



The Sight-Loss Support Group of Central Pennsylvania, Inc.

Turning Darkness into Light Since 1982

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December 2019

MERRY CHRISTMAS

In the words of Helen Keller, "Christmas Day is the festival of optimism." The spirit of Christmas nurtures the best part of ourselves and the world, giving us hope that Peace on Earth may one day be more than a sweet dream. Christmas waves a magic wand over the world and gives us a glimpse of what is possible. Here are a few thoughts of Christmas to kindle our inner light at the darkest time of year. May the magic last.

May the joy of Christmas Day linger like a blessing in the hearts of all. And may the whole year be gladder, sweeter, brighter. - Unknown

May you never be too grown up to search the skies on Christmas Eve. - Unknown

Peace on earth will come to stay when we live Christmas every day. - Helen Steiner Rice

The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart. Wishing you happiness. - Helen Keller

2ND THURSDAYS SUPPORT GROUP MEETING

January Meeting, January 9th, 11:30 am-1:00 pm

We start off the New Year with a special speaker, Shelley Haupt, a Vision Rehabilitation Therapist from the Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services. We hope you'll join us for Shelley's 'show and tell' session of products and devices that help VIPs in their everyday lives.

Our 2nd Thursday's lunch group is held on the second Thursday of each month, rain, snow, or shine, at Mount Nittany Residences (301 Rolling Ridge Dr.) We have a simple lunch, share our stories and experiences, learn about services and resources, and offer support to one another. We're an informal group – sometimes we have a special speaker, sometimes not. Occasionally, we'll arrange a special event; a play, baseball game, or special tour. We hope to meet you soon.

VIEW VIA VOICE_SCHEDULE OF AUDIO-DESCRIBED EVENTS WINTER 2019/2020

Jersey Boys: Center for the Performing Arts (CPA), Tuesday, January 28, 2020, 7:30 PM, EISENHOWER AUDITORIUM, PSU.

Go behind the music and inside the story of Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons in the Tony and Grammy Award-winning true-life musical phenomenon, Jersey Boys. From the streets of New Jersey to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, this is the musical that's just too good to be true. Note: This show contains authentic "profane Jersey language" and is recommended for ages 12 and older. TICKETS ARE REQUIRED*; PLEASE RESERVE THE AD SERVICE BY JANUARY 14.

Carmen: Center for the Performing Arts (CPA), Sunday, March 29, 2020, 2:00PM, EISENHOWER AUDITORIUM, PSU.

Bizet's thrilling story of deadly obsession, Carmen seduces with an amazing array of instantly recognizable melodies and masterful arias beloved across the globe. An ordinary soldier becomes mesmerized by a beguiling factory girl with a plan. With its twisting tale of romance, deceit, and disaster set to magnetic music, Bizet's masterpiece has become one of the world's most popular operas.

This production, featuring sets from Atlanta Opera, includes Penn State School of Music students and alumni as principal singers and the Penn State Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Gerardo Edelstein. The artistic director of Penn State's Opera Theatre is Ted Christopher. Carmen will be performed in French with English supertitles. **TICKETS ARE REQUIRED*; PLEASE RESERVE THE AD SERVICE BY MARCH 15.**

Spamalot: Penn State Centre Stage, Saturday, April 4, 2020, 2:00 PM, PSU Playhouse Theatre.

We are excited to be returning audio-description to the Playhouse Theatre, with Centre Stage's presentation of Spamalot! This 2005 Tony winner for Best Musical is a hilarious musical comedy based on the iconic 1975 film, Monty Python and the Holy Grail. An absurdist farce of the musical theatre canon, Spamalot follows King Arthur in his quest throughout England to recruit his Knights of the Round Table. After gathering in Camelot, Arthur and his gang of misfits are sent on a quest to find the Holy Grail. Throughout this bizarre journey the group comes in contact with many challenges and characters that continue to test their strength and wits, neither of which are impressive. Spamalot is both a celebration and critique of the human condition. It is a glimpse into a society that seems to exist simultaneously in the Medieval Period as well as 2020. **TICKETS ARE REQUIRED and may be purchased through the theater online, or by calling 814-863-0255; Audio-description is available for the April 4th 2:00 PM matinee only. **PLEASE RESERVE THE AD SERVICE BY MARCH 21.****

Les Miserables: State High Thespians, Sunday April 5, 2020, 2:00PM, STATE COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM.

Set against the backdrop of 19th-century France, *Les Miserables* tells an enthralling story of broken dreams and unrequited love, passion, sacrifice and redemption — a timeless testament to the survival of the human spirit. Featuring the thrilling score and beloved songs “I Dreamed A Dream,” “On My Own,” “One Day More,” and many more, this epic and uplifting story has become one of the most celebrated musicals in theatrical history. TICKETS ARE REQUIRED (more info closer to the performance date); PLEASE RESERVE THE AD SERVICE BY MARCH 22.

**The Color Purple: Center for the Performing Arts (CPA),
Wednesday, April 15, 7:30 PM, EISENHOWER AUDITORIUM, PSU.**

The Color Purple is the 2016 Tony Award winner for Best Musical Revival! Hailed as “a direct hit to the heart” (*The Hollywood Reporter*), this joyous American classic conquered Broadway in an all-new “ravishingly reconceived production that is a glory to behold” (*The New York Times*). With a soul-raising, Grammy-winning score of jazz, gospel, ragtime, and blues, The Color Purple gives an exhilarating new spirit to this Pulitzer Prize-winning story. Don’t miss this stunning re-imagining of an epic story about a young woman’s journey to love and triumph in the American South. TICKETS ARE REQUIRED*; PLEASE RESERVE THE AD SERVICE BY APRIL 1.

**Hong Kong Ballet, Alice (in wonderland): April 24, 7:30 PM,
EISENHOWER AUDITORIUM, PSU.**

Get ready for a wild, wild ride down the rabbit hole! Bursting with energy and imagination, Septime Webre’s extravagant Alice (in wonderland) explodes with jaw-dropping excitement and fantasy. Marvel at the sleek and chic costumes, bold sets, and thrilling original score. This giddy, over-the-top reimagining of Lewis Carroll’s timeless tale promises exhilarating fun for all ages. Fasten your seatbelts, and join Hong Kong Ballet on a spectacular adventure overflowing with unexpected humor and unbridled passion. Hong Kong Ballet, founded in 1979, is one of the premier ballet companies in Asia. The company—with almost fifty dancers from Asia, Australia, Europe, and the United States—features a

repertoire combining classical masterpieces, admired contemporary works, and newly commissioned ballets. Webre, former artistic director of The Washington Ballet, joined Hong Kong Ballet as artistic director in 2017. TICKETS ARE REQUIRED*; PLEASE RESERVE THE AD SERVICE BY APRIL 10.

REMEMBER: The audio-description service is free, but reservations through the SLSG are required **AT LEAST TWO WEEKS IN ADVANCE.** On the night of the performance, please arrive in plenty of time to acquire your headset and go to your seat before the 15-minute pre-show description begins. Those with full-vision may also find the introduction and description helpful and interesting. Note that assistance with ticket costs is available for many performances. Please call the Sight-Loss Support Group of Central PA at (814) 238-0132 or email at office@smsg.org for reservations or for further information.

***Ticket Information for the PSU Center for the Performing Arts (CPA) at Eisenhower Auditorium:** Tickets are necessary and may be purchased by calling the CPA at (814)-863-0255 or (800)-ARTS-TIX. A limited number of complimentary tickets are available at the Eisenhower Auditorium for patrons with sight-loss and a guest through their Accessibility Program; phone Joi Loree McKenzie directly at the CPA at 814-865-5011 for SLSG client reduced tickets. The CPA's audio-described schedule can be easily viewed at <https://cpa.psu.edu/eventswithad>.

Tip: View the calendar page of the Sight-Loss Support Group's website (www.smsg.org/calendar) for more information on past and future events.

AIRA: VISION ON DEMAND

Aira (pronounced "I-rah") has made quite a debut on the access technology scene recently. Aira is a "visual interpreter for the blind", enabling users to explore the world in augmented ways using a fusion of technologies and services. The Aira service connects you directly to a live Aira agent who has been specially trained to assist people with vision loss.

Here's how Aira works. You wear smart glasses with miniaturized sensors and a wide-angle camera that pairs with a smart phone. You connect to an Aira agent using the Aira app and a Wi-Fi internet connection. Through the camera that is embedded in the glasses, the agent sees what you are looking at and talks with you via a bluetooth earpiece plugged into the smart phone. The agent works at a dashboard that draws upon GPS data and input from your surroundings to help you read text, describe the environment, and direct your movements.

Aira is an information service and navigation tool that allows you to travel independently while learning about your surroundings. The agent can give you detailed descriptions of buildings, landscapes, and people in the environment. If you want to know about a restaurant you're headed to for lunch, the agent can quickly access a Yelp review. Aira agents can read print menus, business cards, signs, and handwritten notes. They can even take photos and e-mail them to you. Aira can help you shop, do homework, or learn a new skill. Erich Mansar, who is legally blind from retinitis pigmentosa, recently ran the Boston marathon assisted by Aira. Some people have used Aira while bowling or experiencing Disneyland. The possibilities are endless, and users are discovering innovative ways to apply the Aira service every day.

There is a cost for using Aira through a monthly subscription service. Currently, the Standard Plan costs \$99 per month and gives you 120 minutes of assistance. The Advance Plan, at \$199 per month, offers 300 minutes. A new introductory plan offers 30 minutes of service for just \$20 a month. Each plan comes with bonus minutes for a three-month trial period. You'll find more information at the Aira website, www.aira.io or call 800-835-1934.

Launched in 2017, Aira is at the beginning of its existence. Over time, the cost of the product will most likely drop significantly. Currently, certain businesses, institutions, organizations, and public spaces offer free Aira service. This is a growing trend. Aira is exploring ways of making the service more affordable by looking into governmental subsidies and the possibility of securing insurance coverage for individuals.

Kirk Adams, CEO of the American Foundation for the Blind, says, "Whether the task at hand requires a sophisticated console or safely navigating a sprawling airport, it's clear that Aira's new technology represents a quantum leap in independence and accessibility for those with visual impairments." He believes Aira can "widen opportunities for employment, education, and enhanced quality of life."

In State College, Aira is available at Wegmans, the PA Military Museum, and AT&T. We'll keep you posted as this list expands.

HELPING THE BLIND SEE: THREE AMAZING DEVICES

In the last few years several devices have come on the market that enhance the vision of visually impaired individuals. Here's a quick look at each one.

IrisVision: This device is suitable for people with low vision that stems from macular degeneration, glaucoma, Stargardt's disease, and diabetic retinopathy. You must have some useable vision to use this device effectively. The cost is \$2,500.

This off-the shelf product consists of a Samsung virtual reality headset worn over glasses that connect with a Samsung Galaxy smart phone. As you look around, the phone's camera automatically focuses on what you are looking at whether it is close up or far away. The image is projected inside the headset, making it feel like you are looking at a large screen TV. You can increase the magnification up to 12X.

IrisVision is an FDA approved, Class I medical device that is being used in some optometrists' and ophthalmologists' practices as a low vision aid similar to a video magnifier. It is not recommended for walking, running, or driving.

ESight: This device is recommended for individuals with low vision that stems from macular degeneration, Stargardt's disease, retinitis

pigmentosa, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, retinal detachment and more. The cost is \$9,995.

This device is similar to IrisVision but it is designed specifically for people with low vision and comes with a higher price tag. Electronic glasses are equipped with two high-speed cameras and a video and computer processor mounted in front of each eye. High-resolution images are projected in real time in front of you. Images can be magnified up to 14X with reverse contrast capability. Prescription lens inserts are available. The product is FDA approved. Unlike IrisVision, you can be mobile with eSight – walking, playing sports, perhaps even driving (in the future).

Orcam MyEye and Orcam MyReader: Orcam is for individuals who cannot read printed materials. The cost is \$3,500 for OrCam MyEye and \$2,500 for OrCam MyReader.

OrCam does not enhance vision but recognizes text and objects and speaks aloud via a small earpiece. Two Orcam models are available. Orcam My Eye has more capabilities and can read text, recognize faces, and identify products. Orcam MyReader reads text only.

The device consists of a camera that can be mounted on most eyeglass frames and includes an earpiece. Using some basic hand gestures, the camera takes a photo of any text and then uses optical character recognition (OCR) to read the text aloud through a small earpiece. Orcam MyEye uses artificial intelligence to recognize faces and products. OrCam is battery operated, wireless, and does not require an internet connection.

These devices are expensive and at the beginning of their lifecycle. Be aware that companies will make improvements to these devices down the road, so your device may quickly be outdated. If you are thinking of purchasing a device be sure to investigate thoroughly - get hands-on experience with the equipment before your purchase and understand the learning curve involved. All this being said, IrisVision, eSight, and Orcam are exciting developments that hold great promise for helping low vision individuals enhance or regain some of their vision.

FELIZ NAVIDAD

The beloved Christmas song, "Feliz Navidad" by Jose Feliciano, is a big, bright, buoyant tune that simply wishes us Merry Christmas in Spanish and English. When Feliciano sings it, he spreads holiday joy with an earnestness that is contagious.

**Prospero ano y Felicidad
I want to wish you a Merry Christmas
from the bottom of my heart!!!**

Jose Feliciano, now 74, was the first crossover artist to blend English lyrics with Latin rhythms. Born in 1945 in Puerto Rico, Feliciano has been blind since birth. He moved with his family to Spanish Harlem in New York City when he was five years old. He was exposed to music from both the Spanish-speaking and English-speaking worlds. Feliciano was an early bloomer, playing professionally at a young age and signing a major recording contract by age 19. In 1968 he had a hit with his version of The Doors' "Light My Fire," which led to two Grammy Awards for Best Pop Song and Best New Artist of the Year.

Listen to "Feliz Navidad" this holiday season and catch the spirit of the season even if you don't quite know what "Prospero ano y Felicidad" means.

**WE WANT TO WISH YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS
FROM THE BOTTOM OF OUR HEARTS!!!**



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SECOND THURSDAYS SUPPORT GROUP MEETINGS

Dec 12 3rd Annual Christmas Party
Jan 9 Shelley Haupt, Vision Rehabilitation Therapist, BBVS
Feb 13 TBA
Mar 12 TBA
Apr 9 TBA

AUDIO-DESCRIBED PERFORMANCES

Jan 28 Jersey Boys
Mar 29 Carmen
Apr 4 Spamalot (PSU Theatre Dept)
Apr 5 Les Miserables (State College HS Thespians)
Apr 15 The Color Purple
Apr 24 Hong Kong Ballet, Alice (in Wonderland)

**Remember to check our website (www.slsg.org)
for announcements, updates, and further information, and to follow
“Sight-Loss Support Group of Central PA Inc” on Facebook.**

**THE OUTLOOK
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