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LONG-TERM CARE PROGRAM ADDS PHONE LINE FOR DEAF
SMOLINSKI, REARDON TURN ON SERTOMA-DONATED TDD PHONE

LOCKPORT—Deaf and communication-impaired county residents will now have access to a new tool when making decisions about long-term care for themselves and loved ones, thanks to a donation to the county from the Sertoma Club.

Niagara County Legislator Pete Smolinski, R-North Tonawanda, who chairs the County Legislature's Community Services Committee, and John Reardon, president of the Sertoma Club and Niagara County Board of Health president, announced the donation of the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf this morning in Lockport, officially turning the device on for county residents. The duo were joined by Suzette Rutherford, coordinator for the county's NY Connects program.

NY Connects is a program designed to help county residents make informed decisions about long-term care for themselves and elderly, disabled, and chronically-ill family members. It works closely with the Niagara County Office for the Aging.

"The need for this device at the NY Connects program site was evident because they've had a number of individuals calling for information and referral services who are hearing impaired," Reardon explained. "The TDD will facilitate direct communication between the office and the individuals calling in who are either severely hearing-impaired or deaf."

Reardon noted that the TDD device, essentially a modern teletype machine, made "virtual real-time dialogue" possible.

"Without this device, communicating with the program and trying to obtain information about referrals and services can be a real obstacle," Reardon noted, pointing to a state-run relay system that often added substantial turnaround time for inquiries from the hearing impaired. "Hearing-disabled individuals get frustrated with that. This is something that will benefit the program and be of great benefit to those individuals in our county with communications impairments."

Reardon noted that veteran county lawmaker Smolinski, who joined him in formally turning on the TDD phone, had been an active advocate for the Sertoma donation.

"Pete actually was part of the process, and very interested in obtaining this," Reardon noted, adding that Smolinski, in addition to his committee chairmanship, also holds a seat on the Niagara County Board of Health, which Reardon presides over. "Pete and I discussed the benefits of adding the TDD line, and certainly the county was very interested in obtaining the phone. He really helped facilitate that."

Rutherford also made public the new telephone number for the TDD line at the teletype's formal dedication. County residents wishing to communicate with NY Connects via TDD may do so at (716) 438-3061.

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