

May 2006 Disaster Relief Appeal

Dear Colleagues:

Last year during the Katrina and Rita Hurricanes many NAJIT members as well as colleagues from the medical, sign language and other sister organizations of the interpreting and translation community expressed interest in assisting the non-English, deaf and hard of hearing, the LEP population and the government with competent interpretation and translation services.

Interpreters are the bridge across the linguistic divide that sometimes separate people in need of help from the agencies and organizations that can provide the help they need. This critical function of interpreters was underscored last year when the scope of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita overwhelmed the ability of on-site resources to provide limited English proficient persons and the deaf and hard of hearing population with timely emergency information and services. In the face of these disasters, many members of NAJIT and its sister organizations expressed a willingness to fill the breach, and offered to help, either through on-site deployment or by telephone. In response, the leadership of NAJIT sought to establish some formal national mechanism through which agencies and organizations responsible for providing critical emergency information and assistance could locate and utilize the services of competent interpreters and translators.

Among the possible mechanisms discussed was the creation of an internet link through which volunteers could identify themselves to aid providers. While a number of these providers expressed interest in making use of the special language skills of NAJIT members and sister organizations, the scope and depth of the required infrastructure, among other reasons, made it impossible to finalize the necessary procedures. Nonetheless, NAJIT has continued to pursue efforts to more efficiently link government entities with competent interpreters and translators should future national or natural disasters arise.

On Saturday, May 20, 2006, in his keynote address, Mr. Everette Jordan, Director of the National Virtual Translation Center (NVTC), a government entity, announced that three years ago the federal government passed a law to create a National Civilian Linguist Reserve Corps designed to make the best use of people with translation and interpretation skills whenever a national need arises. Mr. Jordan noted that although it is the Defense Department that is charged with organizing the database of language skills, the NVTC is also participating so that those with language skills can either volunteer their time or be hired for occasional assignments before the next disaster strikes.

Mr. Jordan further expressed the NVTC's interest in building relationships with NAJIT and its sister T & I organizations and exploring a variety of potential volunteer services and employment opportunities for NAJIT members among others and the NVTC or other government agencies during national emergencies. The NVTC has agreed to take the lead by placing a link on its web site through which members of NAJIT and its sister

organizations consisting of qualified translators and interpreters in sign language, medical and legal can indicate their willingness to provide aid to their neighbors in times of an emergency. The link is located at: <http://www.nvtc.gov>.

Some of us have already made use of the NVTC link to indicate our willingness to be part of the response to future national and natural emergencies. Hurricane season has already begun, therefore, we encourage our colleagues that are interested in joining in these efforts and are willing and able to assist to sign up as soon as possible.

As of July 2008, the Director of the NVTC is Jeff Robinson. The new NVTC Director remains committed to partnering with NAJIT and the American Red Cross to help leverage the nation's language resources during national emergencies.