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(rain date July 18th)
FROM 11:30AM - 8PM

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New company goes word for word



Jennifer Bonfilio, founder of Coast 2 Coast Captioning, uses a stenotype machine to provide real-time captions. (Photo by Allie Ward.)

By ALLIE WARD

When your world is silent, even everyday activities can be a struggle.

Hamilton resident Jennifer Bonfilio witnessed those struggles firsthand when she worked with a deaf student at Princeton University, using the skills she developed as a court reporter to capture every word of every lecture in every class.

"I was going to all her classes, taking down every lecture and that was how she was able to access the information," Bonfilio said. "It was a really, really incredible tool for her and many deaf people are accessing that service."

Communication access real-time translation (CART) became a passion for Bonfilio

and the basis for her new company. Bonfilio and her business partner Debra Joyce launched Coast 2 Coast Captioning (c2cc) in May.

After the Princeton job, Bonfilio worked from home as a broadcast captioner for a few years, but realized she missed the personal gratification that came from helping an individual. She decided to turn her attention back to CART.

"It's very isolating to do captioning from home, and when you CART for somebody, they're so appreciative and you get instant feedback on how helpful you've been to them," she said. "When you caption for television, you're helping millions of people but you never get that feedback."

C2cc provides CART services and cap-



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CAPTIONING LINGO:

steno - shorthand device used to transcribe speech

cart - communication access real time translation

captioning - text appears in conjunction with image

open captioning - all viewers can see it, often used when the audio is not very good (ex: 911 call)

closed captioning - activated only by the user

subtitles - usually refers to a specific language

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captioning for sports stadiums or arenas, meetings or conventions and entertainment venues across the country to give the deaf and hard-of-hearing community the same experience as the hearing world.

"We will utilize independent contractors — captioners and CART providers — across the country," Bonfilio said. "Our goal is to be the premiere, number one captioning provider for sports stadiums."

Bonfilio and Joyce, who lives in the Boston area, both have their own captioning companies, but decided to join forces to form c2cc.

"Debra had a great interest in stadium captioning, as do I, so we started talking and we thought it might make sense to combine forces so then we could eliminate doing everything twice," Bonfilio said.

Bonfilio's company, NJCaptions, will remain intact, but will only offer training for court reporters who want to become captioners. Captioning and CART involve a stenotype, a shorthand machine used to transcribe speech, and the training is extensive.

"Learning the theory is one thing. Building your speed up to anywhere from 225 words a minute to 300 words a minute, is very, very, very difficult, and that's just the court reporting," she said. "With court reporting, you take down everything, you go home and transcribe it. If your writing is fast and it gets sloppy, we can read our own writing and we know what it's supposed to say. With real time CART and

captioning, it has to be perfect. We're verbatim, word-for-word."

Bonfilio worked with the New York Yankees last season, attending every home game to provide captioning. She would caption anything anyone in the stadium with hearing could hear, and the text would appear on a large Daktronics board in center field.

A 2006 lawsuit against FedEx Field in Landover, Md., home of the Washington Redskins, set precedent when a judge ruled that captioning must be provided in the stadium. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) mandates accommodations for people with disabilities, but a lot of sports stadiums are just now looking into options for the deaf and hard-of-hearing.

"The ADA is vague," Bonfilio said. "It says 'reasonable accommodations should be afforded to people with disabilities.' It doesn't say 'captioning should be afforded to deaf people.'"

C2cc is currently in negotiations with sports arenas like the Meadowlands Sports Complex in East Rutherford, the Prudential Center in Newark, Rutgers University and other places across the country. In the meantime, both Bonfilio and Joyce have been doing on-site CART work and working out the details of their new business.

"A lot of stadiums are researching it, but I think there will be a day where every stadium in the country will have captioning," she said.



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