

Special Needs Tech News

A newsletter celebrating enabling technology, the people who use it and the companies that make it possible.

Janet Hopkins

EDITOR'S CORNER

Conferences

The assistive technology industry has been getting together at the **Assistive Technology Industry Association Conference** in Orlando, Florida since 1999. The 2002 conference will be held January 16-19,. The areas of emphasis include augmentation and alternative communication (AAC), Blindness / Low vision, computer access and curriculum adaptations, electronic aids to daily living (ADL's) and more. This conference serves as a leading forum for a wide variety of professional presentations and discussion about new assistive technology, practical applications, and services. It offers extensive product information and training sessions about the newest AT products. www.atia.org

A little closer to home, Vancouver will be hosting the **International Seating Symposium** in February 2002. This conference would be of interest to service providers who wish to attend wheelchair, seating and mobility presentations.

Continued on page 3

Please feel free to make complete copies of this publication for anyone that you would like to share it with.

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ASSISTIVE TECH EDUCATIONAL CONSULTING

PROVIDING CLIENT-FOCUSED
INFORMATION AND TRAINING ON
SPECIAL NEEDS TECHNOLOGY.

SPECIALIST IN COMPUTER
APPLICATIONS FOR LEARNING
DISABILITIES AND LOW VISION

WEB RESOURCES

Mouse Tracks

Internet resources provide online technology and disability information. Some sites that may be helpful are listed below.

Education

Computer Learning Foundation

This nonprofit international organization is based in Palo Alto, California. The foundation's goals are to help parents and educators use technology effectively to improve the quality of education and prepare youth for the workplace. To receive a free copy of their newsletter, fill out their online application form.

www.computerlearning.org

Vision

Macular Degeneration Foundation

This site provides information and research news of interest to people affected by macular

INSIDE

- ① Mouse Tracks
- ② Corporate Kudos
MindPlay's "My Reading Coach"
- ③ Scholarships for the Blind
- ④ Corporate Profile
Aurora Systems

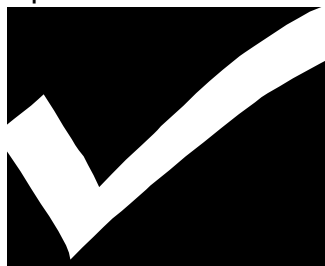
degeneration and related low vision conditions. Their newsletter is distributed electronically.

www.eyesight.org

Computer Access

Equal Access to Software and Information

EASI is located in Rochester, New York and is partially funded through the National Science Foundation. It provides the education community with information about adaptive computer technology. Electronic discussion lists, videos and publications can be accessed through this site. <http://www.rit.edu/~easi/>



Corporate Kudos

MindPlay's "My Reading Coach"

My Reading Coach, developed by **MindPlay**, is a unique interactive software product designed to improve phonics, spelling and reading comprehension skills.

Forty-seven different skill building lessons are included in this program. Each lesson is taught by Jim Larrabee, a reading teacher and speech pathologist. The interactive

video and audio technology of **My Reading Coach** provides a supportive one-on-one program suitable for individuals age 7 to adult who need help learning to read.

The single student edition of **My Reading Coach** includes the three CD program with one 3.5" floppy disk key. The program has a one year or 100 hour time limit (whichever comes first). The cost per student is \$99(US). Additional student disks for same computer use are \$89(US).

MindPlay suggests that learners should use **My Reading Coach** at least 5 hours per week and complete the program within 3-5 months. This provides low performers with the opportunity to reinforce their learning through lesson repetition. Most learners are able to complete this program in fewer than 60 hours.

In January 2001, **My Reading Coach** was implemented as a pilot program with five second grade classes in Tucson, Arizona. All students who completed at least 30 of the 47 lessons showed improvement in reading comprehension according to pre and post-testing carried out by the Tucson Unified School District. On average, there was an improvement

of almost two grade levels in reading comprehension in just four months.

My Reading Coach is an affordable option for consumers in search of a flexible program to address reading skill development. When installed on a desktop or laptop computer with the necessary system requirements, **My**

Reading Coach performs as an on-call reading tutor available to fit an irregular or busy schedule. This product offers a school, mobile or home-based instructional solution for individuals who value self-directed learning as well as consumers in small communities, rural or remote locations.

Lesson mastery is promoted through a variety of instructional modalities along with individualized constructive feedback. Not sure if your student or child needs **My Reading Coach**? Log onto

www.mindplay.com to take a free phonics diagnostic assessment and a reading comprehension assessment.

To find out more about this product and others developed by **MindPlay**, visit their website:

www.mindplay.com

Conferences cont'

SITE 2002, the Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education

International Conference, runs from March 18-23, 2002 in Nashville, Tennessee. This conference is for educators interested in the creation and dissemination of knowledge about the use of information technology in teacher education and faculty/staff development.

www.aace.org/site

ED-MEDIA 2002, the World Conference on Educational Multimedia, Hypermedia & Telecommunications, will be held from June 24-29, 2002 in Denver, Colorado. This annual conference is a multi-disciplinary forum for the discussion and exchange of information on the research, development, and applications on all topics related to multimedia, hypermedia and telecommunications/distance education. The conference is organized by the Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE). www.aace.org



Scholarships for the Blind

Freedom Scientific, Inc., a company that makes technology products for the visually impaired, has announced a \$101,000 scholarship program for students who are blind. This new program will start during the 2001-2002 school year. High school and college graduates in Canada and the United States who wish to continue their education may apply. **Freedom Scientific** has partnered with six non-profit organizations to provide application and selection assistance. Canadian applicants should contact the **Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB)**. Applications and information will be made available on their web site www.cnib.ca

Winning applicants will receive vouchers in amounts of either \$2,500 or \$1,500 to apply toward the purchase of **Freedom Scientific's** full line of products, including hardware, software, accessories, training and tutorials.

Corporate Profile Aurora Systems

Are you looking for software that offers support for a range of disabilities? A BC-based company, **Aurora Systems Inc.**, develops a product package to assist several groups of people. **Aurora 3.0 for Windows** is designed to help people with dyslexia and learning disabilities as well as individuals with speech and keyboarding impairments such as cerebral palsy and ALS.

The **Aurora 3.0 for Windows** package includes **Aurora Prediction**, **Aurora Echo**, **Aurora Talk** and **Aurora RealVoice** speech synthesis. **Prediction**, **Echo** and **Talk** may also be purchased separately. Purchasers are entitled to one free major upgrade. This adds good value to the price of this product, but the single user license agreement is even more generous. Single users are permitted to install the software on multiple computers for their own use. This means that a purchaser

can install **Aurora** software on his/her own home, office and laptop computers with no additional expense. This is a cost-effective option for a person who desires software support in more than one environment.

Aurora Echo is a screen reading program that is operated using the on-screen **Echo** toolbar. The toolbar offers a number of screen reading options. **Aurora Echo's** screen reading features allow the user to control letter, word, sentence, punctuation feedback and more. This allows the user to customize the auditory feedback received while typing. Manual reading applications can be used instead of, or in addition to, the typing feedback. The **Echo** toolbar facilitates clipboard reading and various document reading options. There is also a unique run-on sentence warning feature.

Aurora Talk provides conversational support for speech disabled computer users. This augmentative communication software allows the user to easily store and quickly retrieve responses, questions, phrases, entire conversations or speeches. **Aurora Talk** offers public speaking support for individuals and professionals who wish to prepare, deliver

and control their own presentations. When this software is installed on a laptop computer, it provides mobile communication independence for speech disabled individuals.

Aurora Prediction provides excellent support for people who experience keyboarding challenges as a result of dyslexia. **Aurora Prediction** also provides relief for slow typists and people who tire easily while keyboarding. There are over 100,000 words in the **Aurora Prediction** vocabulary. The location and size of the on-screen **Prediction** window can be customized to suit the user. It can even be configured to track text input so that it is conveniently kept in sight. This is helpful if it is to be used with a screen magnification program. As letters are typed into a text input program such as Microsoft Word, **Aurora Prediction** rapidly adjusts its list of predicted words. This allows the individual to use a single keystroke to select and insert the correct word instead of entering the rest of the missing letters. **Aurora** has pioneered the development of phonetic word prediction as well as multiple word prediction. These features add even more power to **Aurora Prediction's** keystroke reduction capabilities.

Aurora Prediction also provides homonym support and an impressive collection of geographical place names in its vocabulary.

Robert Basler, president of **Aurora Systems**, says the company takes note of every product suggestion they get from their customers. "Our users are the experts in the field. As a company, we are dedicated to making our customers happy. We have a couple of significant projects well underway that are slated for release in 2002."

Aurora Systems has designed a very informative and user-friendly website. In addition to online sales and support information, there is a detailed online tour of **Aurora 3.0** which provides a closer look at these products. To learn more about **Aurora**, visit their website:

www.aurora-systems.com

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