

Hearing Matters

By Cyril Peach

Captioning for the Hearing Impaired

One of our branch members recently told me that his wife always watches television with the closed captioning option enabled. Closed captioning, as most of you know, prints out the dialogue and sound effects of video programming such as television shows, movies, DVDs, and other technology. It is a godsend to those who are completely deaf and it works wonders for those who are hard of hearing. Apart from aiding the deaf and hard of hearing community, it can improve the reading and writing of those with low literacy skills and it can help those who are trying to learn English or French. Research has shown that captioning benefits over 10 million Canadians; that's about one-third of the population.

One would think that in this day and age, efficient captioning of all programming exists since the cost to provide it is very miniscule and the process seems relatively simple. However, try watching the weather channel or live news telecasts with closed captioning enabled and you will soon see how inefficient the captioning really is with respect to live telecasts. You will notice that the printed text is not in sync with the mouth movements of the speaker. I've noticed a delay of up to 30 seconds at times. You will notice misspelled words, run-together words and sentences, and words that make absolutely no sense at all. And if they show a map of British Columbia while texting in the weather for Labrador, you can see why this would be very confusing for the uninformed!

Through research, I found that the technology to provide efficient and economic captioning of all programming does exist. It is a form of discrimination not to provide it. The captioning must be accurate and verbatim. It is an insult to our intelligence not to provide the best quality possible.

The major cause of substandard provisions made for the deaf and hard of hearing is that a hearing loss is not visible and often is overlooked and misunderstood. The irony is that modern technologists focus on helping people who can hear to hear better sound instead of focusing on helping people with hearing loss to hear better sound. The quality of technologies for

people with hearing loss need to be improved. Improvements in the closed captioning system would be a major step in the right direction.

On another note, once again it has been brought to my attention that many motorists are not heeding the signs : CAUTION. HEARING IMPAIRED CHILDREN IN NEIGHBOURHOOD. PLEASE REDUCE SPEED AND DRIVE WITH CAUTION. Signs with this warning have been erected by the town council on Johnny Hill Drive and Ikey Street because there are hearing impaired children living in those areas. All drivers know that they should reduce speed in all residential areas but you need to be extra careful in those neighbourhoods where you see those signs. Most children who are involved in playing, bicycling, etc. do not pay close attention to motorists. Hard of hearing children also have the disadvantage of not hearing oncoming traffic. It is up to the motorist to exercise extreme caution. No one sets out to have an accident and most can be avoided. You, the adult, must take responsibility. This town isn't that big where you must rush to get from point A to point B.

Cyril is president of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association-HVGB Branch. You can reach him at 896-5434 or speech@hotmail.com