

# DISABILITY HAS A FACE

## CELEBRATING REPRESENTATION AT THE MEDIA ACCESS AWARDS

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A push for greater inclusion has been accelerating for some time, but over the past couple of months, the entertainment industry has taken a hard look at itself and rolled up its sleeves.

On November 17, the Media Access Awards (MAA), an annual event celebrating the portrayal and employment of people with disabilities, presented the eighth awards show of its current incarnation. Initially created by Norman Lear and Fern Field (who was honored this year with the Norman Lear–Geri Jewell Lifetime Achievement Award), the MAA went dark for a few years before its rebirth in 2010, when the PGA and WGA revived the event together with SAG-AFTRA and CSA.

The event has recognized numerous PGA members with the Producers Guild of America George Sunga Award for their contributions toward representation of those with disabilities. Prior honorees include Mike Tollin, Bruce Cohen, Betsy Beers, Shonda Rhimes, Noah Hawley and Jonathan Murray. This year, the Diversity Committee chose members Todd Lieberman and David Hoberman for their work on such films as *Stronger*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Wonder*.

These works, while entertaining, bring to audiences a real understanding of what an inclusive society can look and feel like. Whether telling the story of Jeff Bauman's harrowing experience of losing his legs at the Boston Marathon bombing, the character of Auggie in *Wonder*, who is bullied for his facial disfigurement, or the love story at the center of *Beauty and the Beast*, Todd and David invite us to empathize with characters that are distinct from us. They remind us of the great value that each of us, with our own uniqueness, brings to society and the world.

PGA member Nic Novicki was also honored with the SAG-AFTRA Harold Russell Award for his acting work as well as for his producing efforts in the creation of the Easterseals Disability Film Challenge.

Other artists honored were Robia Rashid for *Atypical* (WGAW Evan Somers Award), Alan Yang and Aziz Ansari for *Master of None* (WGAW Excellence in Writing Award), The Ruderman Foundation for their work on behalf of people with disabilities (SAG-AFTRA Disability Experience Award), and Telsey + Company for a banner year in casting actors with disabilities in such shows as *I'm Dying Up Here*, *Atypical* and the upcoming series *Love You More* (CSA Award).

The show was hosted by Haben Girma, the first deaf/blind woman to graduate from Harvard Law School, and Oliver Trevena, the host of *Young Hollywood*.

There are 57 million Americans living with a disability today. There is still a long road to the broad inclusion of the disabled in the media whose images mirror America. The Media Access Awards is a showcase of the talent and stories that are paving the way. ■



Above left: Media Access Awards founders Fern Field and Norman Lear; below: PGA members and George Sunga Award honorees Todd Lieberman (left) and David Hoberman (right) with *Wonder* cast member Jacob Tremblay and PGA Diversity Chair Deborah Calla.

