



## River City Tech News Q3 2004

Profile: Teresa Sansone Ferguson  
By Sheena Colbath Harden

Teresa Sansone Ferguson serves as Chair of the Austin Music Commission, which acts in an advisory capacity to the City Council on all music related issues. She also servers on the board of Knowbility (<http://www.knowbility.org>), and as chair of AIR (Accessibility Internet Rally) Interactive for the Arts, an event sponsored by Knowbility held in conjunction with SXSW Interactive. AIR brings in volunteer Web developers to build Web sites for musicians, artists and art groups - sites that are both media-rich and accessible to people with disabilities.

In February 2002, the City Council appointed her to a special task force to research ways in which the city can promote and assist our live music industry. In June 2002, she was appointed to Austin's Downtown Commission to help guide and support cultural development in Austin's downtown sector. In 2003 she received the Dewey Winburne Community Service Award for her many contributions to the community.

Ms. Ferguson is a marketing / public relations director at Athens Group, Inc., an Austin-based, employee-owned technology consulting firm founded in 1998. Teresa also works part-time at the local NPR affiliate, KUT Radio, 90.5 FM (<http://www.kut.org>) where she hosts and produces two shows: Femme FM and the Austin Music Minute. She also designed and built KUT's first Web site.

Teresa received her BA degree in business and marketing from The University of Missouri - Columbia. She also is a graduate of Leadership Austin (class of 1996-97). She is married to Neil, and they have two dogs, Benny and Ella.

*Sheena:* Teresa, you are involved in both Austin music and technology access. Do those areas intersect for you? If so, how?

*Teresa:* Most people would agree that music is \*the\* universal language with the power to tear down barriers between people and countries. And, when you stop to think about how people all over the world access and enjoy music, the methods are increasingly tied to technology (iTunes, digital and Internet radio, etc). It just seems appropriate to include the music and art communities to further Knowbility's goal of "barrier-free IT."

Also, I think there's a more fundamental tie between music and technology. I've worked in the technology industry for more than 14 years, and I'm \*still\* amazed at the number of computer programmers and technology professionals who lead double lives as musicians. I think it's been proven that there is a natural

connection between music and technology -- people who have an affinity toward one field often have talents in the other.

*Sheena:* How did you first become interested in Knowbility's Accessibility Internet Rally (AIR)?

*Teresa:* I participated on a volunteer tech team in the very first AIR event. (1998?) I was not only impressed with the event, but with Knowbility and all of the people involved.

*Sheena:* What is the most rewarding aspect of working AIR?

*Teresa:* The appreciation of the musicians, art groups and non-profits is the best part! They love their new Web sites, of course, but I think they also appreciate receiving information and insight about accessibility issues -- through AIR they find a new audience.

*Sheena:* As someone involved from early on with SXSW, how have newer technologies like WiFi changed the face of SXSW Interactive?

*Teresa:* I think newer technologies make accessibility more \*real\* for programmers. Programmers may not always understand accessibility in terms of special needs of people with disabilities, but increasingly they're seeing the need for universal information access: access -- via technology -- by all people AND devices.

*Sheena:* In your opinion how have technology and the digital divide affected Austin music/musicians?

*Teresa:* It truly is all about access. Musicians want their art enjoyed by as many people as possible. Since technology is one of the best ways to achieve this goal, they'd like to remove any and all barriers that get in the way.