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. (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 … 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.
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... 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.