

ACB's Audio Description Project (ADP) Our First Decade

by Joel Snyder, PhD, Director, ADP – December 2018

The purpose of the American Council of the Blind's Audio Description Project (ADP) is to boost levels of description activity and disseminate information on that work throughout the nation. Its major goal is to sponsor a broad range of activities designed to build awareness of audio description (AD) among the general public as well as its principal users, people who are blind or have low vision.

2018 is our tenth full year of activity and I want to acknowledge some individuals who have done so much to make the ADP a success: Chris Gray, former President of the ACB, was especially welcoming of the idea for the ADP when it was proposed in 2009; Mitch Pomerantz continued that support and appointed Kim Charlson as the first chair of our steering committee—Kim, a long-time advocate for AD, is now the ACB's President and has been a strong advocate for the ADP's work; and succeeding Kim as the chair of our steering committee is Dan Spoone—he established our subcommittee structure: that structure, along with Dan's superb organizational savvy, has allowed us to do so much. And, of course, Fred Brack, our top-notch webmaster—he has built our website into the go-to repository of information on all things AD.

Here's a brief summary of our work throughout 2018 and over the past decade:

- The ADP Conferences: the July 2018 gathering in St. Louis was our fifth full gathering of AD consumers, producers, advocates and many other supporters; we hold this conference every other year in conjunction with ACB's annual conference and convention. We have hosted speakers and participants from two dozen countries over the years – in 2018, conference was a great success: multiple panels and individual speakers included our luncheon speaker, actress Marilee Talkington and a screening of "Dealt," the story of Richard Turner, a master "card manipulator" (magician) who is blind—Mr. Turner attended several conference sessions; and in our "off" years, we present a half-day of activities and sessions focused on areas of particular interest to AD consumers like "Audio Description Accessibility and Technology"; an "Open Forum with Representatives from Major Providers and Streaming Services" and "Audio Description Advocacy";

- The Audio Description Institutes: as of July 2018, we presented our fourteenth Audio Description Institute, the world's foremost AD training sessions—we do them twice a year, in February in conjunction with ACB's mid-year meeting in Washington, DC and then each summer along with the ACB Convention – the July 2018 St. Louis session involved 17 registrants as well as contributions from AD consumers—Dr. Francisco Lima, Estelle Condra (wife of a registrant)—and special guest Kathleen Zieder, President of ACVREP;

- the 2018 AD Achievement Award winners were announced: Performing Arts—MindsEye Radio/Marjorie Moore - St. Louis, MO, Media—Rooted in Rights - Seattle, WA, Museums/Visual Art/Visitor Centers—Tennessee School for the Blind and Julia Cawthon - Nashville, TN; International—Amos Be'er, CEO, The Central Library for the Blind and Visually Impaired People, Israel; Special Recognition-International—Antonio Vazquez Martin, Aristia Producciones SLU-Madrid, Spain; Dr. Margaret R. Pfanstiehl Memorial Achievement Award in Audio Description-Research and Development—Dr. Francisco Lima-Recife, Brazil; and the Barry Levine Memorial Award for Career Achievement in Audio Description—The Carl and Ruth Shapiro Family National Center for Accessible Media at WGBH (NCAM);

- the ADP website—acb.org/adp—now has over 2,300 “Likes” on the ADP Facebook page and we continue to broaden the ADP reach on Twitter—in 2018, we provided weekly updates on audio-described DVDs and Blu-ray discs (over 150 in 2018) and created a Master List of over 1,500 titles now available on streaming platforms—we also provided updates on TV shows including video description and our comprehensive listing of broadcast television programs with audio description;

- DC Aid Association grant award--\$15,000 was awarded to ACB for an ADP project and is being used to develop an audio described tour of the Smithsonian Institution's “Insect Zoo” (in process);

- the BADIES (Benefits of Audio Description In Education contest): the 2018 version of the contest was announced in September 2017 and we received 36 entries (the most ever) from students ages 8-18—our 2018 Grand Prize winner was introduced at the midyear meeting and gave a stellar reading of his award-winning essay – we are currently reviewing almost 30 entries to the 2019 contest;

- ACB and the ADP have been principal advocates for AD before Congress, the FCC and the US Access Board. We were active in establishing the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act in 2010 and we continue to work toward an increase in AD on broadcast and cable television: as a member of FCC/Disability Advisory Committee Video Programming subcommittee, stressed the need to determine the substantive nature (if any) of visual information included with emergency announcements and how it might be described most effectively, emphasized the need for digitized information regarding broadcasts with AD, and lobbied for the establishment of multiple SAP channels;

- ongoing work with Martine Abel and Frederic Schroeder of the World Blind Union resulted in a landmark survey of member nations regarding the state of AD in their countries - the survey was distributed in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese and the final report is available at:

<http://acb.org/adp/docs/WBU-ACB%20%20AD%20Survey-FINAL%20REPORT.pdf>

- we worked with United Airlines on including AD with in-flight entertainment system;

- we're working with the Italy-based ADLAB PRO as a member of its evaluation committee, examining training programs for audio describers

- we consulted with several individuals on obtaining AD for cruise vacations—have developed and distributed a “white paper” on the state of description/access for blind passengers and cruises;

- ongoing work on developing a certification effort with the ACVREP (the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals)—produced a “white paper” on certification for distribution to the field for feedback and held two open conference calls as well as open sessions at the July 2018 ADP Conference and the August 2018 LEAD Conference – applications for membership on the initiative’s Subject Matter Expert Committee are currently being reviewed;

- the ACB publication *The Visual Made Verbal: A Comprehensive Training Manual and Guide to the History and Applications of Audio Description*—is now available as an audio book through the NLS, in text and MS WORD from the ACB Mini-Mall and has been published in Russian, Portuguese and Polish print versions (Spanish, French and Arabic versions are in early stages of development);

- we have collaborated on AD projects with the National Park Service including, most recently, the Uni Describe initiative focused on accessibility to NPS brochures and other materials.
- in St. Louis, in conjunction with the ADP Conference and the Institute, we screened an audio described film, “The Shape of Water” for approximately 65 attendees at the ACB Described Film Night screening;
- continued to earn income from Amazon.com fees associated with the purchase of DVDs on the ADP website--since 2009 and the inception of the ADP we’ve earned well over \$10,000; in 2018 alone: almost \$1,100;

And throughout the last decade:

- we partnered with the Smith-Kettlewell Eye Research Institute to conduct focus groups that were essential to the establishment of the Video Description Leadership Network and the UDescribe project;
- we are proud to have developed the first-ever audio described tour of The White House, voiced by the legendary blind announcer Ed Walker. We also produced live AD for each of the last three inauguration broadcasts on ABC;
- in September of 2017, we produced “The Eclipse Project”—live audio description of the total eclipse of the sun. The programs was broadcast on ACB Radio and many other outlets around the nation;
- the DC Aid Association for the Blind has generously supported several ADP-produced efforts: the first-ever audio described tour of the US Holocaust Memorial and Museum, description for the Washington, DC residency of Axis Dance Company, a unique collaboration with Arena Stage where we offered AD at every performance of two of Arenas major productions;
- we have also produced description for special media projects including live audio description for the ABC broadcasts of the 2016 and 2012 presidential inaugurations, the 30th anniversary DVD of “The Miracle Worker”, “War Against The Weak”, a feature film presented at the “disThis” film series in New York City, a film produced for the United Nations’ International Labour Organization in Geneva—“Count Me In!”, the Arts & Entertainment Network documentary “Barack Obama” and WETA’s “Mosque in Morgantown”;

- in 2010, the ADP produced a “guideline of guidelines”—a collection of AD best practices noted in AD guidelines produced around the world; it’s available on our website as is the first published paper on audio description: Gregory Frazier’s 1977 seminal “An All-Audio Narration of the Teleplay ‘The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman’.”

- finally it has been my honor to spread the word about the good work of the ADP, speak on audio description and train describers in more than 40 states and in over 60 countries—in the last twelve months domestically in Denver, Seattle, St. Louis, Iowa City, Minot, ND, New York City, Columbus, Houston, Austin, Venice, FL, Scranton and San Diego and internationally in Canada, China (Shanghai, Beijing and Hong Kong), Taiwan, S. Korea, Belgium, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, Cyprus, Israel, Morocco, Singapore, Brunei, and Germany.