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For Immediate Release

Three Prestigious Awards Given During APH Annual Meeting

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (October 5, 2023) – American Printing House (APH) presented the Wings of Freedom, Horizon Award, and Navigator Award during APH’s 155th Annual Meeting. The event took place Wednesday, October 4, at an in-person ceremony at the Hyatt Regency Downtown Louisville.

Wings of Freedom - Larry Skutchan

The Wings of Freedom award is the highest honor presented by APH. The award is not annual, but given periodically, only as deserved. The Wings of Freedom award was established to honor individuals who have shown exemplary leadership in the blindness and low vision field. This year’s award will be presented to Larry Skutchan.

"This is not just a recognition of my work, but a testament to the collective efforts towards a more inclusive world. It underscores the importance of accessibility and the power of technology to break down barriers, enabling individuals with visual impairments to spread their wings and soar towards greater independence and opportunity," said Skutchan. "This award symbolizes the progress we have made in ensuring that blind individuals have the tools they need to thrive. To me, and to all blind people, it signifies the strides we've taken and the path forward toward a society where every barrier can be overcome, and every dream can be achieved."

Skutchan’s career has been a great example of innovation. In 1985, he started his career at APH as a Systems Programmer and created accessible educational software for the Apple computer. He created the Speaking Speller and the TexTalker screen reader for the Apple IIe computer. In his personal time, Larry created ProWORDS: a talking word processing program.

He later left APH, to fulfill his dream of writing some of the best accessible software on the market, Automatic Screen Access Program (ASAP) and Automatic Screen Access Program for Windows (ASAW). In 1998, Skutchan returned to APH as the Director of Technology Product Research, and was instrumental in shepherding a number of Windows apps, such as Talking Typer, Learn Keys, Talking Word Puzzles, and Studio Recorder.

Throughout the changing world of technology, Skutchan was part of the revolutionary development of several amazing products and apps, including but not limited to:

- The Book Port. (A handheld, portable device that allowed blind users to access digital talking libraries newspapers, magazines, and more.)
- Mobile Manger. (A handheld, portable device that allowed blind users to wirelessly download books.)
- BraillePlus 18. (The first Android braille notetaking/PDA)
- Nearby Explorer (An app that opened the doors for pedestrians and passengers who are blind to travel independently.)
- Orbit Reader 20TM. (A product that introduced braille cell technology in a low-priced, refreshable braille display and stand-alone reader.)
- BrailleBlaster. (A braille transcription program to help transcribers provide students who are blind with braille textbooks on demand.)
- Mantis Q40. (A Bluetooth® keyboard and 40-cell refreshable braille display.)
- Indoor Wayfinding. (An app that allows users to easily navigate businesses.)

Horizon Award - Deane Blazie

The Horizon Award recognizes individuals who continually pursue innovative ideas that result in the development of products designed to improve the quality of life for people who are blind or have low vision. This year's award will be presented to Deane Blazie.

"I feel incredibly honored and grateful to have been chosen by APH to receive the prestigious Horizon Award. This achievement would not have been possible without the guidance and support of my mentors, Tim Cranmer and Fred Gissoni, as well as the unwavering support from my friends and, of course, my wife Marty," said Blazie. "I hope that my story can serve as an inspiration to others, encouraging them to continue the mission of using technology to enhance the lives of individuals with visual impairments," said Blazie.

Blazie co-founded Maryland Computer Services (MCS) in 1976. The company specialized in software design for businesses. While there, MCS also designed and marketed the first synthetic speech device for the blind, the Talking Telephone Directory. MCS became the world's largest manufacturer of synthetic speech products and Braille printers.

Years later, he founded Blazie Engineering, which became the world's largest producer of products for the blind. In 1987, Blazie Engineering introduced the Braille 'n' Speak, a pocket note taker like today's Personal Digital Assistants. The Braille 'n' Speak, and other products produced by Blazie Engineering help the blind have greater access to information and with it, greater opportunity to reach their potential. Blazie is retired, but

still active as a consultant to numerous organizations of the blind and has served on several boards of directors and committees.

Navigator Award - Be My Eyes

The Navigator Award recognizes the collaborative efforts and partnerships necessary to remove barriers and provide pathways ensuring that individuals have full access to education and life. This year's award will be presented to Be My Eyes.

“This award is a true honor for Be My eyes and its community of seven million volunteers and users. Together APH and Be My Eyes are inventing new ways to connect blind youth and adults with caring people and humanistic technologies,” said Bryan Bashin, Be My Eyes Vice-Chair. “APH has been at the center of these values for generations. It gives us great pleasure to collaborate and design new ways to put powerful new tools in the hands of blind students in the years ahead.”

Be My Eyes is a free mobile app with one main goal: to make the world more accessible for blind and low-vision people. The app connects individuals who are blind or low vision with sighted volunteers and companies from all over the world through a live video call.

About American Printing House for the Blind

American Printing House for the Blind is a worldwide leader in designing innovative lifelong learning solutions for children and adults who are blind or low vision. In this fast-changing world, we believe in the power and necessity of learning to open the doors to educational success, satisfying employment, social inclusion, active citizenship, and personal well-being. We level the learning playing field by providing specialized technology, materials, products, and services that are essential for education and life. American Printing House for the Blind is headquartered at 1839 Frankfort Avenue in Louisville, Kentucky. For more information, please visit www.aph.org.

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