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Raise Awareness By Giving Constituents a Voice

Empowering your clients to improve their world can make for positive press.

Advocates for handicap accessibility chose July 26, 2005 — the 15th anniversary of the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) — to unveil the Rolling Gourmet dining guide and celebrate new opportunities for New Hampshire residents with disabilities. At a noon press conference at a Concord restaurant, they announced the guide, presented restaurant owners with a certificate of appreciation for accessibility and offered the media tours to show what makes a restaurant accessible.

The guide, which covers restaurants throughout the state, came about as a way to give persons with disabilities a voice and counter negative press regarding ADA access issues, says Julia Freeman-Woolpert, outreach advocacy specialist with the Disabilities Rights Center (DRC) in Concord, which partnered with the New Hampshire Chapter of the National Spinal Cord Injury Association to create the guide.

“We wanted an approach to access that was positive, fun and participatory,” says Freeman-Woolpert. “We wanted to give people who encountered access issues a way to take action and go public with them, to reward accessible restaurants and encourage less-accessible ones to improve. We also wanted to portray people with disabilities in positive, respectable roles and make the point that accessibility is good for business.

“We also like to educate the public that people with disabilities make up over 20 percent, or nearly 50 million in this country. They are estimated to have \$175 billion in discretionary income. Being more inclusive by allowing access to restaurants, through programs like the Rolling Gourmet, just makes good business sense.”

The dining guide is proving popular, she says. “We get more hits on this part of the website than any other. People notice it and like it as a tool for dining and a way to convey positive messages. We had one man rate a Pizza Hut that was difficult to enter due to heavy doors and no automatic opener. Later, he recontacted us to let us know that, due to his advocacy, Pizza Hut had installed a doorbell to call for assistance.”

She notes that costs of the guide are exceeding budgeted dollars, delaying plans to implement components such as

awarding more certificates to ADA-compliant restaurants and providing constructive feedback to those in need of improvement. She says Lisa Thompson, president of the New Hampshire Chapter of the National Spinal Cord Injury Association, is spearheading efforts to obtain grants and other funding to expand the scope and visibility of the dining guide project.

Also, Freeman-Woolpert says, “we’d like to get more people involved with rating restaurants, more visibility, and increase our feedback capacity. We’re working on stronger ties with the New Hampshire Lodging and Restaurant Association (NHLRA) and their new executive director, with hopes of getting the word out about the Rolling Gourmet and of getting their assistance in making more restaurants accessible.”

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		THE ROLLING GOURMET				
		NAME OF RESTAURANT:	BELOW AVERAGE	AVERAGE	ABOVE AVERAGE	COMMENTS
Restaurant Accessibility Rating Guide	LOCATION:					
	PARKING	• Is there well-marked accessible parking (including access aisles) at or close to the restaurant?		Somewhat inconvenient	Fully Accessible	
	GETTING INTO THE RESTAURANT	• Can you easily enter the restaurant in a wheelchair using the same entrance as everyone else? How easy was it?	I could not get in!	Inconvenient or a separate entrance	Fully Accessible	
	INSIDE ACCESS	• Can you maneuver around using your chair, cane, crutches, etc. easily? (e.g. Are there inaccessible areas? Are tables accessible? Can you sit up close?)	I could not get around	Inconvenient but do-able	Fully Accessible	
	RESTROOM ACCESS	• Are both men's and women's rooms accessible? (e.g. can you get into the bathroom, move around comfortably, use the facilities? Are there grab bars?)	I could not use the facilities	Inconvenient but do-able	Fully Accessible	
	ACCOMMODATIONS	• If you asked for a specific accommodation (e.g. large font or Braille menu, read the menu to you, welcome your guide dog), was it provided?	Not Accommodating	Minor problems	Fully Accommodating	
	OVERALL EXPERIENCE	• Did you enjoy your dining experience? Was the food and service good? Did the server treat you with respect?		It was OK		
Optional:						
Your name: _____		Email: _____				
Address: _____		Phone: _____			What accommodations do you use? _____	

New Hampshireans with disabilities rate restaurant accessibility with this form, giving positive press to readily accessible restaurants and leading others to make needed modifications.

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