

## **ARIZONA DISABILITY ADVOCACY COALITION HONORS 'UNBEATEN' LEADERS AT FILM FESTIVAL**

The Arizona Disability Advocacy Coalition ([AzDAC](#)) has honored seven of Arizona's disability community leaders at the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Film Festival, which celebrated the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ADA. The Unbeaten Spirit Medals honor individuals who have shown an indomitable spirit when it comes to their work on behalf of the disability community. This is the first time the awards have been given to Arizonans. The honorees are David Carey, Mike Armstrong, Lance Blair, Jany Deng, John Gutierrez, Jennifer Longdon and Andrew Smith.

David Carey is an advocacy specialist for Arizona Bridge to Independent Living (ABIL), as well as a founder and chair of Inspire Human Services Co-Op, which helps people with disabilities to lead independent lives. Carey, who became a quadriplegic following a gunshot accident in 1989, has been a tireless advocate for health care access and safe public transportation options for persons with physical disabilities. Originally from Texas, Carey lives in Tempe.

North Phoenix resident Mike Armstrong lost his sight as a young man and had to have his eyes removed and replaced with an assortment of prosthetic eyes. He is a Foundation for Blind Children board member, has climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro with a fundraising team and is a professional martial arts instructor who volunteers teaching self-defense training for adult blind students.

Lance Blair is the founder of Disabled Explorers, an Arizona-based non-profit organization that encourages and enables people with disabilities to explore and enjoy travel in the backcountry of Arizona. In 2008 Blair led a Disabled Explorers team on a Continental Divide Expedition over 24 days and 5,000 miles. Blair has been an amputee

for 22 years and is now an intensive care nurse and wilderness EMT. He is Overland Certified and is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. He resides in central Phoenix.

Jany Deng works part-time as a program manager at the AZ Lost Boys Center in Phoenix. In his position, Deng seeks out referral sources to assist the Lost Boys participants, and is touted as someone whom the Lost Boys and Girls seek out for all their needs. His goal is to start a non-medical transportation company to assist those with disabilities in a way that will allow them to remain independent. In addition, he wants to provide training and assistance for the Lost Boys participants in order to help them attain jobs and maintain their independence. Deng lives in southwest Phoenix.

Central Phoenix resident John Gutierrez has been an advocate at the Arizona Center for Disability Law for 21 years, having spent most of those years in the Client Assistance Program (CAP), where he advocates on behalf of applicants and clients of the Arizona Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) to ensure they receive the services they are entitled to from RSA. Gutierrez is the supervisor of the CAP and, through his work, hundreds of individuals with disabilities have received vocational rehabilitation services necessary to reach an employment goal.

Jennifer Longdon is a person with a spinal cord injury that has an outstanding record of advocacy and accomplishments on behalf of those with disabilities. She recently inspired Phoenix television anchorwoman Catherine Anaya to support fundraising for the Virginia G. Piper Sport and Fitness Center. She has also raised more than \$40,000 for spinal cord injury research at the Reeve Irvine Research Center at the University of California in Irvine and completed the P.F. Chang's Half Marathon in 2009

and 2010 as a wheelchair user in a standard division. Longdon currently resides in north Phoenix.

The final award recipient, Andy Smith, was diagnosed with brain cancer several years ago. He had to have brain surgery immediately to save his life, followed by chemo and radiation. He was in remission when he was again diagnosed with cancer and endured more treatment. Shortly after this, Smith's mother was diagnosed with lung cancer and passed away. Despite these obstacles he completed his associate of arts degree at a Maple Woods Community College in Kansas City, Mo., and is currently working on gaining admittance to Arizona State University to work towards his bachelor's degree in computers. He lives in north Phoenix.

The awards ceremony was held in conjunction with the Arizona premiere of "Unbeaten," the second film from award-winning documentary filmmaker Steven C. Barber. The awards were donated by Barber and producer Greg Strom, who were on hand to congratulate the honorees.

"Our film highlights some amazing people who happen to have disabilities," said Barber. "We wanted to honor a handful of amazing people in Arizona who work to improve conditions for people with disabilities every day. We are glad we could celebrate the 20th anniversary of the ADA with our film and with the film festival attendees."

"We were thrilled to debut 'Unbeaten' at the ADA Film Festival," said David Carey, advocacy specialist for Arizona Bridge to Independent Living (ABIL) and co-chair of the film festival committee. "The film highlights the independence of people with disabilities, which is what we've been striving for through the ADA and our

advocacy efforts in the past 20 years. We are looking forward to more films like this that underscores our abilities.”

For more information, visit [www.azdac.org](http://www.azdac.org) and [www.unbeatthemovie.com](http://www.unbeatthemovie.com).