Does ‘F’ mean fantastico?

Maple Woods offers new program on interpreting.

By Linda May

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Interpreting isn't just a matter of knowing a foreign language, said professional interpreter Alton Myers. It involves adhering to a code of ethics, understanding where to place yourself during an interpreting session and being sensitive to cultural differences.

Metropolitan Community College Maple Woods is offering a new certificate program on the basics of interpreting, as well as interpreting ethics and legal issues. All students must pass a hearing, reading and language before they can take the class.

Chad Montweel, coordinator of the foreign language interpreting program, said the college and schools and hospitals to determine the need for interpreters before creating the curriculum.

"The issue is that people think that the community wants something like this," he said. "Currently, to work as an interpreter, you don't need any sort of certification.

"But just because you speak another language, you're not qualified to interpret." Myers said a lot of interpreting occurs in a family member, friends or children, but using them can create problems. For example, they might not know proper terminology. "When a complex word comes up, like hepatitis, they don't know what it means," he said.

In such situations, they can't interpret everything — such as a diagnosis of cancer, the result of a test or the symptoms of a disease. Myers said.

And sometimes, when a child interprets for the parents, understanding information can be revised. Myers recalled an incident in which a boy told his mom that the "t" on his report card stood for fantastico — the Spanish word for fantastic.

"A lot of the stories are funny," she said. "But the information is being skewed." Myers added that sometimes a community can find itself thrust into the position of needing interpreters incorrectly. For example, when Triumph Foods opened a pork processing plant in St. Joseph, Mo., the company employed a large number of immigrants. That created a need for interpreters in education, hospitals and law enforcement.

"We're a nation, all these public agencies have to have interpreters," she said. "We coordinate with the need, professional training and standards are then final." Myers said.

"The need in Kansas City has been there for a long time," she said. "But there is a perception that our foreign language population is not that large. And then there is a perception that anyone who is bilingual will do it." For more information, call 816-487-6850.

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