

the Independent

A Publication of Freedom Resource
Center for Independent Living, Inc.

Summer 2006

Volume 14

Issue 03

What's Inside

•What's Wrong
With This
Picture?

•From Where I
Sit

•Recreation

•Legislative
News

•Profile in
Advocacy

•Upcoming
Events

Is accessible parking coming to a city near you?

By Andrea Nelson, independent living
advocate

In Jamestown, accessible parking is a big deal- so big it's been the talk of the town: radio, TV, newspaper... In fact, compliance with accessible parking regulations has proven to be a positive thing in Jamestown and a big boost for the Mayor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities. I had heard that there was a group in Fargo working on this issue and thought that maybe we could do something about the parking signs and many parking violations (specifically to accessible parking) here too. Something needed to be done, but the Mayor's Committee was struggling and barely treading water looking for solutions to each individual parking violation. I made some calls, used my charm and spoke with Tom Thompson of Fargo. Man, was I ever in luck by calling Tom. We met for about 20

minutes and I had most of my work done. All I needed to do was put it into action in Jamestown.

The first step in Jamestown was to have the city ordinance updated. In the 2001-2003 legislative session, language regarding parking was added to the North Dakota Century Code (NDCC). It states: *An entity that violates the requirements of subsection 9 is guilty of an infraction (\$500.00) if the entity does not comply with subsection 9 within sixty days after receiving official notification of the violation. (NDCC 39-01-15-12).* So, you may be asking yourself- what does that have to do with the Jamestown City Ordinance? Well, like most towns, this change was not implemented into the city code. I presented this to the Jamestown Chief of Police along with the support of the Jamestown Mayor's Committee. And as of June 1, 2006, Jamestown has made an update in the city code to follow the NDCC. Now you may be thinking, "Well who cares, and what the heck does that italicized writing mean anyway?" It means that if you provide parking to customers (whether it's marked or assumed parking), you must have proper accessible parking as deemed by the NDCC 39-01-15-9. If your parking space does not meet the

What's Wrong with this Picture?

Retail aisle widths must be a minimum of 36 inches. Retail stores may need to adjust their layout of racks and shelves in order to permit wheelchair access, although they are not required to do so if it would result in a significant loss of selling space. However, the store is still required to make the goods and services that are located along inaccessible aisles available to individuals with disabilities through alternative methods.



Election 2006: Vote Or Get out of the Way

by Chuck Stebbins, systems change advocate

Unless you live under a rock, or only watch re-runs of Gilligan's Island during prime news hours, or you are dead, you know that there is an election this coming November. On the federal level, it may decide who the leadership will be in the House of Representatives, and possibly the Senate. On the local level, it will decide who represents your voice and opinion at the state Capitol come legislative session time, and in city and county governments in both states.

In the coming months across Minnesota and North Dakota, big, medium, and small town streets and neighborhoods will host a plethora of signs asking you for your support. You'll probably drive or walk by them a couple of zillion times before election day. There will be billboards with larger than life melon heads smiling down at you as you drive by. There will be knocks on the door from Tom, Dick, Harry, and Mary, and commercials from those that can afford it. And when the smoke clears after November 8th, we will have a delegation of men and women we can start complaining about all over again. Oh, and by the way, if you don't vote...you don't get to complain.

In Minnesota, 67 Senators, and 134 Representatives are up. That's every blessed one of them. On the federal level, one Senate seat and eight Representative seats are up for grabs.

In North Dakota there is not even close to that many statewide...I think it's because of that out migration thing they've got going on. North Dakota has elections in all the odd districts...not to be confused with odd "fellows" in those districts...so that means, 46 Representatives and 24 Senators will be campaigning for election, or re-election, whichever the case may be. There are two congressional guys up this year as well, one Senate seat and one Representative seat. I'll give you folks in North Dakota three guesses who they are. I think they're red, or maybe they're blue...could be kind of a maroon, or a shady kind of gray, but that's only if you're into putting people in color categories so you can figure out how to deal with them.

Now being the nonpartisan organization that we are, we cannot support any one particular candidate on any one specific issue. But we can, however, stress the importance of

getting out there and voicing your support for the candidate and issues of your choice by getting to the polls. And we cannot stress enough the importance of the disability community getting to the polls to support candidates that support the rights of people with disabilities everywhere. Freedom's priorities for this year include these said rights...the right to accessible, affordable housing; the right to live in the home and community of your choice; the right to be gainfully employed; the right to accessible transportation; and the right to access medical treatment.

If you leave the civic responsibility up to just a few people who actually pull the lever, touch the screen, or fill in the ovals these days; you may get a few people representing an opinion that may not be the majority opinion that's out there.

Expressing your opinion is very easy for some, hard to articulate for others, and down right difficult still for some others. Some opinions we could care less about, while others we would stand in line for. There is however one place you can go to express your opinion, and no one need know what you said, but simply that you said it. It's the one place where everyone has an equal voice, the voting booth. ■

From Where I Sit

By Nate Aalgaard, executive director

This issue of *the Independent* is about recreation. So I'm thinking, "Now, how do I make this interesting to most of the readers of this newsletter?" The thought that comes to my mind is this: If your coworkers knew what you were daydreaming about at work, what would they think?

Without allowing too much time for speculation, I'll let you in on a secret. What I daydream about at work these days — is pool. That's right, billiards. I'm infected. I'm feverish over it. I don't know how or why this happened at my age. Maybe I was just looking for something to do. Maybe I was bored.

The first experience was with a couple friends after lunch. I was absolutely no good, but I liked it. So after a couple of initial times going out to play, I started thinking, "I wonder if there is a perfect place to go to shoot pool." I started driving around town looking for it. This isn't as simple as you might think. Criteria included accessible parking, an accessible bathroom, decent food and beverages, and the sufficient availability of a pool table when we needed one. Here's what I found:

O'Leary's in Moorhead: No real accessible parking, but the lot is big. The bathroom is accessible. Food and beverages good. The bad news: The pool table and accessories appear to have been neglected for quite some time. The cue ball even has a chunk out of it.

Mick's office, also in Moorhead: No accessible parking, a front entryway that is almost impossible to get through alone, and the pool tables are down one step. They have a portable ramp they said would work. Unfortunately it was made out

of pressboard and had a hole in it, and was barely wider than my chair. I declined. The new bathrooms on the lower level may have been accessible, but since I couldn't get down there I don't know for sure.

Billiards on Broadway, Fargo: When in doubt, go see the pros, right? Great equipment, and plenty of it. Lots of parking downtown, except of course right after it snows and the curbs and part of the accessible parking spots are covered. The drawback is that the upper level, where the bar is, opens much earlier than the downstairs, and you have to go through the downstairs and up the freight elevator (with assistance) to get upstairs. So, you either have to call when you get there, or bring someone who can go up the steps to get help. It's a hassle.

Rick's bar in Fargo: Has three tables, the bathrooms are pretty good, and the food and beverages are OK. I didn't know that a person can park on the north side by the bottle shop and have a nice level entrance into the building. If you park on the west side you have a lot of problems, which of course I encountered. It does get pretty smoky and there.

I also checked out the VFW and the American Legion in Moorhead. The Legion apparently got rid of their pool table for liability reasons. *Do old guys really fight over pool?* The VFW has a couple of tables, which are upstairs. They do have an elevator. I never did play there, so I don't know anything about the food or beverages.

Last but not least, the Side Street Bar and Grill at the Howard Johnson in downtown Fargo: This place probably comes out on top. The parking is OK, but not great. Two pool tables, in fairly good shape. The food and beverages are good. When I found out that they had a separate



unisex accessible bathroom near the front desk, that problem was taken care of. The other bathroom is like the Roach Motel. You can check in, but if you use a wheelchair you have a heck of a time getting back out.

In order to minimize some of these hassles, I went so far as to clear out my breezeway and put in my own pool table. I was a heartbeat away from totally renovating the place last winter so I could get enough heat in there to practice. There were days last winter when I couldn't find anybody to go out and play pool with on weekends. I was like that sick kid staring out the window with his lip hanging out watching his friends play. But I usually get over it.

One other issue I had to deal with was adaptive equipment. For someone with limited use of his hands, holding a cue stick, or making a bridge to take a shot are very difficult. I have tried different tape products on my cue to give me a better grip. I have a cuff, which helps my hand make a bridge for the shots. I also have different types of extensions, both for my cue stick and to reach out for very long shots. I keep experimenting and trying to find

Sit: Page 7

Tired of Not Having Something to do? Let me introduce you to A.S.T.R.O.

By Scott Burlingame, assistant program director

Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Today, I say, never doubt that a small group of dedicated people can change the way we view recreational opportunities for people with disabilities in our community, because they are about to.

One of the biggest challenges facing people with disabilities is often the lack of recreational opportunities. The barriers are often things like: a) can't get into a facility (If you want to go bowling in south Fargo); b) lack of knowledge about available accommodations (See Chick Kastrinos story); c) don't know about events; or d) can't afford them on a fixed income (I think this is one of the biggest). I have always felt that if you don't have fun things to look forward to, to participate in, and to talk about afterward, you're not very independent.

Over the past five years or so Freedom Resource Center has hosted a group of community volunteers who have fundraised for, organized, and promoted recreational events for people with disabilities, their friends, and their families in the community. The work that this group has done over time has brought many events during this five-year period, and many hundreds of people have attended.

During this time, however, one thing has always amazed me about this group and these events. That was how when it comes to having fun, it is amazing how miserable some folks can become. The stress level of our group always seemed high, and often people who were dedicated to having fun one month dropped out the next. After five years of this process, the group had slowed to a stop during the past few months. In June, the weekly craft class, despite great effort and intentions,

became more work for its leadership than fun and called it quits.

The fact is, Freedom Resource Center for Independent Living Inc., is a disability rights organization, not a recreation provider. Recreation is not one of our core services and our grants cannot directly fund activities. We don't hire people to run recreation programs. But one of the things we are charged to do is increase the community capacity to serve people with disabilities. After all these years, the Recreation program was not cutting it.

So, I decided to pull together an informal group and talk about if we should continue. I think everybody involved would say what we had been doing has value, but we needed to change. So we had a brainstorming session about what we wanted. When we were done, we had a new name, a new purpose, and a plan for independence. And we are always going to remember to have fun.

Let me introduce you to Athletes and Sportsmen and women Together for Recreational Opportunities (ASTRO). ASTRO has three current goals. The first is to work to provide events that people will remember. Ideas that we have kicked around are pheasant hunts, deer hunts, wheelchair basketball, pool, fishing tournaments, archery, and other outdoor activities. The goal is to help provide people, with all types of disabilities, opportunities for recreation that is not currently accessible for them. The second goal is to effectively raise the funds for each event. Our hope is that by holding major events, we will be able to find sponsors that will make the events happen. The third goal is independence. As I said above, Freedom Resource Center is not a recreation organization. If this is ever going to be successful, it is important that this group stands on its own. In our research we found a model organization in a similar market called R.A.D.A.R Sports in Rochester, MN (radarsports.tripod.com).

So be looking forward to more information about upcoming events on these pages. ■

New to the mentor program: E-mentoring!

Freedom Resource Center would like to invite you to visit our website www.freedomrc.org and click on Ask a Mentor to post any disability related question. With this exciting new addition to our Peer Mentor Program individuals can post questions for our mentors.

Our mentors are people with disabilities who are volunteering to share their knowledge, skills, and experiences with others.

The Peer Mentor Program, in its simplest form, is an opportunity for people with disabilities to empower others with disabilities to live independently. It is about people utilizing personal knowledge and experiences to address the questions of others.

High Tech Archery

By Chick Kastrinos, board member



In my dreams, I walk, dance, work, and participate in sports. Before my accident, I was a pretty good athlete. One of the sports I enjoyed was archery. In my heart and my mind these things were still important to me. But, unfortunately, my legs and my arms no longer work.

A few years ago, my parents were hosting a picnic. My Mom had asked a local man to demonstrate some trick archery for us. He couldn't do it, but came to meet me. When I told him I used to shoot archery, he said there was no reason why I couldn't still do it. I thought to myself, "What planet is this guy from anyway?" My wheelchair alone should give him the indication of my immobility. Well, Delmer McLean, it seems, is a man of his word. He contacted the engineering department at NDSU and got some students to build a crossbow for me. He and my friend, Alan Messner, gave me back part of my life that I thought was gone forever.

This past year I was invited to speak at the National Archer's Convention in Minneapolis. The sportsmen were quite excited to help out a disabled person reconnect with the sport of archery. Their positive demeanor encouraged me to realize

that anyone is capable of enjoying this sport when putting your mind to it. By using a click pad with my cheek, I am able to direct a laser onto the targets. The people at our local archery range do not see me as a quadriplegic, but as a fellow sportsman.

I have also had the pleasure of meeting a couple of Olympic archers. It would have never been possible before. My Mom always told us to look at the positive side of things. Being disabled is not a joy ride, but it could be worse. ■

What some people say...

"People hate me because I am a multifaceted, talented, wealthy, internationally famous genius." - Jerry Lewis, comedian. Yea, but what about the kids Jerry? Isn't it supposed be about the kids? Jeez!

Information

In an attempt to reduce the cost of mailings please send your email address to freedom@freedomrc.org

If you would like to be removed from our mailing list please call 701-478-0459 or 1-800-450-0459.

Freedom Resource Center and/or its Board of Directors do not necessarily endorse or support any of the views expressed within the personal testimonies contained in this newsletter, unless approval is specifically mentioned.

Funding for this publication was provided by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, Rehabilitation Services from the state's general fund and The Federal Department of Education.

Alternate formats available upon request.

Editorial Board: Nate Aalgaard, Mark Bourdon, Deane Feland, DeAnn LaFond, Chuck Stebbins

Veterans on the Lake, Ely MN

By Deane Feland, board member



Deane Feland, holding fish

Every year in June, a group of veterans gather at Ely, MN for maneuvers. Veterans on the Lake Resort, a not-for-profit organization, will provide a barrier-free setting for a memorable outdoor recreation experience for disabled veterans, veterans, their families, friends and supporters. It is designed "With Veterans in Mind" while recognizing what they have contributed to and sacrificed for our nation. The 40 to 50 of us gathered prepare our equipment, readying ourselves as a group for their mission. Some are assigned to light craft, others to heavy craft, and share a

mission in mind. Set out to catch every Northern and Walleye in Wilderness Lake. The event is sponsored by Castaway Disabilities of Iowa City. Because of this event, I have made friendships that lasted for the four years that I've attended. I went again this year. Some pictures will relate some of the fun events, but cannot impart to you the wonderful food and great lodging, and magnificent sights of the wilderness area.

The resort is staffed with healthcare professionals, counselors, law enforcement, a therapist, and as he puts it a computer geek. They all volunteer from the Veteran's hospital. The resort provides seven days of feeling normal and successful; and comradeship celebrated with bonfires, smores, and kettle corn. This is definitely a highlight every year for me and I know that the other members who attend regularly feel likewise.

Following is a fish story that Deane shared with me and another staff member shortly after his trip to the veteran's camp. I warned him that if he didn't tell it I would. Keep in mind that

this may be embellished just a little bit. ☺ So here goes.

We're sitting there in the boat on a very nice sunny day with lines in the water waiting for whatever may come around...when all of a sudden something hit my line. It felt heavy, almost like a log. As I was reeling it in I could see that my line was moving pretty much in a straight line toward the boat, so whatever was on was not flailing about, just coming straight for us. At that point I did think it might be a log.

As I reeled it up to the side of the boat I could now see that it was a huge Northern--must have been all of five feet long, at least that's what it looked like in the water. As I lifted it out of the water to get the monster in the boat, I could see that it was all of about three feet long. About half way to the edge of the boat the big fish decided to fight, and wiggled its way out of the hook and back to the lake it went. Disappointed and somewhat winded, I looked to the other members of my party to make sure that they could verify this fish story. Affidavits can be obtained if requested.

Thanks Deane, it was a great fish story.
cds ■

Profiles in Advocacy: Mary Westra

By Mary Westra and Joyce Wolter, IL specialist, Fergus Falls

Mary Westra, senior, dressed in her prom dress, protested outside the Fergus Falls High School Prom on May 6, 2006. Mary has been asking to attend the Prom since leaving the High School to attend school at Twin Oaks School. Mary has an IEP for learning disabilities and Twin Oaks was better able to meet her special learning needs. She requested that the High School continue to meet her social/emotional and transitional needs through her IEP. She and her parents began requesting that Mary be allowed to attend Prom and other extra curricular activities at her sophomore year IEP and continued at every IEP meeting since that time. They were denied every time. The High School, including Superintendent Dr. Mark Bezek, said that Mary was not a student at the High School, therefore did not qualify to go to Prom. Mary argued that she WAS a student at the high school, since she is served by the Special Education Cooperative. To further prove her point, she showed the school the mail she receives from the Dist. #544, including an invitation to Post Prom activities.

Prom and other extra curricular activities can and should be written into IEP's to help special education students join healthy "mainstream" activities. ■



Gift Card

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

Please Check if you are interested in:

- Volunteering at Freedom Resource Center
- Have a Freedom Resource Center staff member speak to your group

I would like my contribution:

- To be used wherever needed
- Endowment
- In memory/honor of

Your thoughtful gift will be acknowledged to the person(s) indicated:

Name: _____

Address: _____

- Please check if you do not want your name published as a contributor

Enclosed is my tax deductible donation:

- \$100
- \$50
- \$25
- \$10
- Other

Thank you for supporting Freedom Resource Center

Sit: Page 3

things that work better for me. It's all part of the challenge.

Playing pool was sort of a replacement for another activity I used to do: Quad Rugby. I wrote about that a few months ago when the film Murderball came out. But as we all know, competitive athletics isn't for everyone, especially when you get a bit older. And yes, I have come to that realization. I had a lot of the same feelings about that sport as I do pool. I'd spend time with my teammates talking strategy, reminiscing about past games, and just hanging out, perhaps downing a few cool ones. We were competitive and always worked to get better, but the social aspect was a vital part of it too. It is necessary for a healthy life balance. Now, I practice pool by myself, but that only goes so far. I need to be with other people as well.

I've been to one wheelchair pool tournament, last winter in Rochester. I'm hoping to go to another one this fall. It gives me something to work toward. Going to tournaments can also be a lot of fun, because you meet new people and learn new strategies. For those of us who need some adaptive equipment, it's also a great place to get new ideas.

My wish for those of you reading this is that you will find a recreational activity that is healthy, enjoyable, and that you can spend those spare moments daydreaming about. Have fun! ■

Parking: Page 1

requirements under the NDCC, you are guilty of an infraction and will be fined \$500.00.

So, does that mean all we did was give the city police department more things to do and to get small business fined a checkbook-breaking \$500.00? NO! It's actually quite simple and cheap to be in compliance. All you need is 3 signs (listed under the NDCC), a place to put them (has to be in front of the parking space), blue paint, and the proper number of spaces. The cost for one complete compliant parking space is about \$50.00, which to me seems fairly inexpensive.

I notified businesses in Jamestown by sending out a letter defining what happened, what they need to do, and who to contact. Response so far has been nothing but POSITIVE! ■



2701 9th Ave. S, Ste. H • Fargo, ND 58103

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

The Mission of Freedom Resource Center for Independent Living is to work toward equality and inclusion for people with disabilities through programs of empowerment, community education and systems change.

We envision a society where ALL individuals are valued, respected and have equal opportunity, access, responsibility, and freedom of choice in all aspects of life.

Upcoming Events

July 18, 2006 9 a.m.-3 p.m.

The ARC of Cass County's 50th Anniversary/Attic Treasures Grand Opening

The Arc Attic Treasures at 3201 43rd Street South, Fargo. Attend the Ribbon Cutting at 9 a.m., Cake and Ice Cream, Disability Awareness Activities, Entertainers, Door Prizes and much, much more.

July 24-27, 2006 in Bismarck

August 7-10, 2006 in Moorhead, MN

Magic Mobility Camp

Contact Adair Grommesh 701-866-9002 (cell) 866-225-4673 toll-free. Registration is \$25.

August 23 and 24

The North Dakota Disabilities Advocacy Consortium (NDDAC) will be holding its 2nd Annual Dakota Disabilities Issues Forum. This conference will be held in Bismarck. Contact Brenda or Jim at 701-223-0347.

September 6-7

Northern Plains Conference on Aging and Disability

Holiday Inn, Fargo

Contact Sandy Arends 701-298-4420

September 19

Freedom Resource Center Annual Meeting – Holiday Inn, Fargo 5:30 pm,

Raffle Ticket/Annual Meeting Ticket cost \$10.00.

October 9

North Dakota Human Rights Coalition's 4th Annual Conference

Best Western Ramkota Hotel, 800 South Third Street, Bismarck, ND. For more information contact: <http://www.ndhrc.org/>