

In addition to track and field, the Cambodian team of 38 people also competed in shooting, wheelchair marathon and table tennis. A total of 2,430 athletes from 34 countries attended.

Considering the athletes live in a country where disabled people are frequently shunned and face a daily struggle to survive, the team's overall performance was a major accomplishment.

"We gained a lot of confidence from this experience," says Prom. "Now we're going to train hard for the 2000 Paralympic Games in Sydney, Australia."

Kids Help Design Hip Sound System

by Leye Jeannette Chrzanowski

With help from students representing *HiP Magazine*, a publication for young people with hearing impairments, manufacturer PhonicEar® developed a sound amplification system that fits in a handy tote bag. The students, who acted as "product managers" at Phonic Ear's headquarters, identified the features they wanted integrated into a desktop sound system. PhonicEar incorporated the student's suggestions to create the new toteable sound field.

The tote bag with its built-in speaker/amplifier turns the manufacturer's Easy Listener PE 300R or its PE 350SR receiver (sold separately) into a portable lightweight desktop sound system. The toteable sound field, which contains a rechargeable amplifier and a small speaker, can be used wherever FM radio waves are used to amplify sound.

"One of the things they [the students] asked for was system that didn't look like an amplification device," says Todd Bissey, educational product manager for Phonic Ear. "So we designed the bag to look like something any kid might have on their desk."

The student simply plugs an Easy Listener receiver into the tote's jack, then places the handy bag on his or her desktop. An improved signal-to-noise ratio overcomes the effects of distance, background noise and echo for enhanced speech understanding. No cords are required for use with cochlear implant processors, and the entire sound system is only 6.75 x 4.5 x 2.5 inches and weighs only one pound. The toteable sound field, which has a handy storage area for school supplies, can be used in small gatherings, and can provide amplification for up to six people. The product retails for \$275.

For additional information, contact Phonic Ear Inc., 3880 Cypress Drive, Petaluma, CA 94954; (800) 227-0735 (voice in US); (800) 263-8700 (voice in Canada); (707) 769-9624 (fax); <http://www.phonicear.com> (Internet).

More to Baywatch Than Meets the Eye

by Robert Targos.

Some people may look at the popular television show *Baywatch*, and notice little more than sand and skimpy swimsuits. But according to Douglas Schwartz, the 52 year-old executive producer of the world's most successful syndicated television series, those viewers are missing the real meat of the show — the solid social and emotional issues that are at the heart of every episode.

"Ratings are not as important to us as getting stories from people who identify with the stories we handle," he says. "You can never underestimate the power of television," adds Schwartz, who began directing shortly after he received a movie camera on his 13th birthday from his television-producer uncle, Sherwood Schwartz, creator of the popular television show *Gilligan's Island*.

According to Douglas Schwartz, *Baywatch* has touched millions of viewers by covering such topics as divorce, homelessness, peer pressure and a spectrum of others issues — including disability. During the show's nine years on the air, more than 45 story lines have involved people with some type of disability.

"We have done episodes about almost all the different kind of disabilities out there," says Schwartz. "A big part of my basic philosophy is that everybody has obstacles they need to overcome." As a young director of motorcycle movies and documentaries, Schwartz was confronted by his biggest personal and professional obstacle when he was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa (RP) in 1971. He learned that RP is a genetic, degenerative eye disease that reduces a person's field of vision, and eventually causes complete blindness. Schwartz says he was shocked by the diagnosis because he believed everyone's vision was like his own. "But doctors told me I had lost 90 percent of my peripheral vision."

"I thought my career was over," recalls Schwarz. "Doctors told me I had to stop directing, and that I would go blind in two to five years." Devastated, he turned his hand to writing with Michael Berk, his teenage partner, and fellow *Baywatch* creator. During his 17-year hiatus from directing, Schwartz wrote several movies-of-the-week for television, and created two other television series, *Manimal* and *The Wizard*. He's particularly proud of *The Wizard* because of the positive response to the show from both critics and viewers. "It was the first TV show with [a little person] in the lead role," he explains. "We also dealt with issues like cerebral palsy, blindness and other physical disabilities. After the show went off the air, we received 200,000 letters from fans telling us how much the show meant to them."

The veteran writing team added a new partner and created *Baywatch* for NBC in 1987. "After the show was canceled by NBC, it was my uncle who suggested

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that *Baywatch* go to first-run syndication," says Schwartz. "That's what he did with *Gilligan's Island*."

Finally, after years of encouragement from wife Debbie, a therapist, Schwartz returned to directing in 1988. "She taught me to see the glass as half-full instead of half-empty," he explains. "I also realized that [to direct] I see [through] a camera, and a camera doesn't have peripheral vision either." In fact, he notes, "Today, my vision is the same as it was over 30 years ago."

Debbie Schwartz left her private practice after writing a *Baywatch* episode about an overweight girl who overdoses on diet pills after comparing herself to bikini-clad beach beauties. "'Thin Or Die' was the first time we received fan mail for [a *Baywatch*] episode," reports Douglas Schwartz. Since then, Debbie has written over 40 episodes.

The couple also collaborated on a recent episode, "Friends Forever," about a deaf girl who becomes friends with an orangutan. "We sat down and figured out the emotional core, then we let the story blend around it." Schwartz is also working on another television series about a counseling therapist who rescues youths in trouble, some of whom have disabilities.

Schwartz admits he still gets embarrassed when he makes a mistake because of his own disability, but he quickly laughs it off. "I appreciate every day that I get to visit the set and work on *Baywatch*," he says, noting the television show has received several awards for its disability and lifesaving episodes.

"Most shows get fan mail about getting autographs," says Schwartz, adding, "We get more fan mail saying how much viewers like the issues."

Boston: Searching for Barrier-Free Access in the Cradle Of Liberty

by Steve Wright and Heidi Johnson-Wright

Gathered in the basement dining room of a 20th Century restaurant — and being charmed by a decidedly 18th Century Ben Franklin — the problem with Boston became crystal clear. As Dr. Franklin, portrayed by Emmy-winning actor Bill Meikle (who never broke character), broke bread with his charges at Maison Robert restaurant, he spoke of irony. The Boston-born and -reared Franklin character questioned why the patriots championed liberty and justice for all, but without extending such freedoms and equality to women and African Americans.

Meanwhile, on the modern-day streets of Boston, we wondered why so many intersections lacked curbs; why so many crosswalks were made impassable with faux cobblestones; and why such barriers as steps still stood between wheelchair users and historic sites. Boston bills its Faneuil Hall — and indeed the city

proper — as the cradle of liberty. As Americans who belong to the disability community — Heidi uses a wheelchair and crutches for mobility — we wonder why so many historic places are difficult to reach or entirely off limits to people with disabilities.

The Freedom Trail, a 2.5-mile red brick path traces 16 historic sites that are associated with the birth of America's independence. It's a great idea — but its accessibility is questionable at several stops.

The Old Granary Burial Ground, the final resting place for Samuel Adams, Paul Revere and John Hancock, is up a few steps. After Heidi's chair was bumped and pushed up the steep old steps, we did discover a level entrance toward the rear of the hallowed graveyard at Tremont and Park Streets. However, the gate to the accessible entrance was locked at midday, with no explanation of how or where to find the keys to open it.

The entry to Copp's Hill Burial Ground (Hull and Snow Hill Streets) is *completely* out of the question for people who can't climb steps. This historic cemetery at the tip of Boston's North End can be entered only by a steep set of several stairs. We're all for historic preservation, but surely a wheelchair ramp could be built *next* to the steps without damaging the historic context of this off-limits-to-the-disabled Freedom Trail stop.

We could go on and on. The main entrance to the Old North Church — of "one if by land, two if by sea" fame — is up steps and the accessible route is poorly marked. The site's gift shop (located at 193 Salem Street) also is inaccessible.

These spots could learn from the Old South Meeting House, which has superb access thanks to a recent \$7 million renovation. The historic hall has a level entrance, plenty of room to maneuver a wheelchair and access to restrooms and the gift shop via an elevator. There, Meikle, who does a dead-on Franklin in both appearance and opinionated political discourse, takes you on about a mile of historic Boston during his two-hour program that concludes with lunch and more Franklin philosophy and cumudgeonly behavior. Meikle, whose sister has multiple sclerosis, is very aware of making his walks barrier-free. To reserve a spot on his three-hour walking tour and lunch, call Old South Meeting House at (617) 482-6439.

Accessible Attractions

Boston Common is a large, Central Park-like tract of green space that spans from the downtown district to the Back Bay neighborhood. Created in 1634, it is America's oldest park. The Common is not only pleasing to the eye, but to one's wheels as well, since it's generally accessible with decent paved walkways crisscrossing throughout.

Adjoining Boston Common is Public Garden, an area replete with gorgeous landscaping, regal statues and