



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

For more information contact:

Taylor Bostwick

(423) 320-3834

taylor_bostwick@signalcenters.org

Signal Centers Invites Community to Free Accesibility Resource Fair

Come for Breakfast, Connection to Resources, World-Renowned Speaker, Thought Leader Panel

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (April 24, 2025) – As part of the nationwide Global Accessibility Awareness Day movement, the seventh annual Signal Centers Accessibility Awareness Summit is returning next month. This year’s programming includes a free resource fair on Thursday, May 15.

Resource fair attendees will learn about access and inclusion, two ingredients vital to quality of life for the more than one billion people living with disabilities. The event will feature disability service providers who have resources to offer, remarks from a world-reknonwed blind architect, and a panel of local thought leaders. A light breakfast will also be provided.

“It’s so exciting to put so many lived experiences and forward thinkers in a room to connect around accessibility,” said Deardra McGee, director of Signal Centers’ Assistive Technology Services program. “The community has felt the Summit’s impact over the past seven years, and we expect this year to be the most transformative one yet.”

Hosted in partnership with BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee, Chattanooga Coca-Cola Bottling Company, McKee Foods, and Unum, the resource fair will be held from 9 a.m. to noon at Signal Centers’ community event space in the Uptain Building’s third floor (5751 Uptain Road).

Resources

Upon entering, attendees will be surrounded by tables of local disability service providers ready to provide information on products and services available to those living with disabilities. This will give Signal Centers the opportunity to spotlight resources offered by two of its programs: Assistive Technology Services and The Speech & Hearing Center. Assistive Technology Services helps those with disabilities navigate a tech-driven world as independently as possible. The Speech & Hearing Center specializes in communication disorders by providing audiology and speech services to individuals with impairments of all ages and income.

World-Renowned Speaker

After pursuing the ample resources around the room, the event will officially open with remarks from international speaker Chris Downey. Almost two decades ago, Downey was able to return to designing buildings within a month of losing his vision suddenly and completely. As the first blind architect, he adapted through tactile floor plans, a long cane, and networking with visually impaired professionals. He has since focused on creating enriching, accessible environments for those with disabilities. Beyond his completed design projects, his accomplishments include speaking internationally, founding a consulting architecture firm, serving on the California Commission on Disability Access, and teaching at University of California Berkeley.

Thought Leader Panel

Following Downey, guests will participate in a panel discussion featuring:

- Dr. Mina Sartipi, Guerry Professor of the Computer Science and Engineering Department at the University of Tennessee Chattanooga
- Deardra McGee, Director of Assistive Technology Services at Signal Centers
- Wayne Collins, Chief Operating Officer of Orange Grove Center
- Cory Raburn, Vocational Rehabilitation Regional Manager at Tennessee Vocational Rehabilitation

These community leaders will draw from their expertise for an open dialogue on the importance of accessibility and inclusion in Chattanooga. Their goal is to foster deeper awareness and understanding of the issues facing those with disabilities and to lead the conversation on how everyone can collaborate to address them.

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Signal Centers

Signal Centers has been a cornerstone of the Chattanooga community since 1957. Its comprehensive early childhood education and disability services focus on fostering lifelong learning and independence for all. From one classroom of nine children with cerebral palsy to a statewide organization comprised of 13 distinct programs, the nonprofit's mission of self-sufficiency remains unchanged. For more information, visit signalcenters.org.