

Now Premiering! Accessibility at the Coolidge Corner Theater

By Ginny Mazur

The not-for-profit Coolidge Corner Theater is one of Brookline's great treasures that draws regular visits by Goddard House residents. Our art-house cinema not only screens what you see up on the marquee but also offers a stunning array of special programs like live streams from the National Theater in London, Big Screen Classics, opera and red carpet premieres of films with a Boston connection. That's just skimming the top of the list. The dedication of the Coolidge staff to the art of film, culture and community collaboration is amazing.



Captions Display



Viewing English subtitles with captioning device

Coolidge Head Projectionist Nick Lazzaro contacted us a several months ago, to announce great news. The theater spent the winter completely revamping its assistive technology systems for Deaf, hard-of-hearing and vision impaired audiences in all four movie houses, partnering with Boston Light & Sound to introduce state-of-the-art systems for communication access.

For a movie-goer, like myself, with profound hearing loss, this is life-changing. For close to a decade, I've not been able to attend a first-run movie in a theater in English because there are no captions or subtitles. But now at the Coolidge captioning is available for most of the films that are screened. I attended La-La Land during its first week out. What a thrill to be back in the theater for a first run movie, following along without missing a beat, by reading captions through the new access system.

I met up with Nick at his Coolidge "office", the main projection booth, so that I could learn more about all the accessibility devices that the theater offers to help to get the word out so that more movie-goers can benefit. A native of Rutland, Vt., Nick, driven by his love movies, Nick moved to Boston to pursue his interests in the arts. At the School of the Museum of Fine Arts and Tufts University he earned a combined degree in Film History and Video Production. He worked as a freelance editor before joining the Coolidge Corner Theatre almost a decade ago. Nick has played a lead role in identifying, testing and developing the theater's new access systems. Here's what he wants you to know:



Assistive Listening Devices for the Hard of Hearing

This is a receiver worn casually on your hip or held in the hand. It also can come with a lanyard that acts as an induction loop. The Coolidge has reduced the size and improved the sound quality of the device and headphones (or neck-loop). Nick has also added two in-house microphones in the larger movie houses, one and two, so that live movie introductions and post-show discussions are more audible and now run through the system into the devices.



Coolidge Corner Theater



Visual Narration for the Blind or Visually Impaired

Same technology as the Assisted Listening but offers narration of the films visual content that blends along with the film's audio so both are experienced clearly. Headphones or neck-loops are available with the receiver.



Closed Captioning for the Deaf or Hard of Hearing

A receiver fits in your cup-holder with a rubber puck at the base. Simply push it down and crane the display into your field of vision. The text displays as white (better for folks who are colorblind). This is not the rear window technology. It is much more discrete. Most digital feature films have this content. Note: if a movie has subtitles they will not appear on the captioning devices.

Nick Suggests

“People can call or visit the box office (617-734-2501) if they are unsure if the movie they want to experience has these features. The Coolidge website (www.coolidge.org) and weekly schedules list which films have Closed Captioning and/or Visual Narration - week to week it changes with the films shown. All films have Assisted Listening. Look for the above icons.”



Nick Lazzaro in the Projection Booth



Assistive Listening/Audio Descriptive Receivers with Headset

“At the theater, the box office and/or projection staff can quickly instruct people how to use the devices. A pen and paper is easily ready for folks who would rather communicate by writing. We hope that all feel welcome and we appreciate any feedback. So far it's been very constructive and positive!”

Goddard House will plan to offer an instruction session for residents on how to use the new devices at the Coolidge Corner Theater this summer.