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It's Almost Tomorrow

A few of our patrons may be old enough to remember Jo Stafford's Top 40 hit, "It's Almost Tomorrow." This bittersweet ballad got up to #14 on the Billboard charts in 1955, and your editor remembers it from *Your Hit Parade*. (We were, of course, a very young child at the time.)

There's a reason this song has been on our editorial mind. For more than two years we have been telling you how our new Digital Talking Book players (DTBs) were just around the corner. So some of you may find it hard to believe us when we tell you once again that, yes, these wonderful new devices really are just around the corner. But honest, they really are. (Well, almost.)

The Library of Congress has formally awarded the production contract for the new players to Plextor-LLC, a California-based subsidiary of Japan's Shinano Ken-shi Corporation. This contract obligates \$35 million for the production of more than 223,000 players over the next three years.

The players will go into production before the end of this year, and we should start receiving a few of the new models early next year. (Just how early next year? We don't know yet.)

Please note that we are using "few" advisedly. Our initial allotments will be in the neighborhood of 20 players a month, and

we have to give our Tennessee armed services veterans first crack at them. Only when we have provided players to all the veterans who want one can we begin issuing the new models to other patrons.

So, while it isn't tomorrow yet, it really is *almost* tomorrow. Our new DTB players are going into production. Within a few months we will start delivering a small but rapidly growing number of these smaller and more reliable devices to our veterans. As production increases, we'll receive larger allotments each month. Before you know it, tomorrow will be here and you'll be listening to your favorite books on the new DTB players.

A Talking Database for Kids

By Sue Maszaros,
TSLA Special Projects Coordinator

Last issue we alerted you to a new feature coming to our Tennessee Electronic Library (TEL) databases: "ReadSpeaker," a feature that will allow TEL users to listen to a TEL entry read aloud. It will also allow users to download the audio version of the entry to an MP3 player and listen to it another time.

Today I'm happy to announce that the "Read-Speaker" feature has gone live and is now available on the *Kids InfoBits* database, one of the 28 Gale online databases available in TEL.

Kids InfoBits is a database developed especially for beginning researchers from Kindergarten through Grade 5. In addition to the Merriam-Webster's® Elementary Dictionary, this database includes more than 100 full-text, age-appropriate magazines, more than 6,400 searchable, indexed images, about 1,200 maps, flags and seals, and more than 1,700 colorful charts and graphs. These materials cover a broad range of subject areas, including geography, current events, the arts, science, health, people, government, history, sports and more.

Using the "ReadSpeaker" feature is so easy that even grownups can do it. Just look for the red "ReadSpeaker" control bar at the top of the entry. Press the play button to play, and adjust the volume using the "+" and "-" controls.

Downloading the entry for an MP3 player is even easier. Click on the "MP3 Download" button. A drop down menu will ask you to affirm that you will not use the item for commercial purposes. If you agree, the download proceeds immediately.

You can check out this new feature by visiting the TEL website at <http://tntel.tnsos.org/>. (When you get to the TEL website, click on the Research icon, select the county in which you live, and then scroll down the list until you see your local public library.) Or you may access *Kids InfoBits* directly at <http://www.tinygaleurl.com?9e6p4at>.

You will need a password to access *Kids InfoBits* and other TEL databases. Check with your school or local public library branch to get one. If your school or local public library branch can't provide one, you may contact me by phone at (615) 532-4627 or by email at sue.maszaros@state.tn.us.

Please also let me know if you, your children or your grandchildren find *Kids InfoBits* or

other TEL databases helpful in completing school research projects, developing presentations or reports for community organizations, or doing business-related research. I would love to hear your TEL success story along with any suggestions about ways we can make TEL more useful to you.

We hope we will have "ReadSpeaker" operational on some additional TEL databases soon. When we do, you'll hear about it first in *Window to the World*.

Employee Profile

Speaking of kids, the subject of this issue's Employee Profile is Amy Tangerstrom, LBPH's first ever Reader Advisor for Children and Young Adults,

While having an advisor dedicated to young readers is a new thing for LBPH, it's nothing new for Amy. She already has two young readers of her own: daughter Lexie, 16, and son Logan, 12. She also serves as Youth Leader at White Bluff United Methodist Church, where each week she oversees eight or ten more youngsters at her church's Friday Night Soul Feast, a combination dinner, games and entertainment event for which she often bakes.

Born at old St. Thomas Hospital in Nashville (a distinction she shares with your editor), Amy relocated to White Bluff with her family when she was four. Apparently she liked what she saw, as she has been living there ever since.

Amy attended White Bluff's William James School through tenth grade, then finished high school at Dickson County Senior High. Her studies at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville were interrupted by marriage and motherhood, but she returned to APSU to finish her last three courses and graduate with a B.S. in History and Sociology.

Amy worked at the world's toughest job, full-time Mom, until son Logan started school in 2002. That year she joined the Dickson County Public Library as a library assistant, and quickly proceeded up the ladder as circulation manager, interlibrary loan coordinator, and children's librarian.

In 2005 Amy moved to Dickson's Discovery School, where she taught in an inclusion program designed to help special needs kids keep pace in regular classrooms. She joined LBPH in July of this year.

Amy is already developing plans for our 2009 Summer Reading Program, "Be Creative at Your Library." She welcomes suggestions for this program from our young readers and their parents. She would also love to get suggestions for other programs and activities aimed at children and young adults.

Amy's own reading tastes run to murder and mayhem. As she candidly acknowledges: "If somebody doesn't die in it, I don't read it." Her preferences run the gamut of the mystery genre, "from Fluke to Deaver." If you're stuck for a good whodunit, let your reader advisor know. Maybe Amy will take a moment to recommend something for an older reader as well.

Tech-notice: Digital Television and Video Description

This article is for folks who receive their television programs the old fashioned way: over the airwaves. On February 17, 2009, television stations in the United States will all change the technology used to broadcast signals. This change won't affect people with new "HD" TVs, or those who get their programs via cable or satellite dish. But people with older TVs who rely on broadcast signals will have to purchase TV Converter Boxes to process the new signals.

The federal law that mandated this conversion also mandated that viewers can obtain coupons worth \$40 to apply to the cost of the new converter boxes. (Viewers can apply for these coupons online at <https://www.dtv2009.gov>, by phone toll-free at 1-888-DTV-2009, or by mail to PO BOX 2000, Portland, OR 97208-2000.)

Why is this a problem for blind or visually-impaired viewers? Well, converter boxes are not required to process "associated audio services" like the video description provided through the SAP channels on current televisions. They probably will, but buyers must check to be sure the converters they buy will pass these descriptions on to the viewer.

According to our colleagues at the Wisconsin LBPH, the folks at Boston's WGBH Media Access Group tested two converter boxes sold at two of the biggest chains: Best Buy's Insignia model and Radio Shack's Digital Stream converter. The testers found both these models do process video descriptions properly. Both also offer Closed Captioning and SAP buttons on their remote controls, so viewers can activate these features by touch, without having to go through complicated set-up menus. (Unfortunately, neither model offers "talking" set-up menus or controls to assist those with visual impairments.)

If you are buying one of the new digital converter boxes, check to make sure the model you want will provide the services you need. If the salesman can't answer your questions satisfactorily, don't hesitate to demand the information you need to contact the manufacturer and get a definite answer.

Holiday Closures

- Wednesday, 12/24, Thursday, 12/25 and Friday, 12/26 for the Christmas holiday.
- Thursday, 1/1/2009 for New Year's Day.