



bama people

Caring through **CAPTIONS**

Darlene Parker

BY BRIAN HUDGINS

DARLENE PARKER'S CAREER HAS ALLOWED her to give many people their first taste of major world events.

Parker, who earned a bachelor's degree in administrative sciences from UA in 1995, is director of steno captioning and realtime relations at the National Captioning Institute. Captioners with NCI are trained to take down the spoken word in excess of 250 words per minute on stenotype machines in order to provide live closed captioning for the deaf or hard-of-hearing TV and online audience.

Parker previously built her career in court reporting, but a breast cancer diagnosis made that work more difficult, she said. "We use a stenotype machine (as court reporters), and it is very rigorous being in court all day," Parker said. "It was physically challenging for me."

Eventually, she learned that there were career opportunities for her at NCI. "I was lucky to be hired and able to use my skills to help people understand news and sports programs," Parker said. "To be able to caption both the Super Bowl and the World Series was tremendous."

When Parker started with NCI in 1984, she was the sixth person to provide realtime captioning. "We did our first political debate, which was (Ronald) Reagan and

(Walter) Mondale," Parker said. "We received a wonderful letter from a deaf viewer who thanked us. She said for the first time, she felt like she was part of the political process."

The expansion of closed captioning offerings meant Parker and her peers went from captioning a half hour of material daily to doing much more—as premium sports cable channels and local news have gradually included closed captioned programming into their lineups.

For Parker, the switch from captioning to being a department director has made her the manager of a staff of approximately 75 captioners. The career track that has taken her from court reporter to NCI director has been aided by her education, she said. Parker has been an active member of the National Court Reporters Association. It was that association that partnered with UA, and helped Parker obtain her degree from UA through the Bama by Distance program.

"I am so appreciative of UA and the National Court Reporters Association for partnering and allowing us to obtain bachelor's degrees," Parker said.

Brian Hudgins is a freelance writer based in Lafayette, Louisiana.