



June 23, 2015

As President of the National Court Reporters Association (NCRA), the national association representing broadcast captioners, I would like to issue a brief response to a June 20 editorial by Bob Dyer on the accuracy of closed captioning in the Cleveland area.

There is no doubt that it is vital that consumers receive accurate and timely received closed captions. It is extremely unfortunate that Mr. Dyer and Mr. Boltz each had poor experiences with the closed captioning on several of their local media affiliates. However, simply blaming the captioner for the poor captions may miss the root of the issue altogether. The technology behind closed captioning requires a high level of attention from the many different individuals and entities working in tandem to ensure that the high quality captions that are written by the captioner are received by the consumer.

Typically, the process of closed captioning a live news broadcast begins with the captioner receiving the program's audio and sending the captions back to the broadcaster. The broadcaster then must ensure that the captions are displayed properly when turned on by the consumer, while the cable or satellite company must ensure that captions are able to be displayed as well. When one of these links in the chain of high quality captioning is broken, the results are poor, as Mr. Dyer and Mr. Boltz experienced. Even something as minor as the captioner not receiving sufficient preparation materials or being provided an inadequate audio line can cause captioning quality to drop significantly.

It is also important to note that while the above scenario referenced live programming, programs that are prerecorded should be captioned in advance to completely minimize errors and delays.

Over the past several years, NCRA has worked diligently with consumer organizations and the FCC to ensure that the consumer experience with closed captioning continuously improves. In March 2015, the first ever captioning quality regulations were implemented. The regulations included best practices that each of the different entities involved in broadcast captioning are expected to follow. The best practices that were approved by the FCC named four descriptors of quality captioning: accuracy, synchronicity, completeness, and placement of the captions. While early results have been largely promising, it is clear that there are still several steps to go.

Consumers who believe that their captions have fallen short in any of those categories should provide feedback to the station and to the FCC.

In this specific instance with WJW, they solicit feedback at <http://fox8.com/contact/closed-captioning-questions/>.

Consumers can also file a complaint with the FCC by visiting:
https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov/hc/en-us/requests/new?ticket_form_id=36040

Finally, I encourage consumers to visit CaptioningMatters.org for more information on broadcast captioning.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sarah Nageotte". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Sarah Nageotte, RDR, CRR, CBC
2014-2015 President
National Court Reporters Association