

UNCG grad chosen for sign language interpreter program



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By Sonja Beach Special to News & Record

Jennifer Vega has aspired to only one career her whole life: to be a professional interpreter for the deaf.

Born to deaf parents, she started interpreting phone calls at age 8.

“My daughter did not choose this profession; this profession chose her,” said Debby Dailey, her mother.

This summer, Vega is getting the chance to set herself apart in the field.

Courtesy of Sorenson Communications Greensboro resident, Jennifer Vega, is one of only 12 American Sign Language interpreter graduate students, chosen from across the nation, to attend a prestigious, post-graduation American Sign Language interpreter program.

The recent UNCG graduate is one of 12 graduates selected from more than 100 applicants across the United States and Canada to participate in the Video Relay Service Interpreting Institute’s School-to-Work program in Salt Lake City.

The 12-week immersion program is designed to provide in-depth post-graduate training in deaf interpreting, according to vrsii.com.

Vega, a Raleigh native, recently received her bachelor’s in professions in deafness with a concentration in the interpreter prep program.

The School-to-Work program is “kind of like a boot camp,” said Dr. Carolyn Ball, executive director of the Institute. “There isn’t much free time.”

Vega agrees. Each week, she practices interpreting in a different professional setting, including sports, education and medicine.



A typical day begins at 6:30 a.m. and is filled with classroom learning, real-world interpreting assignments — such as ordering pizza or online movie rentals — spending time with a host family, taking national certification exams and assessments to help qualify for jobs, and crafting a personal online portfolio.

There are also weekend assignments.

In addition to receiving personalized attention from five full-time and three part-time faculty and 20 part-time mentors, Vega said she and the other interns benefit from access to state-of-the-art labs and equipment at Sorenson Communications.

Among the six companies that provide video relay services to the deaf community, Sorenson is the only one with an educational component for deaf interpreters and interpreter educators, Ball said.

The School-to-Work program is completely funded by Sorenson through resources set aside for training.

Interns pay nothing to participate.

“We really want the deaf community to have good interpreters, and we want graduates to stay in the field,” Ball said.

The success of the program, which started in 2009, is impressive.

Ball said 97 percent of its interns have remained in the field, and almost 70 percent obtain jobs immediately following completion.

Vega’s father, who is Mexican, uses Mexican Sign Language, which is different from spoken Spanish and from American Sign Language.

“When I look at deaf children, I see my parents (as children),” Vega says, referring to the struggles her parents faced as deaf children before the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act responded to the technology and service needs of the deaf and hard-of-hearing community.

Dailey’s pride in her daughter shines through.

“She will share with the world the beautiful language that her parents and community have given her,” Dailey says.

“I am so proud that she stuck with her dream and my dream for her as well.”

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