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# FOCUS

NTID

National Technical Institute for the Deaf • Rochester Institute of Technology



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# A PENchant For Possibilities

by Karen E. Black



**RIT Vice President for NTID** Dr. Robert Davila discusses the benefits of career education for deaf people. The Chinese symbols behind him read “Tianjin Technical College for the Deaf of Tianjin University of Technology/The Official Opening Ceremony of the PEN-International Multimedia Lab.”

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***“This program helps deaf people worldwide, so they can be educated to explore where their hearts are leading them. PEN just wants to help make it possible for them.”***

**Justin Drawbaugh,  
NTID/RIT Information Technology student**

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**E**ach fall, students from many different countries arrive in upstate New York to study at this unique place called NTID. Indeed, the experience extends far beyond the anticipation of seeing their first snowfall; no one can prepare them for what they find.

Wide-eyed and perhaps a little overwhelmed, most have never before met deaf engineers, architects, designers, machinists or computer specialists. Certainly they have never been in the same place with hundreds of deaf people just like themselves, much less a place where so many hearing people are fluent in sign language.

But their amazement quickly changes to excitement, and they begin to realize the vast number of opportunities available to them . . . opportunities that they never dreamed possible.

Now, the experts at NTID are hand carrying and gently placing those opportunities in colleges around the world.

Through the generosity of The Nippon Foundation, which to date has invested more than \$2 million dollars, a new organization has been formed to help universities across the globe that educate deaf students apply state-of-the-art instructional technologies, improve and update their technical curriculum, and update their computer hardware and software.

Key players in the new organization, called Postsecondary Education Network International, or PEN-International, are NTID and its sister college Tsukuba College of Technology (TCT), of Tsukuba University, in Japan. Working closely together, they have made significant headway in the 15 months since PEN-International was formed.

With 32 years of experience in educating deaf people, James J. DeCaro, Ph.D., former dean of NTID, directs PEN-International with one goal in mind.

“To help other countries help themselves,” he says. “Each country is in a different stage of educating deaf people at the college level. Each has its own set of goals. Add to that mix each country’s unique written, spoken and signed languages, its own culture and technical knowledge, and it becomes a very exciting, multilayered project.”

Tianjin University of Technology (TUT) in China and Japan’s TCT were first to reap the rewards of this project. Taking each step collaboratively, the PEN team first conducted a needs assessment, confirmed equipment needs, and assured compatibility. Next, they developed curriculum to fit each college’s specific needs, and designed and built a multimedia lab that included renovating space, installing new computers/workstations, configuring the network, and installing



#### Chinese faculty member

Kang Shunli pitches in to help set up the new multimedia lab for deaf students, thanks to The Nippon Foundation and PEN-International.



**Technology knows no boundaries** Commemorating Japan's new multimedia lab, Japanese and U.S. deaf students performed haiku poems to a global audience, as the American and Chinese participants simultaneously participated via video conferencing and World Wide Web video streaming. Seated is English Professor Midori Matsufuji, as she watches student Ohata Yoshihiro, standing center, finish his haiku.

projection systems for easier visual instruction. Finally, they trained faculty how to use the new lab to meet their instructional needs.

"Our colleagues are quite technologically savvy," says DeCaro. "Our role is to demonstrate ways of using new and innovative instructional technology to educate deaf students."

"PEN-International has accelerated our ability to apply new instructional technologies by almost a decade," says Bao Guodong, director of Tianjin Technical College for the Deaf. "They are also helping us to become a resource for educators of the deaf throughout China."

"Our new lab has quickly become the most popular lab on campus!" says Professor Han Mei, the multimedia lab supervisor. "The lab now makes innovative multimedia education possible."

The highly symbolic first ribbon-cutting ceremonies for the new labs were conducted in early October and included a simultaneous viewing at each participating college in the U.S., Japan and China via videoconferencing and World Wide Web video streaming.

"It sent a strong message, that despite the turmoil caused by horrible world events, we want to work together for human potential," says DeCaro, "and aside from different languages and cultures and political motives— we *can* and *will* continue to share and learn from each other, because tremendously good things come from that."

The high-tech ribbon-cutting ceremonies conveyed other important messages, like fading boundaries and collapsing barriers.

"Deaf people have historically been limited in career choices," DeCaro says. "We're working to end those days

for deaf people everywhere."

The Nippon Foundation strongly supports that goal.

"There are very few deaf people around the world who can afford to study abroad. Countless other deaf or hard-of-hearing students are left behind and are not able to obtain high quality postsecondary education in their home countries," said Mr. Reizo Utagawa, executive director, The Nippon Foundation. "This is particularly true in developing nations. We believe it is important to establish an educational infrastructure in these countries to prepare deaf and hard-of-hearing people to enter society and the workplace."

An integral part of the process has been a cultural exchange, where



**日本財団**  
The Nippon Foundation

Based in Japan, The Nippon Foundation is one of the largest philanthropic organizations in the world. It believes that all

people on earth share a common duty, a mission of transcending antagonism and overcoming conflict, so that we may instead establish consensus and provide assistance. The Nippon Foundation has dedicated itself to meeting that challenge. The Nippon Foundation previously awarded NTID two \$1 million grants to establish an endowed scholarship fund for deaf students from developing countries to attend RIT.



**PEN International Director** Dr. James DeCaro, holding document, receives visiting professorship honors at Tianjin University in China. He is standing with Guodong Bao, director of the university's Technical College for the Deaf, left, and Jun Li, the university's president.



**Popcorn! Peanuts!** NTID's Mary Lamb, senior staff assistant, and The Nippon Foundation's Executive Director Reizo Utagawa enjoy a favorite American pastime during a Rochester Red Wing's baseball game. Special guest Utagawa threw the first pitch that game.

Chinese, Japanese, and American deaf and hearing students and faculty visited each other's countries, gaining hands-on training, technology transfer, networking, and a taste of different cultures.

"I came home with a new realization that we are not alone, because we have the same feelings inside as the deaf Chinese students we met," says Justin Drawbaugh, a fourth-year Information Technology student who traveled to China with five other NTID students and three students from Japan's Tsukuba College.

The exchange trip also helped broaden graduate student Julie Stewart's professional aspirations.

"I now want to work in education

at the international level and explore how other countries are educating the deaf to see how it can apply to the American system," she says. "We were in awe being there. I came back with more understanding of how fortunate we are as deaf people living in America, and I realized that America is a baby compared to China in history!"

The long-term goals of PEN-International are twofold: to equip deaf students with the skills needed to compete in a high technology, global marketplace; and to prepare universities to share the knowledge and instructional products they develop with other colleges in their corner of the world.

Over the five-year life of the project, PEN-International will work in as many as six different countries.

"PEN-International has encouraged students, and in particular, faculty members to actively shape their own destiny," says The Nippon Foundation's Utagawa. "They train faculty, who then train other faculty throughout the region. As

a result, we are placing a special emphasis on improving educational infrastructure worldwide."

"We are now building upon our successes and working with two new partners," DeCaro says.

They are Bauman Moscow State Technical University in Russia and de la Salle University—College of St. Benilde in the Philippines.

PEN-International's Web site, [www.pen.ntid.rit.edu](http://www.pen.ntid.rit.edu), is being designed to serve as a multilingual portal for faculty training and development for all participant countries. The PEN team also is developing a Survival Sign Language Dictionary that will include 125 words and phrases from English, Russian and Japanese sign languages, and later will include Chinese, Philippine, and others. In addition, the PEN team is partnering with the World Federation of the Deaf to develop a database of colleges and universities worldwide that serve people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

But, DeCaro says, the ultimate goal is to have an impact on the students.

"We're doing this to make a difference in the lives of young deaf people who—through no fault of their own—" he says, "have been deprived access to social and economic opportunities in their countries."



**Riding in style** NTID/RIT student Justin Drawbaugh enjoyed a ride in a bicycle jinriksha, a common form of transportation in China. Students from the U.S. and Japan visited there as part of PEN-International's cultural exchange.