

ACB's Audio Description Project (ADP) Our Tenth Year

by Joel Snyder, PhD, Director, ADP – July 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 over the past decade:

- The ADP Conferences: this conference is 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 -- 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".

- Beginning on Wednesday of this week, we will hold 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.

- Each year, we honor leaders in AD throughout the world with achievement awards in Media, Performing Arts, Museums/Visual Art/Visitor Centers and an International Achievement Award in addition to the Dr. Margaret Pfanstiehl Memorial Achievement Award in Research and Development and the Barry Levine Memorial Award for Career Achievement in Audio Description.
- What began as our Young Described Film Critic Contest has evolved into a major collaboration with the Described and Captioned Media, DCMP program—the BADIEs (Benefits of Audio Description in Education). These awards recognize blind kids who write reviews of described media, especially the accessible videos available through the DCMP.
- Our website really is the world's most through resource for information on audio description: we feature each week a wide range of articles on audio description, we maintain up-to-date listings of what television programs, which feature films and those DVDs which include AD; and you can order those DVDs through our collaboration with amazon.com. We also list theaters and museums throughout the United States that offer audio description. We maintain an active listserve discussion group, a Facebook page that has over 3,000 "likes" and a twitter feed.
- 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 the mandate for AD on broadcast and cable television.
- We also 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.
- 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 last year, 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, and currently we are developing an audio described tour of the Smithsonian Institution’s Insect Zoo at the National Museum of Natural History in conjunction with Dr. Francisco Lima, a blind professor of audio description in Recife, Brazil.
- We have also produced description for special media projects including 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”.
- The ADP is working closely with the World Blind Union to develop information on AD activity world-wide—we recently distributed a survey on AD to WBU members, made available on the web in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese.
- 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’.”
- We are currently actively partnering with the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals to build a certification program for audio description professionals.
- Last year, the ADP produced a white paper on accessibility via description on-board cruise ships; we are currently exploring ways to distribute the paper in an effort to build accessibility for blind cruise passengers.

- In 2014, the ACB published my book, *The Visual Made Verbal: A Comprehensive Training Manual and Guide to the History and Applications of Audio Description*. The book has been published in Portuguese, Polish and Russian and a Spanish version is currently in development in conjunction with the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

- 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 50 countries, most recently in Spain, Switzerland, Cyprus, Israel, Korea and China just over the last six months.