

Hear, There, Everywhere

An unconventional app innovator aims for instant accessibility | By George W. Stone | Photography by Powers and Crewe |

This month, Catharine McNally launches her first iPhone app. If she seems electrically charged, that's only half the story. "I *am* a magnetic field," says the indefatigable 26-year-old entrepreneur, who lost her hearing to meningitis at eight months and gained an utterly unique way of approaching the world's challenges. As the founder of Keen Guides—which creates downloadable tours to museums, colleges and public venues—McNally is a maverick on matters of information accessibility. She's now an IT shooting star, even if her cochlear implants, glowing laptop and permanently buzzing phone tend to demagnetize her Metro card.

Born in Winston-Salem and educated at Wake Forest, McNally had her eureka! moment while she was an intern at London's Dali Universe museum. Unable to take the audio and live tours, she invented alternatives—braille booklets and transcripts—that opened the world of Salvador Dali's artistry to everyone. Later, while working

at the Kennedy Center, McNally built on her success, developing geocoded, info-packed, mobile platform guides to make cultural venues more accessible. With that, her startup was born.

What began as a niche product for people with disabilities quickly became a content aggregation and distribution platform intended for all people. "We discovered everyone was looking for an independent travel experience. So, our approach now is to have the community come together to educate one another," she says. Powered by seed investment from LaunchBox Digital, Arlington-based Keen Guides has the potential to become a cutting-edge source for instantly downloadable tours to just about everywhere.

More than anything else, Keen Guides is designed to bring people together, says McNally, who is an aspiring competition-level sharpshooter. "When I go hunting, I miss on purpose," she jokes. Must be the only thing she misses. ■

McNally's Hots:

Antique Browning shotgun, TOMS Shoes, Cloud computing, Lomography, Lost Dog Café, Clean fuels, Wii Fit, Trek FX-5 hybrid bicycle

McNally's Nots:

Segways, Demagnetized Metro cards, Perez Hilton, Vodka, Facebook pokes, Sand traps, Crowded bike racks, Knockoff designer handbags



THE ACCESSIBLE TOUR GUIDE

Catharine McNally—here at the FDR Memorial—often quotes Eleanor Roosevelt: "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."