

## **NPR, Harris Corporation and Towson University Launch Global Effort To Make Radio Accessible to Hearing and Sight Impaired**

*First Over-The-Air Transmission From Special CES Station*

**LAS VEGAS, January 8, 2008—(LVCC S227)**—NPR, Harris Corporation and Towson University today announced a new initiative to make radio more accessible to the hundreds of millions of hearing and visually impaired people around the world.

At a press conference at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, the three organizations announced the global accessible radio technology initiative and provided the first live demonstration of the accessible radio technology. The group also announced a new research center for developing future technologies on the campus of Towson University near Baltimore, MD. Additional plans call for the establishment of an international consortium of equipment manufacturers, broadcasters and other organizations to help foster broad adoption of the initiative.

The initiative will be spearheaded by the three founding organizations and will leverage cutting-edge HD Radio™ technology to enable hearing-impaired people to “see” live radio content on specially equipped receivers by applying television closed-captioning processes to radio broadcasts. The technology also will provide audio cues and voice prompts, as well as advanced radio reading services, for those visually impaired and blind.

“Digital radio technology makes it possible—for the first time—to serve the sensory impaired,” says Mike Starling, vice president and chief technology officer of NPR. “Beyond developing the technology, this initiative will ensure the accessibility of these radio services at minimal costs.”

During the press conference, the organizations showcased the first over-the-air transmission of the accessible radio technology using a signal from WX3NPR, a special temporary station authorized by the FCC for the live broadcast. Attendees at the press conference watched the text transcript of the NPR flagship morning news magazine “Morning Edition” on the HD Radio receiver’s viewing screen, which is what a hearing-impaired listener will see using the technology. Additionally, the demonstration carried a digital radio reading service that will assist the visually impaired with daily readings of current books, newspapers and magazines.

Following the demonstration, the participating organizations unveiled details for the International Center for Accessible Radio Technology (ICART), which will be headquartered at Towson University in Towson, MD. Towson will house the primary administrative and academic research office for the initiative, with NPR Labs in Washington, DC, providing technology R&D and software development, and Harris Corporation supplying transmission and research support at its radio broadcast technology center in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Members of the global initiative went on to detail plans to further study and understand the challenges faced by the sensory-impaired population in accessing radio broadcasts, and develop methodologies to address those issues through cutting-edge technologies. To ensure that the effort represents the widest range of participants and fosters the broadest

possible adoption, organizers said they will work to bring together policymakers, broadcasters, transmission equipment companies and receiver manufacturers from around the world. Presently, the initiative has more than a dozen members, representing virtually every aspect of the “microphone to loudspeaker” chain: broadcasters, network content providers, infrastructure and transmission equipment companies, and receiver manufacturers. In addition to founding members NPR, Harris and Towson University, supporting organizations include iBiquity Digital Corporation, Delphi, NDS, Radiosophy, Helen Keller Institute, Carl and Ruth Shapiro Family National Center for Accessible Media at WGBH(NCAM), Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons, and the G3ict, an Advocacy Initiative of the United Nations Global Alliance for ICT and Development.

NPR, Harris and Towson will jointly determine strategic direction of the organization, with assistance from the initiative’s full membership. NPR will provide much of the content, Harris will provide much of the transmission-related technologies, and Towson will provide research into the needs of the sensory-disabled population and will house the primary ICART facility on its campus.

“We’re working very closely with radio stations around the world to ensure they have the right technical infrastructure in place for this initiative,” said Howard Lance, chairman, president and chief executive officer of Harris Corporation. “The new HD Radio transmission systems we’re installing are tailor-made for this effort, as their digital capabilities will make it relatively easy for stations to transmit live textual transcripts to HD Radio receivers.”

“There is tremendous need for accessible radio for sensory-impaired people, including the deaf, hard-of-hearing, blind, visually impaired, print impaired, deaf/blind, and mobility impaired,” said Dr. Ellyn Sheffield, assistant professor of psychology at Towson and co-director of ICART. “There is no question this initiative will have a profound impact on the quality of millions of people’s lives. Finally, sensory-disabled individuals will have access to all radio programming, as well as radio emergency alerts and vital disaster recovery information.”

HD Radio enables station operators to split their broadcasts up into multiple channels, providing several CD-quality channels for their audiences. Through this accessible radio initiative, a small amount of the total data capacity will be used to carry textual data that will be shown live on a screen on new versions of HD Radio receivers, essentially providing a closed-captioning transcript of live broadcasts for the deaf. Initially, the closed-captioning text will be created by live, court-reporting-type captioners at individual stations and networks. Ultimately, the initiative is hoping to leverage advanced speech-to-text translation software applications that one day allow expansion of captioning across the radio dial. Specially equipped HD Radio receivers are in development with several features to provide the visually impaired audience with better access to broadcasts, such as audio prompts that notify which direction the tuner is going, what channel the radio is on, and larger, easier-to-read text on the radios.

More than 1,500 radio stations are currently broadcasting in HD Radio in the United States. Over half of the CPB-qualified stations have been awarded HD Radio conversion grants by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. According to current estimates, by 2010, all 825 public radio stations should be broadcasting digitally.

More information on the initiative can be found at [www.i-cart.net](http://www.i-cart.net).

### **About NPR**

Since its launch in 1970, NPR has evolved into a leading multimedia company, award-winning primary news provider and dominant force in American life. NPR produces and/or distributes 1,500 hours of programming weekly, including more than 150 hours of news, information, talk, entertainment and cultural shows for the 800-plus NPR Member stations around the country, attracting 26.5 million listeners weekly. NPR also programs two 24/7 channels for Sirius satellite radio and five 24/7 music multicast channels for digital HD Radio, having served as an industry leader in HD research and development; additionally it produces nearly 90 podcasts, making it the biggest podcaster among American media companies. [www.NPR.org](http://www.NPR.org) offers extensive original video and audio content, hourly newscasts, concerts and free audio streaming of current and archived NPR programs.

### **About Harris Corporation**

Harris is an international communications and information technology company serving government and commercial markets in more than 150 countries. Headquartered in Melbourne, Florida, the company has annual revenue of over \$4 billion and 16,000 employees—including nearly 7,000 engineers and scientists. Harris is dedicated to developing best-in-class *assured communications*™ products, systems, and services. Additional information about Harris Corporation is available at [www.harris.com](http://www.harris.com).

### **About Towson University**

Founded in 1866, Towson University is recognized among the nation's best regional public universities, offering more than 100 bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree programs in the liberal arts and sciences, and applied professional fields. Located in suburban Towson, eight miles north of Baltimore, the university's beautifully landscaped, 328-acre setting offers a pleasant environment for study and a diverse campus life, as well as easy access to a wealth of university and community resources. With nearly 20,000 students, Towson University is the second-largest public university in Maryland. As a metropolitan university, Towson combines research-based learning with practical application. Its many interdisciplinary partnerships with public and private organizations throughout Maryland provide opportunities for research, internships and jobs. The university's radio station, WTMD, will soon convert to digital format and will serve as the initial testing ground for the initiative. Towson University is a founding member of the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU); TU President Robert Caret holds the office of president. Additional information can be found at [www.towson.edu](http://www.towson.edu).

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