



ADA Live! EPISODE 16: THE NATIONAL ADA SYMPOSIUM 2015

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Presenters: Jim de Jong, Great Plains ADA Center

Host: Sally Weiss, Southeast ADA Center

VOICE OVER ANNOUNCER: Blog Talk Radio. (Music) Welcome to WADA ADA Live! Talk Radio, brought to you by Southeast ADA Center, your leader for information, training and guidance on the Americans with Disabilities Act. And here's your host.

SALLY WEISS: Good afternoon and welcome to WADA ADA Live!. On behalf of the Southeast ADA Center, the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University and the ADA National Network, welcome to the 16th episode of ADA Live!. My name is Sally Weiss, and I am Director of Knowledge Translation for the Southeast ADA Center.

Our guest today is my colleague, Jim de Jong, Director of the Great Plains ADA Center, and our topic is the 2015 National ADA Symposium that will be held in Atlanta from May 10th to May 13th. ADA Live! listening audience, you can submit your questions about the National ADA Symposium at any time at adalive.org. Jim, welcome to our show.

JIM DE JONG: Sally, thank you very much. Nice to talk with you again.

SALLY WEISS: I always enjoy our conversations. Jim, please tell our listeners about the ADA Symposium -- what it is and how many symposiums there have been to date.

JIM DE JONG: The ADA Symposium is the National Conference on training on the ADA as well as related subjects. And this will be our 19th symposium that's been held nationally. Generally we have had people come from every state in the union and expect that to be the same this year.

And it provides numerous breakout sessions. In fact, 72 various breakout sessions that people will have the option to select from and to attend as they wish on topics that range all the way from transportation accessibility to website accessibility, to the history

of the ADA, and employment, and pretty much anything you could think of that is related to the ADA.

And as I said, we have had it for 19 years. We have been in various cities before, but never before in the Southeast or in Atlanta. So we are particularly excited to be coming to your region and your area to offer this great national training conference that we do annually that will be close and easily accessible for the people of your region.

SALLY WEISS: Thank you, Jim. Would you talk a little bit about how and why the Great Plains ADA Center decided to hold the first few symposiums?

JIM DE JONG: Some may not be aware, but the Great Plains serves Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa and Missouri and sometimes we help out our counterparts in the states that touch us. Those of us in Missouri here realize we have numerous states that border our state. So we are commonly referred to as living in the flyover zone. People on their way from Washington will fly to Denver or San Francisco. And it was our theory to realize that people in our region could not all afford necessarily to get to Washington, D.C. as often as they may wish, or to some of the variety of trainings that may have been being offered or discussions on the ADA.

So we said what we will do is bring Washington to you. And so we would bring in federal representatives from the U.S. Department of Justice, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, United States Access board. U.S. Department of Transportation and bring them into Kansas City or St. Louis or Omaha so people would be able to hear them locally and learn and be able to participate and ask questions. From that, if you will, smaller idea, we then began to realize, as you all know, there are numerous experts in particular fields in various parts of the country.

There may be an expert on housing like Kathy Gips that lives in the Boston area. Or we may be interested in Lex Freeden -- of course, many know from the disability rights movement -- from Houston, Texas. And we thought that this would be great to bring a mixture of the experts and people that represent the Federal agencies, as well as those living out in local communities and in particular states with experience and knowledge about not only the regulations of the ADA, but exciting and interactive and successful techniques of implementing the ADA, whether it be in a small town; whether be in a large city or a corporation, or whatever venue, a university or a college.

And so the idea to bring everybody together under one roof to have the multitude of sessions. And that's how it began, and this is how it has grown now to being the National ADA training conference that occurs annually. And we have been fortunate enough, as I have said, to move it around the country and we are so excited to be coming to Atlanta in 2015.

SALLY WEISS: We are delighted to co-host the symposium with you. Can you be a little bit more specific about some of the presenters or faculty that you have invited for the 2015 Symposium?

JIM DE JONG: Certainly. I mentioned to you a couple of the names, but let me expound. [One] would be John Wodatch. He was former chief of the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, now retired. Now obviously still retains a great deal of knowledge on the history the ADA as well as going back to, as many may remember, the Rehabilitation Act and Section 504 and very honestly talks as it relates to the '64 Civil Rights Act, too. John is a very sought-after speaker and part of our faculty. Another example would be Sally Conway, who is currently with the U.S. Department of Justice and probably the most tireless person in providing technical assistance to people throughout the country.

We will have representatives from the International Code Commission. As people may know the ADA has the 2010 Accessibility Standards, and we are trying to blend those constantly with the International Building Code. We will have representatives from there to talk about where those blend together and where they might vary. There's about four different areas there.

There's a great deal of interest from people in the design community to hear from the Department of Justice and also the International Code Commission and, of course, we will have representatives from the U.S. Access Board. Such as Melissa Anderson speaking about public rights of way, a very large emerging issue that we'll soon be seeing standards on. Or Jill Botke who is with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and, very honestly, continually ranks as our top presenter.

We will have a gentleman, Ed Neuberg, who is an ADA coordinator with the City of Denver, speaking about the activities they have gone through to be accessible, but also, they were under a Department of Justice court order. We will get to hear that. But we will also hear things from a woman, Annette Bowls, who works with the Phoenix Suns and the issues of accessible stadiums and ticketing.

We get to hear from some talented people that we get to call colleagues. As a matter of fact -- like your own Pam Williamson -- as well as Peter Blanck from Syracuse University. People like Michael Morris, you and I have known for years, who has been in Washington and a major advocate and proponent of the Americans with Disabilities Act. And also to hear from some of the great advocates who have worked sometimes in the streets to bring forward the issue of equal rights for people with disabilities, such as Mark Johnson and Bob Kafka. So we're very excited about this large group of people.

I want to make it clear we just don't target just one area of the ADA. We cover all aspects of it -- from design to employment, to web accessibility, to physical access, to communication access, to speaking very honestly about access in correction facilities.

SALLY WEISS: Jim, I have been to several symposiums and I thoroughly enjoyed it. Can you explain to someone who might be new to this, what they could expect to find? What would be a typical day at the Symposium?

JIM DE JONG: I am glad you asked that question, because, first of all, I can say it can be exhausting. It can be a sensory overload. Our sessions are generally broken into an hour and a half or hour and 45-minute sessions. So on a typical day a person would wake up -- we provide a networking breakfast, where people are very excited about it in morning and they can get together with either people from their same state or region or get together with people from their area of interest, while having a very nice breakfast and be able to talk about that subject area of concern to them, or about things happening in that area.

Then they go to one of the what I keep referring to as the "breakout session". That would then take place, probably two of them in the morning they would move to. We do leave enough time between sessions for people to chat a little bit and take care of normal business, as well as if one has, say, a physical impairment, the ability to get to the next session.

So they would have the second session in the morning. They may in the first one go to a discussion on recreation guidelines. The second one they might go to might be -- what are some of the rules and regulations and experiences of Googling with an employer, Googling applicants for a job position and what that might entail for the individual with disabilities trying to get a job.

Then we will move on to our luncheon, which we are always very excited about. It's a sit-down luncheon with a keynote speaker, and we are very much hoping it will be Representative John Lewis to speak about the advancement of human rights in America and the Civil Rights Act up to the ADA.

From that point then, we would have a break period for people to, again, network, and move on again to break out sessions. Generally there will be two in the afternoon they would be able to attend.

So that would repeat itself a couple of days. The Symposium lasts for essentially two and a half to three days -- Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. We have pre-con sessions on Sunday. So if someone, Sally, had not attended a training before or new to the field, we do a basics training course about the ADA on Sunday afternoon so people

can feel up to speed and up to par to attend the more in-depth sessions. And when I get a chance I'd very much like to tell you about our opening reception, when you feel that's appropriate.

SALLY WEISS: I will ask you that shortly. ADA Live! listening audience, if you have a question about the 2015 National ADA Symposium, you can submit it at any time at our online forum at adalive.org and now a word from our sponsors.

VOICE-OVER ANNOUNCER: The Great Plains ADA Center, located in Columbia, Missouri, at the University of Missouri Human Environmental Sciences and Architectural Studies Department is a member of the ADA National Network. Established in 1991, the Great Plains ADA Center serves individuals, families and entities of Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska. The Great Plains ADA Center combines expertise on ADA federal guidelines with years of hands-on experience to provide technical assistance, training and products that are effective and user-friendly. For answers to your ADA questions, contact the ADA National Network at 1-800-949-4232.

SALLY WEISS: Welcome back.

We're talking with Jim de Jong about the 2015 National ADA Symposium. Jim you wanted to talk about the opening reception?

JIM DE JONG: Yes, we are very excited welcome able to secure the new National Civil Rights and Human Rights Museum in Atlanta that many people may be familiar with, and on Sunday evening on the 10th of May, we will hold a reception for participants of the Symposium at the Museum.

We are very excited and we will have this exclusively. It's being catered by Wolfgang Puck for those foodies, but it will give people a chance to tour the museum and interact with one another and get comfortable with people from across the country as well as the very exciting fact there are former Freedom Riders to articulate and tell their own stories from back in the times of civil rights struggles. Along with representatives that fought for access to transportation, particularly known as ADAPT, here for people with disabilities that will also be sharing those experiences as well. We are very excited for that to be our official opening of the ADA Symposium in 2015.

SALLY WEISS: Jim, it's going to be a very exciting Symposium. And a combination of celebrations of both civil rights acts and achievements. Can you go back to talking about the actual symposium. It sounds like there are going to be different sessions to choose from, are they organized into different tracks?

JIM DE JONG: Yes, we do put them in tracks, but you're not forced to stay within a single track. As an example we will have a track on design, but you may be interested in, let's say, of the 8 different sessions there, in the Design Track, you may only be interested in four of them. You would be able to when registering to pick those you want to go to and pick others, say, in the employment track. Or if you're an ADA coordinator or a person with a disability perhaps just with community interest, you could move in to one of those.

So even though they are called "tracks" it's not a requirement that an individual stay strictly within that. You are allowed to select each time section where you want to be.

SALLY WEISS: Jim, could you explain the registration process just a little bit?

From what you said, I believe I go and I register for the Symposium. Then I can look at all the sections offered?

JIM DE JONG: That's correct and I appreciate you asking on January 5th, 2015, we will go up live on our website, which is the adasymposium.org, and people will be able to register or even to just peruse the sessions of there will be a matrix there that will show all 72 breakout sessions that will be available.

Also, I think that I should make it clear to your audience, this is not designed strictly for those, for instance, who are architects or those who are in the transportation business.

This is purposely developed to reflect society that we are attempting to enlighten and to integrate. So there are representatives and there are sessions designed for people in the design field and employment field and public works field in general employment. Last year I know we had many participants from the financial industry and we expect that to be the same this year.

So what we see is a mixing just as one would in society, of store-owners and corporate executives or human resources managers, with architects and engineers and people with disabilities of all different types of from all over the country.

And so there's an interest, we believe for everybody. Could be for a recreational therapist or a person that just loves recreation and wants to know how they can make their community recreation facilities more accessible and fair to the healthcare industry and making the healthcare industry more accessible and usable to people with disabilities.

So what we see is a wide variety of sessions that are also attractive to a wide audience and that's really what we get attending.

So when somebody goes on the website, they could either just peruse it and think about it, or they could begin the registration process of selecting the actual sessions they wish to attend, and then they will get an email indicating to them what that will be.

Let me add that while they are at this Symposium they will then be able to use an app to negotiate the various sessions they are attending, or the activities going on.

We have an app which people will be able to download at the session that would take care of that.

One other point I would like to make is we are trying to be very “green” conscious, and I think we may have been one of the first in the country. We do not mail out a lot of materials at a time, or give out a lot of materials in the sessions. But we have a website people can go to and either download that material on to their smart device or be able to print the materials themselves if they care to, so that we're, again, trying to be as green as possible.

SALLY WEISS: Jim, would you give our listeners the website one more time?

JIM DE JONG: That would be www.adasymposium.org.

SALLY WEISS: Jim, what sort of the feedback have you had from previous Symposiums?

JIM DE JONG: One the great things about that is we do an extensive evaluation to anyone who participates and in fact, this coming year it's going to be where people can do it right on-site as well. The feedback has been, number one, that 100% of attendees indicate what they learn at the Symposium they have used to help implement the ADA in their work or their community. The other part people point out very strongly that is good about the ADA is the ability to network with others, either others of the same profession or others of the same community, or to learn from people from different communities or different activities.

And there's so much value placed on this networking that we constantly hear that on our feedback and we think we provide that value both in the breakfast session and luncheons and by trying to have a little extra time between sessions so people can chat when going from one to the other. Beyond that, you can see we have no evening activities planned. What we find is many people end up gathering together to go out to dinner to share experiences. So networking, even though not written in as a session, is the underlying and huge strength of the ADA Symposium for all attendees.

SALLY WEISS: We are going to pause now for a word from our sponsors and then we will be right back.

VOICE-OVER ANNOUNCER: The Southeast ADA Center is your leader in providing information, training and guidance on the Americans with Disabilities Act and disability access tailored to the needs of business, government and individuals at local, state and regional levels. The Southeast ADA Center, located in Atlanta, Georgia, is a member of the ADA National Network and serves eight states in the Southeast Region. For answers to your ADA questions contact the ADA National Network at 1-800-949-4232.

SALLY WEISS: Welcome back to our conversation with Jim de Jong about the 2015 National ADA Symposium. We have been talking about registering for the Symposium.

One of our listeners asks how she can request an interpreter. Can you tell us about how someone asks for interpreter or large print or other types of accommodations?

JIM DE JONG: Certainly, Sally. And, again, we not only try to reflect society, but try to reflect the best practices as required and suggested by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

So any sort of reasonable accommodation by an individual can be requested on the accessible website when they register. If that is not adequate alone or if they need to do that, for instance, do not have electronic access and they register through paper, then we can have a telephone conversation with them.

But we have a large cadre of interpreters available for the Symposium as well as we have been RealTime captioning for the large sessions as well as individual sessions when requested. Large prints or electronic print as many prefer will be made available for anybody needing that accommodation. So whatever the accommodation. What we are finding most commonly these days is food allergies also and people asking for accommodations for the lunches or breakfasts and, I think, we have been able to successfully meet all the requests in the past. It's very clear on the forms and the website as well as staff is more than willing to address any issues and accommodate any reasonable accommodation request.

Let me just share one additional fact for the first time we will have at this Symposium, Sally, I know you will find exciting, too. For visual impairment people there will be an app if you have a smart device, to go on to and there will be sensors located throughout the entire conference area that you merely will need to ask your smart device, for instance, can you direct me to the Women's bathroom on the first floor? It will give you exact directions and lead you to that site. Or if you said I would like to visit the booth on Accessible Technology, I don't think -- or the area, I don't think I mentioned that Georgia Tech will be having their own room filled with all the latest Assistive Technology devices available for the public to look at.

This app would guide the visually-impaired person to that site. This will be the first time this new product has been used in a national conference and we are very excited to be linked with them to highlight this avenue of greater access for those with visual impairments. We've been told it also assists many people who sometimes are just directionally-impaired, if you will.

SALLY WEISS: You were talking about me, weren't you Jim?

JIM DE JONG: I was speaking about one of my staff members, but if you fall in that area, Sally, we will gladly be able to accommodate you better.

SALLY WEISS: I will self-identify on that one. I get lost just coming out of a room.

[Laughter]

JIM DE JONG: I don't think you are alone and, especially in a new area venue and I think this device will be useful for many more than just those who have visual impairments.

SALLY WEISS: Thanks, Jim. You said the registration opened this year, January 15th I believe how many people do you expect for this 2015 Symposium?

JIM DE JONG: Let me first correct you and that's one the rare things I have ever had to do, but normally, Sally, you don't need correcting. It's January 5th, not the 15th. Shortly after the New Year. So people will be able to register at that time. We will be expecting over 700 people to attend. Last year the number came out right around 720. We can hold at this conference setting with the various rooms, I think, people know there's fire standards that don't allow you to put too many people in a room and with this large number of breakout rooms, we can handle up to about 725 participants, so that will be the limit.

Last year we sold out two months after registration opened. So I could only encourage your listeners and everybody interested to please register as early as possible.

What we do do, just so you are aware is we block off a session as it fills. So you may go up there, and the registration in general is still open, but that session, for instance, on the ADA and Olmstead you wanted to attend is already filled. I strongly recommend to people the sooner, the better the earlier, the better, and we certainly hope to see people there. The way that can happen is they get registered as soon as possible.

SALLY WEISS: Thank you, Jim. We're almost out of time. Do you have any final comments you want to share with our audience about the 2015 National ADA Symposium?

JIM DE JONG: I would like to let people know that we do have -- we are aware of allergies and we ask for people to be aware of obviously not smoking that's not allowed in the building at all. And obviously, to try and to be scent-free. We wanted our listeners to be aware of that, too. We think this is going to be the biggest largest and appropriately celebration of the 25th anniversary of the ADA and we are very excited to be able to collaborate first with the Southeast ADA Center, as well as the National Center for Civil and Human Rights to hold our reception. Thank you very much for allowing me to share this information with your listeners, and we hope to see everybody in May in Atlanta.

SALLY WEISS: Thank you, Jim. At this time, I would like to thank Jim de Jong, director of the Great Plains ADA Center for joining us today on WADA ADA Live! and also thank you to our ADA Live! listening audience. The Southeast ADA Center is grateful for your support and participation in this series of WADA, ADA Live! broadcasts. Remember, you can submit questions about any of our ADA Live! topics by going to adalive.org. If you have questions about the Americans with Disabilities Act, please contact your regional ADA Center at 1-800-949-4232. That's 1-800-949-4232. All calls are free and confidential.

Join us again next month on February 4th, 2015 for another episode of ADA Live!.

VOICE-OVER ANNOUNCER: Thank you for listening to ADA Live! Talk radio, brought to you by the Southeast ADA Center. Remember to join us the first Wednesday of each month for another ADA topic, and you can call 1-800-949-4232 for answers to your ADA questions.

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