

Disability Unite: Celebrating Community in Central Park

By Kieran O'Brien-Kern



Lachi performs at a previous Disability Unite Festival. Photo credit: Rick Guidotti, Positive Exposure

This July marks 34 years of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and a celebration of Disability Pride. On July 14th, the Disability Unite Festival will honor the occasion through entertainment and advocacy both at the Central Park Naumberg Bandshell and online for virtual revelers. Founded in 2020 by the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD) and Project Access for All, the goal of Disability Unite was to create an inclusive virtual celebration of Disability Pride and the 30th Anniversary of the ADA at a time when all in-person activities were canceled due to COVID-19. The focus then was on vital services, but as Disability Unite's Founder and Director, Matt Axel, pointed

out, "arts, culture, and celebrating pride are also vital to life."

The Disability Unite team could have used any of the existing virtual platforms, but they weren't inclusive enough, so they created their own platform with three stages and four streaming options including captions, audio descriptions, American Sign Language, and plain language. "Our community deserves a platform that puts access first; access is not an add-on. It should be built in as you create something," Axel explained.

In 2022, the NYC Commission on Human Rights took up the mantle of being Disability Unite's City Agency Partner. This helped keep advocacy as a key focus alongside

entertainment. Axel shared that one of the most powerful things that he encountered while planning the event is that each group under the broad umbrella of the disability community has its own community with a rich culture and specific needs. And yet, disability organizations around NYC recognize that we are "stronger together."

Through this notion, much can be achieved. For example, one of the key advocacy wins from the 2022 Disability Unite Festival was that a number of high ranking New York City Police Department (NYPD) members attended to connect with and learn from disability community members, and as a result, NYPD is piloting

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training programs to work with diverse needs of disabled people.

That year was the first in-person Disability Unite Festival, and I had the privilege of attending. 5,000 people joined in Central Park and 2,000 joined virtually. There was music that engaged the soul, art that patrons could touch, and tables with services from across the city. It was the type of event where you found what and who you needed, making connections along the way.

This year, Disability Unite is back both virtually and in person

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By Emily Ladau



July is my favorite month. If you happen to have an interest in horoscopes, then you won't be surprised to learn that I'm a Leo. But beyond that fun fact, what I love most about July is celebrating Disability Pride Month. It's a time to reflect on the rich, complex history of the disability community. It's a time to honor the multitude of diverse disability experiences. And it's a time to embrace disability as an identity without shame.

Although this July will mark 34 years since the passage of the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), being proud to be disabled is still rather radi-

cal in a world that has a long way to go when it comes to accepting disability as part of the beautiful fabric of our society. I often say this is because it's possible to create a policy, but it's not possible to legislate attitudes. So, even though we've come so far under the ADA, there is yet more to be done.

This issue of *Able News* is dedicated to recognizing the progress we've made and the advocates whose tireless pursuit of access, equity, and justice helped lead us here. As with every issue I've had the privilege of editing so far, it's been a joy to support our writers in publishing



stories that shine a spotlight on the true power of the disability community.

I hope that you are celebrating yourselves this month and every month—and know that I am celebrating us, too.

Disability Unite: Championing Change in Central Park

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on three stages. The festival's theme is "Championing Change: Past, Present, & Future." It will look at the festival's evolution, celebrate the 34th anniversary of the ADA, and recognize both the work that has been done and that is yet to come.

On the main stage, attendees will get to enjoy some of the hottest disabled performers, including Wawa's World, James Ian, and The Disability Hip Hop Jam Featuring 4 Wheel City & Friends. And one of

the major virtual draws this year is Disability Unite's Got Talent. Disabled performers from across the globe had the opportunity to be nominated and there was a voting process to choose the top 10, who will perform virtually at the festival.

In addition to performances, there is a lot more happening at this year's event. Kids will have the opportunity to take part in a project making banners that will adorn the streets of New York.

There will be cooperative art making with disabled artists and allies. Patrons will get to embrace their zen moment with accessible yoga and embrace texture with a loom workshop. A calm section will be designated for when you just need to take space. And display tables will feature a bevy of services and opportunities within the five boroughs.

Interested in attending? Learn more and join the festivities by visiting DisabilityUnite.org

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Hochul's Congestion Pricing Pause Harms Transit Accessibility Efforts

By Christopher Alvarez

Honk! Honk! New York State Governor Kathy Hochul joined Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) officials and congestion pricing supporters in a Union Square rally just six months ago to celebrate the victory of advocates who pushed to enact the program meant to end gridlock in New York City. Governor Hochul called the toll initiative “transformative.” But now, she faces brutal backlash for rolling back on her stance and temporarily putting a “pause” on the launch of the tolling plan, which was set for June 30th.

Officially known as the Central Business District Tolling Program, the plan, which passed five years ago, was going to impose a \$15 charge on cars entering local streets and avenues at or below 60th Street in Manhattan to reduce traffic and emissions in New York City and provide a funding stream for much needed capital investments in public transit. But as New York is still trying to climb out of prolonged inflation, Governor Hochul ruled that the timing is just not right.

“While our recovery has been stronger and swifter than anyone imagined, it is by no means complete. And we cannot afford to undercut this momentum, and I won't allow this delicate recovery to be jeopardized,” said Governor Hochul in a press conference addressing affordability and the cost of living early last month. “Circumstances have changed and we must respond to the facts on the ground—not from the rhetoric from five years ago. So, after careful consideration, I have come to the difficult decision that implementing the planned congestion pricing system risks too many unintended consequences for New Yorkers at this time.”

Governor Hochul said that her decision came after several conversations with everyday New Yorkers, like small business owners who expressed their desperate fear of losing their

Image credit: Jessica Murray

customers who come from states and neighboring boroughs due to rising prices.

However, this pause poses significant challenges for the MTA. Cancellation of congestion pricing also puts a stop to the \$1 billion funding to the MTA's 2020-2024 Capital Program that includes implementing accessibility at numerous subway stations.

“She's not thinking about a lot of other people that are impacted negatively by doing away with this program,” said Jessica Murray, an organizer with the Rise and Resist Elevator Action Group, which advocates for expanding access in the subway. “The cost to the disabled community is a lot higher because they already have higher transportation costs and it's really hard to get around the city because the subways are not accessible. Congestion pricing was supposed to pay for accessibility upgrades, and now all of that is up in the air.”

Just two years ago, advocates championed what MTA chairman and CEO Janno Lieber called “a truly historic day” when the agency settled a class-action lawsuit filed in New York State by several advocacy groups, in which the MTA committed to install elevators in 95% of New York City's

subway stations by the year 2055.

Presently, under the settlement agreement, 38 stations are being updated. 151 stops are already in compliance with the ADA—30% of the 493 stations that make up the New York City subway system and the Staten Island Railway.

Financially, Hochul's halt is not only getting in the way of MTA's promised accessibility upgrades, but also forcing them to reassess how to allocate the remaining \$28 billion of work left on their original \$55 billion capital plan for other significant project investments that are needed.

Furthermore, gridlock and traffic jams keep building up. Shortly after Governor Hochul's announcement, Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine put out a press release highlighting the dire concerns resulting from this pause:

“We have paralyzing levels of traffic in midtown and downtown. This is slowing emergency response times, harming the climate, and serving as an enormous drag on our economy. Meanwhile, our public transit system faces desperate capital needs for station renovations, accessibility improvements, signaling upgrades, the extension of the Second Ave Subway, and

more. Today's news leaves us with dire questions about how we will address these crises.”

Murray echoes these traffic concerns: “It's traffic not only for ambulances, but also for para-transit vehicles that are trying to get around in that part of the city,” she said. “It disproportionately impacts the disabled community that are sadly a lot more auto-dependent here in New York City than they should be because we have an inaccessible public transit system.”

Governor Hochul insists that she “understands the financial pressures [New Yorkers] are facing.” She is focused on “putting more money back in...pockets” and plans to revisit how to implement congestion pricing without adding to the strain.

“I didn't believe in the first place that congestion pricing would be a metric for fixed transit and certainly fixed accessibility,” said wheelchair user and transit accessibility advocate Sasha Blair-Goldensohn. “But I do believe what can fix accessibility and make transit more inclusive is to have strong legal guidelines and guardrails that require a certain amount of spending to do on accessibility. And the first is a timeline.”

ELEVATORS ARE FOR EVERYONE



Disability Vote

Voting Accessibility: Progress, But More to Do

By Jake April

October 29, 2002 was a day of freedom that people with disabilities had been waiting a long time for: individuals in need of adaptations to vote independently had gained protections for improved voting accessibility through the Help Americans Vote Act (HAVA).

HAVA was established and signed by then-President George W. Bush, ensuring equal opportunity for all American citizens, regardless of limitations, to exercise their civil right to vote. This meant people with disabilities could vote privately and independently.

One person who greatly benefited from HAVA is Ms. Marilyn Tucci of Shirley, NY.

Tucci is legally blind and when the veteran voter found out that inaccessibility would no longer stop her from voting without assistance, her reaction was one of great enthusiasm.

“Oh my God, now I can vote independently...I used to have somebody go in (the polling site) with me to pull a curtain and a lever.” Now Tucci is able to use a Ballot Marking Device to cast her vote on her own.

However, since the inception of accessible voting machines, operating them has not always been a smooth process. The (sometimes) lack of ease of operation results in unjust treatment toward people with disabilities, making it necessary for them to rely on others for assistance.

Tucci remembers quite a few times that there were problems with the machines. Instead of being able to vote in less than 15 minutes, she would often be there for hours, listening to excuses from staff as to why the machines weren't working. As a result, she needed someone to physically help her with her vote.

Then, in the 2020 federal election, Tucci tried to cast her vote at Brookhaven Town Hall; she again had issues with the machines and the staff.

After an unsuccessful attempt to vote using the Dominion Im-

agecast, which uses the Ballot Marking Device (BMD) to make the voting process accessible, she was informed of her right to file a HAVA Complaint.

Armed with knowledge from American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today (ADAPT), Tucci filed a complaint under HAVA with the New York State Board of Elections (SBOE) on December 4, 2020. The complaint alleges “certain conduct that constitutes violations of Title III of the Help America Vote Act of 2002.”

Tucci recounts, “I've never done anything like that before. I just felt like my right to privacy and independence [was] taken away. And two people had to help me vote, which I kind of resented because I didn't have anybody with me. So, I was really annoyed by that.” She continues, “So, I did a HAVA complaint. And when we had the hearing, they agreed with everything I said.”

Tucci had no trouble voting in the 2021 and 2022 elections. She said, “I think everything went smooth[ly] with those two years of voting after I filed that HAVA Complaint. And I was so happy because I'm in and out of there in 10-12 minutes. No problems.”

Then in November 2023, Tucci expected to vote independently at an early voting poll site. She experienced a new level of frustration: the ballot marking device (BMD) was not properly placed for privacy; the staff was not adherent to HAVA.

“I signed in (at the polling place) and this woman approached me and I said, ‘I'd like to use the accessible voting machine, please.’ And she said okay. She showed me where it was... I put my hand on it. And then I said, could you please turn the machine around?”

Ms. Tucci points out that's one thing she should not have to broach. “It should be automatic that one machine is facing the wall.” Tucci had to ask a poll worker three times to turn the machine around. Additionally,

Dominion Voting
ImageCast® Evolution
ballot-marking device.



she needed headphones to use the device, which according to her, should have been automatically provided, but weren't. Tucci had to request them from a poll worker. “I asked her for the paper that goes over the earphones for cleanliness,” Tucci recalled, but the poll worker said “we will just throw them away.”

Following the directions on the BMD, Tucci completed the full process of selecting and submitting her votes. However, a poll worker notified her that the machine did not retain the entries, but instead produced a blank ballot.

The poll worker did not offer to troubleshoot the machine. When Tucci asked if she could use one of the other two machines, she was told that the machines were scanners, not accessible voting machines.

The poll workers suggested she take two staff members into the poll booth with her. Tucci declined the offer, as it would violate her privacy.

She instead asked her friend Elysia who had accompanied her to help. Tucci said, “If I was going to let anybody vote for me, I would ask my friend... Why should a Democrat or a Republican know who I'm voting for?” Tucci's voting companion later wrote a letter to the Board of Electors defending Tucci's case.

In February 2024, Tucci filed another Complaint under HAVA, detailing her November 2023 voting troubles. A hearing was held in April 2024, and in early June 2024, the SBOE found that her experiences had indeed violated HAVA and must be remedied in the future with proper training for poll workers.

Tucci's mixed bag of experiences is reflected more broadly

in a new report, “Voting Experiences Since HAVA: Perspectives of People with Disabilities Report to the U. S. Election Assistance Commission,” which shows that HAVA has ultimately brought about progress.

Overall, polling places are becoming more physically accessible. Parking spaces and ramps have been more readily available, the availability of accessible voting machines has increased, and the needs of voters have been met with mail-in-voting and accessible ballot delivery and return. Mail-in voting increased the number of disabled persons who chose to vote; however, this did not change the problem of voting independently for all.

As the report explains, “Overall, both the survey and focus group data indicates that HAVA has made a significant difference in the voting experiences of many people with disabilities. At the same time, challenges remain, particularly for those with vision, cognitive, and invisible disabilities such as anxiety.”

The accomplishments of HAVA are noteworthy. With that said, as the report shows, “further efforts should be made to address both long-standing challenges such as polling place accessibility, and recent difficulties such as health and safety concerns, that are faced by people with disabilities.”

Disability History

Precursors to Disability Pride

by Warren Shaw

In 2015, Mayor Bill DeBlasio declared that henceforth July was going to be Disability Pride Month in New York City. The declaration was celebrated with a parade and the first-ever museum exhibit about disability activism in New York City at the Brooklyn Museum (curated by Yours Truly).

There have been debates about whether the parades held in and after 2015 were the first Disability Pride parades in the City, or whether certain earlier marches, held in the 1990s under a different name, were also disability pride events. I am not about to wade into any definitional debates. But even though the term “Disability Pride” wasn’t widely in use before 2015, the idea of taking pride in the accomplishments and the strength of the City’s disability community goes back long before. Let’s talk about some of the precursors to Disability Pride in New York City.

There was pride on January 27, 1967, when a group of disabled citizens picketed City Hall

to protest Mayor Lindsay’s plan to invalidate parking permits in Midtown.

Pride was rolling when activists like Vincent Marchiselli got legislation passed to outlaw discrimination against people with disabilities, via a bill that defined a person with a disability as someone who relied upon a device, appliance, or seeing-eye dog in the performance of “daily responsibilities as a self-sufficient, productive and complete human being.”

Pride and bawdy humanity inspired a late-1960s bumper sticker that commanded fellow motorists to “Honk If You’re A Horny Handicapper.”

Pride motivated my father, Julius Shaw, when he submitted a paper for publication in the extremely academic *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, in 1971. As usual, the table of contents for the issue was going to be filled with professors and authors with credentials like “Ph.D,” “O.T.R.,” and “M.D.”—except for Julie, who hadn’t even

had a day of college at that point. Instead, he requested a “p.h.” after his name, meaning “physically handicapped,” which he called the most relevant of all credentials.

Pride and swagger led Julie to joke, a few years later, that his new column in the *Soho Weekly News* should be entitled “A Crutch In Your Crotch.”

Pride was on the page when Eunice Fiorito, the first Director of the Mayor’s Office of the Handicapped, wrote that her first report to the Mayor was “not merely the annual report of another government authority. It represents...the history of a social movement.”

It was pride that led the Disabled In Action (DIA) Singers to compose and perform “Let The Children Stare” and “Walking On My Wheels,” and to parody disability bigotry in songs like “Peter Singer’s Wonderful World,” with its ironic lyrics: “Disabled people have no personhood/Think we should kill them quick, and if we could/What a wonderful world it would be.”



Photo of political button, showing outline of person in a wheelchair, with a power fist in the wheel and the letters “DIA” on the arm. Designed by Patricio Figueroa, 1970.

It was pride that underscored 1990s slogans like “Nothing About Us Without Us” and “Free Our People;” pride that climbed up the steps of the Capitol in 1990; and pride that occupied the offices of Health, Education, and Welfare in 1977.

I love the term Disability Pride, and I love celebrating Disability Pride Month. But pride is no newcomer to the disability community. This July, let us take pride in all the innovators and activists who’ve come before. Let us celebrate the great chain of being that has brought us to this month, in this year, in this City.

For more of Warren’s work in disability history, please go to DisabilityHistoryNYC.com

Health and Wellness

Diets Don’t Work, But These Strategies Can Help You Maintain Health

By Heather McMullen, MD, Director of Bariatric Surgery at Northwell Health



The Katz Institute for Women’s Health (KIWH), the only network of experts devoted to every aspect of women’s care, is putting women first. The below content was originally published in its entirety on Northwell Health’s blog, The Well, and exemplifies KIWH’s commitment to raise health for all women.

This article is provided for educational and informational purposes only and does not constitute providing medical advice or professional services. The information provided should not be used for diagnosing or treating a health problem or disease, and

those seeking personal medical advice should consult with a licensed physician. Always seek the advice of your doctor or other qualified health provider regarding a medical condition.

While “fad” diets may lead to short-term weight loss, the reality is that you’re likely to gain that weight back once you stop following their dietary guidelines. This may become even more pronounced as you get older since our bodies naturally lose muscle and metabolism slows down as we age. The other reality we must address is that it is harder

for women to lose weight than men. This is because women tend to have more body fat and less muscle mass than men, resulting in slower metabolisms.

However, hormones also play a role in women managing their weight, as estrogen causes the body to store and retain fat. This primarily occurs around the abdomen, thighs, and breasts to provide an energy source for future pregnancies and breastfeeding.

That said, it is important to manage your weight for health reasons. A recent scientific state-

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Tech On the Go: Apps that Make Travel Easier

By Jeremy Morak, Marketing Manager, Lighthouse Guild



The summer is the perfect time to explore new neighborhoods and travel to new cities or countries. For people who are blind or visually impaired, navigating new destinations can pose potential challenges, but thanks to the advancement of assistive technology, traveling has never been easier or more accessible! You can stroll through cobblestone streets, feel the sun's warmth on your face as you uncover hidden

treasures, or visit a continent you've never been to—all with the help of your smartphone. Dr. Bryan Wolynski, Chief Technology Officer at Lighthouse Guild, highlights three navigation apps that are changing how blind and visually impaired individuals travel. Buckle up, place your seat in the upright position, and get ready to explore with confidence!

All of these apps are free to download. They use sound and

vibration to safely guide users through outdoor environments. Keep in mind that there are apps such as GoodMaps and RightHear that support indoor navigation or orientation, but the following apps are more suited for outdoor traveling.

1. Lazarillo

Lazarillo is a specialized GPS app that provides way-finding guidance and mapping solutions for people who are blind or visually impaired. Using audio messages, Lazarillo will tell a user about landmarks or points of interest on their path, the street someone is walking on, and upcoming intersections. Like a radio, Lazarillo will announce what's around you while you are traveling and using the app. Users can customize how much information they want to receive while walking. For example, someone can specify that they only want to be informed about restaurants. The app will also assist user orientation by signaling which direction to turn before beginning the journey. For more information, visit <https://lazarillo.app/>

2. HapticNav

HapticNav operates through haptic technology, which uses vibration to guide users without the need of audio or visual guidance. Once a user inputs their travel destination, the app creates

a route and guides the individual through a virtual corridor. If a person veers off course, either too far to the right or too far to the left, the phone will begin to vibrate, signaling to the user that they are no longer within the path. For more information, visit <https://haptic.works/>

3. Oko

Oko provides turn-by-turn instructions via GPS but also uses audio and haptic feedback to alert the user to the status of pedestrian traffic signals. As you scan an intersection with your phone's camera in a straight-ahead direction, the app uses different sounds based on whether the pedestrian signal indicates to stop or walk, and even provides a countdown. For more information, visit <https://www.eyes.ai/>

These apps can be powerful tools for people who are blind or visually impaired. However, people should rely first on their orientation and mobility training and use forms of technology as a secondary option. Navigation and orientation apps are revolutionizing how we move around the world but are not always one hundred percent accurate. The safest way to travel is to use all of the resources available. Nevertheless, navigation apps can help make traveling less stressful and more fun.

Diets Don't Work, But These Strategies Can Help You Maintain Health

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ment from the American Heart Association made clear that obesity contributes directly to the risk of heart disease. This is especially true if you're holding extra girth around your waistline.

To lose weight and keep it off for good, you need to make seemingly small but significant changes.

The first thing to do is stop worrying about the number on the scale. You may never be able to get to your "ideal" weight, and that's okay. A lot of women don't realize that losing even a few pounds can have health benefits.

A 2018 study found that people who lost just 5% to 10% of their body weight were 22% less likely to develop metabolic syndrome, a group of risk factors such as high blood pressure and abnormal cholesterol levels that raise the risk of heart attack and stroke.

I tell every patient who wants to lose weight to start by keeping a food diary for a couple of days. This can help them figure out where to make some easy changes. For example, if you skip breakfast, try drinking a protein shake every morning to avoid overeating at lunch.

The same holds true for exercise. If you're not in the best physical condition, going to a gym might feel overwhelming. But you can start small. Commit to moving more. If you can only manage 10 minutes at a time, that's better than nothing. Just resist the temptation to overdo it, and try to pick something you can stick to long term.

There are a few other essentials to consider. If able to, women should consider doing strength training two to three times a week (but, again, start slow). It's also imperative that you build in time for

sleep. Research has found a link between poor sleep and being overweight or obese.

Finally, focus on making healthy eating a natural part of your lifestyle. Resist the urge to label foods as "good" or "bad." Instead, make sure your diet is rich in fruits, veggies, whole grains, lean protein, and healthy fats such as nuts, olive oil, and avocados. If you make these changes, I guarantee you won't just see the numbers on your scale go down: You'll feel more energized, which is more motivation to stay the course.

Beep Baseball is Changing the Game for Inclusion

By Steven McCoy



Long Island Bombers after the game along with the author of the article.

On Saturday, May 18th, I had the incredible opportunity to attend a Long Island Bombers Beep Baseball game in Central Park in New York City, and let me tell you, it was an absolute blast. The Long Island Bombers are an adaptive baseball team specifically designed for individuals who are blind and visually impaired. As one of the thirty teams associated with the National Beep Baseball Association (NBBA), they have been making an impact since 1997.

The Long Island Bombers are not just about playing baseball; they are dedicated to raising awareness and educating the community about blindness. Through the game of beep baseball, they provide athletes who are blind or have a vision disability with the chance to experience the thrill of the game while also offering a strong support network to their members. Their mission is to expand educational clinics, speaking engagements, and demonstrations throughout the entire region, showcasing the power of inclusivity and adaptability in sports.

Beep baseball may sound like a totally different ball game, but at its core, it's baseball with a

unique twist. Players rely solely on their senses and skills, from diving to stop a beeping ball to running full speed toward the sound of a buzzing base to score a run. Every moment is filled with excitement and teamwork.

During my time with the team, I had the privilege of interviewing one of their star players, Alex Barrera. He shared, "The Long Island Bombers are dedicated to educating the community about blindness. Through the game of beep baseball, we provide athletes that are blind or have a vision disability the opportunity to play the game and offer a support network to its members. It is the Bomber's goal to expand educational clinics, speaking engagements, and demonstrations throughout the entire region."

According to the National Center on Health, Physical Activity, and Disability (NCHPAD), individuals with disabilities represent the largest minority group in the United States, with approximately 61 million people having a disability. Despite this statistic, people with disabilities are often underrepresented in sports and face challenges to inclusion.

The Long Island Bombers are breaking down barriers by show-

ing the abilities, determination, and spirit of individuals with visual impairments through the game of beep baseball. By promoting inclusivity and diversity in sports, they are not only changing the game but also inspiring others to rethink what is possible.

The impact of the Long Island Bombers extends far beyond the baseball field. By providing a platform for individuals with disabilities to participate in sports, they are empowering a community and challenging stereotypes. The Bombers symbolize the changing face of sports, reflecting a more inclusive and diverse landscape for all.

Support for the Bombers can be shown through volunteering or donations, which are crucial for assisting athletes in practices and competitions, as well as funding travel to various events nationwide. Volunteers play a key role in guiding players during games, aiding in defensive plays and overall performance. Through strategic direction and teamwork, the team exemplifies resilience, unity, and inclusivity, emphasizing empowerment and education for all.

To stay updated on the Long Island Bombers' schedule and learn more about their mission, visit libombers.org

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Disability Culture

The Viscardi Center Announces Kornreich Institute for Disability Studies

By Kim Brussell

The Viscardi Center announced the creation of the Kornreich Institute for Disability Studies (KIDS) at its signature fundraiser, Celebrity Night, on May 16th. It's named in recognition of the lead donors, John and Janet Kornreich, well-known philanthropists who reside on Long Island and support some of The Viscardi Center and Henry Viscardi School's most impactful, transformative initiatives. "To whom much is given, much is expected," quoted Janet Kornreich as the couple introduced the vision for the Institute. The Institute will promote a culture of disability equity and inclusion for people with disabilities.

"I think this will be the largest single project in the history of Viscardi," shared John Kornreich. "Its mission is to inform, educate, inspire and entertain." Its museum-style content, oral history components, and interactive technology will be incorporated into the curriculum at Henry Viscardi School, which serves medically fragile students with severe physical disabilities. This will serve to build students' confidence and promote social and emotional learning.

"This Institute will focus on teaching students enrolled in K-12 about disability history and disability culture."

Further, the Institute will be a resource to educate nondisabled students and the public about the disability experience, as it will be made available to local schools, colleges and universities, businesses, organizations, disability scholars, and government entities. The goal is to facilitate increased awareness about the accomplishments of people with disabilities on Long Island, in New York, and throughout the United States.

During his remarks about the Institute, Mr. Kornreich provided a compelling example of the type of educational content that will be a part of it, presented in an entertaining way. He told the story of Jim Abbott, a one-handed, American professional baseball pitcher who exceeded everyone's expectations except his own. He noted Abbott enjoyed an award-winning college career at the University of Michigan, led the U.S. Olympic team to a gold medal in 1988, was drafted by Major League Baseball's California Angels, and threw a no-hitter in 1993 as a New York Yankee in a 4-0 win against the Cleveland Indians. Following this impressive list of accomplishments, Mr. Kornreich introduced video of Abbott's no-hitter, which brought the significance of the project to light.

Viscardi's President and CEO, Dr. Chris Rosa, described KIDS as the Kornreich's boldest venture yet. "This Institute will focus on teaching students enrolled in K-12 about disability history and disability culture. Henry Viscardi School students will not only learn social studies and culture through a disability studies lens, they will be empowered to teach their peers without disabilities about disability history and culture from their own distinctive perspectives and in their own authentic, resonant voices." Alluding to a larger, national element of the project focusing on preserving disability history, Dr. Rosa added, "At the heart of KIDS will be something unique and, quite literally, historic."

In an interview after his no-hitter, Abbott shared a pertinent reminder: "Just because you do things a little bit differently, it doesn't mean you can't do them just as well." That's just the message the Kornreich Institute for Disability Studies, set to open fall 2025, is meant to drive home for all who visit.



Rendering of Kornreich Institute for Disability Studies.

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Locations and Partners

<p>Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY Manhattan 1010 Avenue of the Americas, Suite 301 New York, NY 10003</p> <p>Queens 80-02 Kew Gardens Rd, Suite 400 Kew Gardens, NY 11415</p> <p>Brooklyn 30 Third Avenue, #800A Brooklyn, NY 11217</p>	<p>Community Health Action of Staten Island (CHASI) 56 Bay St, 4th Floor Staten Island, NY 10301</p> <p>COMMUNITY HEALTH ACTION OF STATEN ISLAND A member of Hudson River Health Care</p>	<p>Bronx Independent Living Services (BILS) 4419 Third Ave, #2C Bronx, NY 10457</p> <p>Bronx Independent Living SERVICES</p>
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Community Events



July 9

6:00-7:00pm

**MTA Accessibility:
Expanding Access for All**

Join the MTA Accessibility team and the New York Transit Museum virtually to discuss the history of accessibility at the MTA and look to the future of accessibility beyond the requirements of the ADA. Learn more about new technologies and solutions that the MTA is testing across subways, buses, and paratransit to make that vision of a universally accessible system a reality, and how you can be part of this movement. **Register at:** nytransitmuseum.org/program/accessibility2024



**Prevent
Blindness**

Focus on Eye Health Summit

July 10-11

**13th Annual Focus on Eye
Health Summit**

This free virtual interactive event will emphasize the importance of a person-centered approach to vision health interventions, research, communications, and care. **Learn more and register:** eyesummit.vfairs.com

July 14

Disability Unite Festival

Celebrate Disability Pride with friends and family virtually, or in-person at the Central Park Naumburg Bandshell in New York City to celebrate community, and commemorate the 34th anniversary of the ADA. For virtual participants, the Disability Unite Festival will be livestreamed with all access accommodations for those unable to travel or not located in NYC. **Learn more and register:** disabilityunite.org



July 18

5:00-6:30pm

**High Line OffLine Summer
Arts Workshop**

The High Line, in collaboration with Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library, presents an opportunity to join a hands-on workshop and interact closely with featured celebrated artist Kaela Mei-Chee Chambers, explore meaning, and create tactile sculpture, and other art. **Learn more and register:** nypl.org/events/programs/2024/07/18/high-line-offline-summer-arts-workshops



July 26

11:00am-2:30pm

SILO's 2024 ADA Celebration

Self-Initiated Living Options, Inc. (SILO) is hosting a free celebration of the 34th anniversary of the signing of the ADA with local social service agencies, educators, advocates, families, and friends. This free event will take place at 3253 Route 112, next to bldg. 10, in Medford, NY. **Learn more and register:** siloinc.org/ada



November 19

11:00am-2:00pm

Reach for a Star Luncheon

For over 40 years, the luncheon has raised funds to support the after-school and adaptive sports programs at the Henry Viscardi School. This year's live, featured performer is Jarrod Spector, a Broadway icon. After setting a record of 1500 performances as Frankie Valli in *Jersey Boys*, Spector was nominated for a Tony Award for his portrayal of Barry Mann in *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*. He is currently playing another iconic real-life character, King George III in *Hamilton*. The event features an elaborate cocktail hour, a sit-down lunch, and a Chance Raffle/Silent Auction. **Learn more and purchase a ticket:** viscardicenter.org/event/annual-reach-for-a-star-luncheon

★ Perspectives on 34 Years of the Americans with Disabilities Act ★

Shifting Systems

The ADA and DRA: Symbiotic Changemaking

By Rebecca Williford, Esq., President & CEO, Disability Rights Advocates (DRA)

When the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law in July 1990, I was a non-disabled sporty kid, almost 10 years old. I had no idea about the seminal role this law would soon play in my life and the life of the organization I now lead: Disability Rights Advocates (DRA). When I acquired my disability a few years later in high school and my parents started having to advocate for me in education and healthcare systems, the ADA made it somewhat easier for us to navigate. And when I decided to become a lawyer and learned about disability rights law, the winding, synergistic paths of the ADA and DRA crystalized and captivated me.

The vision of the ADA, a robust federal civil rights law, is prohibition of discrimination against people with disabilities in everyday activities. It was an important expansion of prior laws like the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which protects against discrimination by entities that receive federal funding and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

(IDEA) which established certain educational rights. The ADA, on paper, guarantees that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else when it comes to many spheres of life—employment, healthcare, technology, entertainment, and transportation, just to name a few. But in order to make that vision a reality, the ADA has always required enforcement through the court system. DRA was created three years after the passage of the ADA to be that enforcer when it comes to systemic barriers.

DRA's founders created this organization to tackle systemic, illegal barriers facing people with disabilities. DRA's work began in the birthplace of the U.S. disability rights movement: Berkeley, California. Together with disability community organizations across the country, DRA identified healthcare providers, higher education institutions, municipalities, employers, (and the list goes on) that were illegally discriminating against people with disabilities. And through one precedent-setting lawsuit

after another, DRA used the ADA (and other laws) to protect the civil rights of people with disabilities—requiring those discriminating entities to remove barriers and move towards inclusion.

Our ADA lawsuits have made sure that people with disabilities are not discriminated against when participating in high-stakes academic testing, that municipalities include the needs of people with disabilities in their emergency preparedness plans, and that people with disabilities have equal access to transportation and medical treatment, to name just a few important victories.

None of these victories would have been possible without the ADA, and none of these victories would have been possible without DRA. Now, more than three decades later, one might think that DRA's work is winding down. Quite the opposite is unfortunately true. With offices now in California, New York, and Chicago, our work has never been more robust, as barriers that people with disabilities are facing are rampant across the country.

Every time society grows and changes (as we have in extreme ways as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, global warfare, climate change, and massive political upheaval to name just a few factors), society has a choice to include or exclude people with disabilities. DRA is using the ADA to represent people with disabilities who are demanding equal access to many spheres of society. For example, today we are using the ADA to seek more accessible elections in California for people with print disabilities. We are also using the ADA to make sure Tennessee provides effective communication to d/Deaf people who receive services from the State's Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and its Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services. And we're using the ADA to fight for rights on so many other fronts. The work goes on and, thank goodness the ADA keeps on providing the foundation for cases that establish rights to all of us with disabilities across the country.

Connect, Learn, and Advocate

Share Your Thoughts on Disability Inequities

People in the disability community are encouraged to respond to a request for information, or RFI, from the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP). OSTP is asking the public for feedback to understand the full scope of inequities faced by disabled people and to identify gaps in our current knowledge. This information will steer the development of the Federal Evidence Agenda on Disability Equity, which will ultimately support the government in making data-informed policy decisions to advance equity in all areas—including health, employment, education and others—for people with disabilities. **You may submit comments until July 15, 2024 by visiting <https://bit.ly/3xocP0V>**

Pathways for Hiring People with Disabilities into Clean Energy Jobs

In this free webinar, taking place on July 24th from 2:00-3:00pm, you will learn more about including people with disabilities in the climate jobs industry. **Register: askearn.org/event/pathways-for-hiring-clean-energy-jobs**

ADA 34th Anniversary Update

Mark the 34th Anniversary of the ADA by joining this session as representatives from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) provide an update on their litigation, technical assistance, and enforcement efforts. Participants will have an opportunity to pose questions to the presenters regarding issues in their own workplace or community. **Register: accessibilityonline.org/ADA-Audio-session?id=111127**

Support Rideshare Accessibility

On July 8th and 9th, you can make an impact by showing your support for rideshare accessibility. People with disabilities, especially wheelchair users, are invited to attend a court hearing of a Lyft accessibility trial. Sessions begin at 9:00am. **To learn more about attending, visit: <https://tinyurl.com/LyftTrial>**



United Spinal Now

How the “Greatest Generation” Paved the Way for the ADA

By James Weisman, Esq., General Counsel, United Spinal Association

When the “Greatest Generation” stormed the beaches of Normandy to save the world from Nazi domination during World War II, and when they conquered the Japanese in the Pacific, many died and many more were wounded and became paralyzed. Some of these paralyzed veterans founded Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association (EPVA, now called United Spinal Association) in 1946, and they continued to serve. Many of them were still on the EPVA board when I began work there as an attorney in 1979. They were living with paralysis 34 years after the war ended, ensuring that service members returning from Vietnam with spinal cord injuries received adequate healthcare and benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Vietnam veterans, however, whether they enlisted or were drafted, grew up during the 1960s, when the civil rights movement demonstrated to all Americans how to highlight discrimination and demand change. And change is what they needed.

The patriotic EPVA World

War II and Korea veterans on EPVA's board encouraged the social changes sought by paralyzed Vietnam veterans. EPVA members and employees, led by Long Islanders Bobby Mueller and Ron Kovick, founded an organization called Vietnam Veterans Against the War, which eventually morphed into Vietnam Veterans of America. EPVA's board and executive director, Jim Peters, wanted these recently paralyzed men reintegrated into the community. The disabled Vietnam veterans themselves wanted to earn a living, love and be loved, marry, raise families, and live the American dream—but that required architectural, legislative, and most importantly, societal change.

World War II veterans who used wheelchairs supported their Vietnam veteran counterparts' work with the civilian disabled community. Their efforts resulted in the first federal civil rights law for people with disabilities, the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968. In 1974, Joe Mandella of EPVA and New York's disability activists got the state's Human Rights Law

amended to include the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of disability. They also got New York's Public Buildings Law amended to require buildings (including transportation stations and terminals) built or maintained with state or municipal funds to be accessible.

In 1979, EPVA and I sued the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) using the Human Rights Law and the Public Buildings Law. We alleged that the MTA, in the ordinary course of business, was buying inaccessible buses and renovating stations inaccessibly. What, we argued, does “nondiscrimination” mean, if it does not require that when MTA acts (i.e., buys or renovates) it does so in a manner that lets all New Yorkers ride? How can New York's non-discrimination mandate permit inaccessible equipment and station design?

To fight for transit access, quadriplegic veteran Terry Moakley formed Mobility Through Access (“MTA,” too. Cute, right?), an organization that brought civilians with diverse disabilities together with EPVA. Disabled veterans and

non-veterans worked together to change the minds of elected officials, transit operators, and editorial boards. In 1984, we settled with MTA for Access-A-Ride, accessible buses, and key station access. EPVA replicated that in Philadelphia. By 1988, disabled veterans and non-veterans, working in tandem, had made the two oldest, largest rail systems in the United States commit to accessibility. The Settlement Agreements in these two suits are the basis for the transit provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), passed in 1990.

As we commemorate and celebrate the 34th anniversary of the signing of the ADA by President George H.W. Bush, a World War II veteran, let's salute the veterans who made the world safe for democracy, suffered serious injuries that led to life-long disabilities, and came home and continued to serve their communities. Together with their civilian fellow advocates, they raised the consciousness of those with and without disabilities regarding the needs and rights of the disability community and changed our country forever.

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★ Perspectives on 34 Years of the Americans with Disabilities Act ★

Civics League Conversation

What the ADA Means to Me

By Marcus Johnson, Civics League for Disability Rights (CLDR)

July marks the 34th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a groundbreaking law that ultimately changed the way America views people with disabilities. In a world designed to shun us, where we faced challenges with transportation, employment discrimination, exclusion from public schools, and inaccessible facilities, the ADA was a transformational civil rights law that shattered these barriers and changed the lives of people with disabilities for the better.

I'm grateful that the ADA passed (unbeknownst to me, at the time) just when I needed it. In June 1991, I was a dancer studying at The Juilliard School. After just having completed my second year on a full scholarship, my life was forever transformed when, at the age of 20, I was injured in an automobile accident that led to my spinal cord injury. Looking back, I cannot imagine what beginning my life as a person with a disability would have been like without the protections of the ADA.

The ADA has positively impacted my life in a number of ways. As someone with a phys-

ical disability, I am proud that I am not only employed, but have been for more than 20 years, focusing on the development of advocacy programs and initiatives at Independence Care System (ICS), and also supporting the community as a licensed mental health counselor. These are fields I am passionate about and thrive in. As a wheelchair user, I'm able to ride public transportation on trains, buses, and paratransit. Because of the ADA, more of the public is now accessible and I can travel for leisure and work. Since the ADA, from 1993 to 2019, the percentage of buses that are accessible in New York City increased dramatically from 51% to 99.8%. The frequency of service allows me and others to commute to work and where we need to go. Though I face delays in transit and broken elevators, I can still visit my doctor's office, family and friends, and public restaurants.

In reflecting on the ADA, I acknowledge those who fought with their voices and lives as part of the Disability Rights Movement. This is why I take

great pride in being a disability rights advocate, taking nothing for granted and advocating for our community. I often think of those disability rights advocates who came before me, including Marilyn Saviola and Anna Fay—tenacious, fierce and resilient advocates. They showed me how to plan, identify and succeed in my goals, including supporting my endeavor to earn my second master's degree and work toward a purposeful career. Most importantly, they equipped me with advocacy tools, and taught me how and why to advocate.

Though the ADA allows us to actively participate in American life and has accomplished a great deal, we have a long way to go to further preserve the rights of people with disabilities. Now we face new challenges, such as ongoing cuts to Medicaid spending and reductions in supports and services that make it harder to live independently. Recent changes to the Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Program (CDPAP)—a program that allows people with chronic illnesses and physical disabilities to hire, train,

and supervise their own caregivers—mandated the closure of all fiscal intermediaries by April 2025. This will impact our autonomy and potentially force many into institutions.

While celebrating the ADA is important, it remains a time to reflect and look ahead at how to address the challenges that stand as roadblocks to our independence. We must continue to advocate for accessibility and inclusivity. To meet these challenges head on, I invite the community to learn more about the Civics League for Disability Rights, an independent advocacy group of New Yorkers of all ages with disabilities. Together, for nearly 10 years, we have educated the community on issues that impact their lives, have assisted individuals in being effective advocates, and have organized gatherings to call on local leaders and legislators to support measures that preserve services we need to live independently. To learn more, email civicsleague@gmail.com.

Human rights matter. Our lives matter. The ADA is a reminder of both.

CIDNY Says

The ADA and the Independent Living Movement

By Sharon McLennon Wier, Ph.D., MSEd., CRC, LMHC

This year, we will celebrate 34 years of the inception of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), seminal legislation for people with disabilities. This legislation allowed for people with disabilities to access life activities which comprise the most significant barriers faced by this population, including access to employment, public entities, public transportation, public accommodations and commercial facilities, and telecommunications. Independent Living Centers (ILC's) recognize that these areas of life activity still require great advo-

cacy efforts to ensure that people with disabilities have their voice heard in this society. This is why most ILC's designate advocates to fight for human rights for disabled people in seven core areas: physical and mental healthcare, housing, employment, education, transportation, and voting.

One nexus that the ADA has with ILC's is that this legislation helped to formalize employment opportunities for people with disabilities. ILC's are nonprofit employers that hire qualified people with disabilities to provide program services,

benefits, training, and advocacy assistance to people with disabilities living within their local communities. This is essential, because as of July of 2024, people with disabilities have the highest rates of unemployment in the United States. Disability advocates continue to highlight disparities in employment rates between people with and without disabilities to drive change that will improve opportunities for the disability community.

ILC's ensure that the playing field is level for people with disabilities not just in employment, but in

all areas of life. They emerged from the grassroots Independent Living Movement, which centers on the belief that people with disabilities can live independently if barriers are removed from the environment and replaced with inclusive practices that allow us to thrive. We must remove the preconceived notions that disability is a problem and a sign of underachievement rather than simply a part of life.

For additional information regarding your nearest ILC, please visit cidny.org or call 212-674-2300.

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Affordable Rental Opportunity in Garden City

Southern Land Company (Owner), in cooperation with the Village of Garden City (the "Village"), presents an affordable rental opportunity in the Village of Garden City known as "FLORENT." Florent is a new beautifully designed rental complex located at 555 Stewart Avenue in Garden City containing 150 one, two and three-bedroom apartment homes, 15 of which will be made available to households with incomes at or below 80%, 50% and 30% of the area median income as determined by HUD. Please see Income Chart below.

Lottery Intake Forms will only be accepted by the Long Island Housing Partnership, Inc. (LIHP) beginning 9:00 am August 1, 2024 and ending 5:00 pm on August 30, 2024.

Lottery Intake Forms will be available, beginning August 1, 2024 through LIHP's website at <https://www.lihp.org/rentals.html>. Lottery Intake Forms will only be completed and submitted online at www.lihp.org/rentals.html.

A lottery will be held to determine the order in which applicants will be reviewed for eligibility. Submission of the Lottery Intake Form for does not guarantee a unit. Applicants must meet Owner's tenant screening requirements and income requirements must be complied with. Please consult the Program Guidelines for detailed information available at www.lihp.org/rentals.html.

Income Limits:

Household Size	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
80% AMI	\$87,500	\$100,000	\$112,500	\$124,950	\$134,950	\$144,950	\$154,950	\$164,950
50% AMI	\$54,700	\$62,500	\$70,300	\$78,100	\$84,350	\$90,600	\$96,850	\$103,100
30% AMI	\$32,800	\$37,500	\$42,200	\$46,850	\$50,600	\$54,350	\$58,100	\$61,850

Unit Type	Units Available	AMI	*Rent
1 bedroom	2	1 @ 30% AMI	\$720
		1 @ 50% AMI	\$1,345
2 bedroom	12	4 @ 30% AMI	\$908
		4 @ 50% AMI	\$1,690
		4 @ 80% AMI	\$2,861
3 bedroom	1	1 @ 80% AMI	\$3,310

*Includes a utility allowance

All Fair Housing laws will be followed. If assistance, including language assistance, is needed or if you have questions, please contact LIHP at 631-435-4710 or email at info@lihp.org.

Si tiene alguna pregunta, o necesita asistencia lingüística o de otro tipo, incluidos servicios de traducción y/o interpretación oral, por favor envíe un correo electrónico a LIHP a info@lihp.org.

This notice supersedes all prior notices/publications regarding the program.

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that pursuant to Section 511 of the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998 and 24 CFR 903.17, a public hearing will be held by the Town Board of the Town of Brookhaven at Town Hall, One Independence Hill, Farmingville, NY 11738 on September 9, 2024 at 5:00 p.m. for the purpose of hearing public comments on the formulation of the Town of Brookhaven's Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) Public Housing Agency Five Year Plan/Annual Plan for Fiscal Years 2025 - 2029. All interested persons shall be given the opportunity to be heard at this public hearing. Copies of the proposed Five Year Plan/Annual Plan, required attachments and documents related to the plan shall be available for review by the public at the Town of Brookhaven, Department of Housing and Community Development, located at, One Independence Hill, Farmingville, NY 11738 between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. weekdays and at www.brookhavenny.gov. Written comments will be accepted by email to akarppi@brookhavenny.gov or by mail to the Department of Housing and Community Development, One Independence Hill, Farmingville, New York 11738 no later than September 9, 2024 at 5:00 p.m.

ALISON KARPPI, COMMISSIONER
TOWN OF BROOKHAVEN
DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



Meet Annie and Lakshmee, Sisters and Advocates

By Emily Ladau



Annie and Lakshmee out and about.



Annie's Disability Pride pins.

This month, *Able News* had the opportunity to chat with sisters Annie Nishwani Lachhman and Lakshmee Lachhman-Persad—a dynamic duo committed to shifting the narrative about disability through art, culture, and travel. Lakshmee supports Annie's communication as an accommodation, so her broader answers also express Annie's point of view.

Annie, can you tell us about the work you do as an artist and entrepreneur?

I make Disability Pride pins to raise awareness of disability as an identity. They are inspired by the original Disability Pride flag. I have reimagined the design to be more inclusive and progressive. I made one design with a shooting star, aiming to show that individuals with disabilities are capable of "reaching for the stars" when given the right support in advocacy, accessibility, and adaptive technology. I also made a few designs that have an added brown field to represent people of color who are disproportionately systematically marginalized but are nonetheless at the forefront of the Disability Rights Movement. Other versions showcase an empowered wheelchair user, moving away from the common depiction of us as faceless people without personality, by featuring a smile shown in a tiny gold heart

on the face. I also sell cards with floral paintings on them. This is my way of making my own money using my talents.

Lakshmee, we're so proud to have you on the *Able News* Editorial Advisory Board. Can you tell us about the work you do to highlight accessible travel options across New York City?

I'm really glad to be on the Advisory Board so that I can share more about accessible travel across New York City for the readers here. Thanks for having me as part of it.

I'd love to share the process of how we look for accessible places for our "daycations." We started doing this seven years ago when we were going through a really difficult time as a family and wanted to get out of our homes to heal and feel we were part of a larger community.

I had been in travel and tourism for more than 20 years and had never once seen a disabled person represented in any of the marketing across the industry. And when I started looking for accessible things to do, it was very difficult to find information. Every time I would click on "accessibility" on a website, I would find digital accessibility compliance statements, but not much about accessible information for us to visit the place.

Without any funding behind us and just using our skills, we shared our stories of when we went out in public, how we were treated, and whatever accessibility information we could find on [accessibletravelnyc.com](https://www.accessibletravelnyc.com). It's a travel resource for incoming tourists and local residents with disabilities to find accessible places and things to do.

We became the change we didn't see. We want people to know that they, too, can be changemakers. We don't want to own this space. We have a model in place that people can follow, or if they want, they can contribute information about what their experience is like at sightseeing places, arts and cultural spots, hotels, restaurants, and transportation.

What does disability pride mean to you?

Annie: Disability pride means going out and not being ashamed of my disabilities.

Lakshmee: For me, it's constantly working through ableism, because I have non-apparent disabilities. It's showing up in spaces and asking for the accommodations that I need to fully participate, and not being ashamed to speak up so I can be my full self. Honoring disability pride means being unapologetic.

What disability rights issue is your biggest advocacy priority right now?

Lakshmee: For me, it's transportation equity. It's also important for accessible information for people with disabilities to be publicly available within travel and tourism, as that's part of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Give us the information we need so that we can get to where we're going and know what we're going to encounter.

And together, Annie and I focus on educating about disability pride and disability as an identity. We work on educating children and families of all ages that it's okay to have a disability and it's just part of being human. We use art as a catalyst for change. Annie gets to speak to her art and what the disability pride flag means to her. And I speak about the different models of disabilities and tie it in how our lives have been viewed.

Looking ahead, what's next on your exciting journeys?

Lakshmee: Annie is creating a new set of greeting cards that highlight New York and disability. She is also hoping to work on a children's book educating on disability. For me, I'd like to see some type of standards adopted within travel and tourism to ensure destinations are accessible for all. We're also excited for some upcoming public programming for Disability Pride celebrations.

Embrace Best Practices for Disability Inclusion in the Workplace

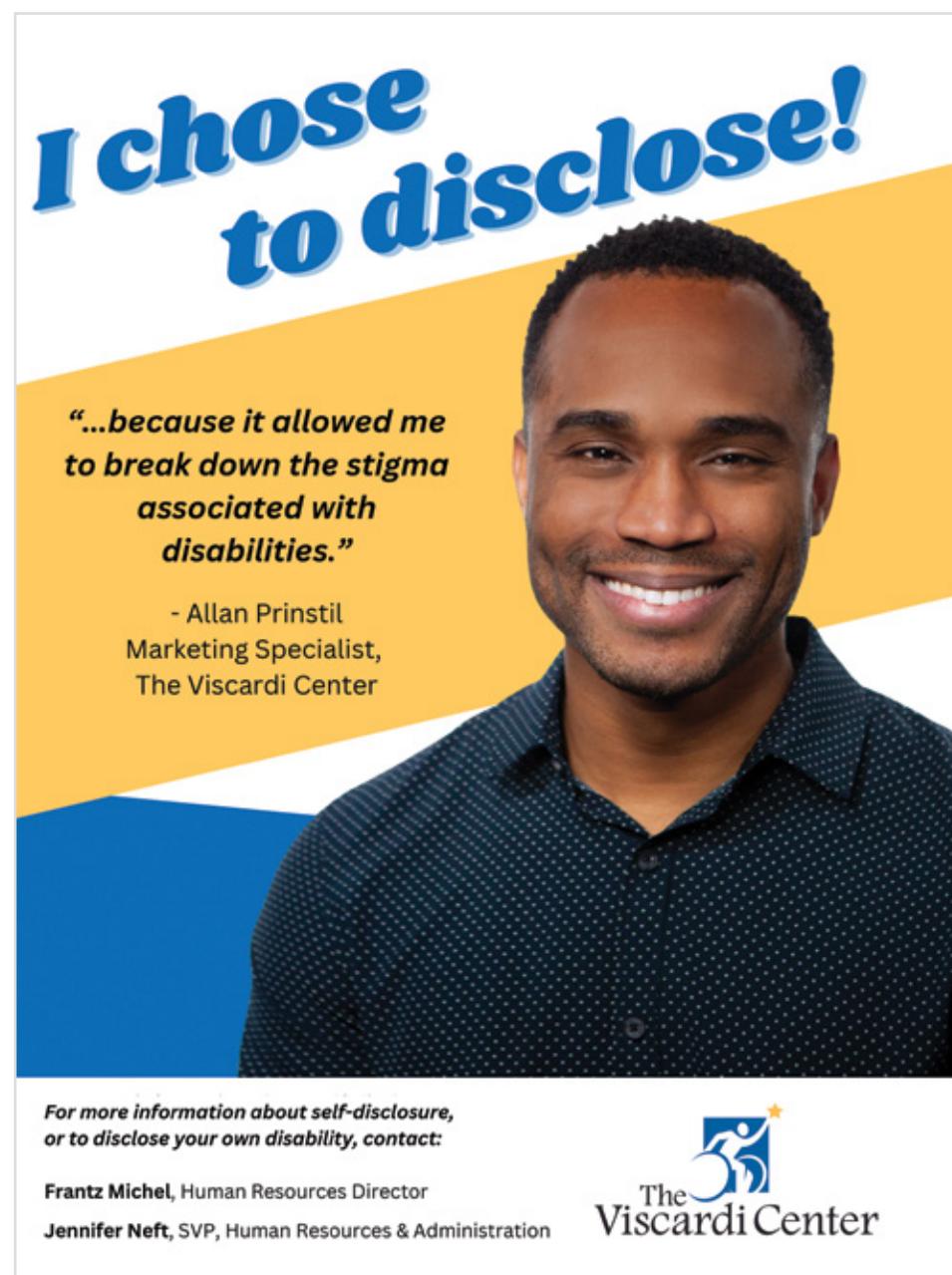
By Kim Brussell

“Naming the disability took the power away from it and gave it back to me,” expressed Alice Muterspaw, VP, Vocational Services, at The Viscardi Center.

The Center is embracing disability identity, not just for the people it serves, but for its employees, too. This past spring, they launched the “I Chose to Disclose” campaign. With a goal of educating employees on the difference between and benefits of self-identification and self-disclosure, the campaign was kicked off by the Center’s disabled President and CEO, Dr. Chris Rosa: “...lend your voice to the rich chorus of people with disabilities singing our Viscardi song,” he encouraged. The campaign features a series of short video vignettes and posters about the journey of a diverse group of employees with congenital, acquired, visible and non-visible disabilities and why they “chose to disclose.”

Empowering individuals with disabilities to bring their whole selves to work is at the root of developing and implementing best practices for disability inclusion in the workplace. Employee Resources Groups (ERGs), as well as strategies to encourage self-identification/self-disclosure, are two ways organizations can ensure disability is part of their Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts. Both are key to attract, hire, retain, and advance a talented pool of disabled employees at all levels, and to foster disability-friendly work environments.

The Viscardi Center already logs over 17% of its employees as having a disability, which is more than double the 7% utilization goal set by the U.S. Federal Government’s rules for Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act—a requirement that federal contractors and subcontractors plan affirmative action toward



Posters created for Viscardi’s self-disclosure campaign have been conversation starters.

employing qualified individuals with disabilities. Even so, as a disability services provider, the Center felt there was still room for growth.

In just a few months, the non-profit has seen results. The most significant? Genuine conversations between colleagues, as well as employees and the youth and adults they serve. “I found that disclosing my hearing loss to my students...makes them more confident or [know] that it’s OK they have a disability,” shared Lauren Feldmann, a science teacher at Henry Viscardi School

, which is attended by students with severe physical disabilities and medical conditions.

Spontaneous teaching moments happen daily. Allan Prinstit, a marketing specialist, talked about his color blindness and the technology he uses to discern colors while apparel shopping to a group of Viscardi 2nd graders while they ate their lunch. What sparked the chat? A poster featuring Allan that was hanging up on the wall in the cafeteria. Being young wheelchair users, they asked him why he was on the poster since they assumed

he was able-bodied. It opened the door for Allan to explain that not every disability can be seen.

In addition, Viscardi has noted new disclosures from not only recent hires, but those that have acquired a disability since joining the team. The campaign gave them the confidence and opportunity to take action.

Henry Schein is also taking action to create a disability-affirming culture. Recognizing that 1.3 billion people in the world have a disability, and that there also are nearly 44 million caregivers in the United States, Henry Schein launched its newest Employee Resource Group, Able & Disabled Allies Partnering Together (ADAPT). The ERG aims to celebrate the diversity of disabilities by raising awareness through education. Its members include people with disabilities as well as those in a support role.

“At Henry Schein, we believe that whether we are disabled or able-bodied, we all have the power and responsibility to make society more inclusive for all,” said Seema Bhansali, Vice President, Team Schein Member Experience & Inclusion, Henry Schein, Inc. “We embrace the principle of inclusivity, recognizing that everyone, regardless of ability, contributes to a more diverse and vibrant society. Our ADAPT ERG serves as a catalyst for building a supportive and inclusive community. Through awareness initiatives, educational programs, and collaborative efforts, the ADAPT ERG empowers individuals with disabilities, their loved ones, and advocates.”

There’s no doubt more can be done to improve employment outcomes for the disability community, and the efforts of Henry Schein and The Viscardi Center exemplify how to lead the way. Everyone deserves to be part of workplace communities that value and celebrate who they are.