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THE UNEXPECTED INNOVATOR OPENING THE DIGITAL DOOR: ATLANTA RADIO LEGEND STEVE BARNES BUILDS FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND FIX FOR INACCESSIBLE VIRTUAL TOURS

As a Federal Accessibility Deadline Nears, Barnes Creative Studios' 360 Accessibility Generator Turns Existing Virtual Tours Into Experiences Blind + Visually Impaired Users Can Explore Independently

From Morning Radio to Paramount+ to Accessibility Tech. One Atlantan's Answer to a Problem Most Organizations Haven't Noticed Yet.

ATLANTA: Hotels, universities, cruise lines and commercial properties have spent years investing in immersive 360° virtual tours to help people explore their spaces from anywhere. For a sighted visitor, a virtual tour is an easy way to preview a resort, walk a campus or evaluate a property. For someone who is blind or visually impaired, that same experience is often a locked door. **Steve Barnes**, founder + president of Atlanta-based **Barnes Creative Studios**, has built the key. His 360 Accessibility Generator (360 AG) adds an accessible layer to virtual tours organizations already own, allowing blind and visually impaired users to navigate and understand a space independently.

The timing is significant. Under the U.S. Department of Justice's ADA Title II rule, state and local government entities, including public colleges and universities, must make their websites and digital content accessible to WCAG 2.1 Level AA standards. Larger public entities now face an **April 26, 2027** compliance deadline, after the Department extended the original 2026 date. At the same time, private businesses such as hotels and attractions continue to face growing scrutiny over digital accessibility. What was once seen as a "nice to have" is quickly becoming a compliance, financial + reputational priority.

An Unlikely Inventor + A Problem Hiding in Plain Sight

Barnes did not set out to become an accessibility technology developer. Best known to Atlanta audiences as co-host of the award-winning "The Morning X with Barnes, Leslie and Jimmy" on 99X, and currently seen as General Cunningham on Tyler Perry's "The Oval" on Paramount+, Barnes founded Barnes Creative Studios in 1999 to produce cinematic video, drone videography and virtual experiences for luxury hospitality, commercial real estate and higher education. In 2012, he began creating immersive virtual tours.

The turning point came in 2017, when a cruise line client facing an accessibility lawsuit reached out for help fixing its virtual tour. Barnes found there was no real solution on the market, so he built one. He launched his first accessible virtual tour player in 2020 and has since developed it into 360 AG, which now powers accessible virtual experiences for brands and institutions including IHG, Four Seasons, Marriott Bonvoy, CBRE and the University of Alabama.

"April 2027 sounds far away, but it isn't. Once you factor in budgets, approvals and the time it takes to review every tour, page and video, most institutions really only have a few months to get this done," said Barnes. "The organizations that start now will be ready. The ones that wait will be scrambling, and the people who rely on that access are the ones left on the outside looking in."

Same Space. Same Experience. Equal Access.

360 AG works with existing tours on most platforms, so organizations do not have to throw away the digital assets they have already invested in.

Key features include:

- Screen reader compatibility
- Full keyboard navigation
- Audio descriptions + captions
- Structured navigation that lets users move through a space on their own

In a side-by-side demonstration, a blind musician explored the same virtual tour before and after the 360 AG upgrade, moving from a tour he could not use to one he could navigate on his own.

For a blind student choosing a college, a traveler deciding on a hotel or a family evaluating a venue, the question is not just whether a website technically complies. It is whether every person can participate independently in the same digital world everyone else takes for granted.

Barnes is available for interviews and can speak to:

- Digital accessibility + inclusion and what the Title II deadline means for public institutions
- Why existing virtual tours are an overlooked accessibility gap for hotels, universities + commercial real estate
- The future of immersive digital experiences + emerging technology
- His journey from Atlanta radio and acting to tech entrepreneurship

Learn more about 360 AG at barnescreativestudios.com/ada-compliant-virtual-tours.

Interviews with Steve Barnes, accessibility demonstrations and photography are available upon request.

ABOUT BARNES CREATIVE STUDIOS: Founded by Steve Barnes, Barnes Creative Studios is an Atlanta-based digital media and immersive marketing agency specializing in high-end cinematic video production, drone videography + 360° virtual experiences for luxury hospitality, commercial real estate and higher education. The company developed the 360 Accessibility Generator (360 AG), which upgrades existing virtual tours with screen reader compatibility, keyboard navigation, audio descriptions and captions so people of all abilities can explore spaces independently. Clients include IHG, Four Seasons, Marriott Bonvoy and CBRE. To learn more, visit www.barnescreativestudios.com.

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