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Sapolin Awards Back After COVID Shutdown



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Awardees surround Mayor Bill DiBlasio at the 2021 Sapolin awards ceremony at the High Line. Shown here are, standing left to right, Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives J. Phillip Thompson, who assisted in the presentations; Chris Nolan of the Central Park Conservancy; Larry Grubler, C.E.O of Transitional Services for New York, Inc.; DiBlasio; Lauren Schechter, co-founder and owner of TotalCaption; J. Soto, manager of programs and inclusion at Eyebeam. Victor Calise, MOPD commissioner and Advocate Carr Massi join them in the front row.

At left, Victor Calise, right, presents 90th birthday cake to Carr Massi as Deputy Mayor Phil Thompson looks on. Approximately 200 people in attendance sang "Happy Birthday."

Mayor Bill DiBlasio and Commissioner of the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities Victor Calise marked the 31st anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities

Act (ADA) by presenting the annual Matt Sapolin Accessibility Awards ceremony.

The event was held this year on the High Line Park in a scaled down version for approximately 200 people.

Four awards are presented each year in honor of the Titles of the ADA in addition to an Advocacy Award.

This year the Employment award went to Transitional

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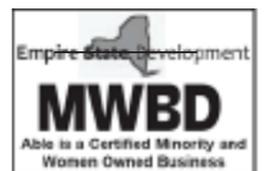
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From The Commissioner's Desk

Getting Back to Work

There has been a lot of anxiety for people with disabilities about returning to work this September and it has a lot of us asking questions. Is the office preparing safety precautions? Am I required to return? Can I ask for an accommodation? Is a vaccine required?

Safety is the biggest concern for everyone and the safest way to return to work is to get vaccinated. Vaccination does two things really well for most people - keeps us from going to the hospital and from dying. These are two things that I certainly get behind.

Other ways to stay safe are by continuing to wear your mask, social distance and wash your hands. Think of these as layers of protection like wearing a hat and gloves when it is cold. Better to have them on than to not have them on.

There are some people with disabilities who are not able to get a vaccine for medical reasons and may find it difficult to go back to work and others may need accommodations. If you need an accommodation you should ask for it through your Human Resources Department (HR) and verify that with documentation from your medical provider.

Reasonable accommoda-

tions for people with disabilities come in many forms and may include a flex schedule (you may need to come in different times to avoid the rush hour); work from home; or a hybrid schedule (a mix of days in and out of the office).

Traveling to and from work is stressful especially during a pandemic. The best ways to stay safe are to avoid packed public transportation by flexing your schedule at work or waiting for an emptier train or bus.

If you have a personal vehicle, you may choose to drive to work or carpool with those in your office who are vaccinated. When taking Paratransit be sure to wear your mask whether it is a direct trip or not.

In preparation for returning to work, reach out to your HR department and be informed of policies and procedures before you return to the office. Knowing what is expected and planning for it can help diminish stress and anxiety.

This is a difficult time for everyone and returning to work is essential to your well-being, socialization and productivity. I have been back in the office since August 2020 and it has relieved a lot of stress experienced from working



from home and it sure is nice to have the office amenities.

Diversity in the workplace is important and people with disabilities bring that diversity. When we are not seen we are not heard and when we are not heard we are not seen. Do not underestimate the power of your physical presence - it changes perceptions of people with disabilities.

Ciao,
Victor Calise
Commissioner



REV UP To Register Voters

Every year the REV UP campaign leads National Disability Voter Registration Week (NDVRW) to grow the political power of people with disabilities.

The group builds its political power by getting communities registered and ready to vote

and engaged on issues important to people with disabilities.

This year NDVRW is Sept. 13 through Sept. 20. Community organizations can join REV UP in getting out the disability vote in 2021.

Interested parties can sign up as a partner, hold an event,

share voting resources on personal social media, send a letter to the editor or op-ed to a local newspaper or even ask local officials to issue a proclamation declaring NDVRW.

More information is available at www.aapd.com, www.weall.vote/revup or by emailing matlaluri@aapd.com.

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P.O. Box 395, OLD BETHPAGE, NY 11804
516 939-2253 FAX 516 939-0540
ablenews@aol.com
www.ablenews.com



Published By
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Publisher
Angela Miele Melledy

Editorial Assistant
Pat Horwell
Allison Howe

Staff Writers
Beth Guarino (emerita)
Karin Falcone Krieger
Sofie Melledy

Columnists
Disabled in Action
Phil Beder
Edith Prentiss (emerita)
Anthony Trocchia
United Spinal Association
Jim Weisman

Production Director
Debbie Simko

Art & Production
Jennifer Becker
Ann Imbrogno

Technical Assistance
Louis Melledy

Social Media Assistance
Sofie Melledy

Office Manager
Fannie Miele (emerita)

Accounting
Margaret Wenzel

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Register! Educate! Vote! Use your Power!

REV UP!

MAKE THE DISABILITY VOTE COUNT

**The Deadline
For The
October Issue of
Able Newspaper
Will Be Sept. 13**

AAPD RAILS at SCOTUS Voting Ruling

According to the American Association of People with Disabilities the U.S. Supreme Court has dealt a significant blow to democracy.

In a statement AAPD wrote, "In its decision on *Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee*, the Supreme Court has undermined Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, a provision meant to protect voters from discriminatory and racist voting restrictions. This destructive decision comes on the heels of nationwide attacks on voting rights in states like Texas where disability advocates prepare for a special legislative session in which legislators will consider more

anti-voting legislation to add seemingly arbitrary barriers for disabled voters, voters of color, and disabled voters of color.

"In Arizona, the Supreme Court decision upholds two incredibly harmful voting bills that have disparate impacts on some voters — a law prohibiting election officials from counting ballots from eligible voters cast in the wrong precinct and a law criminalizing the collection of voted ballots for delivery by anyone but family members, caregivers, and election officials.

"The discarding of ballots cast out of precinct and restrictions on vote-by-mail further disenfranchise disabled and voters of

color, who may not have access to reliable accessible transportation, have limited time to vote, lack access information on precincts that may change last minute or face other voting barriers.

"For tribal communities in Arizona, who experience some of the highest rates of disability, these laws that restrict voting access have especially harsh impacts. Tribal voters often already face barriers of limited access to mail service used for vote-by-mail and long distances to polling sites and post offices and collecting and delivering ballots in groups has helped in the past to address these barriers.

"Stalwarts of Civil Rights, including the late Representative John Lewis, set up the Voting Rights Act of 1965 as a tool to prevent and eliminate racist and other discriminatory practices that exclude certain people from participating in our democracy. We urge Congress to move quickly to introduce and pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act to protect our voting rights from malicious attacks. Disabled people and communities of color have long fought for our right to vote, and we will continue to push for a democracy that is accessible to all."

Report Shows Voter Turnout Up Among PWD

People with disabilities (PWD) made large gains in the historic voter turnout surge of 2020, according to a new report by the Program for Disability Research at Rutgers University and the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC). Expanded access to mail-in ballots pushed disability turnout to 17.7 million, up from 16 million in 2016.

"Turnout increases when people with disabilities have more voting options. It's not 'one size fits all,'" said Professor Lisa Schur, co-director of the Program for Disability Research at Rutgers University. "Many states made it easier to vote during the pandemic, which particularly

helped voters with disabilities."

The researchers analyzed data from the federal government's Current Population Survey Voting and Registration Supplement for November 2020 to calculate disability turnout. They found that 62 percent of PWD voted early in 2020, up from 56 percent in 2016. The higher turnout was reported across all disability types and demographic groups. The turnout gap between people with and without disabilities was relatively unchanged. Compared to 42 percent of people without disabilities, more than 53 percent of PWD voted by mail, with only 26 percent of people with dis-

abilities and 31 percent of people without disabilities voted at a polling place on Election Day.

The 23 states that made it easier to vote by mail appeared to have a higher increase in disability turnout, though the difference is within the margin of error.

An estimated 1.95 million PWD had trouble voting in 2020, but accessibility was significantly improved compared

to previous elections. An earlier study, commissioned by the EAC, found that 11 percent of PWD had trouble voting in 2020, down from 26 percent in 2012. Only 5 percent of PWD experienced difficulties voting by mail, compared to 18 percent of those who voted at a polling place. Voters with disabilities were still almost twice as likely as voters without disabilities to report difficulties.

Disabled Passenger's Suit Against Airline Moves Forward

A federal judge in Utah has granted a motion to allow an Idaho man the chance to continue litigating a case that his now-deceased wife filed last year against American Airlines.

Attorneys for Tammy Sue Spears filed a lawsuit against American Airlines in June of 2020 for events that occurred during a 2019 flight from Salt Lake City, Utah, to Charlotte, N.C. The lawsuit alleged that American Airlines cabin crew members forced Mrs. Spears, a disabled amputee, to crawl from her seat to the lavatory because the airline did not have an aisle wheelchair on

the flight. Mrs. Spears sustained injuries and was humiliated.

Unfortunately, she died on Jan. 4, 2021 for reasons unrelated to events alleged in her complaint.

As the representative of Mrs. Spears' estate, Robert G. "Greg" Spears asked the court to amend the complaint and substitute him for his deceased wife so that he may continue to litigate her claims against American Airlines. American Airlines opposed the motion and moved to dismiss the case, asserting that when Mrs. Spears died,

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BAC Students Clean Up City Parks



This summer, Brooklyn Autistic Center (BAC) students gave back to the community by helping to clean up local Brooklyn parks by partnering with New York City Parks Jr. Litter League. The students walk to a local park weekly, and work on skills such as navigating the community, following instructions and working with a partner. They collaborate to identify litter, use tools to pick it up and dispose of it and weigh what they have collected.

CMS to Improve Services for PWD and Seniors

CMS issued a proposed rule that accelerates the shift from paying for home health services based on volume, to a system that incentivizes value and quality. The rule also seeks feedback on ways to attain health equity for all patients through policy solutions, including enhancing reports on Medicare/Medicaid dual eligible, disability status, people who are LGBTQ+, religious minorities; people who live in rural areas; and people otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

The CY 2022 Home Health Prospective Payment System (HH PPS) proposed rule addresses challenges facing Americans with Medicare

who receive health care at home. The proposed rule also outlines nationwide expansion of the Home Health Value-Based Purchasing (HHVBP) Model to incentivize quality of care improvements without denying or limiting coverage or provision of Medicare benefits for all Medicare consumers, and updates to payment rates and policies under the HH PPS.

“Homebound Medicare patients face a unique set of challenges and barriers to getting the care they need,” said CMS Administrator Chiquita Brooks-LaSure. “Today’s announcement is a reaffirmation of our commitment to these older adults and people with disabilities who are

counting on Medicare for the health care they need. This proposed rule would streamline service delivery and value quality over quantity – at a time when Americans need it most.”

The CMS Innovation Center (CMMI) developed the HHVBP Model, which began Jan. 1, 2016, to determine whether payment incentives for providing better quality of care with greater efficiency would improve the quality and delivery of home health care services to people with Medicare.

The HHVBP Model’s current participants comprise all Medicare-certified home health agencies (HHAs), providing services across nine

randomly selected states. The Third Annual Evaluation Report of the participants’ performance from 2016 to 2018 showed an average 4.6 percent improvement in HHAs’ quality scores and an average annual savings of \$141 million to Medicare.

This year, CMS announced on Jan. 8 that the HHVBP model met the statutory requirements for expansion. CMS is proposing to expand the HHVBP Model nationwide effective Jan. 1, 2022. By expanding the HHVBP Model, CMS seeks to improve the beneficiary experience by providing incentives for HHAs to provide better quality of care with greater

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Sterilization Reparations Approved

Gov. Gavin Newsom (D-Calif.) has approved a \$7.5 million budget request, to provide reparations to survivors of state-sponsored forced or involuntary sterilization in California institutions, between 1909 and

1979, and survivors of involuntary sterilizations in women’s state prisons after 1979.

This makes California the third state in the nation to provide monetary compensation to survivors who were

sterilized under state eugenics laws and the first state to provide reparations to survivors who were sterilized while incarcerated in California’s women’s prisons.

Between 1909 and 1979, California sterilized at least 20,000 people under state law - accounting for one third of eugenics sterilizations nationwide. People with disabilities, Latinas, women and poor people were disproportionately targeted for sterilization. Although the state repealed its eugenics law in 1979, its reproductive violence continued in state prisons into the 2010s.

Most recently, sterilization, a legacy of ongoing eugenics practices in the United States was being used against immigrant women in detention centers in Georgia, making it clear that forced and involuntary sterilizations have never stopped in the U.S., nor in California.

Between 2006 and 2010, a California state audit revealed at least 144 women were illegally sterilized while in California’s custody. In the audit 65 percent described themselves as Black, Hispanic, Mexican or other. Additionally, according to state documents

and interviews, there are at least 100 more women who were forcibly sterilized dating back to the late 1990s. To this day, many survivors still do not even know that their reproductive capacity was stolen from them.

“After 4 years of advocating for reparations, the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund is heartened that California has taken a necessary first step towards ending its legacy of eugenics,” said Carly Myers, DREDF staff attorney. “While no amount of money can bring justice to survivors, we are thankful California has taken responsibility for past abuses, and hopeful this marks a turning point in its treatment of people with disabilities and others who have been targeted for reproductive oppression.”

“The Sterilization and Social Justice Lab is gratified that this bill will provide long-awaited compensation to survivors of involuntary sterilization in California and will continue to inform this process and to highlight links between past and present experiences of reproductive injustice,” Alexandra Minna Stern and Nicole Novak agreed.

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More Training, Higher Wages For Quality DSPs

Direct Service Providers (DSPs) provide around-the-clock care for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDDs), supporting them as they accomplish daily tasks, develop life skills and achieve other personal goals.

Of those that continue to support people with IDD, many lack the training necessary to ensure they take a person-centered approach to support. This puts individuals with IDD at increased risk for physical, mental, and emotional difficulties as their personal needs are left unfulfilled.

A major hurdle for finding quality DSPs is that they are in short supply. Before COVID-19, almost 46 percent of DSPs quit their jobs every two years.

Factors contributing to DSPs leaving the profession include an average hourly wage of about \$11 an hour; lack of affordable health insurance for themselves and their families; little to no public recognition for the importance of their role; persistent staff shortages that increase workload.

The need for DSPs is expected to rise by a full 50 percent by the year 2026.

Most DSPs receive little to no training in person-centered support. This training could improve working conditions and retention, as it helps DSPs better understand the patients in their care.

“It is not uncommon that when an agency or system enters the picture to help a person with IDD, they take over that person’s life instead of supporting it. We need to train more people who provide support to empower people with IDD and help them retain control over their lives,” said Craig Escudé, president of IntellectAbility, a leading pro-

vider of tools and training for person-centered support.

It can be difficult to know what a person with IDD considers important, especially if they communicate non-verbally. Discovery skills help DSPs find out what a person with IDD values,

“We need to empower people with IDD with the ability to fully integrate into society. This is the only situation where we tolerate segregation of an entire group of people. Getting better DSPs into support roles for people with IDD can help bring these people back into the world and dramatically improve their lives,” Escudé said.

Union Holds Roundtable on Care & Jobs

While President Biden’s soft infrastructure bills are one of the most critical issues being debated in Washington, D.C. this summer, the largest healthcare workers union in the country recently held a virtual round table discussion on The Better Care, Better Jobs Act. The conversation focused on the provisions of the act that would invest funds in the homecare industry by securing funding for small agencies providing these services and

prioritizing wage and benefit increases for caregivers.

Panelists included Congressman Paul Tonko (N.Y. - 20) and Rona Shapiro, union executive vice president for home care.

“Our communities and economy are best served when we support our essential workers, particularly our frontline healthcare workers, who have kept us going through this crisis,” Tonko said.

“I’ve pushed hard to advance legislation that invests in our

care workers and ensures the best resources are available to them. That’s why I am a proud co-sponsor of The Better Care Better Jobs Act that takes vital steps to enhance Medicaid funding for home- and community-based services.”

Shapiro said, “These workers have been undervalued. The role they play in their clients’ lives is crucial, and in order for them to continue to be homecare workers, they need to be valued and paid

so that they can take care of their own families at the same time they care for others.”

Other panelists included, Christy Johnston, vice president of governmental & managed care services; Karen Clark, executive director Home Health Care Partners; Denise DiNoto, communications and outreach specialist, Consumer Directed Choices; Kevin Kerwin, vice president of public policy, NYS Association of Health Care Providers.

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Are Masks “Reasonable?”

BY JAMES WEISMAN
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



To those who live in the Northeast, prohibiting public school districts from mandating masks at the height of the Delta variant surge, defying the recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Center for Disease Control (CDC), in the name of local control and then denying control to the locality seems completely bonkers.

However, Florida, or at least its governor, has done just that. Push-back is coming from left, right and center, but the ultimate arbiter could turn out to be the courts and their interpretation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and, of course, the Florida courts' examination of the actual powers of the governor.

Fox and other more extreme right-wing cable news channels and social media spread misinformation about vaccines and politicized the wearing of masks. So did politicians. Gov. Ron DeSantis, a graduate of Harvard Law School, has outlawed mandatory masking in public schools, even if the school district wants to do it. He has threatened to withhold financial assistance and salaries of those who defy him and protect children.

At least one lawsuit has already been filed in federal court challenging DeSantis, saying he is violating several laws, including the ADA and IDEA. The suit alleges that children diagnosed with conditions that compromise their immune systems, such as severe asthma, were being exposed to risk unnecessarily and/or discriminated against because they cannot attend school with their peers, unless their peers are masked.

Many children with disabilities have been stranded at home longer than children without disabilities because of the difficulty of accommodating each child during an emergency. Parents are anxious for their children to receive the services to which they are entitled in the most integrated setting appropriate to their child's needs, i.e. IDEA compliance.

The ADA requires reasonable accommodation. The child that needs masking in order to attend public school safely cannot be accommodated, even by a board of education that wants to make the accommodation.

Gov. DeSantis is the discriminator-in-chief in this case, and is ultimately responsible for the IDEA and ADA violations, but that's if, and only if, a mask mandate is a reasonable accommodation. Three years ago, asking the whole school to wear a mask to accommodate one child or several children, or faculty members, too, for that matter, might have seemed unreasonable. Today, we know just how reasonable and important it is.

Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas, a wheelchair-using paraplegic, issued an executive order in May that banned masking in public schools. Several big cities in the state have announced plans to defy this reckless ban, as the governor has ordered hospitals to halt non-urgent procedures to make room for more COVID patients and seeks out-of-state help for overflowing Texas hospitals.

Political attitudes about healthcare have always evolved. During the 1960s, Ronald Reagan believed Medicare would lead to the socialist takeover of the United States. By the time he was eligible to receive Medicare benefits, he and just about every other American, believed it was a fundamental right. But until now, no one has just denied science, living in an alternate universe, void of facts but filled with opinion and politics.

Mobility Challenged Least Accommodated

Despite a steady year of diversity, equality and inclusion conversations, the 2021 BraunAbility Drive for Inclusion Report Card uncovered that of all marginalized groups, those with mobility challenges have the fewest accommodations to be fully included in society.

Compared with 2020 results, the report also found a disappointing 14 percent decline in the public's willingness to understand and accommodate those with mobility challenges, indicating a seemingly "back to normal" attitude as the nation's restrictions begin to lift.

"[After COVID,] it seems many people are already quickly forgetting to accommodate the needs of those in wheelchairs," stated a wheelchair user who responded to the survey.

BraunAbility, the leading manufacturer of wheelchair-accessible vehicles and lifts, conducted its second-annual Drive for Inclusion Report Card study to assess the nation's state of inclusion. BraunAbility surveyed both the general public and The Driving Force, an online community of nearly 1,900 individuals with mobility challenges and their caregivers. The objective is to identify obstacles to inclusion based on perceptions – or misperceptions – between the general public and those with mobility challenges. The Report Card gives voice to those with mobility challenges, with the ultimate goal of furthering diversity and inclusion for everyone.

This year, BraunAbility found a gap in how the general public and The Driving

Force believe people with mobility disabilities are accommodated, highlighting two different views of the world. Only 23 percent of The Driving Force think people with mobility challenges are fairly accommodated, while 61 percent of the general public see it that way.

A total of 79 percent of The Driving Force believe society is most lacking in design and development of accommodations within businesses they frequent, versus 37 percent of the general public, a disconnect of 42 points.

Those with a mobility disability are two times more likely than the general population to see a lack of inclusion of people with mobility challenges when accommodations for that very audience are being designed.

When it comes to accom-

modations in the workplace and businesses, the majority of The Driving Force agree that organizations are not doing enough to create equal employment opportunities for those with mobility disabilities.

Both groups rated their employers with a C grade for accommodations for those with mobility challenges, with only 7 percent of The Driving Force assigning their employers an A grade. When reflecting on all aspects of society, those with a mobility disability overwhelmingly reported that businesses' design and development of accommodations is what is lacking the most.

Despite living in a dollar-driven society, only a handful of companies garnered recognition as leading the way in disability inclusion. BraunAbility sees this as a huge miss for both employers and product and service providers given the disposable income for work-

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Higher Wages Improve LTC Work Environment

SEIU 775, the caregivers union and the Center for American Progress have studied the impact of higher wages for caregivers and on long-term care.

Their report, "Higher home care wages reduce economic hardship and improve recruitment and retention in one of the country's fastest growing jobs," provides evidence that an increase in home care wages can yield significant improvements for the wellbeing of caregivers and the availability of quality, affordable home care.

U.S. Sen. Patty Murray (D, Wash.) recently met with home care workers and senior and disability advocacy representatives to discuss the report's findings, the American Jobs Plan, and the recently proposed Better Jobs Better Care Act.

Featuring data collected from 5,307 caregivers in Washington State, the report supports the proposed \$400 billion investment in home care services and workforce included in Pres. Joe Biden's American Jobs Plan. Through surveys and in-depth interviews, caregivers reported how the increase of just \$2.50 per hour above base wages affected their lives and the sus-

tainability of caregiving as their career.

Prior to hazard pay, 66 percent of caregivers reported "just getting by" or "finding it difficult to get by" financially; following the wage increase, only 16 percent reported this level of economic insecurity.

Before hazard pay, 36 percent of caregivers feared losing their housing, compared to 15 percent who reported feeling this way since hazard pay.

The number of respondents who reported that they "often or always ate less or skipped meals due to financial issues" decreased significantly across all caregivers.

Of caregivers who were already in the field prior to hazard pay, 55 percent reported that hazard pay heavily influenced their decision to continue caregiving. For those new to the job, 41 percent reported that hazard pay was a heavy influencer on their decision to become a caregiver.

Despite the growing demand for home care services and calls for racial and economic justice across the country, caregiving - a career held predominantly by women, Black, Indigenous and people of color, and workers

from low-income households - remains undervalued and poorly compensated.

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Crossing Streets Safely In The Big City

By Carol Moog

Crossing the street can be a daunting task for many people in big cities and surrounding suburbs. Solutions are available to make it easier and safer?

The standard pedestrian interval is the time when pedestrians can cross safely. It is indicated by the “walk” signal at light-controlled intersections. The walk signal comes on at the same time the traffic light for the street next to the pedestrian (parallel) turns green. People cross at the same time that the traffic on the parallel street is moving.

A problem with the standard pedestrian interval is that cars or bicycles from the parallel street can turn onto the street where pedestrians are crossing potentially creating a dangerous

situation, especially for people with certain disabilities.

Part of the solution to maximize pedestrian safety is to install a leading pedestrian interval (LPI) at high-volume intersections. With LPIs, the walk signal comes on for pedestrians before the traffic light turns green for the parallel street traffic to flow. In fact, both streets are stopped for an interval of 3 to 6 seconds, allowing pedestrians to cross with no moving traffic.

With a LPI, pedestrians get a head start to cross before cars are allowed to move from any direction. In this scenario, pedestrians not only establish a right of way, but they are also more visible to turning cars. Traffic engineers have analyzed intersections that would benefit from LPIs, usually those with a high

volume of potentially hazardous traffic for pedestrians.

At intersections with LPIs installed between 2003 and 2011, there was a 37 percent decrease in severe pedestrian/bicyclist injuries and deaths.

Vision Zero, a multi-national program dedicated to achieving zero traffic fatalities or serious injuries, is leading an initiative to replace the standard pedestrian interval with LPIs in New York City, making streets safer for pedestrians.

But what if a person can't see the walk signal?

People who are visually impaired or blind use the sound of the surging traffic on the parallel street to initiate their crossings. In a standard light-controlled intersection, this surge coincides with the pedestrian crossing cycle. At intersections with LPIs, cars on the parallel street are waiting for the green light as pedestrians have the walk signal.

This lack of synchronization can make it difficult for people with vision impairments. Since they can't see the walk signal and the cars on the parallel street are still waiting for a green light,

they are losing 3 to 6 seconds of the crossing cycle. Often, the pedestrian light is already starting to flash “don't walk” when the parallel traffic starts to move. There may not be enough time to complete the crossing safely.

What is considered a safety improvement for sighted pedestrians becomes a more dangerous situation for pedestrians who cannot see the crosswalk light.

There is, however, a simple solution that would maintain the safety benefits for sighted pedestrians while also increasing safety for those who are visually impaired – installing an audible pedestrian signal at every intersection with an LPI.

The audible pedestrian signal can be heard when the visual pedestrian signal changes to “walk,” before the parallel street traffic starts.

To make challenging intersections safer for all visually-impaired or blind pedestrians, and in fact for all pedestrians, the answer is clear. Audible pedestrian signals must be added to every intersection that has an LPI.

Carol Moog is Senior Mobility Instructor at Lighthouse Guild.

App Helps Visually Impaired Manage Wardrobe

Two industrial design students from Carleton University have won an Innovative Designs for Accessibility (IDeA) student competition award from Universities Canada.

Liana Meere and Mandy Hui took top honors in the competition's Attitudinal/Systemic barriers category for their concept Closet, a label system that enables people with visual disabilities to independently manage their clothes.

“The Carleton community is incredibly proud of Liana and Mandy in being recognized by Universities Canada for their innovation and dedication toward enhancing accessibility standards,” said Larry Kostiuik, dean of the faculty of engineering and design.

The IDeA student competition challenges university students across Canada to use their creativity to develop innovative, cost-effective and practical solutions to accessibility barriers for people with disabilities.

The team of Meere and Hui identified three key challenges the visually disabled face when managing their wardrobe: identifying colors, matching clothes and reading wash label instructions.

The team's market research revealed that several products exist

to help address these issues but are seldom adopted by the people they were intended to help. Further research showed that the existing products are not reliable, troublesome to use and rarely address all three challenges.

Meere and Hui developed their label and app system called Closet to better tackle the challenges their research identified. The resulting concept is a two-part system involving both a clothing label and a compatible app. The labels will be created during manufacturing and will include both braille and a QR code to provide access to clothing information using a mobile device.

The award submission also notes that Closet encourages clothing manufacturers to practice accessible design and places assistive tools at the fingertips of users. The simple label design allows people who can see and read Braille to quickly identify their clothes. The Closet app also enables people with visual impairments to distinguish garment colors and pair items up, saving combinations in scans.

With characteristics and care information all in one place, people of all visual abilities can access accurate information about their clothing to carry out this everyday task independently.



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CIDNY SAYS

Now Is Not The Time For Paratransit Shared Rides

BY SHARON MCLENNON-WIER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

If you have even taken Access-A-Ride (AAR) in New York City, I am sure you have some interesting stories.

While it is an essential service that many people with disabilities, rely on for transportation, and for some, their only option for transportation, there are a number of issues that need improvement. One such issue I would like to mention is shared rides.

During the pandemic shared rides were suspended. As Access-A-Ride can often be the only transportation option for some people with disabilities, this was a welcome safety measure.

You should know that I am a totally blind woman and use paratransit services. Knowing that I would have a vehicle to myself if I needed or chose to take AAR was certainly a welcome relief during these tough times.

Despite concerns and objections from riders and disability advocates, and despite the fact that we are still very much in the midst of a pandemic, shared rides returned in July 2021. Now is not the time to return to shared rides. Safety, while perhaps the most important reason, is only one of the reasons we believe this.

The quality of service of AAR is something that may not be understood by people who do not use the service. Vehicles are frequently old and not as clean as they could or should be. Rides are often late with long trip times, especially when there are shared rides.

This is a big problem when it comes to things like getting to a medical appointment, a full-time and/or part-time work assignment, a job interview or school. We've heard reports of some drivers not wearing masks. In addition, we do not know about their vaccination status. This puts us at tremendous risk and in uncertain and possibly high-anxiety situations.

With the rise of the COVID-19 Delta variant, we say again, now is not the time for shared rides. The Delta variant has been reported to be highly contagious. It is also now the most prevalent strain of the virus in New York City.

A paratransit ride is already in an enclosed space with the potential of passengers and/or drivers who may not have a full-vaccinated status. The addition of multiple riders with trips scheduled throughout the five boroughs will result in an increased trip time.

A ride that should be only 30 minutes could now take an hour or two hours. It is not a position that people with disabilities should face, especially if Access-A-Ride is someone's only option for transportation.

We are calling for the suspension of shared rides until it becomes safe again. You can help. You can contact the MTA by calling 877 337-2017 or visit <https://new.mta.info/customer-feedback> to let them know how you feel about this issue.

When we speak together, we are heard. Let's make sure the MTA hears us when we say "Now is not the time for shared rides."

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Students Unhappy With Education Changes

According to recent research, about two thirds of college students with learning disabilities or mental health issues are unhappy with the education they are currently receiving.

Learning technology experts Glean carried out the research to find out how students with disabilities, learning difficulties and mental health issues feel about the sudden switch to blended learning, and if a lack of face-to-face support was negatively impacting their education.

The study, of 250 college students, found that fewer

than 30 percent of those with autism are happy with their education, despite 72 percent admitting that their college offers good assistive accommodations.

In comparison, only 32 percent of students with ADHD felt their colleges offered good accommodations, and 42 percent claimed to be happy with the education they are receiving.

In addition to accommodation offerings, students were also concerned about the assistance provided by their colleges, with more than 80 percent of disabled students dis-

agreeing that their university provides students with lots of support.

Looking at mental health, just one in 10 suffering from depression think their college provides them with the necessary support, and only 14 percent felt they were prepared for college.

Looking at other mental health concerns, 35 percent of students with anxiety issues are happy with their college, and 80 percent felt unprepared for the transition into higher education.

When it comes to online learning, 48 percent of stu-

dents who suffer from mental health issues agreed their studying had gotten worse since learning from home.

However, 36 percent of students with autism said their learning has improved since being at home. This was the only group to have declared more improvement at home than in class.

This indicates that colleges will need to consider how to accommodate students who prefer home learning and students who prefer in-person classes.

For information, one can visit www.glean.co/institutions/.

Lighthouse Has Back-to-School Tips

COVID-19 continues to pose challenges for many parents and students. But whether children are going back to school in a physical classroom or remotely at home, it is important to make sure they get their vision checked. Lighthouse Guild points out that vision is one of the keys to success in school and encourages parents to make sure their children get regular vision screenings.

The guild offers five healthy vision tips to help safeguard children's eye health.

Eating Carrots: The old saying still applies. Encourage children to eat a

well-balanced diet loaded with different types of fruits and veggies as well as fish.

Speaking Up: Children should let parents know if they notice any vision changes. Examples would be blurry vision, frequent squinting, or general eye discomfort.

Wearing Glasses: Parents should help children understand the importance of wearing their eyeglasses. If they are resistant because they believe glasses are unattractive, try pointing out sports figures and other well-known people who wear glasses.

Resting the Eyes: Looking continuously, at a computer, phone or TV screen can tire

the eyes and so, children should be encouraged to take a break from staring at the screen. Parents should teach them the 20/20/20 rule for computer use. After 20 minutes on the computer, they should take a break for 20 seconds and look 20 feet away to relax the eyes.

Wearing Safety Gear: Children should be told to wear goggles or other types of protective eyewear while playing sports, using chemicals or tools for school projects, or engaging in other activities. Many eye injuries can be prevented with better safety habits.

SURFING THERAPY DOG

Continued from page 16

canine-assisted surf therapy and adaptive surfing dog in 2009 when she jumped on the board of a 14-year-old boy with a spinal cord injury.

In 2014, Martinez was introduced to surfing as part of his rehabilitation with the Naval Medical Center in San Diego. He didn't surf prior to his accident, but now he says he can't imagine life without it. He has become a dynamic competitor and respected athlete with im-

pressive results in both local and national adaptive surfing competitions. He has won gold, silver and bronze medals. Martinez and Ricochet have joined forces to battle the suicide epidemic among veterans through Jose's inspirational speaking and Ricochet's emotional healing abilities. They also catch waves together to raise awareness of the healing power of the ocean and the healing power of a dog.

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Owen Incorporates ASL On Debut Album

Since the release of his debut album, "And the Moon Rising", Canadian musician Trevor Owen has been keen to incorporate American Sign Language into his music videos.

The time has finally arrived, and the complete 10-track set of his ASL-enhanced music videos are available now. The brimming double-handful of videos-including "Not the Only One," "Fire Moon," and the album's title track, "And the Moon Rising" feature actor and deaf rights advocate Dawn Jani Birley.

Owen ultimately connected with Birley through the Canadian Hearing Society.

"It turned out to be more involved than I had imagined," Owen said of the process of finding the right translator for the job. A common response I received was 'I don't do music.'

"Indeed, I could not find anyone who would do it."

As a young schoolboy, Owen made the decision to drop out of school back in the 1960s in order to pursue a career in music. He started playing in Yorkville clubs and pubs before landing gigs all across Canada.

He played cover sets, his own original music, with bands and many other acts, until finally recording and releasing "And the Moon Rising" in 2020.

His long-lasting career ended up paying for a post-secondary education, which resulted in him becoming a teacher in Toronto. The complete set of ASL-enhanced music videos for "And the Moon Rising" are available now.

At right is the cover of Trevor Owen's album, "And the Moon Rising"



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INFORMATION FORUM

REGISTRATION OPEN FOR AUTISM SPEAKS RACES

Registration is now open for the Autism Speaks Race to a Kinder World.

Races include July 4, Independence Day 5K; Oct. 2, Bullying Awareness 5K; Nov. 13, World Kindness Day 5K; Jan. 1, New Year's Day 5K; and March 20, Spring into Kindness 5K. For more information, the public can visit their website www.autismspeaks.org.

MUSICIANS WITH DISABILITIES MAY APPLY FOR AWARD

Daniel's Music Foundation has announced a call for entries in the second annual Danny Awards, sponsored by René Plessner. The entry submission deadline is Sept. 12. The award showcases and recognizes the musical talents of individuals with disabilities. The top ten award recipients chosen from video submissions will receive a personalized award, an honorarium of \$500 and up to \$500 in travel reimbursement. They will have the opportunity to share their musical talents Sunday, Oct. 17 via the internet.

To learn more about submitting an entry or how to tune in to the live event, one can visit danielmusic.org/TheDannys2021.

NAD OPENS REGISTRATION FOR LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

The NAD Leadership Training Conference (NLTC) will be free for anyone to join. Anyone interested in joining the National Association of the Deaf can easily do so or renew their membership online.

A certificate of attendance for those who want one for employment or other purposes will be available with payment of a \$10 processing fee.

The virtual NLTC event will take place on Zoom during September 19 through 25 and includes three plenaries and 10 workshops. The plenary sessions will explore opportunities for dismantling racism in the deaf community. Workshops include Self-Care; Befriending Legislators; Recruiting Young Leaders; Working Together - Not Against Each Other; Managing Organization Funds; Fundraising; Communication Strategies; and Advocacy Training. Registration is available by visiting www.nad.org/2021-nltc-registration/.

AT-HOME VACCINATIONS NOW AVAILABLE

In-home vaccination is now available for all New Yorkers.

One can visit, nyc.gov/homevaccine or call 877-829-4692 to request an in-home appointment.

ACCESS-A-RIDE RETURNS TO PRE-PANDEMIC SCHEDULING

MTA New York City Transit has begun a phased return to scheduling shared rides on Access-A-Ride to return to its pre-pandemic guest policies as customers begin to resume travel with family and friends. Customers will again be able to book travel with a (Personal Care Assistant) PCA and one guest in all cases, and additional guests will be accommodated on a space available basis.

Since mid-March 2020, the MTA stopped all shared rides and the booking of guests on Access-A-Ride.

All dedicated vehicles are disinfected daily. Broker services follow similar disinfection and health check requirements under the regulatory authority of the NYC TLC. As a reminder, masks are required for customers, PCA, guests and drivers when traveling on Access-A-Ride and at our assessment centers regardless of vaccination status. Non-shared transportation is still offered for those customers who are COVID-positive or symptomatic.

FCC ACCEPTING NOMINATIONS FOR ACCESSIBILITY AWARDS

Nominations are being accepted for the 10th FCC Chair's Awards for Advancement in Accessibility (Chair's AAA). The nomination period runs through Sept. 17.

The FCC is soliciting nominations for innovative practices, technologies and organizations that have creatively leveraged communications and broadband technology to break down accessibility barriers and ensure that people with disabilities have been able to participate equally in our increasingly connected world.

The commission is interested in nominations that have addressed the needs of people with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic in education, work and civic life.

For information about what to include in the nomination, one can visit <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-374661A1.docx>.

Award winners will be recognized at a ceremony to be held later this year.

STUDENT ACCOMMODATIONS STREAMLINED FOR THE ACT

Under a new policy, any student who currently receives testing accommodations under the IDEA and Section 504 will automatically qualify for testing accommodations when they register for the ACT.

Students who do not qualify under the new policy will still have the opportunity to apply for accommodations.

AMPUTEE COALITION VIRTUAL CONFERENCE OPENS THIS MONTH

Amputee Coalition will host the 2021 National Conference virtually, Sept. 29 through Oct. 2.

The coalition is committed to the community's health and safety and partnering to develop and execute an innovative, inclusive experience that will include a virtual exhibit hall, expansive peer support and educational sessions and fun.

For information and to register, one can visit www.amputee-coalition.org.

DRA TO HOLD GALA VIRTUALLY IN OCTOBER

Disability Rights Advocates will hold its annual gala at 7 p.m., Thursday Oct. 7.

The event is virtual and free to all. Registration is recommended for exclusive event updates. All audio will be captioned and have ASL interpretation.

The program will include a conversation with President and CEO Kathy Martinez, about DRA's future direction, a performance by musician Raul Midón, remarks from former Attorney General Eric Holder and reflections by the founder of The Coelho Center for Disability Law, Policy & Innovation, Tony Coelho.

NYC FAMILY WELCOME CENTERS ACCEPTING APPOINTMENTS

Family Welcome Centers have been serving NYC families remotely during the pandemic, but they are now opening one center in each borough for in-person appointments.

To request support or set up an appointment, one can complete and submit the DOE's form at www.schools.nyc.gov or call 718 935-2828. A response will be sent within 72 hours.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN SUMMIT HOLDING REGISTRATION

The Universal Design (UD) Summit, Sept. 29 through Oct. 1, is the leading conference in North America exclusively dedicated to universal housing and communities.

The summit is a unique educational program and conference that aims to promote UD principles in public places, housing and digital spaces with exceptional content and experiences. It will include keynote speeches by top industry leaders, as well as 18 breakout sessions, salon chat networking time, office hours with sponsors and vendors and a thought-leaders round table with Q & A session. The roundtable will feature all five speakers and will give attendees the opportunity to pose questions to the group.

One can register by visiting their website www.udsummit.com/registration/.

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SWM 71, looking for a phone friend. Male or Female. **A398**

SWM, 56, wheelchair user, seeks single female 40-55 for friendship and more. Into baseball, fishing, comedy clubs. I live in Sayville, NY. I do not drive. Send photo and phone number. **A396**

Professional man seeks nice lady for long term serious relationship. Please include phone number. Serious replies only.. **A399**

Senior Female, Nassau, looking for senior male to enjoy simple things in life, family, hugs, walking WHLI, Platters. **A395**

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SAPOLIN AWARDS Continued from page 1

Services for New York, Inc. (TSINY). TSINY is a non profit mental health corporation which provides community-based services to individuals recovering from mental illness.

The organization was started in 1975 and serves 4000 people each year. TSINY has worked with MOPD to hire individuals with mental health disabilities.

The Central Park conservancy was awarded the Public Service Award. This not-for-profit conservancy invests tens of millions of dollars each year into NYC Park's care. In partnership with the City, including NYC Parks and MOPD, the Conservancy has demonstrated an exemplary commitment to ensuring that the park's spaces and programs are accessible to people with disabilities.

The Public Accommodations Award was presented

to TotalCaption, a Certified Woman-Owned Business Enterprise, that has provided onsite and remote Communication Access Real-Time Translation (CART) services, web captioning and transcription services to New York City government agencies including MOPD, Broadway, museums and cultural venues, academic institutions, Fortune 500 companies, and even presidents of the United States.

Eyebeam received the Communication and Technology Award. Eyebeam provides space and support for a community of diverse, justice-driven artists, including artists who engage with technology and its impact on society.

During the past 20 years, Eyebeam has provided robust professional and financial support to more than 500 artists, including individuals with disabilities.

The Frieda Zames Advocacy Award was given to Carr Massi. Massi's career began in the mid-1960s with a stint at Courage, Inc., a disability self-help organization. She later joined Disabled in Action (DIA), where she twice served as president and has been active for 50 years.

She co-founded the Metropolitan Chapter of the National Paraplegia Foundation and was involved in its conversion into the Center for Independence of the

Disabled, New York (CID-NY). She was president of the board of directors of the Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled (BCID) and worked at the Rusk Institute and in the Occupational Therapy Program at New York University.

Now 90 years old, Massi continues to advocate for New Yorkers.

Food for the event was provided by Contento Restaurant.

MOBILITY CHALLENGED LEAST ACCOMMODATED Continued from page 7

ing-age people with disabilities is about \$490 billion. That disposable income is comparable to other significant market segments, such as African Americans (\$501 billion) and Hispanics (\$582 billion), according to the same study.

The survey showed Target, Walmart and Marriott International to be most inclusive.

Amazon, The Home Depot, Costco Wholesale, Homewood Suites by Hilton, Kroger and Toyota received an honorable mention.

To review the full 2021 Drive for Inclusion Report Card and to learn more about Drive for Inclusion, one can visit their site, www.DriveforInclusion.com.



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AIRLINE SUIT MOVES FORWARD

Continued from page 3

all of the claims were extinguished.

U.S. District Court Judge Tena Williams for the District of Utah ruled in favor of Mr. Spears.

The lawsuit against American Airlines asserts two claims for negligence, a claim for negligent infliction of emotional distress, and a claim for intentional infliction of emotional distress. Mr. Spears also filed a claim for loss of consortium.

According to the complaint, the Spearses consulted with American Airlines about Mrs. Spears' disability well before her scheduled travel and specifically requested an

onboard aisle wheelchair for the flight. When she arrived at the Salt Lake City International Airport on the day of her flight, TSA employees used a wheelchair to transport her to her gate, and airlines employees used an aisle chair to help her board the plane.

After she took her seat, the airline removed the aisle chair from the plane. When she told a flight attendant she needed to use the restroom the attendant told her to either "hold it" or make her way to the lavatory without using the aisle chair. Unable to wait, Mrs. Spears asked for help getting to the lavatory.

American Airlines employees tried to help but instead "lifted, dropped, pushed, dragged and injured" Mrs. Spears, the

complaint alleges. She needed supplemental oxygen until the flight landed in North Carolina.

CMS TO IMPROVE HOME HEALTH SERVICES

Continued from page 4

efficiency. Additionally, the proposed rule would improve the Home Health Quality Reporting Program by removing or replacing certain quality measures to reduce burden and increase focus on patient outcomes. CMS would also begin collecting data on two measures promoting coordination of care in the Home Health Quality Reporting Program effective January 1, 2023 as well as measures un-

der Long Term Care Hospital and Inpatient Rehabilitation Quality Reporting Programs effective October 1, 2022.

This would position the agency with data to monitor outcomes across diverse populations and support the recent Executive Order 13985 of Jan. 20, 2021, entitled "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government."

THE ACCESS INDEX

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SPORTS SCENE

Surfing Therapy Dog Helps Triple Amputee Vet

Army veteran Jose Martinez, a purple heart recipient became a triple amputee after stepping on an improvised explosive device (IED) in Afghanistan.

He has been competing in adaptive surfing competitions since 2017 and is a member of Team USA's Adaptive surfing team. Later this year he'll be entering the US Open of Adaptive Surfing in Oceanside, Calif. and the 2021 Ampsurf ISA World Para Surfing Championship in Pismo Beach, Calif.

Surf Dog Ricochet has been sponsoring Martinez for several years now. She has included a surfboard to the sponsorship. "The custom board that One More Wave shaped has made a big difference, said Martinez. "I'm able to paddle better and make better turns. I can't wait to use it in competition. I can't thank Ricochet enough for her continued support. In return we have changed people's minds and hearts, showing them anything is possible."

Martinez has his sights on going to the Paralympics in 2028. But sadly, it won't hap-



Wounded Warrior Martinez and his benefactor, Surf Dog Ricochet share the surf together.

pen in Ricochet's lifetime because she's 13 years old now. "I take great comfort in knowing Ricochet's legacy will live on through the sponsorship of Martinez. It's a privilege to be so closely associated with

one of adaptive surfing's most recognizable individuals," said Judy Fridono, Ricochet's guardian.

Ricochet is a certified goal-directed therapy dog that has been helping wounded

warriors and veterans with PTSD since 2009. She is also an honorary member of Team USA due to her broad support of the adaptive surfing community. She became the first-ever

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Bike-On Clinics Resume at Burke



The Therapeutic Recreation Department at Burke Rehabilitation Hospital recently sponsored a Bike-On

Clinic to provide a full day of education and exercise to members of the community with mobility impairments.

Director of Recreational Therapy and Adaptive Sports, Eileen Andreassi and her department assisted participants in the program as they were custom fitted for handcycles and recumbent bicycles. The clinic took place on Burke's White Plains track. The program runs from May through October and is open to the public.

People living in the community with a disability register for the program and work with therapists and volunteers to determine the best cycle and learn how to use it. Therapeutic recreation department staff and therapy volunteers work with participants weekly during the winter months so they are fully trained.

They help participants, who have shown dedication to the sport, secure funding to purchase a cycle for home use. Cyclists, who demonstrate a commitment to the program are invited to join the Burke Cycling team, which runs independently from the clinics.

The team has participated locally in 5K fall races including the American Heart Association's Heart Walk, and looks forward to rebuilding the team after pausing due to COVID-19.

Reservations for the Sept. 16 clinic are now being accepted by emailing Eileen Andreassi at eandreassi@burke.org or calling 914 597-2248.