner boxes are equipped to handle EIA-608 captions, some cable company tuner boxes are not fully compatible with the EIA-708 standards. Having an integrated HDTV or digital television set with built-in tuners will

reduce the possibility of caption loss due to this compatibility issue.

If you are considering purchasing a TV/DVD/VCR combo set, please test the unit while in the store to be sure that the DVD player will support captioning. Several consumers have purchased combo sets and discovered that the TV will display captions on television programs and the VCR will display captioned videos, but the DVD player will not. (You'll want to test the unit with a DVD labeled "CC" and not one that is labeled Subtitled for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (SDH) as SDH subtitles/captions are displayed on the TV screen without going through a decoder).

The Federal Communications Commission website at: <http://www.dtv.gov/shopgde.html> is a good source for more information about digital TV. □

Back in the Day

Continued from page 3

down. Then he would drive to NCI in Northern Virginia and deliver the run-down to us at about 5:00 p.m. Our support staff would then comb the "Washington Post," the U.P.I. and A.P. wires to see if they could find any corresponding stories, so we could familiarize ourselves with names and terminology. We were on our own when it came to the human-interest stories that were at the end of almost every newscast.

Armed with tons of names, which may never come up, prep feverishly began. Back then we had huge Pertec hard drives that were about two feet by three feet and two feet high. Huge "platters" about 15-18 inches in diameter stored our data. That meant we had to stop prepping at 5:50 p.m., 40 minutes before the newscast. (Can we make this process any more challenging?) If we received additional prep after 5:50 p.m., we were able to enter only 10 "change commands" (the shorthand codes used to create the captions) – for example, AAA = Al Qaeda. When we entered the

11th "change command," it would kick out the first one! Boy we have come a long way – having gained the ability to make dictionary entries right up until air-time (and during commercial breaks), fax machines, email, the Internet, etc.!

In 1985 we began real-time captioning Monday Night Football. I was a huge Redskins fan, and I couldn't believe I was going to be paid to caption football. I studied the "Sports News" to become acquainted with all the players and coaches. Before I had only been a Redskins fan; now I was becoming a football fan and could "talk" football with anybody. It came in very handy when I was single! I was thrilled when I was scheduled to caption the World Series and then a few months later the Super Bowl. I thought I had died and gone to heaven!

That was then, and this is now. I've been married to a wonderful man for 12 years, who happens to have Redskin tickets – purely a coincidence, I assure you! Our 6-year-old son, Evan learned to read

at an exceptionally early age thanks in part to watching only captioned videos. It has now been 29 years since my breast cancer and mastectomy. I've lived more years post-op than pre-op. Nice stats! I consider myself extremely blessed to have reached by 52nd birthday, to be healthy, and in good enough shape to keep up with my energetic first grader.

I feel equally fortunate in my professional life. NCI and the captioning industry have grown exponentially since back in the day. June 4, 2006 marks my 22nd anniversary with NCI. Now I am a trainer, I help manage our large number of captioners, and I'm on call 24/7 to respond to emergencies.

How lucky for me that I found salvation in my own back yard in a rewarding career that helps others. I feel so fortunate that fate brought me here and because there is no question that I would have been absolutely miserable as a paralegal! □

New Captioned Home Video and DVD Releases

Adventure

Lord of War (Artisan/Lions Gate)

Children's Entertainment

Miss Spider's Sunny Patch:

Captain Sunny Patch
(Artisan/Lions Gate)

Miss Spider's Sunny Patch:

Happy Heartwood Day
(Artisan/Lions Gate)

Thundercats: Season One
(Warner Bros)

Comedy

Beyond the Fringe

(1964– British comedy)
(Acorn Media)

Elizabethtown (Warner Bros)

Footballers Wives:

The Complete Second Season
(British TV Series)
(Capital Entertainment)

Happy Endings (Artisan/Lions Gate)

Last Holiday (2006) (Paramount)

National Lampoon's Adam and Eve
(New Line)

The Harold Lloyd Comedy Collection
(New Line)

The Weather Man (Paramount)

Drama

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof – Deluxe Edition
(1958) (Warner Bros)

The Champ (1931) (Warner Bros)

The Good Earth (1937) (Warner Bros)

Foyle's War – Set 3 (Acorn Media)

Imagine: John Lennon – Deluxe Edition
(Warner Bros)

In Love and War (1996) (New Line)

Kitty Foyle (1940) (Warner Bros)

Johnny Belinda (1948) (Warner Bros)

The Outsiders – The Complete Novel
(1983) (Warner Bros)

The Thing About My Folks (New Line)



Horror

Creep (Artisan/Lions Gate)

How to Make A Monster (1958)
(Artisan/Lions Gate)

Tales from the Crypt: The Complete
Second Season (Warner Bros)

Val Lewton Horror Collection
(Warner Bros)

- Cat People (1942)/Curse of the
Cat People (1944)

- I Walked with a Zombie (1943)/
The Body Snatcher (1945)

Werewolf Hunter: Legend of Romasanta
(Artisan/Lions Gate)

Mystery

Hetty Wainthropp Investigates:
Complete Third Season
(Acorn Media)

Inspector Alleyn Mysteries – Set 2
(Acorn Media)

Sci-Fi

Devil's Rejects (Artisan/Lions Gate)

War of the Planets (2005) (Artisan/Lions
Gate)

War of the Worlds: Special Collector's
Edition (1953) (Paramount)

Suspense/Thriller

King Kong (1933) (Warner Bros)

Son of Kong (1933) (Warner Bros)

Mighty Joe Young (1949) (Warner Bros)

Tales of the Unexpected – Set 2
(Acorn Media)

Tales of the Unexpected – Set 3
(Acorn Media)

Television Series

Alf – Season 3 (Artisan/Lions Gate)

3rd Rock from the Sun –
Season 3 and Season 4
(Anchor Bay Entertainment)

Blue Collar TV: Season 1, Volume 1
(Warner Bros)

Dallas: The Complete Fourth Season
(Warner Bros)

Full House: The Complete Second
Season (Warner Bros)

The Huckleberry Hound Show: Vol. 1
(Warner Bros)

Life Goes On – The Complete First
Season (Warner Bros)

Lois and Clark: the Complete Second
Season (Warner Bros)

Roseanne: Season 3 (Anchor Bay
Entertainment)

The Yogi Bear Show: The Complete
Series (Warner Bros)

Westerns

Cimarron (1931) (Warner Bros)

The Sam Peckinpah Collection (Warner
Bros)

- The Wild Bunch (1969)

- Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid (1973)

- The Ballad of Cable Hogue
(1970)

- Ride the High Country (1962) 