



St. Louis Arts & Entertainment  
Presents

# Exploring St. Louis from a Blind Perspective

By Stephen Kissel

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St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind

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## **Introduction**

In the Spring of 2009, the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind began a project to stimulate awareness and creativity among local museums and cultural venues in reference to making their exhibits and attractions accessible and engaging for patrons who may be either blind or visually impaired. These efforts not only resulted in a re-assessment and appraisal of present accommodations, but they also led to many new partnerships between the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind and local venues in order to develop new opportunities for blind and visually impaired individuals to experience history, theater, science, astronomy, wildlife, recreation, and the arts. It was soon realized that our investigations yielded a plethora of information and insights that sight-impaired individuals would likely find invaluable when exploring St. Louis and its many attractions, information that surpasses what is typically provided online. As a result, in order to benefit the blind and visually impaired residents and visitors to the St. Louis area, we have compiled our findings into one comprehensive St. Louis Arts and Entertainment Guide, written from the perspective of a blind individual.

Being totally blind myself, and having been visually impaired (low-vision) for the first seventeen years of my life, I have tried to offer a fair assessment of the major tourist and cultural attractions in St. Louis from a sight-impaired individual's perspective. This information has been gathered over the past three years through personal collaboration with visitor services departments and by experiencing attractions and accommodations first-hand. In my reviews, I analyze current accommodations that are geared specifically towards people with visual impairments; I cover current developments for future services, and I highlight many features of the facilities which, though not specifically designed for sight-impaired individuals, do, nonetheless, enhance the overall experience of a blind patron. I have tried to be realistic in my judgment, and if certain precautions arose during my investigation that should be taken into account by sight-impaired individuals, I have made every effort to properly address them.

I do hope readers will find this guide informative and enlightening about the many opportunities that exist for blind or visually impaired individuals in St. Louis. The St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind has always believed in promoting personal independence, community involvement, and employability among blind and visually impaired individuals, and we hope our efforts in this project will continue to encourage and inspire sight-impaired individuals to explore new avenues of entertainment and cultural enrichment.

Best Regards,

Stephen Kissel

St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind

## Getting Around

If it becomes necessary for interested readers to procure their own means of transportation to a given destination, below is a compiled list of popular modes of public transportation to assist in getting around. Remember to have exact change, to tip cab drivers, and to check how late these services run when planning a trip.

Metro's Call-A-Ride service: a door to door service for residents with a proven disability. Residents may sign up and book rides by calling one of the following numbers.

(888) 652-3617

(314) 652-3617

Metro Bus and Metro Link: St. Louis' City and County bus services and light rail system.

<http://www.metrostlouis.org>

Missouri Phone: (314) 231-2345

Illinois Phone: (618) 271-2345

E-mail: [transitinformation@metrostlouis.org](mailto:transitinformation@metrostlouis.org)

Forest Park Trolley Service:

<http://www.slfpc.com/ForestPark.html>

a summer-time trolley that makes regular rounds from the DeBaliviere Metro Link station and major locations around Forest Park

Frequency: Trolley's depart from their regular route stops every twenty minutes

Pricing: One Trolley ticket is valid for the entire day for as many rides as is necessary. Adults ride for \$2.00 while individuals with disabilities, children under thirteen years of age, and senior citizens ride for \$1.00. Children under five years of age ride for free.

Hours of operation: Runs daily through September 28, 2014 from 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Special Summer Hours: Memorial Day Weekend through Labor Day, 9:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Special Muny Hours: For all Muny performances, the Trolley will have additional extended hours, making runs every twenty minutes between the Forest Park DeBaliviere Metro Link Station and the Muny from 7:00 p.m. to 8:42 p.m. and again from 9:22 p.m. to 11:28 p.m.



Popular Local Taxi services:

*Laclede Cab Company*

(314) 652-3456

*St. Louis County Cab/Yellow Cab Company*

(314) 991-5300

## **SECTION 1: THEATRICAL VENUES**

### **Descriptive Video Service at the Movies**

Descriptive Video Service for the blind may be found at the following AMC movie theaters in the St. Louis metropolitan area.

AMC West Olive 16 Cinema

12657 Olive Street

Creve Coeur, MO 63141

(314) 205-9800

AMC Chesterfield 14 Cinema

291 Chesterfield Mall

Chesterfield, MO 63017

(636) 532-7326, extension 0

AMC Creve Coeur 12 Cinema

10465 Olive Boulevard

Creve Coeur, MO 63141

(314) 994-0946

AMC Showplace 12 Cinema

6633 Center Grove Road

Edwardsville, IL 62025

(618) 659-7479

Nearly all screening rooms in each of these four theaters are equipped with this adaptive technology. To verify showtimes and to double-check the availability of Descriptive Video Service, please call the customer service numbers provided above. For blind individuals who may be traveling independently, the West Olive 16 cinema, Creve Coeur 12 cinema, and Showplace 12 Cinema will provide the most ideal setting, for cab and bus services will be able to pull directly up to the main entrance, and the individual will avoid having to first navigate through a large mall in order to reach the theater. Each cinema possesses an ample supply of well-maintained wireless headsets for this service which may be picked up free of charge from the customer service desk, located immediately inside the main entrance. Be sure to check that they are the headsets for Descriptive Video Service (for the blind) and not the headsets used for audio enhancement (for the hearing impaired). Please also note that Descriptive Video Service is not provided for the previews of coming attractions. Therefore, technical mishaps, though rare, will not be easily detectable until the feature presentation itself has officially started. The staff attendants at customer service should be able to confirm whether the headset has been fully charged, minimizing chances of technical difficulties.

For those who have never experienced Descriptive Video Service before, these professionally recorded audio descriptions, created by the WGBH Media Access Group in Boston, Massachusetts, are designed to immerse the listener in a wide variety of visual components featured in mainstream movies. This adds an invaluable component to a blind individual's cinematic experience, allowing the listener to take in the scenery, visual design, actions, screen credits, and unique cinematography of the movie. Additionally, as more and more films are released in a 3D format, WGBH has increasingly incorporated descriptions of these optical illusions into their scripts, always striving to assist the listener in experiencing the motion picture to its fullest potential. Furthermore, the descriptions have been painstakingly synchronized with the film so that the descriptions do not compete with dialogue or the overall fluidity of the film.



## **Powell Hall**

St. Louis Symphony

718 North Grand Boulevard

St. Louis, MO 63103

(314) 533-2500

<http://www.stlsymphony.org>

### **Rating of Accessibility (out of 5 stars)**

Overall Rating: 5 stars

- Accessibility by Metro's bus routes: 5 stars
- Usher Staff: 5 stars
- Availability and Quality of Live Descriptive Audio: not applicable
- Quality of experience if visiting unaccompanied: 5 stars
- Non-visual experience of group tours: 5 stars (untested by this author)

This evaluation was last updated on July 1, 2014 by Stephen Kissel, Blind Community Enrichment Associate for the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind, with the assistance of Mrs. Cynthia Schon, Facilities Manager for Powell Hall.

Attending a performance at Powell Hall is an absolutely amazing experience. The building's acoustics complement the high degree of musical talent within the St. Louis Symphony, and seasonal concerts exhibit a diverse array of works by a variety of composers, ranging from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart to George Gershwin to film composer John Williams. Blind and visually impaired visitors will find the Powell Hall staff extremely accommodating, the facility relatively easy to navigate, and the musical performance immensely impressive. The readily available usher staff enables a blind or visually impaired visitor to navigate the facility confidently and with minimal difficulty. Additional accommodations such as Braille signage and downloadable program notes provide visitors with easily accessible information about the facility's performances, services, and amenities. However, the auditory splendor of the orchestral performances, without a doubt, remains the Symphony's most enticing quality for both sighted and non-sighted patrons.

The first advantage to visiting Powell Hall is its close proximity to public transportation. Cabs, Metro's Call-A-Ride service, and other sighted drivers are able to drop off passengers directly in front of the main entrance. For those utilizing Metro services, the number 70 bus has

a stop immediately outside Powell Hall, as well as at the connecting Grand Avenue Metro Link Station, located one and a half miles south.

Upon arriving at the hall, there are ushers at several major points inside and outside of the building which make it very easy to solicit assistance to find one's way into, around, and out of the facility. Often, the ushers are waiting on the sidewalk as patrons disembark from their vehicles, and they are prompt to check on patrons during intermission and after the performance if requested. The ticket window is also conveniently located straight inside the main entrance. Although sighted assistance is necessary to locate one's designated seat, the logical and straightforward layout of the facility can enable a blind or visually impaired individual to navigate the facility independently if given clear directions. Braille signage on restrooms and in the elevator further increase the potential for independent travel. However, the hallways can become especially crowded after the performance as everyone funnels in a mass movement towards the exits. As a result, it is advisable for blind or visually impaired individuals to solicit sighted assistance when exiting the theater. Due to the moderate lighting in the auditorium, all low-vision individuals should always bring their canes to Powell Hall, minimizing any potential problems in navigating large congested crowds.

If a sight-impaired individual is interested in attending a performance at Powell Hall but cannot afford the regularly priced tickets, many available discount options make attending a symphony at Powell Hall very affordable for everyone. Individual student tickets are available for \$10.00 (Premium Orchestral Series) and \$25.00 (Live at Powell Hall Series) with proof of a valid student ID. Thanks to the generosity of the St. Louis Symphony, a limited number of complimentary ticket vouchers are available annually through the St. Louis Society for the Blind and Visually Impaired. These are also on a first come, first serve basis. Interested individuals may reserve up to two complimentary tickets by calling the St. Louis Society for the Blind at 314-968-9000.

Occasionally during certain performances, the Symphony utilizes footage on a large movie screen in order to enhance the musical performance. For example, highlights from the 2014-2015 Live at Powell Hall series will include *The Godfather*, *Gladiator*, *Pixar in Concert*, and *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*. All will feature a screening of the above-mentioned movie with the St. Louis Symphony providing the live film score. Descriptive audio will not be offered for these performances, and low-vision individuals may wish to bring binoculars or a monocular, depending on the location of their seat. The auditory presentation, however, surpasses anything heard in a modern cinema. Hearing the film score performed live really gives the listener a deeper appreciation for the talent and coordination that is involved in recording music for a motion picture. Blind patrons will enjoy this auditory sensation just as much as any sighted patron.

As one will quickly discover, there are no bad seats in the house from an auditory perspective, though the top-most balcony seats could easily be considered prime auditory seats. However, guide dog users will wish to take extra precaution in selecting a seat when purchasing tickets. Most rows of seats are not spacious enough to accommodate service animals, but if the individual were to request an aisle seat or a seat in a wheel chair section, the individual will find that such arrangements work best for one's four-legged companion.

Before visiting, be sure to check out the St. Louis Symphony's accessible and well-organized website. Here, patrons will find a calendar of events for the current season, sound clips of signature pieces, and other online amenities that will render the visitor well informed and well-prepared for their trip to Powell Hall. Concert programs, for example, may easily be obtained in advance in a blind-friendly format through the Symphony's website. Within a week of the performance, the Symphony posts downloadable pdf documents of the basic program information (minus extra media such as advertisements). These documents are very accessible through screen enlarging software and through OCR software, such as Kurzweil or Open Book. For visitors with low vision, the Symphony maintains a small supply of large print programs (also omitting additional information such as ads), and inquiries of their ability may be made to any usher. As the house lights only produce moderate lighting, if a low-vision individual believes that he or she may require better lighting by which to read their program, that individual would be well-advised to bring a small flashlight, providing of course that that person does not use said flashlight during the performance, as this can be very distracting to other sighted patrons in attendance.

Before the performance or during intermission, visitors may wish to purchase refreshments at one of two bars: one located on the ground floor, just off of the main lobby and another located on the lower terrace. Both bars offer large-print menus upon request, and visitors will find the staff extremely accommodating, willing to assist a patron by whatever means are necessary in order to make the individual's experience positive and enjoyable.

Originally conceived as a movie house, Powell Hall is adorned with an elegant architecture, design, and history. Group tours of ten or more people are available free of charge upon request, allowing both sighted and non-sighted visitors to take in the building's rich history, grand décor, and typical back stage activity. The facility's flexibility on group sizes allows tour guides to adjust their presentation to suit the needs and interests of a particular individual or small group.

The hall's friendly and accommodating service, coupled with the impeccable performance by the professional orchestra, will be sure to make a visit to Powell Hall a truly memorable experience.

For specific details regarding performance times and ticket prices, please call the Powell Hall box office at (314) 534-1700.

For further inquiries, please contact:

Mrs. Cynthia Schon, Facilities Manager for Powell Hall

**Phone:** (314) 286-4104

**E-mail:** [cynthias@stlsymphony.org](mailto:cynthias@stlsymphony.org)

## **The Fabulous Fox Theater**

527 North Grand Boulevard

St. Louis, MO 63103

(314) 534-1678

<http://www.fabulousfox.com>

### **Rating of Accessibility (out of 5 stars)**

Overall Rating: 4.9 stars

- Accessible by Metro's bus routes: 4.5 stars
- Usher Staff: 4.75 stars
- Availability and Quality of Live Descriptive Audio: 5 stars
- Quality of experience if visiting unaccompanied: 5 stars
- Non-visual experience of group tours: 5 stars

This evaluation was last updated on June 17, 2014 by Stephen Kissel, Blind Community Enrichment Associate for the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind, with the assistance of Ms. Aleece Vogd, Director of Visitor Services at the Fabulous Fox Theater, Ms. Karen Cullen, the Fox's Multi-Media Designer, and Ms. Angie Yorke, the Lighthouse's Blind Community Enrichment Programs Manager.

St. Louis' Fabulous Fox Theater is one of the city's great cultural and theatrical treasures. Originally conceived in the 1920's as a movie house, the Fox now serves as a professional theater and concert venue that sponsors performances of touring Broadway musicals, acclaimed entertainers, and top-rated concerts. The facility's close proximity to Metro stops and its well-trained team of hospitable ushers make accessing and navigating the theater very manageable for blind or visually impaired individuals. Furthermore, additional accommodations such as the regular offering of live descriptive audio and the increased accessibility of the Fox's website further enhance blind and visually impaired patrons' enjoyment and appreciation for Fox performances.

For individuals relying on public transportation, there are multiple options for reaching the Fox Theater. Cabs, Metro's Call-A-Ride service, and other sighted drivers are able to make stops directly in front of the theater's main entrance. Metro's Number 70 bus also has a stop on the opposite side of Grand Boulevard, just outside Powell Hall. This leaves theater patrons with only a two block southward walk to the Fox. Assistance may be necessary in order to safely cross Grand Boulevard, but in all other aspects, the route is very straight-forward.

Navigating the theater is relatively simple, thanks to audio cues and the ability to easily solicit sighted assistance. Upon entering the Fox, the sound of the beeping ticket scanners help to guide sight-impaired individuals in the correct direction, and the bustle of activity in the main lobby enables blind and visually impaired individuals to quickly inquire about locating an usher. Ushers are stationed at key locations throughout the facility, and they are eager to offer whatever assistance may be necessary. Upon request, ushers will return to the individual's seat if further Sighted Guide assistance is desired during intermission or after the conclusion of the performance. This can be especially helpful after the final curtain call when everyone funnels in a mass movement towards the exit. Since crowds are especially dense during this particular time, it is highly advisable for sight-impaired individuals to solicit Sighted Guide assistance from an usher or other sighted companion when exiting the theater. As the auditorium is moderately lit, low-vision individuals should always bring their canes in order to safely and efficiently navigate the facility.

If traveling independently, the elevator on stage left (the right side as one faces the stage) provides the easiest way to access the upper and lower balconies, as it is situated just off of the north end of the main lobby. The hallways tend to have a fairly logical layout, and a blind or visually impaired individual should be able to navigate them reasonably well if given clear instructions by an usher or sighted individual. Many of the rows of seats do not have enough leg room to accommodate a guide dog. Therefore, when purchasing tickets, guide dog users should be sure to request a seat on an aisle or in a wheel chair section. Both options work much better to accommodate service animals.

Currently, the Fox does not offer programs in blind-accessible formats (i.e. large-print, Braille, or downloadable digital copy). Low vision individuals may wish to bring a flashlight and magnifying glass to more closely examine their program, but this can get somewhat complicated to properly juggle one's program, flashlight, and magnifying glass at the same time. Totally blind individuals who may be fortunate enough to own a pocket scanner should be able to scan a clear copy. Headphones are strongly recommended if talking pocket scanners are to be used. Also, if flashlights are utilized, these should be turned off during the performance so as not to disturb other nearby theater patrons. If such technological solutions are not available or practical, a sighted companion should be able to easily relay the important information from their own program.

The Fox's seasons offer a wide selection of shows that should appeal to all age groups. Broadway favorites, including *Wicked*, *The Lion King*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *The Book of Mormon*, and *Les Misserables*, have all appeared on the Fox stage, many of which have returned multiple times by popular demand. Renowned musicians and entertainers, including Celtic Woman, Radio City Music Hall's Rockettes, comedian Bill Cosby, and story teller Garrison Keillor, have also toured at the Fabulous Fox Theater to great acclaim. The music, the singing, and even the tap dancing are incredible to witness from an auditory perspective.

To take in the equally impressive visual aspects of the performance, blind and visually impaired visitors have two options. If a patron still has an adequate degree of usable sight, binoculars or monoculars will yield a slightly better view of the stage, but this may vary, depending on the location of one's seat. If such strategies are still not sufficient, the Fabulous Fox Theater is pleased to announce the continued seasonal offering of live descriptive audio for the blind for all US Bank Broadway series musicals. The described performances can

accommodate up to thirty blind or visually impaired patrons per show and will be offered at the second Friday evening performance of each run, the same performance at which the signing for the deaf is offered. Those familiar with the descriptive audio service at the Muny will note the same high quality of audio description at Fox performances, thanks to a small team of committed describers and state-of-the-art equipment that deliver the service with remarkable clarity. The descriptions offer a new level of enjoyment and appreciation to the musical performance by helping the listener to visualize the impressive and meticulously coordinated array of sets and costumes, lighting and special effects, and choreography of professional Broadway Theater. They also alert the listener to key non-verbal actions, movements, and expressions that allow the blind patron to more easily follow the story's chain of events. Further details on the specific show titles, dates, and times of described Fox performances may be found under the "ADA Accessibility" link on the Fox's homepage.

As an added incentive and to aid those who may not be able to afford regularly-priced Fox tickets, blind or visually impaired individuals interested in attending a described Fox musical have the option to purchase up to two half-priced tickets for all described performances through the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind, thanks to the Lighthouse's generous support of the program. This offer applies to any seating section. Tickets reserved through the Lighthouse will be available for pick-up at the Fox's indoor box office window the day of the performance. Although described performances are not presently scheduled for the Fox's off-series musicals, the service may be requested by contacting the Fox's Visitor Services Department.

As the Fabulous Fox Theater used to serve as an old movie palace, the facility itself is equally as impressive as the shows that perform there. Weekly group tours are offered at 10:30 a.m. on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. These tours provide an excellent opportunity for blind and visually impaired individuals to explore the building's elaborate decor and fascinating history. All tours depart from the box office and explore many of the key locations inside the theater, including the main lobby, amphitheater, on stage and back stage areas, the old screening room, and a hallway commemorating the many stars and shows that have appeared on the Fox's stage. Access to the on stage and back stage areas depends on whether the stage is in use by a visiting show, but the rest of the tour remains the same throughout the year. The guides are both informative and descriptive, and visitors are at liberty to ask to carefully touch anything within arm's reach, allowing blind and visually impaired individuals to more fully comprehend and appreciate the ornate design of the theater. Saturday tours feature an extra treat that will be enjoyed by both sighted and non-sighted visitors, for the tour includes a live performance on one of the theater's original Wurlitzer organs. Once again, this is under the stipulation that the stage and orchestra pit are not being used by a visiting show. All around, the tour is an amazing experience, regardless of a visitor's vision status, and the price of admission is very affordable, costing only five dollars during the week and eight dollars on Saturdays.

In recent years, the Fox's web design team has made significant improvements to the theater's website's compatibility with screen reading and screen enlarging software by clarifying and reformatting the site's alternative text and pop-up menus. Additionally, any pop-up videos, particularly those found on the homepage have been either adjusted or eliminated altogether, so as not to impair the ease of navigation by Jaws for Windows users. Regrettably, the absence of headings will make navigating the website slightly tedious for Jaws users, but

these recent changes over the past years have nevertheless drastically improved the ability of blind and sight impaired computer users to independently and efficiently navigate the website.

St. Louis is very fortunate to have such a terrific theatrical venue, and individuals with an interest and appreciation for theatrical and musical performances will find their visit to the Fabulous Fox Theater a truly unique and phenomenal experience.

Basic information regarding show times and ticket prices may be obtained by calling Metrotix at (314) 534-1111.

For any questions regarding the services listed above, please contact Ms. Aleece Vogd, Director of Visitor Services at the Fox Theater.

Phone: (314) 657-5049

E-mail: [aleecev@foxstl.com](mailto:aleecev@foxstl.com)

To reserve a pair of half-priced tickets, please contact:

Ms. Angie Yorke, Blind Community Enrichment Programs Manager for the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind

Phone: (314) 423-4333, extension 132

E-mail: [ayorke@lhbindustries.com](mailto:ayorke@lhbindustries.com)



## **The Muny**

Municipal Theater Association of St. Louis

The Muny, Forest Park

St. Louis, MO 63112

(314) 361-1900

<http://www.muny.org>

### **Rating of Accessibility (out of 5 stars)**

Overall Rating: 4.75 stars

- Accessible by Metro's bus routes: 5 stars
- Usher staff: 5 stars
- Availability and Quality of Live Descriptive Audio: 5 stars
- Quality of experience if visiting unaccompanied: 4 stars
- Non-visual experience of group tours: 5 stars

This evaluation was last updated on June 5, 2014 by Stephen Kissel, Blind Community Enrichment Associate for the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind, with the assistance of Mr. Sean Smith, Director of Operations and Facilities for the St. Louis Muny and Ms. Diane Church, the Muny's Director of Group Sales and Special Events.

For over ninety years, the staff and players at the St. Louis Muny have provided the residents of the St. Louis metropolitan area with a lively and professional summer season of Broadway musicals which have been thoroughly enjoyed by both sighted and non-sighted audiences. This outdoor theater, located in Forest Park, boasts an impressive array of accommodating services, including a well-trained and personable team of ushers, Braille and large-print concession stand menus, affordable seating, intriguing and interactive backstage tours, and an assertive and detailed descriptive audio service. These amenities make the Muny a perfect summer night outing for a blind or visually impaired person with a love of musicals.

The Muny's accessibility through public transportation routes has greatly improved over the past year. The nearest public transportation stop to the Muny is a Metro Link station on DeBaliviere, but thanks to Metro's Summer Trolley service in Forest Park, visitors relying on public transportation can be conveniently shuttled from the Metro station to the Muny's main entrance and box office. In addition to the trolley's normal summer hours (9:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.), trolley services are extended during the Muny's summer season to specifically

accommodate Muny patrons arriving and departing from the theater. For further details, please see the “Getting Around” section at the beginning of this guide.

Other options for reaching the Muny include Metro’s Call-A-Ride service, local cab companies, and other sighted drivers. Like the Metro Trolley, all three of these modes of transportation will be able to let passengers off within a reasonable walking distance of the main entrance and ticket window. Adventurous explorers can also take the south-bound Number 90 bus from the DeBaliviere station to the History Museum. From this point the individual will still have about a 0.7 mile walk to the main entrance to the Muny. This is not the simplest or most direct route, and if other means of transportation are available, this route should be considered a last resort for sight-impaired individuals.

After reaching the Muny by whatever means are available, there are ushers waiting at the entrance area who may assist the person in locating the ticket window. From this point, an usher can be paged to escort the individual to his or her seat. Sean Smith, the Muny’s Director of Operations and Facilities, expects a high caliber from the performance of his ushers, and it shows when an individual witnesses the service first-hand. Not only are the Muny’s ushers extremely friendly and considerate, but they will go the extra mile to ensure that visitors have a pleasant experience. One will have no trouble soliciting sighted guide assistance in finding one’s seat, and, if requested, ushers will return to check on visitors during intermission and after the final curtain call.

The Muny also has a well-developed team of volunteers that provides live audio description for the blind during every Monday night performance. Descriptions are generally extremely informative, giving the listener a thorough explanation of the sets, costumes, choreography, and other actions visible on stage. In addition, the listener is also given a pre-show description which relates basic information found in the individual’s program and describes some of the major set pieces used in the performance. By relaying such key pieces of information ahead of time, the describers provide accurate and thorough descriptions that enhance rather than detract from the actual performance. Descriptions are received through a wireless headset which may be checked out at the souvenir stand with a valid photo ID card or driver’s license. Thanks to the purchase in 2013 of a new FM transmitter, these receivers should be able to pick up a clear signal throughout roughly half of the amphitheater, and individuals may request seating within these closer sections of seats when purchasing tickets. The closer one sits to the right-most sections (as you face the stage), the clearer the reception will be. These precautions should minimize or eliminate any potential problems with the listening devices.

The Muny has been very generous each season in donating a fixed number of tickets for all Monday night performances to the St. Louis Society for the Blind and Visually Impaired. These complimentary tickets are available in pairs (to accommodate a sighted companion) on a first come, first serve basis and may be obtained by calling the St. Louis Society for the Blind at 314-968-9000. This section of seats not only sits well within the desired range of the audio transmitter, but it also sits very close to the station where the listening devices are obtained, adding to the convenience of the service. This standing arrangement between the Muny and the St. Louis Society for the Blind has been deeply appreciated, and it enables blind patrons who cannot always afford full-priced Muny tickets to enjoy a theatrical performance of professional quality. Additionally, the Muny continues to reserve the top-most 1500 seats as free and open to the public. All seating sections are spacious enough to accommodate patrons with guide dogs,

but requesting an aisle seat when purchasing tickets is still recommended so as not to disrupt the easy flow of traffic into and across the aisles.

As in previous years, the Muny's concession stand is equipped with a team of friendly and accommodating vendors, as well as Braille and large-print menus, allowing blind or visually impaired individuals to place an informed and timely order without presenting an inconvenience to other hungry patrons. If the individual is not able or does not have the time to locate the concession stand, vendors make regular rounds through the various seating sections before the performance and during intermission, and they do an adequate job of making themselves heard, so they are very easy to locate.

For groups of twenty or more ticket holders, the Muny offers backstage tours before every performance. Thanks to recent efforts by the Group Tours and Special Events department, these tours have been given a complete make-over, so as to make the content and format more accommodating and engaging for blind or visually impaired group members. The script itself is more descriptive, and the guides utilize an expanding array of tactile-visual components to allow both sighted and non-sighted visitors a closer look at the amazing sets and costumes created for Muny productions. These tours provide a fascinating opportunity to go behind the scenes and to discover what it takes to design, rehearse, and execute a professional theatrical production. The guides possess a wealth of intriguing facts about Muny performances and Muny history, and they are eager to answer any questions. Although the tour is only fifteen or twenty minutes long, the guides work hard to ensure that the experience is enjoyable and memorable for all in attendance. The tour concludes on the very stage of the Muny itself, an experience not to be missed. To arrange for a group tour, please contact Dianne Church, the Muny's Director of Group Sales and Special Events, using the contact information provided at the end of this entry.

A full description of all services and amenities may be found on the Muny's website. While browsing the web pages, visitors have the ability to also view programs from current and previous seasons which are made available in a pdf format. These program notes are posted by opening night, enabling both sighted and non-sighted individuals to explore basic information about the upcoming shows, its actors, and musical selections. Although a visually impaired individual should have no problem viewing these program notes, a blind individual will have to first translate the graphical images of the programs pages into plain text using either the Kurzweil or Open Book software. Overall, the site remains very accessible to screen reading and screen enlarging software, making it very easy for a blind or visually impaired individual to plan their visit and to obtain information about upcoming performances.

The St. Louis Muny remains America's largest outdoor theater, and its sizable group of committed actors, crew members, and other staff work hard to provide patrons with exceptional productions. Furthermore, the available services such as a rich collection of online programs, a thorough descriptive audio service, and a collection of very accessible staff and crew make the Muny a prime resource for any blind or visually impaired individual who may be interested in attending, learning about, or becoming involved in theatrical productions. Whatever one's reason may be for visiting the Muny, it is bound to be a memorable experience and should be strongly recommended to anyone with an interest in theatrical and musical performances.

For specific details regarding show times and ticket prices, please call Metrotix at: (314) 534-1111.

For any further questions, please contact:

Mr. Sean Smith, Director of Operations and Facilities at the St. Louis Muny

Phone: (314) 361-1900, extension 310

E-mail: [ssmith@muny.org](mailto:ssmith@muny.org)

For questions pertaining to backstage group tours, please contact Ms. Dianne Church, Director of Group Sales and Special Events.

Phone: (314) 361-1900, extension 308

E-mail: [dchurch@muny.org](mailto:dchurch@muny.org)

## **SECTION 2: OUTDOOR VENUES**

### **The St. Louis Zoo**

One Government Drive

St. Louis, MO 63110

(314) 781-0900

<http://www.stlzoo.org>

#### **Rating of Accessibility (out of 5 stars)**

Overall Rating: 3.75 stars

- Accessible by Metro's bus routes: 4 stars
- Availability of docent-led tours upon request: 5 stars (untested by this author)
- On-site docents and staff: 5 stars
- Ease of visibility of featured attractions: 3 stars
- Tactile and auditory components: 3 stars (under further evaluation)

This evaluation was last updated on June 5, 2014 by Stephen Kissel, Blind Community Enrichment Associate for the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind, with the assistance of Ms. Louise Bradshaw, the Zoo's Director of Education, and Mr. Wyndel Hill, Vice President of Internal Relations for the St. Louis Zoo.

Although a visit to the zoo tends to be a rather visual experience, the St. Louis Zoo should not immediately be discarded by blind or visually impaired individuals when selecting a day trip. Remaining one of only three large-scale zoos in the nation to offer free general admission to the public, the St. Louis Zoo houses a wide variety of wild and exotic animals and offers an entertaining selection of shows, exhibits, and attractions. The wide availability of the docents and a small selection of tactile and auditory components help to improve a blind or visually impaired visitor's experience, but sighted assistance remains vital within this spacious and very visual tourist attraction.

If traveling by public transportation, blind and visually impaired visitors will find the St. Louis Zoo relatively accessible. The Number 90 Metro bus stops at Government and Fine Arts Drive, placing pedestrians about a hundred yards west of the Living World entrance. A more detailed set of walking directions from the bus stop to the Living World entrance will need to be obtained in order to properly orient the sight-impaired individual if traveling independently.

Metro's Call-A-Ride service, Metro's Forest Park Summer Trolley service, cabs, and other sighted drivers will be able to bring passengers right up to the north and south entrances. However, the extensiveness of the zoo's grounds and the scarcity of blind-friendly way finding amenities present several orientation and mobility obstacles to blind travelers. In the case of the railroad crossings, these navigational difficulties can present a potential safety hazard. As a result, blind and visually impaired individuals should not attempt to navigate the Zoo unaccompanied.

If a sight-impaired individual cannot acquire a sighted companion, it is possible to arrange in advance for a docent to aid in the individual's exploration of the Zoo. As a courtesy to the staff and volunteers, it is preferred that the Zoo receive two weeks advanced notice of a request for this service. This will allow the docent to properly prepare a tour that will be as interesting and meaningful for the blind or visually impaired individual as possible.

As many of the animals are featured in a recreation of their natural habitats, it can often be difficult for low-vision individuals to spot them. Binoculars and monoculars can sometimes improve the chances of a low-vision individual being able to catch glimpses of the wildlife, but this varies greatly, depending on proximity and the animal's ability to camouflage itself with its surroundings. Although most of the signage contains large print and high-contrast colors, it may still be advisable, as a precaution, for a low-vision individual to bring some kind of magnifying device for use on the animal name plates. No Braille signage currently exists at the Zoo, neither on name plates nor on way finding signage.

Despite the remoteness of some of the featured animals and the informational text, the Zoo does offer a small selection of features which can enhance a blind or visually impaired visitor's experience if assisted by a sighted individual. For individuals or small groups exploring the grounds independently, docents can be found mingling with tourists throughout the Zoo. These experienced, well-trained volunteer staff members possess a wealth of fascinating information about the animals. They are very easy to engage in casual conversation, and the information gained by talking to them far exceeds the basic information found on the animal name plates. One popular attraction at the zoo is a narrated train tour. For any visitor, regardless of visual capabilities, this serves as an excellent way to observe the wide variety of animals which inhabit the St. Louis Zoo. The tour guides adequately inform passengers about the facility's diverse animal population, and they are very quick to point out any visible wildlife. The petting zoo offers an opportunity to interact with several miniature animals, and Caribbean Cove allows visitors to get a close look at, touch, and feed a small variety of sea creatures, including sting rays and sharks, in a very safe and supervised environment. Additionally, a front row seat at any of the animal shows, such as the sea lion show, will give visually impaired visitors an up close and personal look at some of the featured inhabitants of the St. Louis Zoo, as well as a plethora of fascinating tid bits on their unique abilities and behaviors.

Tactile representations of featured animals are scarce, but there are a few that blind visitors will find very appealing. For example, locations such as the entrances to the Penguin House, Insectarium, and Children's Zoo feature large metal sculptures of a signature creature. Regrettably, these are not always within easy reach. The hippo's habitat has a rather unique display. In addition to listing several fun facts about features of the hippo's head, the display is also adorned with a life-sized cast of the hippo's head. Although a blind individual will require assistance in reading the text, the cast adds a fascinating tactile component that adds a whole new

level of dimension to the information on display. Exhibits like this one are rare, so blind or visually impaired individuals should also be sure to visit the gift shop where they can examine additional figurines, masks, and plush toys of many featured animals.

The Zoo's Education Building contains countless animal relics (skulls, feathers, and dried droppings to name a few) which are used for educational programs. These are at the disposal of docents who may be giving private or group tours, and during favorable weather conditions, carts of animal artifacts can be found traveling through the Zoo.

Most recently, the staff at the Zoo's Education Department has been revising its school programs to present a more interactive and more universally accessible experience for young kids and school groups to learn about animals and their habitats. These new approaches offer a goldmine of opportunities for blind and visually impaired individuals to explore and examine a wide variety of wild and exotic animals. One might not be able to safely feel a live crocodile or bear, but one would easily be able to handle a preserved skull or piece of hide. Animal artifacts, weights and measuring tools, miniature models and landscapes, and more descriptive presentations now create a universally immersive experience, opening up new doors of exploration for the blind. Teachers and group leaders should be sure to ask about these additional accommodations when scheduling a field trip or educational session. If the Zoo knows in advance that a particular student or group member is blind, they can pool the necessary resources to create a program that is universally accessible and enjoyable.

There is so much to see and do at the St. Louis Zoo that a person could easily spend an entire day there. For such occasions, the Living World contains a cafeteria-style restaurant, and several hamburger and hot dog stands may be found throughout the grounds. None of these vendors have Braille or large print menus, but the workers are very helpful in accommodating blind individuals, making it easy to place an order in a timely manner.

Due to the recent success of implementing a more universal design in the Zoo's educational programs, discussions have escalated on how to make the Zoo's grounds, animals, and exhibits more blind-friendly. Through these efforts, the staff at the St. Louis Zoo hopes to find new ways to utilize many senses in ways that would make its presentation of the shows, exhibits, and animals more appealing, engaging, and meaningful for all visitors. More information will be made available as developments progress.

Before visiting, be sure to check out the Zoo's website. It contains a great deal of valuable and interesting information about the St. Louis Zoo, its animals, shows, attractions, schedules, and much more. The site is well organized and functions extremely well with screen enlarging and screen reading software.

For any questions about any of the services noted above, or for updates on forthcoming enhancements, please contact one of the following department heads.

Mr. Wyndel Hill, Vice President of Internal Relations

Phone: (314) 646-4571

E-mail: [hill@stlzoo.org](mailto:hill@stlzoo.org)



## **Grant's Farm**

10501 Gravois Road

St. Louis, MO 63123

(314) 843-1700

<http://www.grantsfarm.com>

### **Rating of Accessibility (out of 5 stars)**

Overall Rating: 4 stars

- Accessible by Metro's bus routes: 3 stars
- Availability of docent-led guides upon request: 0 stars
- On-site docents and staff: 4 stars
- Ease of visibility of featured attractions: 4 stars
- Tactile and auditory components: 4.5 stars

This evaluation was last updated on July 14, 2014 by Stephen Kissel, Blind Community Enrichment Associate for the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind, with the assistance of Mr. Steve Bogard, Supervisor of Guest Operations at Grant's Farm.

Like the St. Louis Zoo, Grant's Farm is an outdoor facility that showcases a small variety of animal wildlife as well as Anheuser-Busch products and memorabilia. Due to the spacious grounds, lack of Braille signage, and lack of large-print maps, it is not the most accessible facility for a blind or visually impaired individual to visit unaccompanied. However, since the facility is geared more towards a younger generation of visitors, it is very unlikely that a blind or visually impaired person would be visiting Grant's Farm on their own. This is not to say that a blind or visually impaired visitor cannot enjoy themselves at Grant's Farm, for many of the animal attractions are either very interactive or of a very close proximity to the visitor. Nevertheless, sighted assistance remains necessary to take full advantage of the features and attractions.

Grant's Farm is not close to any of Metro's bus stops. As a result, individuals wishing to reach the facility via public transportation would be well advised to take advantage of Metro's Call-A-Ride service, local cab companies, or other sighted drivers. However, guest drop-offs are prohibited; all vehicles entering the parking lot must pay. Therefore, it is once again advisable to visit Grant's Farm as part of a group or with a sighted companion. Admission to the park is free, though parking and some additional programs and activities are not.

The grounds do present a few significant navigational obstacles, but most of these can easily be overcome through soliciting the proper sighted assistance. Only three out of four restrooms are identified with Braille signage (the restroom by the General Store being the one without). Plans exist to remedy this problem in the near future. No further utilization of Braille signage is found on the grounds, so soliciting sighted assistance is crucial in correctly locating even the most basic of amenities. Upon arrival, all visitors receive a map and a list of the day's scheduled shows. Low-vision individuals who may need to reference this material (such as an individual in a parental position) will wish to bring a small magnifying device or pocket scanner. Otherwise, sighted assistance will need to be solicited. Show times can also be obtained by visiting the Grant's Farm website. Totally blind individuals will find navigating the grounds very straightforward if given clear verbal directions. Extra assistance, however, may be needed within the more spacious areas such as the outdoor eating facilities.

After first entering the park, one of the first noticeable attractions is the tram tour. This is an excellent way to explore the sights and wide variety of wildlife at Grant's Farm. The tram tour guides are very informative, and the animals can frequently be seen roaming extremely close to the tram, making them easy for a low-vision visitor to spot.

The tram ride concludes at the tier garden, a very centrally-located position within Grant's Farm. From this point, the visitor can access various hands-on and interactive activities such as riding a carousel, feeding and petting small animals in a petting zoo, getting one's picture taken with one of the world-famous Budweiser Clydesdales, and exploring the facility's collection of various Anheuser-Busch carriages (which may not be touched). Additional paid programs that include a parakeet feeding experience, a Clydesdale VIP tour, and camel rides offer even more opportunities for interacting directly with the residential wildlife. There are always staff members on duty at these key points of interest, providing adequate supervision for the youth, and making it very easy to solicit sighted assistance when necessary. There are several more animals not included in the petting zoo which may be petted if the animal chooses to wander close enough to the railing of their enclosure (which they often do). During times when the park is less crowded, it is common to find staff walking around with snakes and other animals for the public to examine on an up close and personal level. A plethora of birds inhabit Grant's Farm, and even if the person cannot see them, they can frequently be heard throughout the park, adding a pleasant auditory aspect to the atmosphere.

The facility also offers two thirty minute shows at regular intervals throughout the day: the small animal show and the elephant show. These are great opportunities for kids to see some of the many inhabitants of Grant's Farm showing off their unique talents. Often, especially in the Small Animal Show, the "hosts" look for kids to participate in certain tricks, stunts, or activities, adding another potential layer of participation and public interaction. Requesting a front-row seat by an on-duty staff member at the amphitheater will enable a visitor with low vision to receive the best possible view of the animals, although binoculars or monoculars are helpful if the individual has to sit further back. The seating rows are fairly spacious, but as a courtesy to other sighted visitors, guide dog users are advised to procure an aisle seat to maximize the easy flow of pedestrian traffic across the aisles.

There are multiple locations around the grounds where the individual may purchase snacks and drinks. Meals are also served at the brat haus, an outdoor picnic area which offers a variety of barbecue items, drinks, German music, and complimentary alcoholic beverages for people

who are twenty-one years or older. No Braille or large print menus are available, but the staff is very friendly and willing to help a sight-impaired individual place an order in a timely manner.

The wide variety of animals which may be seen at Grant's Farm often overshadows its historic background. Even though the grounds are now the ancestral home of the Busch family, this place was also once the home of our eighteenth President, Ulysses S. Grant, after whom the park is named. His cabin still sits on the grounds, about a mile from its original location. Interested visitors and groups may book private expeditions to the house, either online or upon arrival. It is a unique opportunity that should not be overlooked when deciding to visit. General information about animals, shows, special events, and directions can be found on the Grant's Farm website. A lack of headings will make the site somewhat tedious for Jaws for Windows users, and none of the site's images contain clear or descriptive alternative text. However, in all other aspects, the site is very accessible for both blind and low-vision computer users, presenting visitor information in a clear and organized manner. It should definitely be consulted before visiting, for it will greatly prepare the visitor for all scheduled attractions and events.

For any further questions concerning your visit, please contact:

Mr. Steve Bogard, Supervisor of Guest Operations at Grant's Farm

Phone: (314) 525-0812

E-mail: [steve.bogard@anheuser-busch.com](mailto:steve.bogard@anheuser-busch.com)

## **Missouri Botanical Garden**

4344 Shaw Boulevard

St. Louis, MO 63110

(314) 577-9400

<http://www.mobot.org>

### **Rating of Accessibility (out of 5 stars)**

Overall Rating: 4.8 stars

- Accessible by Metro's bus routes: 5 stars
- Availability of docent-led tours: 5 stars
- Helpfulness of on-site docents and staff: 4.5 stars
- Ease of visibility of featured attractions: 5 stars
- Tactile and auditory interpretation: 4.5 stars

This evaluation was last updated on June 28, 2014 by Stephen Kissel, Blind Community Enrichment Associate for the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind, with the assistance of Ms. Jennifer Smith, Manager of Public Education Programs at the Missouri Botanical Garden, Mr. Donald Frisch, MBG Therapeutic Horticulture Instructor, and Ms. Liz Fathman, MBG Publications Manager.

The Missouri Botanical Garden defies the misconception that flowers, herbs, shrubs, and other plants are only for visual appeal. The Garden's Therapeutic Horticulture programs continue to find new ways that plants can be appreciated through the use of multiple senses. The evolving Zimmerman Sensory Garden, accommodating docents and volunteers, and plans for future enhancements heighten the degree to which blind and visually impaired visitors can learn about and explore our world's diverse plant life.

The Missouri Botanical Garden is very accessible through public transportation. As of June 2014, the Number 14, Number 8, and Number 80 bus routes make regularly-scheduled stops at the Garden's Ridgway Visitor Center's main entrance, at the intersection of Bates and Morganford, and at the intersection of Shaw and Park, respectively. These routes will be directly linked to Metro Link stations and work to maintain the accessibility of the Missouri Botanical Garden via public transportation. As usual, Metro's Call-A-Ride service, local cab companies, and other sighted drivers will be able to easily drop off passengers directly in front of the Ridgway Visitor Center's main entrance. Once inside, the help desk is located directly ahead,

making it a convenient location at which to rendezvous with one's group or at which to solicit assistance in locating the departing station for daily tours.

The tram ride and the complimentary daily tours are both terrific ways to observe and enjoy the key points of interest at the Missouri Botanical Garden. If aware of a visitor's visual impairment, volunteers are careful to add an additional descriptive component to the already informative tours. Customized group tours may also be arranged for a small fee. Please visit the Missouri Botanical Garden's website for further details on regularly-scheduled and specialized group tours. On-site staff members are always eager to help make your visit as enjoyable and illuminating as possible. Visitors will find the Garden's staff extremely helpful and vastly knowledgeable about the peak bloom periods, distinct qualities, and proper method of caring for the wide variety of plant species found at the Missouri Botanical Garden. Furthermore, sight-impaired visitors will find the paths within the gardens easy to follow, while audio cues, such as fountains, provide additional cues for generic orientation.

When visiting the Missouri Botanical Garden, a blind or visually impaired individual should be sure to explore the Zimmerman Sensory Garden, a special garden close to the visitors center in which all the plants are meant to be felt for their unique texture or smelt for their unique fragrance. Fountains and the Solari Bell Tree Sculpture also add a pleasant auditory feature to the atmosphere of the garden. Many horticultural displays are arranged in raised planter beds for easy access and are marked with Braille, raised letter, and large-print name plates. Group tours of this garden are currently available upon request, but a self-guided exploration of the garden, with the assistance of a sighted companion for orientation, is well worth the time of any sight-impaired visitor.

Committed to enhancing the universal accessibility of the grounds, the Garden's Therapeutic Horticulture Programs continue to explore new avenues for heightening a visitor's multi-sensory experience. For example, a tactile map and new entry sign are under current active development in order to improve the means of self-orientation and exploration for both sighted and non-sighted visitors within the Sensory Garden. From a long-term perspective, the Sensory Garden is also being used as a testing ground for making the entirety of the Missouri Botanical Garden more accessible for blind and visually impaired visitors. It is hoped that similar adaptive approaches in the Sensory Garden may gradually be applied and effectively implemented in other areas of the gardens. Garden staff is also considering the creation of a Sensory Tour. This would be a regularly scheduled, more extensive walking tour of the grounds. This would be very similar to the current daily tour, but the guides would rely on the same sensory tactics utilized in the Sensory Garden in how they would engage group members in their horticultural exploration and immersion. Details on further enhancements will be made available as plans progress.

Throughout the remainder of the Garden's extensive grounds, blind and visually impaired visitors can access a growing selection of multi-sensory activities. The Children's Garden offers many multi-sensory experiences from April through October (fees apply for ages 3 to 12). Staffed Germination Stations occur daily on various nature-related topics from 10 a.m. to noon. The Edible Garden offers seasonal tastings on select days of the week. Plan to get wet at the ever-popular splash pad. The Nature Explore Classroom offers a nature art table with natural tactile items and a raised and ground-level sand box. Adjacent to the

Children's Garden is the Brookings Interpretive Center which offers many multi-sensory interactive and hands-on activities. Themes change yearly.

For a light meal, visitors can drop into the Sassafras Café, located in the Ridgway Visitors Center. The way in which the café operates has the potential to be very accommodating for a blind individual. The customer orders from a relatively small menu at the front counter and pays for the meal on the spot. The customer is then given a cup for their drink which they may fill at the drink dispensers which are located on the way to the tables. The customer is also given a card with the number of their order. After the person is seated, the waiter will bring the person his or her meal. By soliciting sighted guide assistance from the café's staff, a blind or visually impaired individual can operate quite efficiently in the restaurant. However, the visitor will need to be able to advocate confidently for him or herself, as there is no Braille or large-print menu, and as the Café's staff may have had minimal experience in previously interacting with blind or visually impaired customers.

For information about the specific gardens within the Missouri Botanical Garden, hours of operation, directions, and special events and exhibits, please visit the Missouri Botanical Garden's website. The information offered on the site is very thorough and informative. Text size may be adjusted using the text-size tool in the homepage's upper right-hand corner. Formatting styles and alternative text for certain links may limit the site's accessibility for Jaws for Windows users. Basic information is still fairly easy to access, but if difficulties arise for Jaws for Windows users, one can always call the main switchboard at the Missouri Botanical Garden to obtain necessary visitor information.

For these and any other questions, please contact one of the following personnel from the Garden's Therapeutic Horticulture Programs.

For any other questions regarding the Missouri Botanical Garden's accessibility, please send inquiries to: [accessiblegarden@mobot.org](mailto:accessiblegarden@mobot.org)

For questions concerning Therapeutic Horticulture programs or the Zimmerman Sensory Garden, contact Mr. Donald Frisch, Coordinator for Therapeutic Horticulture Programs

Phone: (314) 577-9473, extension 6526

E-mail: [Donald.frisch@mobot.org](mailto:Donald.frisch@mobot.org)

## **Laumeier Sculpture Park**

12580 Rott Road

St. Louis, MO 63127

(314) 615-5278

<http://www.laumeier.org>

### **Rating of Accessibility (out of 5 stars)**

Overall Rating: 4 stars

- Accessible by Metro's bus routes: 1.5 stars
- Availability of docent-led tours: 5 stars
- On-site docents and staff: 1 star
- Ease of visibility of featured attractions: 5 stars
- Tactile and auditory interpretation: 5 stars (under continued development)

This evaluation was last updated on June 6, 2014 by Stephen Kissel, Blind Community Enrichment Associate for the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind, with the assistance of Ms. Dana Turkovic, Curator of Exhibitions at Laumeier Sculpture Park.

Laumeier Sculpture Park is a perfect place to visit for anyone interested in three-dimensional art and the great outdoors. While traveling the many walking paths at Laumeier, visitors will encounter many massive artistic creations and sculptures, set amidst an aesthetically pleasing natural environment. The park itself presents a significant amount of navigational challenges which necessitate sighted assistance for blind and visually impaired individuals. However, the park's well-developed docent-led tours and the park's increasing utilization of maquettes and other tactile components provide new and fascinating ways of exploring three-dimensional art.

Although Metro used to have a bus stop on Rott Road, just outside the main entrance to Laumeier Sculpture Park, this is one of many stops that have been cut from Metro's routes over the past few years. The Rott Road stop is hoped to be restored as more funding is made available to Metro in the upcoming years. Currently, the closest stop is on Lindbergh, just under a half a mile away. As this route involves cutting through parking lots, it is not the most ideal of routes, but for a blind individual with highly-developed mobility skills, this route may be navigable if that individual is provided with adequate directions on getting from the stop to Laumeier. Please note, the individual will need to carefully judge if he or she can successfully navigate such a route. For a less stressful commute, local cab services, Metro's Call-A-Ride service, and other sighted drivers remain the best means by which to access Laumeier Sculpture Park.

One's initial arrival at the park presents the second major navigational difficulty. A modest sign currently identifies the main entrance to the Estates House for sighted individuals, but the path may not be immediately obvious to blind or visually impaired visitors. With the assistance of three six-foot gallery signs, two kiosks, and an array of strategically-placed signs and interpretive labels, will low-vision visitors be able to easily find their way around Laumeier? However these way-finding amenities are not accessible for totally blind individuals. Due to the on-going park renovations and construction occurring in 2014 and 2015, it can be difficult to find staff assistance upon arrival.

Most of the paths through the park, though well-kept, are numerous and winding. These factors increase the difficulty with which blind and visually impaired travelers may maintain a clear sense of orientation within the park's spacious grounds. Having a sighted guide to assist in exploring Laumeier Sculpture Park is considered mandatory from this author's point of view when visiting this particular facility.

For visitor convenience, Laumeier Sculpture Park offers individual and group docent-led tours upon request. This is extremely advantageous for both sighted and non-sighted visitors, for the docents offer a wealth of insightful information about the meaning and composition of the various works of art. When giving tours to sight-impaired individuals, docents are careful to incorporate additional verbal descriptions of the sculptures and to showcase the park's growing collection of tactile representations of the various works of art. From May through October, complimentary 2:00 tours are given every first and third Sunday of the month. Additional individual and group tours can be arranged two weeks in advance, costing only \$2.00 per person and \$25.00 for groups of 25 or fewer. The St. Louis Society for the Blind and Visually Impaired, as well as the Missouri School for the Blind, both make regular visits to the park. For information on the next visit by the St. Louis Society for the Blind, please contact Ms. Gloria Tendeck by calling (314) 968-9000.

After ensuring sighted assistance in navigating around Laumeier Sculpture Park, blind and visually impaired visitors will be able to take full advantage of the park's growing collection of maquettes. These are miniature bronze replicas of featured works of art. The replicas are placed on a concrete pedestal along with both Braille and print name plates that relay interesting information about the size and meaning of the sculpture, as well as the name of the artist responsible for its creation. In November 2010, Laumeier Sculpture Park revived new enthusiasm in the maquette project, unveiling five new bronze miniatures and a tactile map of the grounds. In partnership with the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind, the park continues to expand its growing collection of tactile replicas, to repair and improve the older existing maquettes, and to address larger way-finding initiatives to aid both sighted and non-sighted visitors to Laumeier Sculpture Park. The most recent batch of maquettes was just installed in the spring of 2014 with more on the way. This evolving collection has received much positive acclaim from the blind and visually impaired of the area, placing three-dimensional art literally at a person's fingertips. The descriptions on the Braille and large-print name plates also prove indispensable in grasping the artist's interpretation of his or her work. Furthermore, being able to walk directly up to the original work of art completes the experience by placing the size comparison between the original masterpiece and the tactile miniature into proper perspective.

The park also offers audio tours, available to all visitors. These tours are very informative about the meaning and history of the individual sculptures, but some lack a basic visual



description which would be extremely beneficial to blind visitors, especially when dealing with sculptures that currently do not have an accompanying maquette. In addition, the devices themselves are not very accessible to blind or visually impaired individuals, for the iPods operate via a touch screen, so sighted assistance will once again be necessary for a blind or visually impaired individual to gain a full and meaningful experience. Laumeier Sculpture Park staff are currently in the process of re-evaluating, re-writing, and re-recording the audio tour script in order to provide cues and descriptions that will make the tour more accessible and meaningful for sight-impaired patrons. More information on new enhancements and accommodations will be provided as plans progress.

Before visiting, interested individuals will wish to check out Laumeier Sculpture Park's website. Although low vision computer users will experience minimal difficulty in navigating the web pages, the site does pose a significant obstacle to totally blind computer users. Nearly all of the site's key links are activated through graphic pop-up menus and are not accessible through screen reading software such as Jaws for Windows. Laumeier Sculpture Park is aware of this technological barrier and plans to address the issue in the near future. In the meantime, those requiring further information to plan a visit to Laumeier Sculpture Park would be well advised to solicit sighted assistance or to call the main telephone number for the park, listed at the beginning of this entry.

For these and any other questions, please contact Ms. Gennie Swansen, Membership and Museum Services Manager at Laumeier Sculpture Park.

Phone: (314) 615-5279

E-mail: [gswansen@laumeier.org](mailto:gswansen@laumeier.org)

## **SECTION 3: MUSEUMS & HISTORIC SITES**

### **The St. Louis Art Museum**

One Fine Arts Drive

Forest Park

St. Louis, MO 63110-1380

(314) 721-0072

<http://www.slam.org>

#### **Rating of Accessibility (out of 5 stars)**

Overall Rating: 4.4 stars

- Accessible by Metro's bus routes: 4 stars
- Availability of docent-led tours upon request: 5 stars
- On-site docents and staff: 5 stars
- Quality of experience if visiting unaccompanied: 4.3 stars
- Tactile and auditory interpretation: 4 stars

This evaluation was last updated on June 6, 2014 by Stephen Kissel, Blind Community Enrichment Associate for the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind, with the assistance of Ms. Cheryl Benjamin, Associate Educator for the St. Louis Art Museum.

Founded in 1879 and showcased at the 1904 World's Fair, the St. Louis Art Museum remains committed to making "one of the finest comprehensive art collections in the country" accessible and meaningful to all of its visitors, regardless of physical or mental capabilities. Docent-led tours yield much insight into the composition and meaning behind the numerous works of art, and developments continue within the Education Department in an attempt to utilize multiple senses when exploring art with museum visitors. When combined, these factors reflect a welcoming and accommodating atmosphere at the St. Louis Art Museum towards visitors who are blind or visually impaired.

Overall, sight-impaired individuals will find it relatively easy to reach the Art Museum via St. Louis' public transportation systems. Yet until such a time as the massive construction project at the Art Museum reaches completion, it may be advisable for independently-traveling blind visitors to rely on modes of transportation that can leave them directly in front of the main

entrance, so as to avoid navigating construction zones. Cabs, sighted drivers, and Metro's Call-A-Ride service are able to drop off passengers directly in front of the main entrance to the museum. The closest Metro Link station is on DeBaliviere, approximately 1.10 miles from the Art Museum. From this station, visitors can catch the south-bound Number 90 bus which will put the passenger within a reasonable walking distance from the main entrance of the Art Museum. If an individual were to visit the museum during the summer tourist season (i.e., April through October), the Forest Park's summer trolley also makes regular rounds between the DeBaliviere station and the major facilities and attractions located throughout Forest Park. As the trolley stops directly outside the Art Museum's main entrance, this option is by far the easiest and most direct way by which to reach this particular venue through established public transportation routes. For further details, see the "Getting Around" section at the beginning of this guide.

The museum is very accustomed to receiving visitors with disabilities, and with the current services, a blind or visually impaired visitor should be able to experience the displays in a way that is both captivating and culturally enriching. The guest services desk is located off to the side of the main entrance and can be easily located upon arrival. From this point, a blind or visually impaired visitor will find it easy to solicit assistance. It is a convenient spot to rendezvous with one's tour guide, and low-vision visitors will also have the opportunity to pick up large-print maps, magnifying glasses, and large-print copies of name plates from key displays. Although the hallways can be navigated with an adequate amount of ease, the rooms are numerous, and, especially during the current construction and renovation project, some amenities, such as bathrooms, are rather difficult to locate. As a result, utilizing sighted guide assistance in the Art Museum is advisable. Most hallways are wide enough to allow for an easy flow of traffic, but please avoid shore lining with canes as a way of maintaining personal orientation, because many of the works of art are safeguarded by motion sensors.

The museum staff makes every effort to accommodate visitors with special needs and will often provide special tours upon request for visitors with disabilities. However, in order to best cater to the needs and interests of the visitor, the staff prefer to be given two to four weeks advanced notice if such a tour is desired. This way, the staff has ample time to line up docents within the visitor's specific areas of interest. Adequate advanced notice also allows docents to gather any extra relevant material or tactile objects that may enhance the visitor's experience.

At present, verbal imaging serves as the primary tool of the docents in making art accessible to visitors who are blind or visually impaired. Verbal imaging consists of a spoken detailed description of the particular pieces of art, highlighting the layers, content, colors, and style. Docents are also quick to expand upon the overall meaning and history behind the creation of a particular piece of art, deepening the visitor's understanding and appreciation. Unfortunately, even amid the three-dimensional displays such as sculptures, Egyptian sarcophagi, and medieval suits of armor, there is nothing in the museum that may be touched or felt. This is in order to preserve the artifacts on display, and many of the galleries are equipped with motion sensors in order to prevent visitors from straying too close to the priceless works of art.

However, the museum's Education Department does maintain a modest assortment of materials which may be felt. These include Native American beadwork, unique fabrics, and a miniature covered wagon, among others. Such tactile components do not provide scale replicas of any particular piece of art found in the museum. Rather, they are meant to reflect the different

cultures represented by the various artistic displays. If the museum is given ample advanced notice about visitors with visual impairments, these tactile components may be incorporated into tours and educational programs wherever applicable. The above accommodations for blind and visually impaired visitors may be obtained by filling out the online Tour Request Form or by calling the museum two to four weeks in advance of one's visit.

The Education Department at the St. Louis Art Museum, in conjunction with the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind, is currently conducting a series of docent workshops that focus on interacting with sight impaired visitors and on multi-sensory methods of exploring two-dimensional and three-dimensional works of art. The goal of these workshops is to help docents better anticipate and understand both simple and creative ways in which a sight impaired visitor's experience can be made just as meaningful as that of a fully sighted visitor. Simultaneously, the workshops serve to break the conception that art can only be understood and explored visually. Verbal imaging will continue to serve as the docent's foundation for making art accessible to blind and visually impaired patrons, but it is also hoped that additional tactile and auditory components may be eventually incorporated into the existing displays, offering even more dynamic avenues for art exploration and education. Current proposals include installing tactile representations of selective two-dimensional and three-dimensional works of art, as well as utilizing music, temperature, sounds, and literature in order to create a "living" representation of various styles of art. These additional enhancements are still in the conversational stages of development and have not been finalized or green-lit. More information will be made available as the project further develops.

While visiting the Art Museum, guests may wish to purchase a drink or light meal at the museum's café. This is located on the Main Level within Gallery 213, and it remains the only food venue within the Art Museum during the current construction and expansion project. The café is set up in a typical cafeteria lunch line style, and the staff is very helpful in making a quick and orderly selection from the menu.

Blind and visually impaired visitors will also find the museum's website extremely helpful and insightful when planning a visit. The clear alternative text within the links and the use of headings to organize the material maximize the ease with which screen reading and screen enlarging software can navigate the website. Each page contains a detailed description and (when applicable) a phone number or E-mail through which the individual may make further inquiries. Altogether, blind and visually impaired individuals with an interest in art and art history will enjoy their visit to the St. Louis Art Museum, and with the potential for further accommodations, there will continue to be new ways for both sighted and non-sighted visitors to experience artistic displays from new perspectives.

For further information concerning present and upcoming accommodating services at the St. Louis Art Museum, please contact Ms. Cheryl Benjamin, Associate Educator.

Phone: (314) 655-5287

E-mail: [Cheryl.benjamin@slam.org](mailto:Cheryl.benjamin@slam.org)

## **The Missouri History Museum**

5700 Lindell Boulevard

Forest Park

St. Louis, MO 63112

(314) 746-4599

<http://www.mohistory.org>

### **Rating of Accessibility (out of 5 stars)**

Overall Rating: 4.25 stars

- Accessible by Metro's bus routes: 5 stars
- Docent-led tours upon request: 5 stars (untested by this author)
- On-site docents and staff: 4 stars
- Quality of experience if visiting unaccompanied: 4 stars
- Tactile or auditory interpretation: 4 stars

This evaluation was last updated on June 6, 2014 by Stephen Kissel, Blind Community Enrichment Associate for the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind.

Our nation possesses a rich history, and the Missouri History Museum offers a wonderful selection of permanent and visiting exhibitions pertaining to our global, national, and local heritage. This encompasses a wide range of topics, including, but not limited to culture, wildlife, social movements, entertainment, technology, prominent individuals, music, wars, and even plant life. Due to the very visual nature of several of the Museum's exhibits, the facility does present some rather significant challenges to the blind community, but the services which the museum provides, including docent-led tours, hand-held audio tours, and close proximity to public transportation routes, make it possible for someone who is blind or visually impaired to have an enjoyable and enriching experience.

Visitors taking advantage of public transportation will find the Missouri History Museum very accessible. There is a Metro Link station about two blocks away, and the Number 90 bus has a stop by the main entrance (southern entrance) of the museum. As usual, Metro's Call-A-Ride service, Metro's Forest Park Summer Trolley, local cab companies, and other sighted drivers will be able to drop off and pick up passengers directly in front of either the north-side Lindell entrance or the south-side park entrance. Because the northern Lindell Street entrance is closest to the Metro Link Station, and because it is situated off of a semi-enclosed circle drive, it is deemed safer for dropping off passengers.

Upon entering, visitors will find a help desk situated just to their right with an additional ticket desk for fee-based exhibits located straight ahead. This layout is the same, regardless of whether the individual enters through the northern or southern entrance, and, because of their central location, the desks serve as a very convenient point at which to rendezvous with one's group or docent tour guide. The rooms and hallways are simple enough to easily navigate, and spacious enough to allow an easy flow of traffic. The bathrooms are also easy to locate from the main lobby after soliciting verbal directions, and they are clearly identified with braille and large-print signs. However, due to the vastness of the facility, there is currently no easy way for a blind individual to quickly grasp the overall layout of the building and its many galleries. Therefore, in order to take full advantage of the museum's attractions, it is advisable for sight impaired visitors to solicit the assistance of a docent or sighted companion when exploring the museum. Printed maps are available at the help desk which low-vision visitors may wish to examine under a magnifying glass (not provided). Low-vision visitors may also find a magnifying glass helpful in reading the name plates within the exhibits. Although touring exhibits cost extra to view, they are well worth the price of admission. General admission to the Missouri History Museum remains free.

The Missouri History Museum offers two services which greatly help to enhance the accessibility of both the museum and the exhibits. First, the help desks and ticket desks maintain a small supply of hand-held audio tour listening devices, a complimentary service to any visitor. Audio tours are often available for visiting exhibitions, and a small variety of permanent exhibitions are also equipped with this auditory service. The descriptions are very detailed, both in relaying the informative text which accompanies the item on display and usually in providing a physical description of the item itself. Audio files for available audio tours of permanent exhibits may also be accessed on the museum's web site under the "Exhibitions" link, found on the homepage. These tours by no means provide a description for every item in the display, and they do not equal the quality of the first-hand experience of exploring the exhibit in person with a docent or sighted guide, but there is a sufficient amount to give the listener a well-rounded immersion in the content of the exhibition. These audio tours are also careful to point out any tactile or interactive components of the exhibit that the visitor may encounter. Although these hands-on features are rare in permanently-existing museum exhibits, visiting exhibitions continue to offer an especially impressive array of auditory and tactile components that add a whole new dimension to exploring our past. Braille name plates are also being considered as a long-term goal for all MHM exhibits, in addition to the already-existing docent and auditory services. More information on upcoming accommodations will be made available as plans progress.

Museum docents can also contribute quite a bit of insight to a blind or visually impaired individual's visit. If a sight-impaired individual were to notify the museum in advance of his or her forthcoming visit, a docent can be found to serve as a sighted companion. Their rich and enthusiastic knowledge of the exhibits complement the information from the audio tour very nicely. Anyone who is willing to serve as the "eyes" of the blind or visually impaired visitor will help the sight-impaired visitor to explore the exhibit as fully as possible.

If stomachs start to rumble while visiting the Missouri History Museum, the facility offers two options for the hungry patron. Bixby's Restaurant serves a somewhat pricey selection of "sophisticated" cuisines while Bixby's Express serves lighter menu options in a café-style

restaurant. Neither of these venues have Braille or large-print menus, but the staff is very helpful in assisting with the timely selection of a tasty order. Before leaving, be sure to check out the museum's gift shop where store employees are eager to help a visitor select from an impressive array of books, music, accessories, and other souvenirs. At your visit's end, museum staff at either help desk will be happy to call a ride service on your behalf if necessary.

Further information about exhibits, museum hours, services and amenities, and nearly 700 special events may be found on the Missouri History Museum's website. This site is very user-friendly for both screen reading and screen enlarging software. The pages are well organized under headings and contain both clearly labeled links and detailed, informative text. History buffs, students, and scholars will also wish to check out the links to "History Happens Here," the museum's weekly online magazine, as well as the site's developing cross-collection search engine, an excellent resource for conducting research.

For any questions about any of the services offered at the museum, please contact:

Mr. Robert Brock, Manager of Visitor Services for the Missouri History Museum

Phone: (314) 746-4422

E-mail: [rbrock@mohistory.org](mailto:rbrock@mohistory.org)



## **Jefferson National Expansion Memorial**

### **(Better known as the Gateway Arch)**

#### **Part 1: The Museum of Westward Expansion**

11 North 4th Street

St. Louis, MO 63102

(314) 655-1700

<http://www.nps.gov/jeff.htm>

#### **Rating of Accessibility (out of 5 stars)**

Overall Rating: 2.1 stars

- Accessible by Metro's bus routes: 1 star
- Docent-led tours upon request: 0 stars (under consideration)
- On-site docents and staff: 5 stars
- Quality of experience if visiting unaccompanied: 2.1 stars
- Tactile and auditory interpretation: 2 stars (under further development)

This evaluation was last updated on June 28, 2014 by Stephen Kissel, Blind Community Enrichment Associate for the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind, with the assistance of Ms. Ann Honious, Chief of Museum Services and Interpretation for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial.

Commuters pass it every day as they cross the Mississippi River into St. Louis. It is the tallest and the most iconic feature of the St. Louis skyline. It is the Gateway Arch, and all around, beneath, and within this famous monument rests the history of St. Louis and of westward expansion. From the 1803 Lewis and Clark Expedition to the age of the steamboat to the 1965 completion of the Arch itself, the grounds possess many intriguing stories, tributes, and exhibitions that are meant to provide a gateway into the past. The museum remains a fascinating place to visit, but the spacious grounds, layout of the museum galleries, and lack of tactile and auditory components to the exhibits present several obstacles to blind and visually impaired individuals, making it necessary to visit with a sighted companion. As the park approaches its fiftieth anniversary in 2015, many new project proposals are under development which are designed to make the exhibitions and regional history more engaging, enjoyable, and enriching for both sighted and non-sighted visitors. Therefore, it is important to note that much of the information in this entry is subject to change over the upcoming year.

Currently, the Gateway Arch and the Museum of Westward Expansion are not easily accessible through public transportation. The closest Metro stop is a Metro Link station down on Laclede's Landing, approximately five blocks from the museum's main entrance. Since crossing 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Memorial Drive can also prove more difficult for visitors with little to no vision, those wishing to independently travel to the Museum would be well advised to solicit the services of Metro's Call-A-Ride service, local cab companies, or other sighted drivers and should request to be dropped off in front of the Old Cathedral, not the Old Courthouse. Once clear walking directions have been obtained, this arrangement will provide sight impaired travelers with a much simpler, safer, and more direct route to the Museum of Westward Expansion. Although the grounds are easy to navigate, and although the walking paths are paved and well kept, the grounds are quite extensive, and it remains very difficult for a sight impaired individual to become well oriented with the layout of the National Park. A sighted companion who can accompany the blind or visually impaired individual on their visit will allow the sight-impaired visitor to navigate the grounds with a maximum amount of efficiency and would also allow them to take in the vast landscape of the grounds of this national park.

The City Arch Riverfront has recently broken ground on a Park Over the Highway, an elevated landscaped park that will span the distance between the Old Courthouse and the Museum of Westward Expansion. When completed, this new component to the park's grounds will greatly improve navigability, orientation, and pedestrian safety for both sighted and non-sighted visitors. More information on new drop-off locations, way-finding amenities, and overall layout will be made available to the general public as construction nears completion.

Before entering the museum, be sure to feel and walk around one of the massive legs of the Gateway Arch and to walk the six hundred and thirty foot span of the two legs. As the span is equal to the Arch's height, this will help blind and visually impaired visitors to take in the composition, size, and grandeur of the monument. After passing through security, one will encounter the main help desk, located straight ahead at the end of the entry hallway. Here, visitors can be briefed on the many attractions and regularly-scheduled group tours within the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, and blind and visually impaired individuals can obtain descriptive audio devices for the two documentary films and the featurette in the exhibit. As in most cases, this device may be obtained with the use of a valid state ID or driver's license.

Owing to the limited availability of museum staff for extended periods of time, it is not currently possible to arrange for a park ranger to serve as a sighted guide. Furthermore, the museum's exhibits are largely deprived of any auditory and tactile components that would otherwise enable blind and visually impaired visitors to independently explore the exhibits. These factors further necessitate the need for a sighted companion if blind or visually impaired visitors are to fully explore and appreciate the content of the exhibits. On-duty rangers stationed within the main exhibit, if alerted to a visitor's visual disability, can also enhance the experience by retrieving a small collection of available artifacts from the Education Department. These preserved items include tanned hides, animal parts, lead bullets, and a nineteenth-century rifle (not loaded) that visitors may feel and examine. By talking with these well-informed park rangers, visitors can gain fascinating insights into how these objects were valued and used by settlers and Native Americans during the nineteenth-century. A couple animatronic figures

within the main exhibition also deliver short monologues at the touch of a button which often pertain to a specific item or small collection of items on display. These features represent the few auditory and tactile components of the main museum exhibits, for, as in most museums, the artifacts on display are not meant to be touched, despite the fact that many lie within easy reach of the visitor.

Partaking in one of the museum's regularly scheduled group tours of the various exhibits offers a more interactive method for both sighted and non-sighted visitors to learn more about a specific exhibit or theme of the museum. The rangers excel at weaving the collections of artifacts and murals together into a larger and fascinating narrative that seeks to immerse the group members in the human experience and diverse landscapes of such historic ordeals as the 1803 Lewis and Clark Expedition. There are plenty of opportunities during and after the tour for asking further questions, and, if given proper advanced notice of a visitor's visual limitations, the rangers can ensure that additional verbal imaging and tactile components are integrated into the tour. Visitors should check with the museum prior to their visit to confirm which group tours (if any) will be offered on a given day of the week.

The *Monument to the Dream* documentary on the construction of the Gateway Arch, the IMAX film on Lewis and Clark, and the Lewis and Clark featurette in the main exhibit room are all well worth the visitor's time, and all three films offer descriptive audio through a wireless headset which may be obtained at the front help desk. The professional descriptions, put out by the WGBH Media Access Group in Boston, Massachusetts, are of a very high quality, but the headsets, for reasons unknown, are not always able to pick up a clear signal from within an easy viewing distance of the picture. There also seemed to be some confusion at the front desk as to which headsets were for audio description (for the blind or visually impaired) and which ones were for audio enhancement (for the hearing impaired). Luckily these films are shown at regular intervals throughout the day, and if technical difficulties arise, the museum staff will work to remedy the problem before the visitor's departure. As background noises can make it difficult to hear the Lewis and Clark featurette within the main exhibition gallery, visitors with an interest in viewing a movie on Lewis and Clark would be better off to check out the IMAX film, which provides a more thorough overview of the expedition and is shown in a more sound-proof environment.

The trip to the top of the Arch is something not to be missed, even for a blind or visually impaired individual. If additional navigational assistance is required, it is possible to have a park ranger on the ground floor alert the on-duty staff at the Arch's summit who would then meet the visitor at the top of the Arch, helping them to safely navigate the upper passage and to take in the impressive panoramic view. Even when traveling with a sighted companion, the guides on duty at the top of the Arch are well worth engaging in casual conversation, for they can provide detailed and informative descriptions of the view, and they can also relay intriguing facts about the Arch's size, architecture, and construction. The chief point in the Arch ride where the blind person is at a significant disadvantage is while he or she is waiting in line to ride the tram to the top. The walls in the passage way leading to the trams at the southern leg of the Arch act as huge canvases, being covered with pictures and cutouts that depict St. Louis' levee during the age of the steam-powered riverboat. There are even a couple of hands-on objects such as the rope to a steamboat's whistle and a replica of a set of levy scales which were used to weigh cargo. Similarly, the passageway leading to the north leg also contains a life-sized replica of the

monument's keystone, the top-most section of the Arch which visitors may feel and examine, allowing them to grasp the size of the Arch and the manner in which it was constructed. Yet, a sighted companion will prove essential in exploring and appreciating these tactile components and visual décor that are otherwise completely hidden from blind and visually impaired visitors.

The Museum of Westward Expansion will close temporarily in the fall of 2014 for an extensive make-over and renovation. The newly accessible museum will reopen in the fall of 2016, showcasing a universally accessible experience. Everything from the architecture to the facility's layout to the design of the exhibits has been carefully evaluated to present a more universally accessible and engaging experience for all visitors. Thanks to the efforts of the newly-formed City Arch Riverfront Universal Design Group, painstaking attention has been awarded to improving the experience of visitors with a wide variety of physical and mental disabilities. The design teams involved in the 2015 renovations have been working tirelessly to create an immersive, interactive, and multi-sensory experience that brings the museum's history out of the glass display cases and into the hands (and ears) of the blind. When completed, this newly renovated museum will offer blind and visually impaired visitors a truly enriching experience as they journey through history. More information will be made available to the general public as plans and timelines are finalized.

The National Park Service's website for the Museum of Westward Expansion provides a good summary of the attractions and basic visitor information that should be consulted when planning a trip to the Arch's grounds. Though not organized by headings (the site's one shortcoming), the site is very compatible with both screen reading and screen enlarging software.

For any further questions, please contact:

Ms. Ann Honious, Chief of Museum Services and Interpretation for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial.

Phone: (314) 655-1634

E-mail: [ann\\_honious@nps.gov](mailto:ann_honious@nps.gov)

## **Jefferson National Expansion Memorial**

### **Part 2: The Old Courthouse**

11 North 4th Street

St. Louis, MO 63102

(314) 655-1700

<http://www.nps.gov/jeff.htm>

#### **Rating of Accessibility (out of 5 stars)**

Overall Rating: 4.1 stars

- Accessible by Metro's bus routes: 3.5 stars
- Docent-led tours upon request: 5 stars
- On-site docents and staff: 4 stars
- Quality of experience if visiting unaccompanied: 4.1 stars
- Tactile and auditory components: 4 stars (under further development)

This evaluation was last updated on June 28, 2014 by Stephen Kissel, Blind Community Enrichment Associate for the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind, with the assistance of Ms. Ann Honious, Chief of Museum Services and Interpretation for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial.

This section is an extension of my evaluation of the Museum of Westward Expansion, and it is something that is not to be overlooked when planning a visit to the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial. In contrast to the Museum of Westward Expansion, the Old Courthouse was found to be fairly accessible for visitors who are blind or visually impaired. Its closer proximity to public transportation stops, its informative and descriptive ranger tours, and its well-narrated film on the Dred Scott Case will make a blind or visually impaired individual's visit both enjoyable and enriching. Many new project proposals and renovations are under consideration which are designed to make the exhibitions and regional history more engaging, enjoyable, and enriching for both sighted and non-sighted visitors. These plans will also effect how visitors access the main facilities on the park's grounds. Therefore, it is important to note that much of the information in this entry is subject to change over the upcoming year.

For individuals with well-developed mobility skills, there is a Metro-Link station about four blocks away which is walkable in favorable weather with clear verbal directions. Otherwise, there are parking meters outside the courthouse that sighted companions may utilize for their

convenience. As usual, cabs and Metro's Call-A-Ride service will be able to drop off passengers directly in front of the main entrance or within easy walking distance from the Old Courthouse.

Tours are typically offered hourly throughout the day, and they are a terrific way for blind and visually impaired visitors to take in the rich history and architecture of the courthouse. As the staff's ability to offer hourly tours depends on the daily availability of rangers, visitors would be well-advised to call in advance to confirm tour times for a specific day. The information provided by the tour guides really helps visitors to step back in time and view the wide array of activities that took place at this historic landmark, and if the guides are aware of any group members with visual disabilities, they are able to provide adequate physical descriptions of the architecture and surroundings. Blind and visually impaired individuals are at liberty to ask to feel the architecture of the building and other structural features that are accessible and within easy reach. Many of the tours conclude in a restored nineteenth-century courtroom where the visitors are free to examine replicas of the judge's bench, the witness box, and other key furnishings of a typical nineteenth-century courtroom. If this final aspect of the tour is omitted due to time constraints, visitors may ask to be shown the room personally, providing that an available ranger can be found.

The Old Courthouse also has an excellent short film on the Dred Scott Case which is shown at regular intervals throughout the day. According to the Courthouse staff, the movie used to have descriptive audio, but the disc which contained the descriptions deteriorated and was never replaced. However, due to the impeccable narration in the film, the blind visitor will not regret the absence of a descriptive audio track.

There are a couple aspects of the Old Courthouse which could give the blind or visually impaired visitor a little trouble. There are a couple of small exhibits on the Dred Scott case, an exhibit on the history of St. Louis, and a collection of paintings and engravings in the main rotunda that commemorate the construction and history of the Old Courthouse. As with most standard museum displays, these exhibits consist of name plates, photographs, and items behind glass with no additional auditory or tactile enhancements. The Old Courthouse also houses several beautiful, scaled dioramas of the building, steam-powered riverboats, and other related items. For the sake of preserving these three-dimensional works of art, the dioramas are also enclosed in glass cases. Blind and visually impaired individuals will need sighted assistance in visualizing these smaller exhibits.

Like the Museum of Westward Expansion, the exhibits within the Old Courthouse will all be replaced in 2017. The changes will provide a more universally accessible and engaging experience for all visitors. Thanks to the efforts of the newly-formed City Arch Riverfront Universal Design Group, painstaking attention has been awarded to improving the experience of visitors with a wide variety of physical and mental disabilities. The design teams involved in the project have been working tirelessly to create an immersive, interactive, and multi-sensory experience that brings the museum's history out of the glass display cases and into the hands (and ears) of the blind. When completed, these renovations will offer blind and visually impaired visitors a truly enriching experience as they journey through the history of this iconic St. Louis landmark. More information will be made available to the general public as plans and timelines are finalized.

For any further questions about the exhibits and services available at the Old Courthouse, please contact:

Ms. Ann Honious, Chief of Museum Services and Interpretation for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial.

Phone: (314) 655-1634

E-mail: [ann\\_honious@nps.gov](mailto:ann_honious@nps.gov)

## **SECTION 4: INTERACTIVE VENUES**

### **The St. Louis City Museum**

701 North 15th Street

St. Louis, MO 63103

(314) 231-2489

<http://www.citymuseum.org>

#### **Rating of Accessibility (out of 5 stars)**

Overall Rating: 5 stars

- Accessible by Metro's bus routes: 0 stars
- Docent guides upon request: 5 stars
- Well staffed and well supervised: 5 stars
- Tactile and auditory components: 5 stars

This evaluation was last updated on June 10, 2014 by Stephen Kissel, Blind Community Enrichment Associate for the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind.

Although it is called a “museum,” St. Louis’ City Museum is a truly unique facility that has compiled a vast collection of artifacts, art, architecture, and other random pieces of history into one large interactive playground. Most museums contain displays of glass-enclosed artifacts that are accompanied by informative name plates, but the visitors to the City Museum will be able to touch, climb through, crawl over, slide down, and interactively explore its many attractions. This puts the items on “display” in a completely accessible manner for someone with little to no sight. Even though the museum is geared towards a younger generation of tourists, adults will also be fascinated by the history and origins of the items which comprise the building’s attractions and décor. Furthermore, the accommodating nature of the museum staff makes the St. Louis City Museum a terrific destination for any family or group looking for a day trip or night-time activity.

The City Museum is not a venue that blind or visually impaired individuals (parent or child) should consider visiting unaccompanied. For one thing, the nearest Metro station is at the Scott Trade Center, about nine blocks away. Cabs and Metro’s Call-A-Ride service will be able to drop off passengers by the main entrance to the museum, but mobility issues do not stop there. There is no real logical layout to the museum. Furthermore, the sheer magnitude of the facility



and its exhibits could easily overwhelm an unassisted blind patron. There are countless tunnels, jungle gyms, nooks, and crannies into which children are free to explore, so it is necessary to keep a close eye on them, regardless of whether or not they have vision trouble. Furthermore, the existing hallways and passages are often full of energetic youth, so sighted guide assistance is highly recommended in order to safely navigate the facility.

Ms. Lariccia, the museum's Group Sales Director, indicated that, if the museum had advanced notice, a hall staff member could be provided to serve as a guide through the museum. If the blind or visually impaired person happened to be visiting the museum on a less crowded day, the staff may even be able to accommodate the individual on the spot, but advanced notice is still recommended. If wishing to avoid the most crowded times of the year, it may be advisable for the blind or visually impaired individual to avoid visiting during periods close to holidays, the end of the school semesters, and the end of the summer break.

The museum's staff has taken great care to make the facility very safe for children, regardless of physical or mental capabilities. All children who are under seventeen are required to be accompanied by an adult. All of the tunnels are safely enclosed, and they will generally all end at central points throughout the museum. Furthermore, the tunnels and passages all have adjacent walking paths, making it easier for parents, guardians, and group members to keep an eye on the children and the other adventurous young-at-heart who are exploring the enclosed passages. The museum has also set aside special sections of the facility that are only for kids who are six years old or younger. These areas contain slides, smaller ball pits, and activities that are more appropriate for that age group. There is also a very popular arts and crafts area where young visitors can make their own museum souvenirs. Even so, it is advisable for there to be at least one if not two sighted people to each blind or visually impaired child.

As mentioned earlier, the St. Louis City Museum is not a stereotypical museum, nor is it a stereotypical playground. The museum is home to a collection of various artifacts ranging from a boat's propeller to gargoyles to the world's largest pencil. All of these items are out where the public can examine and feel them. In some cases, the artifacts have been turned into playground material. For instance, the old shoe shoot, which is left over from when the building served as a shoe factory, has been transformed into a ten-story spiral slide. An old metal cooling coil from the Anheuser Busch brewery has also been turned into one of the many elevated tunnel passages. The walls are equally as unique. They are all covered from floor to ceiling with items such as gears, steamer pans, ramparts, and safety deposit boxes. Yet, the blind or visually impaired individual would need a sighted guide to fully understand and explore the museum's many attractions, for there are no name plates or written descriptions of the items which comprise the building's displays and decor.

Not only is the City Museum a fun place for energetic and adventurous youth to visit, but blind and visually impaired students who are studying art, engineering, or architecture will find this facility to be a gold mine of hands-on resources. The entire building, including its entrance, is full of building facades, sculptures, and reliefs from various styles and periods of architecture, and there are equally as many displays that could be considered engineering feats as well as elaborate works of art. These include a jungle gym with a plane perched atop and a stone sea serpent stair railing whose fin is comprised of old kid-painted conveyer belt rollers. Even the cave, though it is meant to resemble a realistic cave (complete with trickling streams of water), contains rock formations and tunnels that resemble dinosaur heads and other creatures. All of

these displays, items, and structural designs are completely accessible for blind or visually impaired students to touch and feel.

A full day at the City Museum can work up quite an appetite. In order to accommodate this possibility, the museum is home to a small café called Samwiches. This is set up in a standard cafeteria style, and although no Braille or large-print menus are available, the staff is prepared to help sight-impaired visitors place an order in a timely manner. The menu for this café may also be found on the museum's web site in a pdf document, making it easy for blind or visually impaired people to access through screen enlarging and screen reading software. The café staff is very accommodating and will also prepare pre-ordered lunches which can be ordered over the phone. This is especially helpful for large groups or anyone with special dietary needs.

Before visiting, be sure to consult the “Plan” (your visit) link on the museum’s homepage. It contains valuable visitor information, including what to wear, driving directions, hours, admission fees, and visitor amenities. The site is well organized with headings and clearly labeled links. However, blind computer users will encounter difficulty when browsing the “Attractions” page, for the page relies heavily on graphics to advertise the museum’s array of unique exhibits and attractions. These graphics are not equipped with clear alternative text, so Jaws for Windows users will wish to solicit the help of a sighted computer user to properly explore this portion of the website. Additionally, low-vision individuals using screen enlarging software may need to increase the magnification in order to read the small font, but no real problems are anticipated from this perspective.

For any further questions concerning a visit to the City Museum, please contact the Group Sales Department at the City Museum.

Phone: (314) 231-2489, extension 601

E-mail: [groups@citymuseum.org](mailto:groups@citymuseum.org)

## **The Magic House, St. Louis' Children's Museum**

516 South Kirkwood Road

St. Louis, MO 63122

(314) 822-8900

<http://www.magichouse.org>

### **Rating of Accessibility (out of 5 stars)**

Overall Rating: 4.75 stars

- Accessible by Metro's bus routes: 0 stars
- Docent guides upon request: 0 stars
- Well staffed and well supervised: 5 stars
- Tactile and auditory components: 4.5 stars

This evaluation was last updated on June 10, 2014 by Stephen Kissel, Blind Community Enrichment Associate for the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind, with the assistance of Ms. Carrie Hutchcraft, the Magic House's Director of Marketing.

Magic is so frequently associated with optical illusions and slight-of-hand tricks, but the exhibits and activities at the Magic House explore magic that can be observed using all of the senses, not just sight. The facility itself presents some significant navigational obstacles to sight-impaired individuals, but with the assistance of a sighted companion, blind and visually impaired youth can experience a wide array of fun and engaging activities.

Visitors wishing to take advantage of public transportation will wish to solicit the services of local cab companies, Metro's Call-A-Ride service, or other sighted drivers, for there are no bus stops or Metro Link stations close to the Magic House. Parking is free, and admission is very reasonable: \$9.50 for an individual and \$5.75 a person for groups of at least fifteen people. There is no clearly defined path through the Magic House, and existing paths are often full of energetic youth, so utilizing Sighted Guide assistance when navigating the Magic House is highly recommended. It is not currently possible to arrange for a personal docent guide, but the building is well staffed and well supervised, making the facility safe for youth, and enabling visitors to easily solicit assistance when necessary.

All exhibits at the Magic House rely on the use of many different senses, not just sight. For this reason, the blind or visually impaired visitor is not at a complete disadvantage. The sense of touch allows young visitors to experience the magic of gravity, static electricity, vibrations, and both magnetic and mechanical forces. The sense of hearing allows visitors to experience the

magic of musical sounds, harmony, and melody. Finally, all of these senses are combined into the sense of imagination by allowing visitors to step into the role of a construction worker, bank clerk, early American explorer, detective, Jack (of Jack and the Beanstalk fame), and the President of the United States.

Some featured attractions such as the Hall of Mirrors, the Bubble Room, and the Garden Kaleidoscope rely heavily on the sense of sight, but most can still be enjoyed with the assistance of a sighted companion to describe the visuals. Furthermore, there are enough tactile and auditory exhibits and activities, such as the Children's Village, the Water Works Room, and the facility's iconic ball of static electricity, to allow for a totally fun and enriching experience for blind and visually impaired youth.

The Magic House's Picnic Basket Café boasts a healthy selection of soups, sandwiches, and other basic cafeteria-style foods. As with most cafeterias, there is no Braille or large-print menu, but the menu is basic enough that staff members should be able to assist a blind or visually impaired individual in making an informed decision in a timely manner. The menu may also be downloaded from the Magic House's web site in a pdf format, making the information very accessible to blind or visually impaired individuals through the use of screen reading and screen enlarging software. Thanks to the use of headings and the clear alternative text on the page's links, blind computer users should have little difficulty in obtaining basic visitor information from the website. The one exception to this is the "Exhibitions" page. This is because the information on the various rooms and attractions is presented in the form of graphics or in the form of cycling still images of kids enjoying the many attractions. Screen reading software will not be able to detect the captions within the short slide shows, the only descriptive text on the page. No real problems are anticipated for low-vision individuals using screen enlarging software.

For any questions or general inquiries, please use the "Contact Us" E-mail link on the homepage or call the main telephone number for the Magic House during regular business hours, using the phone number provided at the beginning of this entry.

## **The Saint Louis Science Center and Planetarium**

5050 Oakland Avenue

St. Louis, MO 63110

(314) 289-4400

<http://www.slsc.org>

### **Rating of Accessibility (out of 5 stars)**

Overall Rating: 4.35 stars

- Accessible by Metro's bus routes: 3.5 stars
- Docent Guides Upon Request: 5 stars
- Well Staffed and Well Supervised: 5 stars
- Tactile and Auditory Components: 4 stars (under further development)

This evaluation was last updated on June 10, 2014 by Stephen Kissel, Blind Community Enrichment Associate for the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind, with the assistance of Ms. Frieda Smith, Senior Director of Public Programs at the St. Louis Science Center, Ms. Melisa Thomas, SLSC Early Childhood Programs Manager, Mr. John Lakey, Director of the James S. McDonald Planetarium, Ms. Anna Green, Planetarium Show Presenter, and Ms. Debra Bush, SLSC Volunteer.

As with the City Museum and the Magic House, the Saint Louis Science Center and Planetarium are full of hands-on activities, and although the facility is mostly geared towards young kids, older teens and adults are likely to also find interest in many of the featured attractions. From the Earth's geological layers to the distant stars and planets, this dual museum explores the various realms of science and astronomy in a wide array of interactive and immersive activities. Many of these activities are already accessible for visitors who are blind or visually impaired, and developments continue to yield new interactive features that would enhance a sight-impaired individual's overall experience at the Saint Louis Science Center and Planetarium. Nevertheless, this popular tourist attraction remains one at which a sighted companion will prove indispensable to blind or visually impaired visitors.

From Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend, visitors can catch the Forest Park Trolley from the Metro Link station on DeBaliviere to the main entrance of the Science Center. In addition, Metro has regular year-round bus stops on Oakland, Kingshighway, and Hampton (the Number 59, Number 95, and Number 90 buses respectively). Riders should obtain more specific walking directions before traveling in order to judge which route would best meet the individual's needs and level of confidence in independent traveling. As usual, cabs, Metro's

Call-A-Ride service, and other sighted drivers will leave passengers within an easy walking distance of the main entrance on Oakland. Admission to the Science Center is free, but visitors wishing to explore special touring exhibits, attend a film at the Omni-MAX Theater, or visit the Planetarium should anticipate additional costs for admission into these special areas.

Upon first entering, the visitor will instantly encounter an overwhelming bustle of auditory activity in the main lobby. Do not panic; this is completely normal. You have just entered a spacious lobby with several entrances to featured galleries, multiple ticket booths, ample quantities of energetic youth, and an elaborate elevated ball track. Fortunately, greeters are always stationed directly inside the front entrance, and they are more than happy to point visitors in the right direction. In addition, the help desk is located directly inside the main entrance, serving as a convenient location at which to inquire about special exhibits and amenities or at which to rendezvous with one's group or tour guide.

Currently, Sighted Guide assistance is highly recommended for all blind or visually impaired visitors, regardless of whether that service is being provided by a relative, friend, or SLSC staff member. Although the spacious hallways are easy to navigate, the passages are very wide; there is rarely a single, obvious path through the museum or its galleries; they are often crowded; and a blind or visually impaired visitor could very easily feel overwhelmed at the amount of possible activities and exhibitions. Furthermore, as restroom signage, restaurant menus, and other basic way-finding amenities lack Braille signage, soliciting sighted assistance is ultimately essential in navigating the building in its current state. Sight impaired groups, as well as individual visitors, may call in advance to arrange for an SLSC staff member to serve as a sighted guide through the facility's many exhibits, shows, and attractions. Overall, visitors will find the site's staff extremely friendly and helpful in making one's visit as enjoyable as possible. As the facility strives to constantly improve its accessibility to all visitors, individual feedback is always appreciated, and the staff works hard to make each visit to the Science Center a truly unique experience.

The Science Center has numerous exhibits which range in topics from dinosaurs to the Earth's layers to the human body, and many of these exhibitions contain tactile and auditory components that greatly enhance a blind or visually impaired individual's experience. This is achieved by allowing visitors to explore certain exhibits in ways that require the use of multiple senses. For example, in the dinosaur exhibition, visitors will find tactile components such as a life-sized cast of a brontosaurus' toenail, a rubber imitation of a Tyrannosaurus rex's scales, and small dinosaur toys. The large robotic T-rex (a signature trademark of the St. Louis Science Center) moves and roars throughout the day. The exhibition on the planet Earth also has an earthquake simulator and a machine-made cyclone which can be felt. These are features which are fun for kids to experience, and the inclusion of such tactile and auditory components greatly help blind and visually impaired individuals to more fully comprehend, explore, and appreciate the many displays and attractions.

The Discovery Room and the Life Sciences Lab, among other galleries, contain even more hands-on experiments and puzzles that, with some sighted guidance for instruction, are wonderful for blind and low-vision youth to explore. These interactive galleries deal with topics ranging from architecture to the human body to microscopic organisms. Whether it's creating a foam model of the Gateway Arch, examining the human skeleton, or being tested for fingerprints, blind and visually impaired individuals will thoroughly enjoy exploring these

galleries. Most sight impaired visitors will still need additional assistance in reading the instructions and fun facts on the signs or large touch screens at each station, but most of the activities are extremely blind-friendly. Visitors will encounter similar issues within the human body exhibition, the planet Earth exhibition, and the Syberville Gallery. As in the Discovery Room, most of these issues involve brightly colored pictures on the wall or information displayed on computer monitors. Although low-vision individuals may be able to make out some of the main features and basic information, totally blind visitors will need sighted assistance to provide physical descriptions of the displays and to walk them through the steps of the activity.

A variety of enhancements have already been implemented over the past years in both the Discovery Room and the Life Sciences Lab to further enhance their universal accessibility. The Discovery Room's tactile fossil display is now equipped with new Braille labels to identify each skeleton cast, and tinted windows now cut down on excessive amounts of both glare and heat, making the gallery more comfortable for everyone. Low-vision individuals will also notice new yellow caution tape on the Science Center's main stairwell as a means of clearly identifying the edge of each step. Furthermore, most of the galleries are now also equipped with state-of-the-art iPads, allowing sight impaired visitors easier access to additional information and activities in the Science Center. Low-vision individuals will be able to use the iPads to gain a closer look at the text in a magnification size that meets their needs, and totally blind users will be able to browse the information using Apple's Voice Over application, placing vast amounts of information at the visitor's fingertips. Additional proposals for blind-friendly enhancements to the Science Center galleries have been drafted and will be implemented over the coming years as resources and funding become available.

Throughout the year, the Science Center hosts a variety of special traveling exhibitions. These have included exhibits on the Titanic, Marvel Comics, candy, the circus, pirates, and a Dinosaur Named Sue. Generally, these exhibits feature technology (e.g. audio tours), tactile components, and other hands-on activities that help make the exhibit very accessible to all visitors. These special exhibits require an additional admission fee, but it is well worth it for the amount of enjoyment and enrichment that can be obtained by blind youth and adults.

A unique trademark of the Saint Louis Science Center is the Omni-MAX Theater, an IMAX movie screen in the shape of a dome. Featured films are typically documentary-styled films that explore a wide variety of topics. These include global landscapes, outer space, flight, sea creatures, and even roller coasters. The unique size and shape of the screen creates the illusion that the viewer is right in the middle of the picture and is actually visiting and experiencing what is depicted on the screen. Low-vision individuals should have little trouble taking in the captivating and breath-taking visuals and scenery, but totally blind individuals may find themselves at somewhat of a disadvantage. Currently, descriptive audio for the blind is not available at the Omni-MAX Theater, although it remains a long-term goal for the museum. If the subject matter of the current film interests the visitor, blind individuals should not be discouraged from viewing the pictures, for they often include equally fascinating narration and auditory components that also serve to immerse the viewer in the world depicted on screen.

A covered walkway over the highway connects the Saint Louis Science Center with the adjacent James S. McDonald Planetarium. Currently, the Planetarium is not nearly as accessible as the rest of the facility's attractions. However, major enhancements are being developed and

implemented that are gradually improving the Planetarium's universal accessibility. To coincide with the Planetarium's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2013, the staff unveiled a brand-new version of the facility's signature star show, "The Little Star that Could." Through a combination of synchronized iPads, tactile models, and Braille star charts, blind and visually impaired visitors can now explore the night sky and its countless celestial bodies in new dimensions. Before entering the theater, visitors first encounter a tactile model of the auditorium to help explain the structure of the theater, the appearance of the night sky, and the concept of constellations. Once inside, activities involving temperature and texture teach visitors about the life-span and key characteristics of different types of stars. During the actual star show, totally blind visitors can follow along with their own tactile star chart booklet while low-vision visitors can obtain a closer look at the projected images through synchronized iPads (technology that is still in the experimental stages). These new approaches to exploring astronomy bring the heavens down to a level newly accessible for both sighted and non-sighted visitors alike. Due to the overwhelming success of the newly refurbished Little Star That Could program, the staff at the James S. McDonald Planetarium is hard at work drafting new proposals for implementing these same methods of astronomical accessibility throughout the entire planetarium. It is hoped that the forthcoming enhancements will stimulate renewed local enthusiasm for a topic that is often stereotyped as a strictly visual field of exploration.

In the spring of 2010, a joint partnership developed between the Saint Louis Science Center and the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind. The goal of this partnership is to closely evaluate the Science Center, Omni-MAX Theater, and Planetarium on a room by room basis in terms of accessibility to blind or visually impaired visitors. Informational, technological, and financial resources will be investigated and pooled in order to develop new ways of making the facility's attractions as engaging and accessible as possible for blind and visually impaired visitors. The 2013 enhancements to the James S. McDonald Planetarium marked the first large-scale fruits of this partnership. More information will be made available as developments progress over the coming years.

Additional information concerning the key events and attractions can be found on the Science Center's website. However, whereas low-vision individuals using screen enlarging software will encounter minimal difficulty in navigating the website, totally blind individuals will find the site less accessible. This is largely due to the lack of headings, frequent repetition of multiple groups of links, and non-descriptive alternative text such as "Click here for more information." Blind individuals using screen reading software such as Jaws for Windows will also wish to solicit sighted assistance or call the Omni-MAX Theater directly when inquiring about show times, for the times and show titles are difficult to correctly match when using screen reading software. If problems persist, one can always call the Science Center during regular business hours, using the phone number provided at the beginning of this entry.

For any further general inquiries on exhibits, visiting attractions, current services, or upcoming additions, please contact:

Ms. Vickie Corkhill, Manager of Visitor Experience for the Saint Louis Science Center and Planetarium.

Phone: (314) 286-4608



E-mail: [vcorkhil@slsc.org](mailto:vcorkhil@slsc.org)

## **Acknowledgements**

There are many parties and individuals who should be thanked for their vital contributions to this work and its larger mission. To name each one by name would prove a daunting task indeed, but we still wish to extend our sincere gratitude to all involved. We would first like to thank the staff and volunteers at the facilities featured in this guide for opening their doors to us and for their willingness to explore and develop various services and amenities that would further enhance visits by blind and visually impaired visitors. It has been a pleasure and an honor to work, brain storm, and interact with each and every one of them, and without their support, this project would have never materialized to its fullest potential. In addition, numerous museums, tourist attractions, and vendors across the United States and Canada have offered a wealth of intriguing solutions for making seemingly inaccessible exhibits and attractions not only accessible to those with little to no sight, but also enjoyable and enriching as well.

We'd also like to thank the staff and employees at the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind and LHB Industries for their personal and financial assistance to help propel these projects forward. Some of these adaptive technologies and services can often be quite an expense, and the Lighthouse's financial contributions have allowed several St. Louis venues to offer blind and visually impaired individuals a more engaging and meaningful experience at their facilities. A special thank you goes out to President John Thompson and Ms. Angie Yorke, Blind Community Enrichment Programs Manager, for their active and unquenchable faith in the project.

With a mission of this scale and magnitude, a great deal of its success depended on the resourceful contributions made by regional vendors and organizations. A special thank you goes out to the St. Louis Society for the Blind and Visually Impaired as well as to the Delta Gamma Center for Children With Visual Impairments for their constant support, valued council, and enthusiastic participation in developing and promoting old and new adaptive services. Thanks also to the Delta Gamma Center for putting us in contact with the staff of Laumeier Sculpture Park and for bringing their programs and tactile maquettes to our attention. We'd also like to express our gratitude to the Mind's Eye radio station in Belleville, Illinois for making the information in this guide available to their listeners and for their promotion of upcoming services and special events.

Finally, we would like to offer a thank you to the blind and visually impaired of the St. Louis area for their vital support and contributions. By directly participating in the services which local attractions have to offer and by taking the initiative to enjoy, learn, and explore, you provide the real energy for this project. The enthusiasm, gratitude, and feedback provided by patrons continues to be the driving factors that allow the Lighthouse and local St. Louis attractions to continue to investigate, promote, and enhance accommodating services that will benefit the overall experience of a sight-impaired visitor. The creative solutions that have been discovered through this mission have done more than simply enhance the experience of blind and visually impaired individuals. They have stimulated new thoughts on how the general public can experience and appreciate history, entertainment, and the arts by using avenues that are not restricted to strictly visual presentations. It is a creative effort that we hope will continue to inspire sighted and non-sighted individuals for years to come. We hope you have enjoyed your trip through St. Louis, and we look forward to seeing you around town.