

The RELAY Connection

News, information, updates and more from Maryland Relay.

VRS Offers Breakthrough Calling Option for Sign Language Users



Scores of Marylanders have responded enthusiastically to AT&T's new Video Relay Service (VRS) technology. VRS makes it possible for sign language users to communicate in their native language through video conferencing. The feature also offers a faster way to make a Relay call.

Here's how VRS works:

To set up VRS in your home or office, you will need a computer with a high-speed Internet connection, Microsoft® Internet Explorer and a video camera installed on your computer.

People who use sign language visit a

VRS-capable Web site and enter the phone number of the person they wish to call.

Once a connection is made, the Relay Operator—who is a professionally trained interpreter certified by either the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf or the National Association of the Deaf—begins translating the person's sign language into spoken language for the other (hearing) party.

When the other party responds, the Relay Operator translates those words back into sign language for the VRS user. The call continues in this manner until the conversation is finished.

More than just a technological breakthrough, VRS allows people who use sign language to express emotions and feelings, similar to a person-to-person conversation. During a VRS call, the person using sign language also can gauge the hearing party's tone of voice by observing the body language and facial expressions used by the Relay Operator.

For more information about VRS, including technical specifications and requirements, visit www.mdrelay.org.

GABTR Announces Two Immediate Membership Openings

The Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay (GABTR) consists of 12 Maryland residents appointed by the Governor to advise the Telecommunications Access of Maryland program on the level of access and quality Maryland Relay offers to State citizens.

GABTR currently has two vacancies that must be filled immediately. The first vacancy is for a mobility-disabled relay user; the second is for a deaf relay user. Keeping with our efforts to promote Maryland Relay among all citizens, minorities are encouraged to apply.

If you are interested in being appointed to either position, send a cover letter and resume (please specify which position you are applying for) to the individuals listed below:

**The Hon. Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr.,
Governor**

**Governor's Office of Appointments
State House
Annapolis, MD 21401**

and

**Willis Mann, GABTR Liaison
301 West Preston Street
Suite 1008 A
Baltimore, MD 21201**

For more information about GABTR and the above positions, visit www.mdrelay.org, or e-mail willis@mdrelay.org.

Rescheduled: GABTR Meeting and TTY Relay Discussion Group

The Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay (GABTR) meeting has been rescheduled for Saturday, June 7, 2003, at 9:00 a.m. It will be held in the Magna Center at the Clarion Hotel, 901 Dual Highway (Route 40), Hagerstown (formerly the Ramada Inn). All GABTR meetings are open to the public (interpreters, real-time captioning and assistive listening systems are provided).

The TTY Relay Discussion Group has been rescheduled for May 6, 2003, from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., at the Maryland School for the Deaf in Frederick. Upon arriving at the school, attendees should report to the Seminar Room of the Ely Building. All interested persons are invited to attend, and refreshments will be provided.

For more information about either event, visit www.mdrelay.org.



Outreach Beat *By Elke Pieters*

Since I joined the Maryland Relay team six months ago as outreach account manager, I've been able to take advantage of many opportunities to help our State's citizens learn more about Maryland Relay. In fact, one of my main duties involves traveling around the State to attend disability awareness fairs and other outreach events.

Recently, while attending an outreach function at Aberdeen Proving Ground, I met an Eastern Shore resident who specializes in assisting people with disabilities. After explaining Maryland Relay and the Maryland Accessible Telecommunications program to him in

greater detail, he was eager to share this information with his clients.

You could see the relief on their faces when I told them about our convenient, easy-to-use Voice Carry-Over feature.

Another event I attended was the Cecil County Resource Fair in Elkton, where I met several individuals who could no longer use the phone due to hearing

loss. When I explained Maryland Relay to them, they expressed concern over their typing skills. You could see the relief on their faces when I told them about our convenient, easy-to-use Voice Carry-Over feature.

I have traveled to western, eastern and southern portions of the State as a representative of Maryland Relay, and in the months ahead, I plan to make many more presentations and attend many more events. If you are interested in arranging a Maryland Relay presentation for your organization or group, contact me at epieters@att.com, or you can send a fax to 410-368-8552.

The RELAY Connection

A quarterly publication of the Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM) program in the Maryland Department of Budget & Management,
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301 West Preston Street; Suite 1008 A
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1-800-552-7724 V or TTY
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www.mdrelay.org

MAT Program Continues to Help Thousands of Marylanders Keep in Touch

By Jennifer Curran, TAM Intern



As you know, Maryland Relay enables individuals all over the State who are deaf, hard of hearing, DeafBlind, mobility or speech disabled and use a TTY (text telephone) or another assistive device to communicate with anyone who uses a standard phone. However, for individuals on a limited income, the cost of telecommunications equipment can be out of reach. That's where the Maryland Accessible Telecommunications (MAT) program comes in.

Since 1997, the MAT program has distributed approximately 2,700 pieces of equipment—including TTYs, hands-free speaker phones, amplified telephone sets and phones with volumes or pitch controls—to over 1,600 Maryland residents. Thanks to assistance from the MAT program, these individuals can use Maryland Relay for everything they need, from ordering pizza to making a doctor's appointment to keeping in touch with family, friends and business associates.

According to Mary, a senior citizen who is hard of hearing, "The MAT

program helped me obtain a phone specifically designed for my needs. Now I can make phone calls whenever I need to—without any of the stress and inconvenience I encountered in the past."

To qualify for assistance from the MAT program, applicants must:

- be a Maryland resident and have phone service in their home,
- be at least 5 years of age (persons under age 18 must have their application signed by a parent/guardian),
- be a recipient of SSI (Supplemental Security Income), SSDI (Social Security Disability Income), TEMHA (Transitional Emergency Medical and Housing Assistance) or TCA (Temporary Cash Assistance) benefits,
- provide certification of their disability from a licensed professional.

For more information about the MAT program, contact:

Maryland Accessible Telecommunications
Department of Budget and Management
301 West Preston Street, Suite 1008 A
Baltimore, MD 21201
Phone: 1-800-552-7724 (TTY/Voice)
E-mail: moreinfo@mdrelay.org

Expand Your Relay Horizons *By Willis Mann*

With all the new, or in some cases “refined,” technology that keeps popping up in the relay industry, many of us have started to wonder what kind of impact this will have on standard relay features. While emerging technology may never replace longstanding relay features, its impact is certainly profound.

Video Relay Services (VRS) and Internet Protocol (IP) Relay are good examples of new relay technologies. Both of these features are now available through several relay contractors and private service companies. When these features were first introduced, the number of individuals using standard relay calling features began to decline. The cause? These individuals were beginning to experiment with VRS and IP Relay—and for good reason. While IP Relay permits users to place relay calls over the Internet, VRS allows people who use sign language to communicate, via video conferencing, in their native language. VRS can be used from a user’s home or place of business and allows him or her to express and interpret emotion and facial expressions—just like a person-to-person conversation.

New features like VRS and IP Relay teach us that relay providers need to keep up with demands of the marketplace, and Maryland Relay is no exception. Our telecommunications provider, AT&T, now offers IP Relay and VRS. Technical information and specifications about these features are available on our Web site, www.mdrelay.org. Check it out and start expanding your relay horizons.



THE OPERATOR'S CORNER

Here are some suggestions from the Relay Operators to help your calls proceed smoothly:

- Please be patient while the Relay Operator is placing your call and try not to interrupt him or her.
- Hearing callers should speak at a moderate pace so that the Relay Operator can type their conversations accurately.
- If you are a VCO user, wait until you read “VCO on GA” on your telephone screen before voicing the phone number of the person you are calling.
- Be sure to sign up for a Relay Choice Profile (RCP)! Information you provide as part of your RCP helps the Relay Operator process your calls more efficiently.

AT&T To Begin New Maryland Relay Customer Service

In mid-April, AT&T will launch a new, “in-center” customer service at Maryland Relay. The new service will be staffed 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, by AT&T personnel specially trained to respond to any concerns, comments or questions about Maryland Relay only.

The customer service numbers are listed at the end of this article. If all personnel are assisting other callers, you will be asked to leave your name and phone number (or e-mail address if you prefer to be contacted electronically) on the answering machine. Your call will be returned within one hour.

With the addition of this new AT&T Maryland Relay customer service, we hope to discover new ways to tailor our programs, features, and services to our customer’s needs. So if you have a suggestion, be sure to dial the new customer service number and share it with us.

Customer Service Numbers
1-866-669-0853 (Voice)
1-866-669-0865 (TTY)
1-866-669-0871 (Fax)

Q&A

Relay User Seeks to Speed-Up Calls to Answering Machines and IVR Systems

A Maryland Relay user writes:

“How can I streamline my calls to answering machines and Interactive Voice Response systems?”

A Maryland Relay staff member responds:

Many answering machines and Interactive Voice Response (IVR) systems, particularly those used by businesses, give the caller only 10-15 seconds to begin recording his or her response. If the caller does not respond within this time frame, the system or machine automatically disconnects. This can be a challenge for Relay users, who first have to wait for the Relay Operator to type the text of the answering machine or IVR system before they can begin responding.

There is a way, however, to expedite this process. The next time you are calling a business or toll-free number that features an automated answering system that you have called before, let the Relay Operator know upfront which prompts or extensions you would like him or her to enter (e.g., “Call 1-800-123-9876 and press option one, then ask for the special order clerk”). This way, the Relay Operator can immediately begin voicing your response or entering the prompts you indicate.

Do you have a question for the Maryland Relay staff?

E-mail it to moreinfo@mdrelay.org, and you may see your question answered in a future issue of *The Relay Connection*.

Streamline Your Relay Calls by Submitting a Relay Choice Profile

Searching for a way to streamline your relay calls? Look no further than a Relay Choice Profile (RCP)! Completing an RCP allows you to establish a personal profile that will let the Relay Operator automatically know the communications features you prefer, including TTY, VCO, HCO or voice.

Completing an RCP allows you to establish a personal profile that will let the Relay Operator automatically know the communication features you prefer...

You can even designate a preferred long-distance telephone service carrier. An RCP also permits you to select certain features like Caller ID or set up speed-dial numbers.

All the information you provide in your profile is confidential, and you may edit your profile at any time. To establish your RCP, just visit www.mdrelay.org/ip/rc_form.htm. (If you wish to delete or edit your RCP, you can do so by visiting the same address.)

Multi-User Relay Choice Profiles (MURCPs) also are available for more than one user at the same home or business location. To establish your MURCP, visit www.att.com/relay. After selecting a PIN and password, you will be able to complete and submit your MURCP.

For more information about RCPs and MURCPs, contact Maryland Relay Customer Service at:

1-866-669-0853 (Voice)

1-866-669-0865 (TTY),

or e-mail moreinfo@mdrelay.org.

Please note that some of your preferred calling options may not be available if you are using IP Relay, or if you are calling from a location not listed on your RCP or MURCP.

Don't Forget Maryland Relay's New Voice Access Number

Attention voice users: Since some businesses and organizations have not yet updated their phone systems to allow 7-1-1 dialing, Maryland Relay now offers an additional access number for our voice users, 1-800-201-7165.

If you are a TTY user, don't forget to give both numbers to any friends, family members or business associates who are voice users and will be using Maryland Relay to reach you. By dialing either of these numbers, voice users will be connected to a Maryland Relay operator who will guide them through the logistics of making a Maryland Relay call.

Tip: TTY users may want to include 7-1-1 and our new voice access number on their business cards. You also can download our "How to Use Relay" card, which can be easily pasted to the back of your business card, by visiting, www.mdrelay.org.



With a Little Communication and Coordination, Outreach Team Juggles Growing Number of Presentation Requests

Maryland Relay's outreach team has continued to stay busy this year making presentations to groups, schools and organizations across the State.

Recently, many organizations have requested presentations concerning the features Maryland Relay offers for speech-disabled individuals, including Speech-To-Speech, Hearing Carry-Over and Internet Protocol Relay. The team has been invited to present to the United Cerebral Palsy Association of Montgomery and Prince Georges Counties, the speech pathologists at Kennedy Krieger Institute, the Maryland Speech Language and Hearing Association and at the Innovative Speech Therapy Rehabilitation and Technology Seminar.

As many of you know, *Kids Keeping In Touch*, a hearing loss awareness program, was designed to teach school-aged children about hearing loss and Maryland Relay. Due to the success of the program, many State teachers also have requested Maryland Relay presentations—either to increase their students' awareness of Maryland Relay or to coincide with schoolwide disability awareness days.

The outreach team members—Nancy Seidman, Michael Hollywood, Elke Pieters and Willis Mann—deserve much thanks and praise for rearranging their schedules to accommodate the growing number of requests. If you are a teacher or parent, please keep the Maryland Relay outreach team in mind for upcoming cultural or disability awareness days. To arrange a free presentation for your civic group, classroom or business, call 1-800-552-7724. Every effort will be made to accommodate your request.

Be the First to Learn What's New with Maryland Relay

By Michael Hollywood

Staying on top of all the latest Maryland Relay news and developments is as easy as joining our new e-mail notification service. After joining, you'll receive regular updates, via e-mail, filled with current information related to Maryland Relay. To sign up for the service, send your e-mail address to TAM Administrative Specialist Mike Hollywood at mike@mdrelay.org.

News from the FCC

Reimbursement for International IP Relay Calls Suspended

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) recently announced that it has ordered NECA to immediately suspend reimbursement for international IP relay calls. This means that all Maryland Relay users who place calls via IP Relay will not be able to use the feature to make an international call. Instead, they will have to dial 7-1-1 or 1-800-735-2258 to make these types of calls.

Maryland Relay Staff Members Appointed to Advisory Committee

Recently, the FCC invited TAM director Brenda Kelly-Frey and Rebecca Ladew, a GABTR member, to join the FCC's Consumer Advisory Committee.

On the Committee, Brenda will represent the interests of the National Association for State Relay Administration, the Telecommunications Equipment Distribution Program Association and Maryland Relay. Rebecca will represent Speech-To-Speech users.

SHHH Pushes for National Advertising Campaign to Increase Relay Awareness

Self-Help For Hard of Hearing People (SHHH) has filed comments with the FCC recommending the launch of a high-quality, nationwide advertising campaign designed to inform employers, parents, teachers, healthcare and business professionals and other individuals about relay services. To view the full text of SHHH's comments, visit www.fcc.gov, click on the electronic filing link and enter "CC Docket 98-67" in the search field.

Petition Calls for Reconsideration of Pay Phone Rule Changes

Telecommunications for the Deaf, Inc., the National Association of the Deaf, the Consumer Action Network and SHHH have filed a joint petition asking the FCC to reconsider its recent rule changes for making relay calls from pay phones, and to reinstate previous payment rates. The petition also calls for a national outreach campaign to educate relay users on the proper way to use a pay phone to make a relay call, as well as the various payment methods available.

State Relay Administrators Support NECA Funding Mechanism

Relay administrators from Maryland, Wisconsin, Virginia and Washington filed comments with the FCC regarding a petition filed by Ultratec® entitled, "Clarification Provision and Cost Recovery for CapTel." The administrators' comments expressed support for a National Exchange Carriers Association (NECA) three-year funding mechanism for a variety of relay calls, including Captioned Telephone (CapTel) calls.

GABTR Representatives

You can contact representatives of the Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay (GABTR) at the numbers and e-mail addresses below. They are on this Board to serve the needs of their community and welcome your input.

Mitchell D. Travers, Chair
301-441-2715 (TTY)
mitch.travers@mdrelay.org
Deaf Representative

Isaac O. Agboola
202-651-5040 (TTY)
isaac.agboola@mdrelay.org
Deaf Representative

Brenda Battat
301-657-2248 (V)
301-657-2249 (TTY)
brenda.battat@mdrelay.org
Senior Citizen Representative

Susan Boswell
301-317-8912 (V/TTY)
susan.boswell@mdrelay.org
Hard-of-Hearing Representative

Patricia Bowman
410-767-5768 (TTY)
patricia.bowman@mdrelay.org
Government Representative

Marie Campbell
301-604-1568 (TTY)
marie.campbell@mdrelay.org
Deaf Representative

Rebecca Ladew
410-467-0967 (TTY)
rebecca.ladew@mdrelay.org
Speech-Disabled Representative

Joy Larson
301-588-6545 (TTY)
joy.larson@mdrelay.org
DeafBlind Representative

Susan Miller
410-767-8036 (V)
susan.miller@mdrelay.org
Government Representative

Annette Reichman
202-205-8352 (V)
202-205-9152 (TTY)
annette.reichman@mdrelay.org
Deaf Representative

James A. Stevenson
301-759-2047 (V)
james.stevenson@mdrelay.org
Government Representative

Vacant
Mobility-Disabled Representative

MARYLAND RELAY CONTACT NUMBERS

7-1-1 in Maryland
1-800-201-7165
Voice

1-800-735-2258
Anywhere TTY/HCO

1-888-VCO-WORD
(1-888-826-9673) VCO

1-877-258-9854
2-line VCO

1-877-735-5151
ASCI

1-800-785-5630
Speech-to-Speech

1-900-344-3323
pay-per-call, English

1-900-344-4889
pay-per-call, Spanish

1-800-877-1264
Spanish

1-800-552-7724
TAM Office

1-866-669-0874
Reservation number for
Maryland Conference
Relay, Voice/TTY

Visit our Web site:
www.mdrelay.org

Or send us an e-mail:
moreinfo@mdrelay.org



GABTR Chair Mitch Travers moderates the Internet Protocol Relay Discussion Group, held on March 27, 2003, at the Maryland Relay Center.

Mark your calendar for the TTY Discussion Group. See page 1 for more information.

TAM Staff Gains Newfound Appreciation for Relay Operators

By Michael Hollywood

Recently, Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM) staff members began attending Relay Operator training sessions, not because they're looking for a career change, but because they want to gain a more accurate understanding of the various duties and responsibilities of a typical Relay Operator. The training, which one TAM staff member calls, "an eye-opening experience," has given the TAM team a newfound appreciation for the skills and knowledge required of a Relay Operator.

As part of the training, the team has participated in a variety of role-playing exercises. Playing the part of a Relay Operator has helped the TAM staff realize just how difficult it is to type a conversation word-for-word, especially with background noise and a caller who speaks very fast. Experiencing firsthand the multitasking required of Relay Operators presented many additional challenges for the staff.

This kind of hands-on training will ultimately benefit you—our dedicated users and supporters—by helping the TAM team better respond to your questions and comments.

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IT'S POSSIBLE