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RAD INITIATIVE: REGIONAL ASSETS ARE FOR EVERYONE

Over the past year, the District has engaged assets, its citizen advisory board and the community in research and discussion about efforts to accommodate and to increase participation in asset activities by those with physical and cognitive disabilities.

This work has led to a new RAD initiative, Regional Assets Are for Everyone, which will highlight the efforts assets are making to include all people in their activities and encourage the assets to make additional accommodations.

According to the United States Census, just over 16% of Allegheny County’s population (ages five and older), or 179,000 people, have some type of a disability (such as sensory, physical, mental or emotional conditions) which makes it difficult for a person to function or participate in society; and, how the applicant communicates the applicant’s efforts in accessibility and inclusion, in-cluding: whether the organization has designated someone (full or part time or volunteer), to coordinate matters relating to accessibility; if its facili-ties meet accessibility requirements; if it has adopted other accommodations to promote inclu-sion; and, how the applicant communicates the accessible provisions of its facility/programs.

RAD has also partnered with the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council (GPAC) to create a working group to provide ongoing advice on accessibility issues. New in the third year of its accessibility initiative, GPAC provides workshops, training, networking and resources for arts and culture organizations. Visit GPAC’s webpage Increasing Accessibility in Pittsburgh Arts & Culture at pittsburghartscommission.org for more.

In just the last year, many assets (some using RAD funds) have made improvements to physical spaces to enhance accessibility, and launched efforts to make programming accessible and inclusive (ticketing, web site, audio or video description, assistive listening devices, program-ming for people with cognitive disabilities, etc.). An ongoing list of these efforts can be found on the RAD web site radworkshere.org under the “What’s Happening” tab.

City Theatre: What can we do for you?

The City Theatre Company of Pittsburgh is a leading example of an organization committed to improving accessibility.

“As a professional theater, we want to be as welcoming as possible, but ready with knowl-edge and capability,” said Kristin Link, Director of Education and Accessibility at City Theatre.

City Theatre’s broad-based commitment to accessibility originated a decade ago when the theater accepted an offer from VSA, the interna-tional organization on arts and disability, to be a clearinghouse in Pittsburgh for audio describing equipment for arts organizations. Audio descrip-tion helps to make the visual elements of per-formances, films, videos, multimedia products, museums, and exhibits accessible to people who are blind or have low vision. City Theatre houses the free audio description equipment, and then loans it out and provides training at no cost to other organizations. City Theatre is now also a clearinghouse for open-captioning for VSA.

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FINANCIAL UPDATE

SALES TAX COLLECTIONS EVEN WITH 2012

The District’s share of the county sales tax revenue for the first seven months of 2013 totals $50.2 million or even with the same period last year.

After losing ground for most of the year, revenue turned positive in June and July fueled by strong auto sales. Based on the trend, the District projected that it would meet its revenue target for this year and authorized release of all grants at their budgeted levels.

The District’s 2012 independent audit was completed in April. For the 18th consecutive year there were no management comments or negative findings.

Monthly budget updates, audits and annual reports are available at radworkshere.org.

RAD BOARD NEWS

Advisory Board Update

The District is pleased to welcome two new members of the Citizens Advisory Board. Marisa Bartley is Business Development Officer at Citizens Financial Group and is currently president of the Urban League Young Professionals - Greater Pittsburgh. Tom deMartini is an agent for State Farm in the Cheswick area. A former teacher and high school sports coach, he is active in a number of community organizations including the board of West Deer Emergency Medical Services.

Comments Requested

RAD is seeking comment on its grant pro-gram structure, which currently has three categories of funding: contractual, multi-year and annual. The five-year agreements with the nine existing contrac-tual assets expire at the end of 2014, so the District must decide whether to continue or to revise the grant program in its current structure. If you have a comment, please send it by August 31st to RAD Executive Director David Donahoe: dd@radworkshere.org or 425 Sixth Ave., Suite 1610, Pittsburgh PA 15219. Read more at radworkshere.org.
Regional Assets are for Everyone (Cont.)

Services now available at City Theatre include accessible seating, open captioning and audio-described performances, Braille and large print programs, assistive listening devices, and a web site page dedicated to accessibility information. This season they will present a production with American Sign Language.

City Theatre’s Link does emphasize that, particularly for small and mid-size arts organizations, lack of staff can be a significant barrier in implementing accommodations. For open-captioning, for example, it takes two days to get the script entered in the equipment, and then someone has to run the equipment during the show.

Pittsburgh Opera: Dedicated to outreach

“The Pittsburgh Opera is phenomenal at making creative arts performances meaningful for children with disabilities,” said Lynda Hedfors, chair of the Creative Arts Series at the Western PA School for Blind Children (WPSBC), whose school is designed for students with visual impairment, coupled with other serious cognitive and physical disabilities. “They created a fully interactive program and even left their Opera Trunk with us for the students to have tactile exploration of props and costumes before and after the show.”

“RAD is pleased to note and to congratulate the regional assets who are making special efforts to accommodate everyone,” said David L. Donahoe, Executive Director of the Regional Asset District. “Our goal in the Regional Assets are for Everyone project is to keep that effort moving forward by asking assets not only to devote time and resources, but also to inform the public about the opportunity to participate.”

Regional Asset Highlight

RADical Days 2013

Phipps Conservatory is one of dozens of organizations offering free admissions and performances during RADical Days 2013, RAD’s annual celebration of the assets. Go to radworkshere.org for details!