New Technology Enhances Communication Between The Hearing And The Deaf

(NAPSA)—Have you ever tried to communicate with someone from another culture, who speaks an entirely different language than yours? If so, you know it's not an easy undertaking. In fact, there are millions of people born in the United States who don't understand our spoken language of English, but who communicate in their own beautiful and meaningful language. These people were born without the ability to hear, or lost the function when they were very young.

America's deaf and hard of hearing population is estimated at about 20 million, and many of these individuals communicate using sign language, a rich and expressive language with its own grammar, rhythm and syntax. Unfortunately for the hearing and for the deaf, most hearing Americans do not understand sign language, and therefore have a hard time communicating with their deaf compatriots.

Because of these limitations, the hearing and deaf have had few ways to interact until now. A company based in Connecticut—SignTel, Inc.—has developed a communications device that uses new technologies, such as sophisticated linguistic analysis and artificial intelligence, to allow the hearing and deaf to communicate in their own native languages, privately and conveniently. The SignTel Interpreter™, a Windows-based communications program packaged with a computer such as an IBM ThinkPad® computer, provides real time translation of spoken and written English into streaming sign language on screen to facilitate one-on-one communication between the hearing and the deaf.

The developers of this product hope the availability and use of the SignTel Interpreter will encourage hearing people to interact more closely with the deaf and hard of hearing in work and social situations, as they will no longer have to sacrifice confidentiality, convenience, or real time interaction.

SignTel Interpreter™ is an assistive device that enables the hearing and the deaf to communicate easily.

Current communications systems for the deaf, such as a teletypewriter (TTY) are cumbersome, time-consuming and lack privacy because they require the participation of a live operator to read text inputted by the deaf person to the hearing party, and type the hearing party's response for the deaf person to read. In addition, such systems lack the sophistication to accurately translate the intended meanings of underlying idioms and turns of phrases into meaningful sign language.

The SignTel Interpreter uses sophisticated linguistic analysis and artificial intelligence to translate speech and differentiate between synonyms, multiple meanings and idiomatic phrases. For example, "beat around the bush" cannot be translated directly into sign language, so the SignTel Interpreter translates this phrase into "be direct."

According to Maureen Roselli, a sign language teacher and interpreter who is a member of the linguistic team at SignTel, "It is really easy to use and we believe it will facilitate communication between the hearing and deaf in business, social and educational settings within the United States."

For more information about the SignTel Interpreter please visit the company's Web site, *www. signtelinc.com.*