

RELAY NORTH CAROLINA

Video Transcript for Springfest Keynote Speaker – Tony Davis

Video Title:

Tony Davis | Keynote Speaker | Relay NC 35th Anniversary

Video Description:

To the left is a man in a dark suit with a light-colored shirt. He speaks on a microphone. To his right is a woman with light hair and a long black dress. She is the ASL interpreter and interprets for him as he speaks. Behind them on the stage is a collection of pink, teal, and purple balloons over two large gold balloons that spell out "35."

Tony Davis speaks: Good morning and thank you for coming today. This is Tony and I'm so happy to be here with you.

[One of the ASL interpreters hand Tony a new microphone and his voice is better amplified.]

Tony continues: Thank you, I can't hear myself. I'm late deafened. So, I'm Tony Davis the new director of DSDHH. So happy to be here with you today! I will voice for myself because I'm late Deafened but as I meet each of you later today we can sign together, and I look forward to seeing you.

I just wanted to take a few minutes and welcome you to this amazing celebration of 35 years of Relay North Carolina and I want to start with talking about a timeline related to the formation of Relay North Carolina. In 1987 the North Carolina General Assembly ratified Senate Bill 464 which asked that they do a study related to whether or not TTY should be implemented in North Carolina and the results of that study were yes TTY should be implemented in North Carolina! Two of the real big implementers in that situation were Bill Pease, the late Bill Pease, and also Joan Black. Is Joan here right now? Because I know she wasn't here earlier but if Joan is here I think it's important that you recognize her as one of the founders of North Carolina relay services, that Relay North Carolina was established and that we have a dual party TTY setup. The assignment was given to DSDHH, The Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to administrate. Then they set up a general statute that said from then on, we're going to go ahead and have relay services in North Carolina.

So, again, it started with TTY, but it's really grown beyond TTY. So now we have technology in relay that includes things like caption phones, all different kinds of caption phones, landline caption phones, internet-based caption phones, we have Relay Conference Captioning so that people can go to a conference or go to a meeting and get captioning at that conference or meeting. We have Speech-to-Speech for people who have speech disabilities. So, there's a lot of different types of relay services now in North Carolina.

Now a lot of you might be wondering, is Relay North Carolina going to go away because TTYs, analog TTYs are starting to dissipate a little bit and they're not used as much? And the answer is no. Relay North Carolina won't go away. Because technology continues to evolve. Technology continues to get better and better and better. And part of our responsibility at North Carolina Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is to make sure that we take that technology and we put it into the relay world. We provide the technology that people need to be able to communicate through telecommunications. That's really an important thing that people are able to communicate through telecommunications. And I'm going to share with you a few personal experiences in just a minute. But telecommunications allow people to participate in their job. It allows people to call out and order a pizza. It allows

people to communicate with their family, their friends, everybody around them. Without it, without relay services we wouldn't be able to do those things.

I came prepared to share a few different things and I think I'm going off script and talk a little bit about my own experience. So, at age 35, I was living in California, and I lost my hearing. Overnight my hearing was gone. So I'm 35 years old, I can't hear anymore. I'm working as a social worker. I have a young family. All of a sudden I can't communicate with them but equally as impactful is I couldn't hear on the phone anymore at all. So, I relied on the phone before for my work, and for talking to my parents, and for talking to my family, and for talking with others. And all the sudden, I can't communicate on the phone! So, I had to ask my wife, can you call to make a doctor's appointment for me? Can you call and order pizza?

Do you remember what it was like to order pizza? I mean now you have an app, right? And you can order pizza. For my family, we order pizza every Friday night on the app, and I get a free pizza because we order three and we get a fourth for free. That's how much pizza we eat and we can do that on the app now. It's easy. But back when I lost my hearing at age 35, I couldn't order pizza anymore. That was impactful. Again, I couldn't schedule a doctor's appointment. I couldn't call and pay bills. When I was working at my job, I couldn't answer the phone and I had to ask my coworkers to help.

So, I'm newly deafened and I'm like what do I do? What are the resources? And somebody told me about relay in California then. And I ordered a captioned phone and all of a sudden I could participate in phone calls again. Relay is the segue with the key ingredient to gaining back independence with telecommunications. And all these people in North Carolina with hearing loss or are Deaf, or Hard of Hearing, or newly Deafened, or DeafBlind, or people with speech disabilities need Relay North Carolina. They need to know about it so we've got to do a good job of letting them know about it. And then we need to provide the resources so that they can use it. And then it's going to change their lives like it changed my life. So that was one little resource that changed my life, but it was huge.

Later I moved to Gallaudet to get my master's in social work and I learned to sign and then I could use VRS. So, now in my life, I use captioned phones and I use VRS. So it really is huge for every single one of us. I want to recognize that. I really appreciate everybody who works in relay. I appreciate our contract administrators at our division and I want to ask you to stand up really quick, because I want to recognize you. For those of you who participated in the establishment of Relay North Carolina, or somehow work with Relay North Carolina right now in any way, can you please stand up?

If you help manage the contracts at some point. Yes. Thank you! If you help manage the contracts at some point or are involved in Relay North Carolina could you please stand up? Thank you! Thank you, Becky, I know you too. Thank you. Anybody who's participated in administering Relay North Carolina, please stand up. Thank you. If you use relay or have used relay in the past, please stand up. Wow, right? And if relay was good for you and made a difference in your life and helped you call the doctor, or call the attorney, or call your family please raise your hand.

Relay has impacted us hugely and we are so grateful. And we need an interpreter switch. Go ahead.

[The ASL interpreters switch out and Tony continues.]

I just want to say thank you to all of the founders of Relay North Carolina, everybody who's administered the contracts, everybody who's provided Relay North Carolina services, everybody who's provided relay services throughout the US in any way shape or form.

We have a long way to go because technology is evolving, and I want to let you know that over the next year we're going to work hard to change statutes to allow us to be able to distribute mobile devices so that people can use relay even more. So that they can use captioning on their phones or different tablets. In that way, it's important that we get devices out to people. Especially people who cannot afford those devices without the assistance of the state. And that's why we're here to assist people with that. We're going to work really hard this next year to try and get those phones and tablets out to people so that they can use relay services and we're going to continue to leverage the different technology that develops over the next 35 years so that in 35 years we can come back to this room and we can look at all the technology that's happened since today and look back. Look at how much it made a difference in our lives, helped us to become more independent. And we're also going to work really hard with the people out in North Carolina that don't even know about relay services yet. Kind of like me when I was newly deafened and I didn't know what to do about talking on the phone or what I needed to do. So, we need to do a really good job of connecting with those people and letting them know about relay service. And that's our next goal here. That's what's really important. I look forward to meeting with each of you I haven't met yet today. Please come and talk with me and share with me your relay experiences and stories. What do you want to see in for the next few years with North Carolina DSDHH? I'm very interested to listen to that thank you so much.