

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER

## New assistive listening devices offered at RiverPark Center

*Feb. 23, 2014* -- The RiverPark Center in Owensboro, Ky., has updated its accessibility option for those who have difficulty hearing. The venue purchased 48 Williams Sound assistive listening devices that can be used in Cannon Hall and the Jody Berry Cabaret Theatre.

"Being open and accessible to all is very important to us," said Executive Director Roxi Witt.

The devices hook up to headphones or earplugs and have adjustable volume. The audio is synchronized with the production on stage and plays in real time.

There are four types of headphones or earplugs within the RiverPark Center's collection, including induction neck loop devices, which connect to hearing aids. Patrons can also bring their own headphones to connect to the devices.

Haley Strong, the assistant audio technician, researched various devices. "These seemed to be the most comfortable with an ease of use," she said.

The RiverPark Center's previous assistive devices, which had been offered since the venue opened in 1992, hung around the neck. An eye on the neckpiece had to line up directly with the sound system sensor. "They were just uncomfortable and difficult to use, especially for some older audiences," Strong said.

"People quit trying to use them when they realized they didn't work very well," Witt said. "After 22 years of operation, we're really in the mode of 'Let's try to upgrade and improve as many systems as we can.' Our donors have been very supportive in helping us do that." The new listening devices were \$7,500, including installation. They were purchased with funds raised through [power2give.org](http://power2give.org), under the umbrella of Fund for the Arts, which is active in 14 states across the U.S.

The website allows nonprofit arts, education, humanities and technology organizations to post projects. Individuals and companies can donate. The posts have a 90-day deadline to reach the fundraising goal.

In all, the RiverPark Center has funded four of six projects it's posted on [power2give.com](http://power2give.com), including Inclusive Skating Project, a \$2,900 project that kept admission free for the now-defunct Winter Wonderland in 2011; All Signs Point to Arts, a \$1,000 project that placed promotional monitors in the lobby to keep patrons informed in 2012; and Dutch Boy Dreams, a \$10,000 project to rid the concession area of mold in 2012.

Arts Education Student Scholarships, a \$5,000 project to fund youth programs, only reached 17 percent of the fundraising goal. Sensational Sounds, a \$6,625 project for soundboard upgrades is in progress. With 65 days to go, it has reached 27 percent of the goal, and the Humana Foundation will match it dollar for dollar.

"We're very grateful for our supporters," said Kim Johnson, development director. "Power2Give gives us an opportunity to enhance the RiverPark Center with funds that aren't in our normal operating budget. With 170,000 visitors each year, we want to be sure no group of people is forgotten about." The RiverPark Center's other accessibility features include braille on the restrooms, elevator and other signs; wheelchair access, automatic entrance doors; zero-step, or sloped, entry outside; and audio descriptions for the vision-impaired. Audio descriptions are only available for productions with at least two showings, as the description writers must view the production first.

Strong said the new devices fit standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act. They will be available for the first time at an Owensboro Dance Theatre production Sunday. Patrons must provide a driver's license or other form of ID to check out the devices from the reception desk in the lobby. There will be no extra charge. For those with total hearing loss, Witt said, sign language interpreters can be scheduled.

For more information on accessibility at the RiverPark Center, call 687-2770. To donate to projects, see [riverparkcenter.com](http://riverparkcenter.com) or [power2give.com/kentucky](http://power2give.com/kentucky).