

## Multisensory Adventure for Visually Impaired Offered at Arizona State Museum

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The Arizona State Museum at The University of Arizona will lead an unusual tour of the Pottery Project exhibit for an audience that isn't generally a part of the museum-going public.

The museum's free Touch Tour is for people with vision loss, done in conjunction with Art Beyond Sight Awareness Month in October. The monthlong event gives museums, arts organizations, schools and libraries around the world the opportunity to address the issue of access to arts for the visually impaired.

ASM program coordinator Beth DeWitt said the museum is actively signing up individuals with vision loss and their companions for the tour, which is limited to 30 participants.

The curator-led tour at ASM will include audio descriptions of some of the museum's prehistoric and contemporary Southwest Indian pottery, followed by several hands-on exploration activities.

The audio component of the tour was handled by ARTability, a statewide organization that works to connect people with disabilities with accessible programs in the arts.

The UA Disabilities Resource Center is assisting with Braille and other ingenious ways to help those with vision loss appreciate the tactile nature of the ASM pottery collection.

"The modifications museum educators and exhibit designers can make for the visually impaired benefit all visitors. Tactile and audio materials enrich the experience for everyone by reinforcing the message in multiple ways," DeWitt said.

"Visually impaired audiences deserve meaningful museum experiences and access to the arts. Imagine never experiencing the 'Mona Lisa' or a Picasso. The world's great art and artifacts are in museums â€" it's our duty as museum professionals to make those collections accessible to people of all abilities."

Art Beyond Sight Awareness Month is organized by Art Education for the Blind and provides opportunity and incentive for professionals and institutions to raise public awareness about making art and culture a part of life for adults and children affected by sight loss.

Many people who are visually impaired do not feel welcome at museums and do not take advantage of highly developed, up-to-date programs. Once involved, many with sight loss find museum-going a rewarding activity. The annual Art Beyond Sight Awareness Month provides ways to let the visually impaired know about arts programming in a way that encourages their participation.

Art Education for the Blind is a national organization based in New York City. Established in 1987 by Elisabeth Salzhauer Axel, it seeks to empower institutions to create long-lasting visual arts programming by offering proven methodologies, by training staff on accessibility and sensitivity, and by inviting local blind and sighted people to participate in educational activities.

Axel founded Art Education for the Blind when her grandmother, an artist and art lover, began to lose her sight and was dismayed by the lack of accommodations and services at museums for blind, visually impaired and disabled people.

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