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## Otego woman chosen to study sign language

By Jessica Reynolds Staff writer

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A young woman from Otego is one of only 12 students in the nation chosen to study at a prestigious American Sign Language interpreting program this summer.

Rebekah Spring, 22, is currently in her fifth week at the 12-week immersion program, which takes place at Sorenson Communications' Video Relay Service Interpreting Institute in Salt Lake City.

The intensive School-to-Work Program is the only one of its kind offered in the United States or Canada and focuses on preparing would-be interpreters to better serve the deaf community by surrounding them with the culture and language, according to a recent media release.

Studying at the VRS Interpreting Institute is “a blessing” and an “honor,” Spring said from Salt Lake City on Tuesday.

The School-to-Work Program is designed to help students become fluent in American Sign Language so they can be effective interpreters someday, Spring said.

“Everything here is done in American Sign Language,” she said.

Spring first encountered American Sign Language at Mohawk Valley Community College as an elementary education major, she said. She chose an ASL class to fulfill her foreign language requirement.

“I was engrossed,” Spring said. “It’s a visual language, which I really loved. So I decided I wanted to explore opportunities for employment in the field.”

While on the road to getting her bachelor’s degree in interpreting at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Spring encountered many deaf people who inspired her, she said. She graduated in May 2014 with a 4.0 grade point average.

“It’s been a real privilege to see inside that culture,” Spring said.

When Spring and her 11 classmates complete the program in which they are currently enrolled, they will receive their National Interpreter Certifications, according to the program's website. Spring will return home to Otego to visit her parents and then decide where she wants to settle down, she said.

Spring can then choose to continue her training and become a Video Relay Service interpreter, a person who helps deaf clients easily communicate with friends and family using a Skype-esque computer program.

There are many different settings for interpreting in the professional world, Spring said. She is interested in eventually working as a legal interpreter or teaching interpreting at a college level.

Spring said she would love to help develop interpreting preparation programs in the Otsego County area someday, so that more deaf people could have the chance to efficiently communicate with loved ones.

"I don't know that there's that much awareness back home in the small towns," Spring said.

As a girl growing up in Otego, Spring did not have much experience with deaf individuals, interpreting, or American Sign Language, she said. Now, it's her passion.

"When I would see people signing, I would think, 'Oh, that's neat,' but I never imagined I would be doing this," Spring said. "The School-to-Work program is an amazing program with so many opportunities, and I am so thankful to God and my family for all the many blessings I have."