

Don Whittecar: Assisting disabled artists.

“A higher percentage of people with disabilities want to go into the arts, compared to the rest of the population,” observes Don Whittecar, founder of The Emergent Institute (TEI) and an accomplished photographer and painter in his own right. He started TEI in 2006, funding the organization with money made from securing grants to assist disabled artists.

TEI’s mission statement says, in part, that its purpose is “to provide resources for special needs artists, enabling them to attain self-sufficiency through their chosen educational, vocational, and entrepreneurial ventures within the Visual and Performing Arts.”

As part of that goal, Whittecar started looking for a way to help disabled artists use Adobe Photoshop and other computer software. He discovered MacSpeech Dictate (now Dragon Dictate for Mac) in 2008, and he soon realized that it could be beneficial to his own work too. He notes: “I have two graduate degrees, but I never learned to type, so MacSpeech Dictate has opened up new opportunities for me. It is an amazing help with writing of any kind, considering that I did two master theses by hand and had typists type them.”

MacSpeech Dictate then became a key part of his grant writing: “I can put my thoughts down immediately, so they don’t fly away. It allows me to be spontaneous with recording ideas and possibilities. When I tell people about the software, I always say: ‘Now you can write the way you speak.’”

That conversational style, notes Whittecar, also comes in handy when writing and replying to emails. In addition, he relies on MacSpeech Dictate while navigating the Internet, creating spreadsheets, and more. “There’s so much capability with MacSpeech Dictate, it amazes me”, he says.

Born out of a need

Another part of TEI's mission is hiring people with disabilities, something Whittecar also shares with his trainers. He was born with a neuro-physiological brain disorder, and 14 years ago he was diagnosed with Still's Disease, a form of arthritis that affects his mobility. Those conditions, along with his artistic inclinations, played major roles in the creation of TEI.

TEI's founding was also influenced by Damon Brooks Associates (DBA), a speakers bureau that represents only people with disabilities. DBA is owned by Marc Goldman, himself a disabled Hollywood agent who started his career matching celebrities with non-profit organizations and who was later inspired by a comedian in a wheelchair. Goldman currently represents "The Incredible Hulk" TV show star Lou Ferrigno, actor and

Broadway star Robert Guillaume, talk show host Montel Williams, and others.

Whittecar says he is working with Goldman on additional training programs that cover MacSpeech products as well as Dragon NaturallySpeaking for the PC, both from Nuance Communications. He plans to continue looking for ways to connect speech recognition software with TEI's mission to support artists with disabilities.

IMPORTANT NOTICE:

This success story provides an overview of the user's experience with MacSpeech Dictate. As a result of the acquisition of MacSpeech, Inc. by Nuance Communications, Inc. in 2010, the MacSpeech Dictate product was renamed Dragon Dictate for Mac.

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