

Wednesday, May 7, 2014

**NEIGHBORS**

## Connecting people through sign language

Kennedy grad accepted to prestigious program

By [Julie Mansmann](#)



COURTESY DANA ROBINSON

Jamie Forman, 25, of Bellmore, graduated from the Video Relay Service Interpreting Institute's School-to-Work Program last month.

Before she applied to the program, Forman graduated from Rochester in 2010 and LaGuardia Community College's Interpreter Education Program in 2013. Representatives of Sorenson said the School-to-Work Program is designed for students like Forman, who have graduated from an interpreting program and are ready to begin work in the field.

Forman said she learned about the program at an ASL conference in Indianapolis. She decided to go through the multi-part screening process, and said she was shocked to learn that she was

Jamie Forman's first experience with American Sign Language came during her childhood. The 25-year-old Bellmorite said she has two deaf cousins, but in her youth she learned only a handful of signs from family members.

That changed when Forman, a Kennedy High School graduate, began her undergraduate studies at the University of Rochester. Her experiences in beginners' ASL classes and the area's deaf community influenced her career choice: ASL interpreter.

"I had seen it pretty often when I was growing up, so it was something I was interested in learning for personal reasons," she said. "I really enjoyed the classes I was taking and the professors, and being involved in the community."

Forman's pursuit of an interpreting career led her to become one of 12 students nationwide to be accepted in a prestigious program at a world-class institute based in Salt Lake City. This winter, she took part in the Video Relay Service Interpreting Institute's School-to-Work Program, which was founded by Sorenson Communications, the largest employer of ASL interpreters in the U.S.

Before she applied to the program, Forman graduated

accepted into the competitive program.

“I didn’t know how many people applied, so I wasn’t sure what my chances were,” she said. “I knew it was tough, so I was definitely happy, because it was a really wonderful opportunity.”

On Jan. 7, Forman left for Utah for the 13-week immersion program. She and her fellow students lived at the institute, where they received additional ASL interpreting training, one-on-one mentoring and professional internships in the deaf community. On any given day, Forman was in class, at an internship or with mentors, teachers or her host family.

Students spend time with a family with one or more deaf people. Forman explained that she would go to the movies or a hockey game with her host family, which she said was helpful because it gave her the chance to be in the deaf community in a different way.

“When you’re interpreting, you’re at work,” she said. “It’s a way to improve your language skills in a more casual environment, so it’s helpful in that regard.”

Forman and her classmates graduated from the program on April 3. Having some experience with freelance interpreting, she said she would like to develop a career that allows her to work in a variety of settings and continue to improve her understanding of the language.

“When you start learning any language, it’s tough, but you pick it up quickly,” she said. “When you become more fluent, you feel your progress isn’t as rapid as it once was. But there are always opportunities to learn more, and I think that it’s important that you take them.”

### **Fast facts about the institute**

- The Video Relay Service Interpreting Institute was established by Sorenson Communications in March 2009 in Salt Lake City.
- The VRSII is designed for professionals interpreting video relay service calls.
- Video relay calls are placed on a high-speed Internet connection through a Sorenson videophone connected to a television monitor, or through a personal computer with a Web camera.