



2020 ANNUAL REPORT



DEAR FRIENDS:

With an abundance of warmth and care for our cherished AWB community, we pivoted to virtual programming in early April after completing our previous month's in-person workshop March 1.

Had we known that just twelve days later we would not be seeing each other in person until who knows when...perhaps we would have said good-bye more ceremoniously.

Despite the uncharted landscape we entered in mid-March, AWB was determined to continue programs and move forward. We created new opportunities for our actor participants using Zoom and video for our acting workshops, theater programs, and TGIF weekly socials.

In person gatherings proved to be scarce in 2020 so we are holding on to the ones we were able to do. Prior to the pandemic, we held AWB Melodies performances at the Impact Center and the Kimmel Center during Philly Theater Week. In the fall I held an in-person disability awareness class at Holy Child Academy for elementary and middle school students and was supported by some of our actors who attended via Zoom and were projected onto a large screen.

This year prompted a great deal of conversation around social isolation and the need for community. As we moved into video projects and digital performances, some of our AWB Junior and Senior actors created a Public Service Announcement talking about how they deal with social isolation. Social isolation is something people with physical disabilities often confront even under more normal circumstances. AWB actors felt they could share strategies they use to help them from feeling isolated with the rest of the world through their upbeat video.

We honored Thomas Wlodkowski, VP of Accessibility at Comcast with the 5th Annual AWB Hero Award event in September, a spectacular virtual event broadcast via live stream. The 2020 honoree was very fitting this year because of his important work creating accessible technology. This year highlighted just how important this work continues to be for people with disabilities. Can you imagine getting through 2020 without technology?

Despite the pandemic, I have been both inspired and reassured over the past year of all we have accomplished at AWB this year. We do know that because of you, we have been able to run all our programs this year. We have stretched outside of our comfort zone and experimented with video to create some amazing digital masterpieces, and I am very proud of my staff and actors. I am so very grateful to you for your generosity, belief, and support of me and AWB.

Our clarity of sight in 2020 has been maintained with clear focus this past year. Emphasizing participants' needs, and the crucial role AWB plays in their lives. I know you will enjoy reading our highlights from the past year and we ask for your continued support in thought, time, and treasure. Please continue to be a part of the AWB family, so together we can carry on our vital mission of focusing on ability, building community, and bringing joy and meaning to our AWB actors' lives and families.

CR

With kindness, gratitude, and friendship,
Christine Rouse

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ACTING WITHOUT BOUNDARIES
 AIMS TO TRANSFORM LIVES
 AND BUILD SELF-ESTEEM IN
 AN EMPOWERED COMMUNITY
 OF PEOPLE WITH PHYSICAL
 DISABILITIES THROUGH THEATER
 THAT CELEBRATES ABILITY.

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 [CLICK TO WATCH ANYTHING GOES](#)



THE ACTORS OF THE **AWB SENIOR PROGRAM** WORK TIRELESSLY FOR TWELVE MONTHS TO CREATE A PUBLIC PERFORMANCE IN THE FALL, ALLOWING ACTORS TO EXPERIENCE THE BENEFIT OF LEARNING THE DRAMATIC ARTS BY PERFORMING IN A LIVE THEATRICAL PRODUCTION. THE ULTIMATE TRIUMPHS ARE THE SELF-ESTEEM AND LASTING FRIENDSHIPS THAT ARE CREATED FROM WORKING AS A CLOSE-KNIT ENSEMBLE.

This year's AWB Senior's performance of [Anything Goes](#) was filmed entirely on Zoom. Artistic Director, Neill Hartley cast each actor in their role early in the year allowing for maximum creative exploration and to accommodate various learning styles. He led multiple workshops prior to the filming where each actor practiced and ultimately learned all their lines and songs and then performed them via multiple Zoom film sessions. Music accompaniment was created and directed by Musical Director, Maria Ceferatti. Virtual backgrounds were selected to portray each scene and location necessary for the play. The backgrounds were uploaded by the actors prior to the filming. Costumes were designed and created by AWB's costume designer Connie Koppe, they were either picked up from the AWB office or delivered to the actor's home. The project took over eight weeks to film and was professionally

edited by Patrick Conroy. The families were a huge help and became at home "production assistants." We could not have done it without them. *Anything Goes* made its public debut on November 15th via Zoom. Over one hundred guests attended the virtual performance where Neill Hartley and Christine Rouse addressed the audience on behalf of AWB.

The pandemic also created a new opportunity for the AWB Senior actors. The first TGIF Social started in early April and was an instant success. The intended one-time social event via Zoom immediately turned into a regular weekly gathering. Every Friday at 4:30 PM, actors had an opportunity to share any big news that might have happened that week and participate in a "Question of the Week." Through the TGIF Socials AWB also hosted a Halloween costume party and holiday party with carol sing-alongs.





 [CLICK TO WATCH AWB JUNIORS PERFORMANCE AT THE HERO AWARD](#)



THE ACTORS OF THE **AWB JUNIOR PROGRAM** ARE THE YOUNGEST THESPIANS AT AWB. THESE YOUNG ACTORS COLLABORATE TO CREATE THE SCRIPT, WRITE THE LYRICS TO THE SONGS, AND BRING THEIR CHARACTERS TO LIFE! JUNIOR ACTORS REHEARSE FOR NINE MONTHS CULMINATING IN A MUSICAL IN THE SPRING. DURING THIS PROCESS, THE ACTORS BUILD SKILLS IN TEAMWORK, PUBLIC SPEAKING, AND CONFIDENCE. FRIENDSHIPS FORM, AND THEY JUST HAVE FUN!

Established in 2008, AWB Junior is the first stepping-stone of the AWB program. Actors, beginning as young as age five, gather together each month to rehearse and prepare for an annual musical. Using the context of the theater arts, these gifted actors explore their imagination, engage in movement activities, celebrate their curiosity and find their voice! To feature the talents of these young, but mighty performers, Maria Ceferatti, AWB Junior's Artistic Director, chooses a folktale or children's story for their annual musical. This year's show will be an original adaptation of *Stone Soup*. With the help of the actors, Ms. Ceferatti wrote the script and songs and set the play in a location that

is close to everyone's hearts—Philadelphia! *Stone Soup* features original music and a witty culture-clash as the two main characters, tourists from the South, are introduced to local "Phillyisms." When in-person rehearsals had to be postponed last spring, preparations were made to rehearse and record *Stone Soup* via Zoom. Filming for *Stone Soup* began in the fall and continued into the new year. AWB will proudly be premiering this project in the Spring of 2021. Our Junior actors showed an incredible amount of strength and resilience as they adjusted to the change in program format. We could not be prouder of our Junior actors!





 **CLICK TO WATCH THE
AWB MELODIES HOLIDAY VIDEO**



THE **AWB MELODIES PROGRAM** ALLOWS AWB TO LIVE OUT ITS IMPORTANT MISSION OF SHARING WHAT PEOPLE WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES CAN DO! IT ALSO OPENS CONVERSATIONS AND FACILITATES A BROADER COMMUNITY AWARENESS AROUND PEOPLE WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES.

The AWB Melodies Program had a robust schedule this past year which began with a social outing to *The Glass Menagerie* at the Phoenix Theater followed by a disability awareness workshop held at the Impact Center in Bryn Mawr. Shortly after, we partnered with Harriton High School theater students to raise awareness about AWB at their winter one-act festival in January. Later that month, Jen and Christine went to Temple University and engaged students in a disability awareness conversation. The 2020 AWB Melodies event highlight, *Journeys, a celebration of life, love, and the human spirit which keeps us moving forward* was performed at the Kimmel Center for the second year in a row as part of Philly Theater week. Upon invitation from the Kimmel, special guest Ryan Haddad (Netflix's *The Politician* actor) attended *Journeys* and met with AWB actors after the performance.

When the pandemic hit, we immediately moved into the digital space and began video projects which included AWB's [Public Service Announcement](#) where AWB actors share strategies they use to help from feeling isolated through an upbeat video. Social isolation is something people with physical disabilities often confront even under more normal circumstances.

Over the summer, the Bryn Mawr Rotary Club invited AWB to be guest speakers at a member meeting. This resulted in a virtual Bingo event where AWB was the beneficiary and actors were invited to join the game. In the fall, Christine held an in-person disability awareness class at Holy Child Academy for elementary and middle school students and was supported by some of our actors who attended via Zoom and were projected onto a large screen. The year culminated with an encore performance of *Journeys* which was filmed via Zoom and then woven together into a creative video rendition of the live performance.



Acting Without Boundaries is founded.

2004

AWB Sr.



2006

MELODIES



2008

The AWB Melodies outreach program begins.

AWB celebrates a decade of providing live theater opportunities for children and teens with physical disabilities.

AWB Junior performs its inaugural show.

AWB Jr.



2014



Masters



2012

Christine Rouse and AWB are featured on NBC's *The Today Show*.

AWB establishes the inaugural AWB Hero Award.

AWB establishes the Masters Program and Acting Lab.

2016

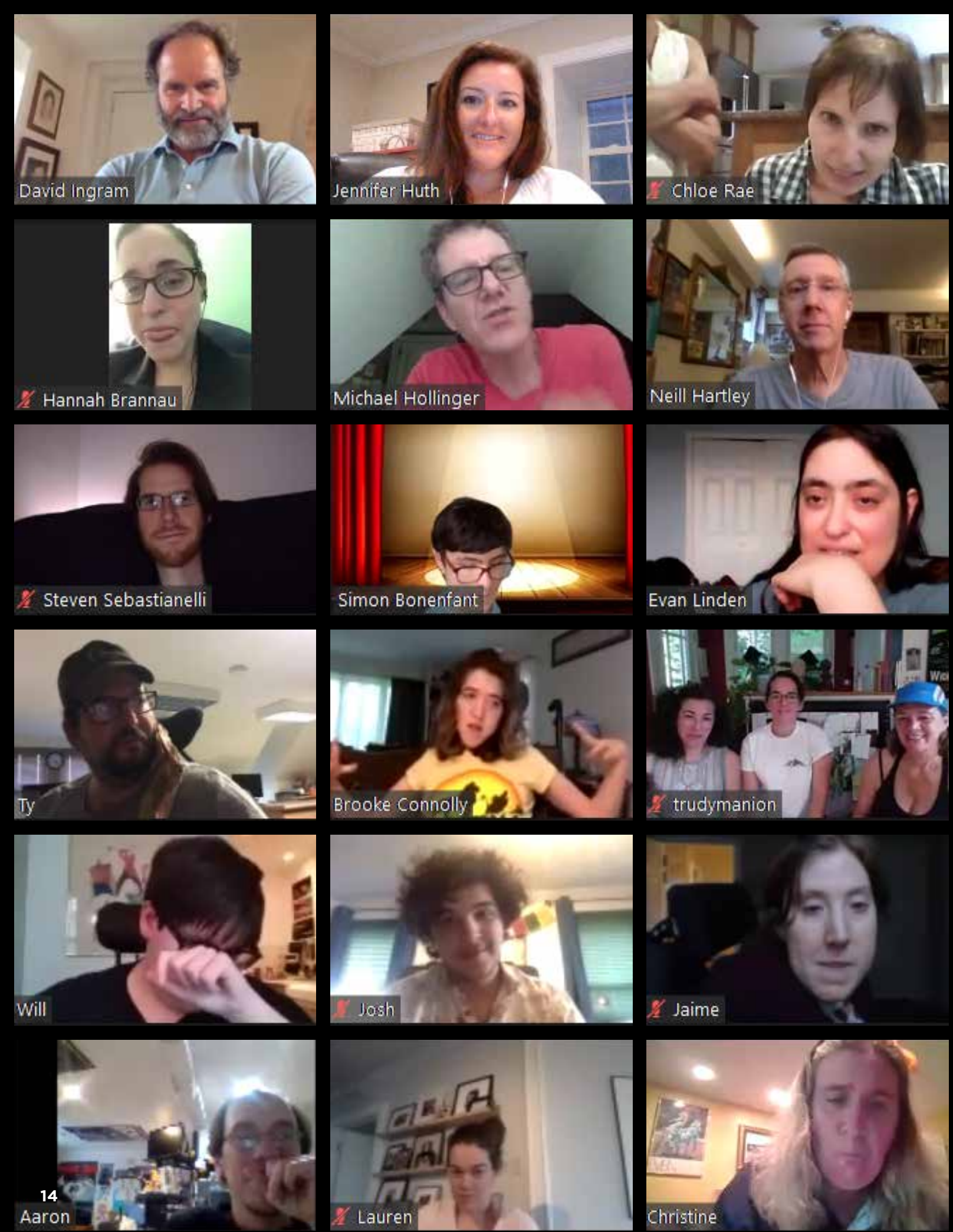
2018

ACTING LAB



2020

All programs run virtually as AWB expands into video.



THE MISSION OF **AWB MASTERS** IS TO PROVIDE AN IMMERSIVE CONSERVATORY EXPERIENCE IN THE THEATRE ARTS. THIS PROGRAM PROVIDES THOROUGH AND COMPREHENSIVE TRAINING TO OBTAIN THE SKILLS OF A PROFESSIONAL THEATRE ARTIST. EACH YEAR ONE DISCIPLINE OF THE CRAFT IS CHOSEN AS THE MAIN FOCUS OF THE PROGRAM.

The second annual AWB Masters program focused on playwriting and directing with featured guest instructors Michael Hollinger and David Ingram. Michael Hollinger is an American playwright and a resident playwright at New Dramatists, Assistant Professor of Theatre at Villanova University, and Artistic Director of Villanova Theatre. David Ingram is an Associate Professor of Theater and Head of Theater Studies at Temple University. David is a long-time member of the People's Light and Theatre Company in Malvern, PA, where he has both acted in and directed many productions.

Participants learned about playwriting and what makes a good play, plus how to interpret and analyze a script. Neill Hartley's segment on directing enabled participants to understand the director's point of

view by sharing a "behind the scenes" look of what it takes to make a show successful. Students became equipped with the skills necessary to write their own short play, a new and challenging experience for most. Participants worked in both large and small group formats where they read individual's plays, shared feedback, and built the skills needed to perform the plays via a virtual platform. It was an intense four days of instruction, growth, collaboration, catharsis, and triumph.

AWB Masters culminated with a final showcase lasting two hours. Each participant had their short play read and acted by other members of the program. Thus, giving everyone the chance to write, act, narrate and direct. The instructors successfully pushed participants to create original works of art.





CLICK TO WATCH VIDEO WRITTEN AND ACTED BY PARTICIPANTS OF THE AWB ACTING LAB AT MAGEE



THROUGH THE **AWB ACTING LAB**, WE SHARE AWB'S NEARLY TWO DECADES OF EXPERTISE AND HELP OTHERS REALIZE THE THERAPEUTIC BENEFITS OF THE PERFORMING ARTS. THE ACTING LAB ENABLES US TO TEACH ON-SITE, AT CARE INSTITUTIONS SERVING PEOPLE WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES. COLLABORATING WITH THESE GREAT ORGANIZATIONS HAS ALLOWED US TO EXPAND OUR REACH ON A BROADER SCALE.

As a small, mature, theater arts non-profit and the only known theater arts organization in the area (and one of very few across the country) who exclusively serve individuals with physical disabilities and, with seventeen years of advanced knowledge and highly specialized expertise, we wanted to share what we know with others. The primary goal for the Acting Lab is to serve more individuals with physical disabilities.

When in person classes were not possible, leadership at Magee worked diligently with AWB, determined to make the Acting Lab happen. Ultimately the class was pushed back to early summer and was taught via Zoom with 7 participants fully engaged for six weeks. The enthusiasm of the students was evident on a weekly basis indicated by their attendance and energy level during class.

The execution of Acting Lab programs took a completely different direction in 2020 because of the pandemic. We started the year knowing we were expanding by adding a new partner, Jefferson Health's Magee Rehabilitation. The original plan was to teach in-person at their wellness facility on Columbus Avenue in Philadelphia in early spring.

Following the success of the Acting Lab with Magee, we returned to Inglis to hold a fall program with their Day Program participants. Both programs shifted successfully to a virtual platform which culminated into a video production written and acted by participants as their final project.





THE **DEVON LENGEL MEMORIAL AWARD** IS GIVEN TO AN AWB COMMUNITY MEMBER WHOSE ENTHUSIASM, DEDICATION, AND PASSION SHINES BRIGHTLY ON OTHERS AND EXEMPLIFIES THE ETERNAL LIGHT AND EVERLASTING IMPRESSION THAT DEVON BROUGHT TO AWB AND TO ALL THOSE SHE INTERACTED WITH.

Devon Lengel was a member of AWB from 2014 to 2018. Acting and singing were two of her passions and AWB gave her the opportunity to express them in multiple stage productions over 5 of her near 15 years. She loved coming to monthly practice and interacting with the other cast members, volunteers, and instructors.

Devon was a witty wordsmith. Sometimes in rehearsals, the actors brainstormed together to write lyrics to songs for the AWB Junior show. She often came up with wonderful rhymes and clever ideas. She loved to tell jokes during rehearsals and often shared her vast knowledge of musicals—singing songs and reciting scenes verbatim from her favorite shows, *The Sound of Music*, *My Fair Lady* and *Oliver*.

Devon's enthusiasm was palpable and her concern for her AWB family was genuine. We know that she is here with us, shining in the stage lights, adding her voice to choruses, and cheering us on from backstage. Beginning in 2019, AWB began to remember Devon with an annual award honoring a member of AWB who, like Devon, has made a lasting impression through their enthusiasm and dedication to AWB, creating a better experience for everyone involved.

Thanks to the generosity of those who love Devon and know how much she cared about AWB, this past year, 2020 the Devon Lengel Memorial Fund was established to support the Junior program, performance t-shirts and wonderful cast reception which follows AWB Junior performances.





 **CLICK TO WATCH
THE 2020 HERO AWARD**

Hero Award

THE **AWB HERO AWARD** IS GIVEN TO A COMMUNITY LEADER WITH A PHYSICAL DISABILITY WHO DISPLAYS REMARKABLE EFFORTS TO OVERCOME ADVERSITY, ENHANCE AWARENESS, REDUCE STIGMA AND INCREASE COMMUNITY ACCESS FOR DISABLED INDIVIDUALS.

The 2020 Hero Award recipient was Thomas Wlodkowski, Vice President of Accessibility at Comcast. Tom has worked tirelessly to bridge the technology gap for the disabled community. The livestreamed virtual event featured a custom webpage built for AWB. Guests were able to view the event video, make a donation, post on a personalized message board, and connect to the online auction. Stephanie Stahl, an award-winning health journalist for CBS3 Philadelphia was the MC. The evening included multiple performances by AWB actors performing many original skits and there was a sneak peak of the Seniors performance of *Anything Goes*. The evening also included a Public Service Announcement on social isolation featuring long-term AWB participants, plus a video project from the students of the AWB

Acting Lab at Magee Rehab. High energy, enthusiasm, sincerity, and warmth was felt through the screen as multiple toasts to Tom were expressed by AWB's staff, board of directors and previous Hero Award recipients. They all joined in to extend congratulations to Tom and show support for AWB and its programs. Actor, Will Thomas, was a featured speaker. He encouraged community engagement by saying "You know, you don't have to run Comcast to be a hero, you can be a hero right now, just by supporting AWB". AWB actor, Simon Bonnenfant, introduced Tom and reminded attendees why he nominated Tom for this award. Tom gave an inspirational acceptance speech with sincerity and humor. The event was amazing—oh what a night!



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